



1 Reworlding America

It [America] developed from a complex, living process of exploration and interpretation.

—EDMUNDO O’GORMAN

Why reworld America? First we must understand what it means to world America. For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, worlding is an act of material and ideological conquest, a form of narrating and inscribing colonial power that has intimate connections to the very production of history. “[It] is the reinscription of a cartography that must (re) present itself as impeccable” on an assumedly “uninscribed earth”; this impeccable reinscription becomes “the condition of the worlding of a world” such that the colonized consciousness can apprehend itself only in and through colonial systems and knowledges.¹

Arif Dirlik offers another dimension of worlding, one that reflects the ascendancy of the United States as a lone superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The more the United States becomes involved with the world and recognizes the interdependencies of the current global condition, the less it is able to sustain its view of itself as a country that is fundamentally different from all other countries and nations, with a unique history and culture. Even as the United States extends its reach into remote parts of the world, the massive migration of peoples to the United States and the growing importance of America as a crucial node in a vast interconnected transnational economy are making American society increasingly transnational. Dirlik writes: “Both issues have to do with the ‘worlding’ of the USA—bringing the USA into the

world as well as bringing the world into the USA.”² We cannot “pretend that the USA may be studied in isolation from the rest of the world, or that either its achievements or failures may be grasped independently of its activities in the world.”³ For Dirlik, worlding involves locating America within the world by questioning its exceptionalist self-idealization and undermining its status as an entity outside world history, as well as attending to the fluid, oft-changing boundaries—cultural, political, territorial—that the United States sets up, manages, and polices as it negotiates its position in a global world. Reworlding America means not so much returning to the kind of worlding that Dirlik suggests as examining the cultural, political, economic, and social processes that bring the world into America and America into the world.

In a related context, Susan Gillman, Kirsten Silva Greusz, and Rob Wilson conceive of worlding as “an active and vigilant critical and poetic process of bringing nearer the *thinging world* and *worlding world* of plurality and multiplicity, at the same time it entails a process of pushing to the horizon of consciousness and dwelling place those things, forces, instruments, signs, and objects that threaten this building-up and renewing of the regenerative life-world and species being.”⁴ Worlding the world is a kind of double movement: while it draws the world into the realm of the cognizable by establishing zones of possibility, relation, and encounter within which the world can become “worldly,” it relegates to the margins of social existence those elements that seem to threaten this process. Thus, it legitimizes particular ideas of America at the same time that it delimits peoples, cultures, and values that threaten hegemonic ideas of America. The nexus of colonial desire and imperial vision in worlding America makes reworlding America imperative. We must interrogate the maneuvers of language, discourse, history, and cultural signs and symbols that claim to produce an authentic and original national history. We must examine the processes by which particular ideas of America are given hegemonic force in order to affirm only certain ideas as essentially “American.” And we must disturb and realign the relations among space, time, and memory that create and sustain official, hegemonic culture by managing and policing those communi-

ties, cultures, and histories that threaten their power. Three contemporary examples will demonstrate the power of worlding, the entrenchment of colonial mentality in worlding America in contemporary public discourse, and the urgency of our task.

Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster's *In Search of America* (2002) narrates their discovery of the enduring vitality of particular ideas of "America." As they state in their introduction:

So here was our experiment: *become reacquainted with the principles of the American founding* and the men who first presented them back in the turbulent days of the eighteenth century; *then go out and look about us for evidence in this America* of the country they so long ago established. If we tell you now that we discovered it—indeed, that the foundations laid back then and built upon in the 225 or so years since, *still form the essence of the American identity*—it should not spoil the experience of this book. In fact, that is the message we hope you will see in every page: that the America of Jefferson and Madison, Hamilton and Franklin, Washington and Adams is as alive now as ever before.⁵

Conceived in the propitious time of "founding" a nation and encoded in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are the quintessential meanings of America. Once decoded, they will provide the critical framework not so much to trace an already established American tradition as to traditionalize contemporary America. Hence, Jennings and Brewster's task is to travel the United States north, west, east, and south to discover the essence of America and, in the ephemeral moment of recognition, to historicize and thereby authorize a particular vision of America. For all their liberal sensitivity to issues of slavery, race, immigration, and religion, Jennings and Brewster leave intact the nation and its vision of the United States as the unique embodiment of America. By insisting on the American Revolution as a clean break from every other historical event in the Americas and thus declaring

America's exceptionalism as evidence of its national character, these writers, even in the new millennium, will not dislodge the white, old pantheon of Jefferson and Madison, not because they cannot but because the millstones of their ideology grind exceedingly well. To situate their drama within a hemispheric dynamic would make it well nigh impossible to embark on their secular yet deeply evangelical endeavor: to draw inspiration from the sacred texts of Americanism and find, in today's United States, its manifestations still alive. Indeed, the last chapter, "Homeland," while pointing to the historical debates on immigration and traditionally ambiguous attitudes toward immigrants, ends with the naturalization, or rather Americanization, of immigrants to the United States. Given the tautology built into Jennings and Brewster's "experiment," it is not surprising that they succeed so well in worlding America, particularly in divining its origins in a monolingual, nationalist, ethnocentric past.

The British historian Niall Ferguson takes a similar approach, but instead of beginning at the "founding" moment, he urges America to recognize its English ancestry and, in the name of civilization and modernity, put on the mantle of the British empire. In *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, Ferguson offers a rationalization of American empire after the fact: "[America] is an empire, in short, that dare not speak its name. It is an empire in denial."⁶ In the sequel, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*, Ferguson goes further: to continue to function as an empire, America needs a massive labor force to police and protect empire's interests: "If one adds together the illegal immigrants, the jobless and the convicts, there is surely ample raw material for a larger American army. . . . Revising the draft would not necessarily be unpopular, so long as it was appropriately targeted."⁷

Ferguson goes against the grain of recent studies of imperialism in American studies and colonial discourse analysis, which focus on Western colonialism, its forms of socialization, its Orientalist projections, its epistemes, and its discourses. In order to examine the conflictual dynamics that constituted empire, he audaciously seeks to revise the very

terms in which empire can be conceptualized historically. He thus translates empire in the sense that José E. Limón suggests—examining it as the site of “multivalent social and moral meanings and outcomes”⁸ and not a homogeneous, all-invasive form of colonial power, both in the colonies and in the home country. A fundamental contradiction of empire is that the very institutions and discourses that were purveyed to justify it also sowed the seeds of national liberation movements. Post-independence societies in several former colonies built national governments by using the ideals and models of administrative governance, representative democracy, and constitutionalism, to name a few.

What Ferguson gains in translating empire, however, he loses in invoking it. The ideology that binds Ferguson’s treatise on empire to an ethics of empire is erased from scrutiny in order to emerge rearticulated as a new form of American millennial morality, a secular vision of a just rule whose legitimacy can be obtained only by a renarration of empire as the gift of the white man, the white nation, and the white civilization to the unfortunate peoples of the world. We are asked to applaud as the torch of colonial enlightenment is passed from Britain to America. Lest we misunderstand his intentions, Ferguson prefaces *Empire* with a section from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and ends it with Rudyard Kipling’s exhortation to “Take up the White Man’s burden.” *Colossus*, interestingly but not surprisingly, is prefaced by quotations from Jefferson and from Milton’s “Samson Agonistes” and ends with references to the “Terminator,” Arnold Schwarzenegger, as the archetype of American empire. Clearly, Ferguson desires to translate and affirm American empire by invoking an imperial ethos and cultivating a hypermasculine sensibility.

As Ferguson, in Spivak’s terms, inscribes a colonial cartography on “uninscribed earth”⁹ by positing Euro-American modernity as a blessing to the world, he effectively wipes out the cultures, histories, and peoples against which empire defines itself and gives substance to its culture, a soul to its citizens, and a burden to its progeny. Because the subject of history—empire—remains at the level of impersonalized, institutional forces, the agent of empire’s history—Europe’s hypermasculine

subject—can remain uncriticized. But those who bear the real burden of empire are further encouraged to become mute witnesses to their dispossession. The perversity of Ferguson's worlding of America is not that it neglects or marginalizes its subjects; it is that the *historicity* of those it colonizes and controls—non-Europeans as agents of history, as human actors endowed with creative potential—can be given or taken away by imperial edict.

Ferguson, by examining empire in relation to international forces, actors, and events, situates Britain and America in a worldly context, in Dirlik's sense of worlding. However, his worlding of the world according to an Anglo-European paradigm reinforces an important nexus between Britain and America. The claim that a continuity of imperial concerns and national self-conceptions links America to Britain legitimizes a powerful worlding of America. The map of the entire world is drawn according to empire's desires and concerns, and in the very process of imposing a British-American colonial cartography, Americans are urged to imagine themselves as a master race with a divine sanction to lead the peoples of the world into the postmodern Eden of the Pax Americana. But this can be possible only if we are willing to imagine our historical inheritance as entirely Anglo-Saxon. So that we can produce a national subject whose colonial past is inextricably linked to an imperial future, the multiple threads of U.S. history and the long and painful struggle of blacks, Chicanos, Indians, Latinos, Irish, Jews, and numerous others to gain freedom and equality are forcefully twisted into a single-stranded narrative with the unities of time, place, and action impeccably observed. Every other competing claim, every other antagonistic presence and agonistic perspective to such a narration of American nation formation through the workings of empire, is effectively rendered meaningless.

Unlike Ferguson, Samuel P. Huntington, in *Who Are We? Challenges to America's National Identity* (2004), does acknowledge competing perspectives on worlding America, but only to delegitimize them by insisting on a particular worlding of America, the creation of "America" by an Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. Huntington identifies four factors that

have led to the current threat to American identity: the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in an absence of an other against which America could define itself; the ascendancy and hegemony of multiculturalism; the post-1965 increase in immigration from Asia and Latin America; and the demands for bilingual education, including the tendency to affirm linguistic plurality in contemporary America.¹⁰ As more and more immigrants and migrants settle down, live, or work in America and, instead of assimilating into mainstream American culture as their predecessors did, celebrate their affiliations to other nations, ethnicities, and languages, America runs the danger of losing “the central elements of American identity, the cultural core and the American Creed.”¹¹ The “American Creed” includes the idea of individual dignity and individualism, emphasis on the rule of law, the valuation of liberty and equality, the notion of popular sovereignty, and the desire for limited government.¹² The culture in which these ideas germinated and eventually flowered in an American demos was, Huntington argues, Protestant and Anglo-Saxon in provenance. Therefore, the process of becoming American necessarily involves accepting *only* Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture as truly American culture. He goes on to observe:

All societies face recurring threats to their existence, to which they eventually succumb. Yet some societies, even when so threatened, are also capable of postponing their demise by halting and reversing the processes of decline and renewing their vitality and identity. I believe that America can do that and that Americans should recommit themselves to the Anglo-Protestant culture, traditions and values that for three and a half centuries have been *embraced* by Americans of all races, ethnicities, and religions and that have been the *source* of their liberty, unity, power, prosperity, and moral leadership as a *force for good in the world*.¹³

Notice that Huntington does world America in Dirlik’s sense—“bringing the USA into the world as well as bringing the world into the USA.”¹⁴

But the project of reworlding America raises other crucial concerns: How and why is the world mapped out as a “world” and the United States as “America”? How are these modes of mapping shaped by the movements of peoples and goods across continents and empires, and how have the narratives of travel and settlement and the discourses of the foreign and strange produced by these movements informed hemispheric social and political interactions, cross-cultural encounters, and transcontinental commerce of commodities and ideas? What kinds of economic and political processes were set in motion to enable the United States to situate itself in the world as an exceptional entity that could transcend history and claim unimpeachable universality? Why is it that Huntington’s worlding of America integrates non-America and non-Americans into a vast global network of international relations and systems within which America and Americans can expend their benevolent energies for the benefit of humankind?

It is one thing to argue “for the importance of Anglo-Protestant culture,”¹⁵ but it is another thing altogether to think that the only way to regenerate a nation and culture supposedly on the brink of disintegration is to recover a putatively lost innocence about the violent forces of modernization that influenced the worlding of the United States as the true repository of all things American. What Huntington does not acknowledge is how easily his argument attains the level of self-evident truth; how skillfully the encounters between the Old and New Worlds are given an exclusively racial character; how seamlessly the national becomes the international; and how deceptively the question of empire is erased from the formation of American nationhood, culture, and identity. Why have peoples of many races and ethnicities “embraced” the American creed and Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture? Huntington’s answer is simple—because it is only through this creed and culture that non-Americans become Americans and find liberty and justice. What is more, by becoming Americans in this manner, the rest of the world becomes the beneficiary of American benevolence and goodwill.

A thorough process of worlding America and worlding the world American style is evident here: abstract ideas are first posited as having

a priori, ahistorical status as *American* ideas; these ideas are then located within the culture of Protestantism that flourished in New England; the dispossession of the Native Indians and the active marginalization of non-Anglo-Saxons as slaves and second-class citizens are reconceived not as an imposition but as an embrace; America as a nation is endowed with the potential to do great and mighty things for humankind; and non-Americans, by becoming Americanized, are urged to position themselves, or rather world themselves, as emissaries for freedom and liberty and their nation as a repository for universal ideas. The next logical step from here is Ferguson's—the establishment and maintenance of American empire. Huntington paves the way, authorizes the policy, and justifies the workings of Ferguson's empire. To become American à la Huntington is inexorably to cultivate an imperial sensibility à la Ferguson. Such is the dangerous consequence of worlding America and worlding the world according to America.

Jennings and Brewster, Ferguson, and Huntington abstract their dramas of empire and nation formation from a much larger, intercontinental New World performance whose scripts and characters, writers and performers have histories more ancient, dissonant, varied, and complex than the histories of Jefferson, Washington, Adams, and Franklin. The genealogy of these worldings of America dates back to the era of “discovery,” the coming of the Europeans to the Americas in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. And while various forms of worlding America emerged in that encounter of Old and New Worlds, a particular narrative of worlding has gained such hegemonic power that today *America* refers not to the hemispheres but to a specific region called the United States. At this point it is worth looking at how these kinds of worldings have also influenced American *literary* studies, one of the central objects of analysis in the reworlding of America.

The notion that the history of America begins with the arrival of the English settlers in New England has been an overarching paradigm in the writing of U.S. history. Speaking specifically of American literary history, Charles F. Richardson wrote in 1887: “The history of American literature is the history of the literature of a part of the English

people, under new geographical and political conditions, within the present limits of the United States.”¹⁶ Furthermore, Richardson notes that in the early stages of the development of a new American literary tradition, the Amerindians hindered the progress of the settlers. In this early literature there is an abiding concern with the Indian “problem”—how to deal with the primitive peoples and convince them of their need to improve their farming methods and lifestyles, obtain an education, and generally become responsible people and improve their culture. “To this day the Indians, possibly as numerous as in 1607, stand on the *outskirts* of Caucasian civilization in North America, a *problem* and a *menace*, a theme for literature, and a subject for moral and industrial reform.”¹⁷ While acknowledging that the Amerindians had a primitive, preliterate cultural tradition, Richardson notes that since their traditions were oral, not written, they were bereft of recorded memory, which was crucial to forming a literary and critical consciousness, and did not significantly affect the formation of American literature. Rather, the literature of the early settlers had strong connections to English and Celtic traditions.

Richardson traces a usable past for American literature, sketching in some detail the strong links from Roman to English to American culture. American literature, seen this way, did not spring up suddenly in an alien environment. To Richardson, the English settlers fashioned for themselves a new culture in a new environment by rearticulating—in a new idiom, in a New World—English and Roman cultural and aesthetic practices. Here is the apotheosis of the American subject: “the individual before his God—such was the Pilgrim or Puritan of Plymouth, Salem, and Boston. The mistakes and triumphs of these brave and self-reliant settlers lie at the very root of intellectual life of New England for two centuries and a half. They made the American nation and American literature possible.”¹⁸ Early American literature embodies “an intense and ever-present religious purpose, a grim confidence in the powers of devout Man, and a determination to secure the rights, individual and collective, of the Puritan communities.”¹⁹ In short, “the seeds of American literature were most effectively sown in New England.”²⁰

Earlier, John Seely Hart, in *Manual of American Literature* (1873), had written, “American Literature, strictly speaking, is that part of English literature which has been produced upon American soil,” and as such, “American Literature dates from the first settlement of the American Colonies,”²¹ meaning the British colonies of New England. Richardson expands upon Hart’s observations. In the three-volume *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1917), the essays dealing with the roots of American history follow the same trajectory, affirming New England as central to the origins of American thought and culture. In a related context, when Charles Angoff, in *A Literary History of the American People* (1931), writes that “It is therefore only by politeness that we can speak of literature in the first one hundred and fifty years of the history of the United States. We really had no literature then” and that “the American people before the Revolution produced no literature at all, in the sense of *belles lettres*,”²² he is evidently calculating backward from 1776, the year in which the United States emerged as a political entity. To Angoff, the nation is the primary category of analysis by which to conceptualize the emergence of American literature in the New World.

Taking a somewhat broader approach, Robert E. Spiller in *The Cycle of American Literature* (1955) proposes the following chronology, which also finds its millennial echo in Geoff Ward’s *The Writing of America* (2002): In the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we have accounts of the discovery of the New World, such as in Columbus’s journals, and in the early seventeenth century we have accounts of its settlement, such as in Bradford’s writings. In the eighteenth century we have preachers like Edwards, who was famous for his fiery orations on human spirituality; scientists like Franklin, who pushed the limits of scientific frontiers, and political leaders like Jefferson, who played a significant role in creating the manifesto that laid the foundation for a new republic. In the early nineteenth century we have such writers as Irving, Bryant, Cooper, Emerson, and Thoreau. In the middle of the nineteenth century Poe and Hawthorne emerge, and in the fifties Melville and Whitman gain prominence. In the latter part of the century Howells, Twain, Dickinson, and Henry James continue the literary tradition. In the first half of

the twentieth century Dreiser, Pound, Eliot, Frost, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner attain recognition. Like the critics before him, Spiller conceptualizes American literary history solely in terms of a new literary tradition that has its roots in English culture and sensibility and in ways that privilege the experiences of European settlers in the New World. The writers he assigns to a distinct canon for each century are nearly all male and white and write in the English language. More important, the history of the formation of the United States as a nation becomes the governing framework within which to situate the emergence and development of various aesthetic traditions.²³

The arguments made by Richardson, Seely, Angoff, Spiller, and Ward, among others, constitute what Donald Pease terms the “field-imaginary,” the “disciplinary unconscious,” or the “fundamental syntax” of American studies—“its tacit assumptions, convictions, primal words, and the charged relations binding them together.”²⁴ As we have seen, the “fundamental syntax” of American studies embodies narratives that begin with the “discovery” of America by Columbus and then with the arrival of the Pilgrim fathers in Massachusetts, the attempts of the British colonies to construct an independent society shorn of all affiliations to the British crown, the growing presence of the English-speaking settlers, and their eventual hegemony in the United States.

But is it historically valid to speak solely about U.S. literature to conceptualize America? What explains the shift from the “United States” to “America”? As early as 1578, several decades before the English settled in New England, the Huguenot voyager Jean de Léry referred to Brazil as “America” in his *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, and throughout his narrative he used the term “Americans” in speaking about the Tupinambas of Brazil. Furthermore, between 1492 and 1607 (the year in which the first English settlement was founded in Jamestown, Virginia), civilizations like the Aztecs were encountered; numerous Amerindian tribes were subdued; driven further into the land, or simply annihilated; and colonial rule was firmly established in various parts of the Americas by European powers such as France, Portugal, and Spain. By what fiat, then, did “America” come to

refer only to a certain region in North America with a history originating in New England?

This worlding of the United States as America, of U.S. history as American history, has gained enormous purchase, and it is the mythic, hegemonic power of this particular narrative, its symbolologies, structures of representation, and modes of articulation, that I seek to interrogate in this book. I begin with the premise that we cannot talk about a monolithic America meaning solely the United States. Rather, we must focus on a range of discursive formations and interpretive strategies arising in the collision of European, Amerindian, African, and, later, Asian cultures and societies. My aim in tracing the emergence of diverse literary traditions in the Americas is not to arrive at a new synthesis by creating an overarching framework or critical paradigm that resolves their social and cultural tensions and paradoxes. Instead, by grafting together the contradictory histories and discourses of conquest, displacement, migration, settlement, exile, and border crossings in the Americas, I attempt to develop a critical vocabulary with which to study the Americas in their transborder, hemispheric dimensions. By insisting that all ideas of America are shot through with the woof of “other Americas,” I seek to develop different ways of conceiving of historical inheritance that counter the narrowly racialized, excessively territorialized, and deeply gendered ideas of America that have historically gained hegemony.

Rather than offering a clear alternative historical or intellectual tradition with which to reworld America, I have chosen to indulge in a form of disruptive textual play at those discursive sites where the many worldings of America have been and continue to be articulated in the moments of negotiating the incommensurable values and demands of various nations and communities in different parts of the Americas. I reconceptualize America here as “Americas,” a plethora of discursive formations whose overlapping, competing modes of narrative address give rise to other ways of articulating the multiple meanings of America. This reconceptualization amounts to a refusal of other worldings that normalize themselves in public imagination and discourse. It is a mode of discursive contestation in developing a critical vocabulary for

interrogating and revising the terms in which the literary and cultural history of America has come to be articulated, and for reimagining the Americas in their interhemispheric dimensions.

What, then, is the relevance of the nation to the project of reworlding America? To reworld America, it is not enough to pose the question of the nation. Reworlding America is intimately linked to rethinking the terms in which modernity, and therefore globalization, have historically come to engender and authorize particular meanings of America. It means rethinking modernity as making both visible and invisible a clashing of dissonant modernities in the Americas; it means tracing the lines of continuity and rupture that shape the material and discursive forms of national belonging and sociocultural pollination. In this context the nation and its attendant ideologies are viewed as an intertwined layer of the ideological armature that ensures the continued valence, however transformed and variegated, of different ideas of America. Thus, I eschew mapping an alternative historical narrative that is chronologically patterned and teleologically imbued in order to contest U.S.-centered American literary history. The history of the United States as “America” is part of a complex networking of intercontinental economies linking the Americas not only to Britain but to other European nations, Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia. This is why the historian Ronald Takaki points out that “Americans originated from many shores,”²⁵ an observation that counters Jennings and Brewster’s, Ferguson’s, and Huntington’s narrow focus on the Anglo-Saxon ancestry of the United States. As Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts perceptively point out, America can be neither reduced to the legacy of white settlement in the United States nor envisioned as just another transatlantic extension of Anglo-Saxon culture in the New World, because both these approaches “ignor[e] the complex ways that ‘Americanness’ as a gendered, raced, and classed phenomenon was constantly negotiated through strategic identification and disidentification with Europeans, on the one hand, and American Indians, African Americans, and other nonwhite populations, on the other hand.”²⁶ Reworlding America involves seeking out the moments when America is “constructed in and through

a set of hierarchical relationships with groups, communities, and nations defined somehow as other, alien, or outside.”²⁷ Far from simply extending the spatializing gesture to encompass Northern and Southern Hemispheres, reworlding America reconfigures spatial displacement as marking not just a redrawing of territorial boundaries and a contesting of the sometimes atavistic, sometimes creolized visions that have controlled them, but as making visible the processes by which the dissonances of the sociocultural morphologies of “America” are produced and managed.

Another axis along which the many meanings of America have come to be authorized is language. In paying attention to the dynamic interaction between languages and cross-cultural contact, this book studies eight texts taken from different historical periods, dealing with the commerce of peoples, ideas, and cultures in various parts of the Americas, and written in Spanish, French, English, and Creole. To be sure, even these languages do not quite function as signifiers of distinct linguistic systems. By the time we make our way from the sixteenth-century ethnographer Jean de Léry’s learned French, which constantly breaks down in attempting to seek metaphoric correlatives to signify the strangeness of the New World, to Patrick Chamoiseau’s effusive late-twentieth-century word scratching in a language born of bastardy and oppression, Creole emerges in the interstices of African languages and French, thus denaturalizing the authority of memory and empire and complicating the nostalgia of the exile’s dream of return and the rebel’s vision of transcendence. To reworld America is also to acknowledge that there is something more to reading and canonizing non-English texts than unearthing and studying them for their ostensibly transgressive value or potential. Multilingualism does not always provide occasions to contest the ideal of monolingualism, and, in more ways than one, non-English texts may sometimes frustrate the subversive potential of the discourse of multilingualism by subscribing without examination to dominant myths and histories. Texts, like authors, tend to develop lives of their own. Even as they outrun their authors’ concerns, they undermine the critics’ methodologies. More important, texts, like people, migrate; they

may carry with them certain ideas and symbols as useful baggage and abandon them in odd places for inexplicable reasons. If we are to relate the question of language to reworlding America, we should attend to the clashing of linguistic codes and to their uneasy yet fecund cohabitation, as travelers, exiles, refugees, and migrants shuttle among numerous nodal points in a global circuit linking diasporic communities living their anxious lives of survival and chance, compromise and gamble, in their dwelling places in various parts of the Americas. The task, then, is not just to discover what ideas of America, what different dreams of the New World, what kinds of desperate negotiations writers and texts in non-English languages articulate in attempting to give shape and meaning to America. It is also to study how non-English texts can emerge as *American* literary works of art through acts of ideological manipulation that elide their multiple allegiances to conflicting intellectual and aesthetic traditions. We will thus be able to frustrate any attempt to use the logic of supplementation to rectify or add to a particular version of American history or contest and revise the monolingual canon of American literature.

Within these contexts, how can we develop critical vocabularies that will address the complexity of transcontinental patterns of social and cultural interaction and the transborder geopolitical determinations that engender global disjunctions and local sedimentations in the flow of power, capital, commodities, ideas, peoples, and symbols within, between, and across the Americas? In short, how can we effectively contest the nationalist, linguistic, religious, geopolitical, and ethnocentric biases that have historically informed the construction of a Eurocentric America? I suggest that we use three critical models: The first is the dialectical model proposed by José David Saldívar (*The Dialectics of Our America*, 1991),²⁸ which seeks to map the confluences and divergences of processes of social and cultural exchange between the Americas. This model was adumbrated as early as 1891 by José Martí (*Nuestra América*) and in 1933 by Herbert Bolton (*The Epic of Greater America*), and was later revived and rearticulated by literary critics such as Belle Chevigny and Gari Laguardia (*Reinventing the Americas*, 1986), Gustavo Pérez-Firmat (*Do*

the Americas Have a Common Literature? 1990), and Earl E. Fitz (*Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context*, 1991). The second model revises, as Paul Jay suggests, the “conception of the emergence of modernity”²⁹ in the Americas by extending the work of cultural critics like Edmundo O’Gorman (*The Invention of America*, 1961), Paul Gilroy (*The Black Atlantic*, 1993), and Edouard Glissant (*Caribbean Poetics*, 1997). The third model addresses the evolution of a border consciousness in what Ramón Saldívar terms the “social interstices” of Anglo-American and Mexican American traditions (*Chicano Narrative: A Dialectic of Difference*, 1990) and the transborder processes of social and cultural exchange that link the U.S. Southwest to Latin America and the Caribbean as the borderlanders search for what Lois P. Zamora calls a “usable past” (*The Usable Past*, 1997).

Nuestra América and the Other America

Writing in 1891, Martí perspectivizes the development of two Americas—“Neustra América” (our America), meaning Latin America, and the other America, meaning North America—as a process in which the United States slowly begins to emerge as a dominating power.³⁰ He casts the relationship between the two Americas in a Manichean dichotomy, an idea insightfully addressed much later by Frantz Fanon in an Afro-Caribbean context (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963, and *Black Skin/White Masks*, 1967). To use Fanon’s terms, the two hemispheres are locked in a “murderous and decisive struggle” for complete economic, social, and political domination.³¹ Martí’s America resists the expansionist programs of the other America. When he further writes, “Our Greece must take priority over the Greece that is not ours” and “the European university must give way to the American university,”³² he sounds a clarion call to create an alternative social and cultural center in the Americas.³³

The publication of *Caliban* and *Nuestra América y Occidente* in the 1970s by the Cuban philosopher Roberto Fernández Retamar marks the fruition of Martí’s dream. Retamar recasts the “discovery” of America

as the “disaster” of America and employs a new nomenclature to rewrite history from the perspective of the marginalized and dispossessed. In traditional narratives of Old World/New World contact, the first settlers are typically the central figures, whose speech and actions are recorded as official history. Retamar, as a way of bringing the native peoples of the Americas back into the narrative, insists on a reading of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* in which Caliban, the wretched half human, half monster, is the central figure. Caliban’s famous declaration to Prospero—“You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse”³⁴—provides a model for contextualizing the history of colonialism and resistance in the Americas, particularly Latin America. Just as Caliban uses the very tool (the language taught him by Prospero) that was used to colonize him (or it?), Latin America could use colonial tools to undermine colonial power.³⁵

Carolyn Porter’s suggestion that we reorganize American studies with reference to places and events offers a productive way of emphasizing alternative centers and marginal spaces. Focusing on Havana, New Orleans, New England, Los Angeles, or Mexico City, or even on events like the Haitian Revolution and the Mexican War, would facilitate an engagement with literary history in which national boundaries would neither disappear nor simply be questioned, but the multiple and nodal points of contact and the varied modes of intellectual and material commerce among cities, regions, and even towns within and between the continents would gain prominence. “Such a framework would necessarily include Africa and the triangular trade route joining its east coast to Europe and the Americas. It would also necessarily multiply vantage points within Latin America, whose cultural and political heterogeneity resists any monolithic overview.”³⁶ The quadruple set of relations that her reconfiguration sets up—between the Americas, between Europe and the Americas, between Africa and the Americas, and between Europe and Africa—would enable us, she contends, to “grasp how the cultural, political, and economic relations between and within the Americas might work to reconstellate the field itself, reflecting its questions in accord with a large frame. Theoretically speaking, ‘Amer-

ica,' both geopolitically and historically would become at once *internally fissured* and *externally relativized*."³⁷

For instance, if, in an African studies course or program, we focused on Harlem, we would be able to study not just this local, urban place and its treatment in art, but also its complicated relationship to the history of black migration during the early decades of the twentieth century and to the back-and-forth movement of travel and migration between the South and the North in the United States. We would also be able to highlight, for example, the slow transformation of a southern consciousness, rooted in the memory of slave plantations, into an urban, modern sensibility; address the role and symbolic significance of the city in the black imagination; follow the evolution of gospel and blues inflected with a new modern tone and rhythm; and highlight the interactions between European and black musicians in the formation of a musical tradition like jazz. Moreover, by giving attention to writers like Claude McKay and Marcus Garvey, we can see how the social processes linking Harlem to the South are intertwined with the histories of resistance and opposition to colonial presence in various Caribbean islands. We could also focus on the role of Paris, as a European cultural center, in determining and influencing black aesthetic production during the early decades of the twentieth century, particularly in the works of W. E. B. DuBois and Richard Wright. Here the significance of Harlem and Paris would problematize any Eurocentered ideas about black engagement in the social and cultural milieu of the time.

However, these proposals, while promising, can facilitate only modest reformulations of American literary history; they cannot address the heterogeneous processes of interaction among the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Paul Jay proposes an approach "that confronts the history of the region in terms of a *revised* conception of the emergence of modernity"³⁸ and suggests paying attention to locations which are not within national boundaries, but which are "*between* or which *transgress* conventional borders—liminal margins or border zones in which individual and national identities migrate, merge, and hybridize."³⁹ But in what sense can we revise modernity? I suggest that a productive way to begin

would be to link Nelly Richard's and Edmundo O'Gorman's crucial conceptual move to *rehistoricize* modernity with Paul Gilroy's notion of the "black Atlantic" and Edouard Glissant's idea of overlapping modernities. Since rehistoricizing modernity would entail reperiodizing modernity, reworlding America's focus on intercontinental migration and cultural translation could go a long way in contesting Eurocentered conceptualizations of modernity.

The Critique of Modernity

Richard's central argument is that the entire project of modernity, in the general sense of European expansion in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, was designed to position Europeans marching towards an ever-unfolding, grand, universal history. As the English, French, Spanish, and other European settlers established themselves as colonial powers in the Americas, native societies and cultures faced the prospect of either complete annihilation or a form of condescending assimilation coupled with native cultural denigration. Speaking of Latin America, Richard writes, "In this Manichean scheme of things, modernity is found guilty of having destroyed the characteristics of a true Latin American identity through a conglomeration of influences which are invariably regarded as threats, falsifications, or travesties of the region's original and authentic nucleus of culture."⁴⁰ In other words, modernization in the Americas always meant Europeanization.⁴¹ Richard seems to echo the arguments made by the Mexican philosopher Edmundo O'Gorman in *The Invention of America* (1961), whose thesis is that modernity in the Americas originated not when America was discovered but when it began to be *invented*.

O'Gorman rejects the substantialistic concept of America as a thing-in-itself, already existing in time and space, discourse, and belief, whose discovery would automatically unravel the meaning of America. Rather, O'Gorman argues that America was "produced" in the intersection of Old World cosmographic theories, European political intrigues, religious injunctions and worldviews, and personal idiosyncrasies and dispositions, all of which generated the meaning of America over time.

Coterminous with this production, an incipient humanism that stressed the limitless potential of man to shape his own cosmic destiny began to gain credence.⁴² It was in this context that, according to O’Gorman, America “developed from a complex, living process of exploration and interpretation,” and its “history will no longer be that which has happened to America, but that which it has been, is, and is in the act of being.”⁴³

Common to O’Gorman and Richard are the analeptic extension of modernity and the idea of a break or rupture from the past, but while Richard privileges the perspective of the Native Indians and the African slaves, O’Gorman recasts modernity as the undermining of medieval beliefs, beginning with the finding, not the discovery, of a land mass west of Europe. To O’Gorman, it is the very production of America as a narrative strategy that marks the process of modernization, or rather the entry point of modernity, in the Americas. If we follow Richard’s and O’Gorman’s premise, modernity begins with the era of New World conquest and settlement and the consolidation of colonial power, and then, in the eighteenth century (at least in Europe), coalesces with the project of the Enlightenment, the founding of nations, the establishing of juridical institutions, the development of the army, and the building of roads, bridges, railroads, trains, telephones, hospitals, and so on. It is in this context that we can productively extend Gilroy’s idea of the black Atlantic and Glissant’s idea of overlapping modernities.

Gilroy argues that it would be parochial to study writers like W. E. B. DuBois, Martin Delaney, Phillis Wheatley, Claude McKay, and Richard Wright strictly within the nationalist framework of the United States, since such a focus would not address these writers’ common experience of travel and displacement. Instead, he proposes the black Atlantic “as a single, complex, unit of analysis . . . to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” to study the “deterritorialized, multiplex and anti-national basis for the affinity of the identity of passions between divers black populations.”⁴⁴ It is within the nexus of the black Atlantic, argues Gilroy, that we can see the emergence of a “counter culture of modernity.” He uses the metaphor of a ship to

conceptualize the intercontinental engagement of cultures and economies. The ship, perpetually moving, emblematic of the “shifting spaces” and “half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialization and modernization,” and shaping the Atlantic as a “system of cultural exchanges,”⁴⁵ dramatizes the dispersal of migrant cultures, a dispersal that redraws the margins of the nation by undermining the absolutism of ethnic identity and the provincialism of nationalism.

It would be useful to link Gilroy’s idea of the articulation of a counterculture of modernity with Edouard Glissant’s notion of the “irruption of modernity” in the Americas. Glissant distinguishes between a “maturing” European modernity and a “living” American modernity. He argues that literary tradition, and by extension history itself, in the Americas did not mature and evolve slowly as it did in Europe. Instead, America experienced a nonmaturing process that Glissant calls “lived modernity,” to connote the sense of immediacy and unpredictability that necessarily accompanies the writing of history and the quest for identity in the collision of societies and cultures in the Americas. It is sudden, brutal, and imposed and connotes a “violent departure from tradition, from literary continuity.”⁴⁶ Thus, to Glissant, literature in the Americas “is the product of a system of modernity that is sudden and not sustained or ‘evolved.’”⁴⁷ But what is crucial in Glissant’s formulation of lived modernity is his emphasis that lived modernity “overlaps with the preoccupations of matured ‘modernity’ in other zones of culture and thought.”⁴⁸ It is here that we can make the link to Gilroy’s notions of “syncopated temporality” and the articulation of black identity as a counterculture of modernity. The revision of history and the recovery of culture in the Americas are thus possible only from within the sites of chiasmus—the inversions, displacements, entanglements—of these modernities.

In the reconfiguration of the very terms in which modernity can be theorized (Richard and O’Gorman) and delineation of the emergence of divergent modernities (Gilroy’s counterculture in the black Atlantic and Glissant’s overlapping modernities), a crucial question emerges: how can we, to extend Jay, “complicate how we think about American litera-

ture by *retheorizing the spaces(s) in which it has emerged*?⁴⁹ The impulse, Jay notes, should be not on finding social coherence, political unity, and cultural homogeneity within nations and states, but on “directing critical attention to the liminal margins and permeable border zones out of which the cultures of the Americas have emerged.”⁵⁰ Jay’s emphasis on “spaces,” “cultures,” and “permeable border zones” has three important implications: first, it enables a theorization of *divergent* responses to modernity in different locations in the Americas; secondly, by insisting on the plurality of cultural formations, it anticipates the “clash” of “values and commitments”⁵¹ in the Americas; and thirdly, it configures the border not simply as something that contains, orders, and restricts whatever emanates from the center, but as a site in which something emerges, is produced, or is given birth to. Approaching this issue by addressing the formation of a border consciousness in the U.S. Southwest not only would be fruitful but would enable us to meditate on the formation of a new border imaginary engendered in the dialectic of global and regional modes of sociality and interaction in the Americas.

Border Crossings

Contemporary theorizations of border experience in North America have focused on the U.S. Southwest, Texas, and those former parts of northern Mexico annexed by the United States with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848: California, New Mexico, Arizona, and parts of Nevada, Colorado, and Utah. But to speak only of these regions is problematic, since the very idea of the borderlands hinges on both the notion of the border and whatever lies on the “other” side of the border. Oscar Martínez helpfully delineates the border as “a line that separates one nation from another or, in the case of internal entities, one province or locality from another. The essential functions of a border are to keep people in their own space and to prevent, control, or regulate interactions among them.”⁵² In this case the line of separation is the nearly 2,000-mile-long fenced borderline that divides the United States from Mexico. This border is always regulated,

patrolled, and controlled. The flow of people and goods across it varies depending on regional political and market demands, U.S. and Mexican foreign policy interests, and, more recently, the pressures of a global market. What gives rise to the borderlands and border experience are the social, political, and cultural policies and activities that necessitate, at different points in time, varied levels of interaction between peoples on both sides of the border.

We can map the diverse forms of social affiliation and cultural articulation in the border regions from the migration of the Aztecs from Aztlán to central Mexico in about 1168 AD and their return to the Southwest as mixed bloods after their defeat by the conquistadors in 1521;⁵³ through the numerous inland journeys by the Spanish settlers as they moved upward to northern Mexico in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and continuing through the war of 1848, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the bracero program of 1940–50, the establishment of maquiladoras along the Mexican border, the rise of the Chicano movement in the 1960s, the transnational economic policies of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994 (“one of the primary political instruments of globalization in the Americas”),⁵⁴ and the postmodern globality of the present, which links the borderlands to larger networks of transnational social and cultural formations. We will then be able to study what Guillermo Gómez-Peña calls the “epistemology of multiplicity and a border semiotics”⁵⁵ in which the “phantasmatics of Nuéstra América’s borders”⁵⁶ are engendered.

We will also, as John Carlos Rowe observes, be able to address the transborder ties between various contact zones within the borderlands to other cities and countries in Central and South America: Southern California’s ties to Central America and Asia; Lower Texas’s (or “Greater Houston”) ties to Mexico and the Caribbean; the Southeast’s intimate ties to the cross-continental flows of peoples in the black Atlantic; and Miami’s close ties to Cuba, Haiti, and other regions of Latin America.⁵⁷ Rowe emphasizes not only the interregional linkages in the borderlands but their Pan-American and intercontinental forms of economic ex-

change, political economy, and cultural production, which frequently intersect and overlap. The borderlands, in other words, are frayed with multiple, permeable borders and zones of contact. Rowe also suggests that because “America” circulates as a sign, symbol, and “commodity of new cultural imperialism” within and across these multiple chiasmatic sites, we should address the specific manner in which local and regional cultures “‘write back’ against cultural and even political and economic domination.”⁵⁸ Such a focus would also involve, to extend Amy Kaplan, the “multiple histories of continental and overseas expansion, conquest, conflict and resistance which have shaped the cultures of the United States and the cultures of those it has dominated within and beyond its geopolitical boundaries.”⁵⁹ The implications are global in scope as “America’s conceptual and geographic boundaries” become “fluid, contested, and historically changing.”⁶⁰ The implication, as Rowe suggests, is that there can be no monolithic American studies, however much we globalize or internationalize it, that we can “command.”⁶¹ Rather, the mapping of “different Americas” can “help foreground the multilingual and multicultural realities of social life and economic opportunity in any of the Americas”⁶² as the history of America yields to the histories of the Americas.

These three critical models—the dialectical, hemispheric configuration, the critique of modernity, and border crossings—foreground social and cultural production in the Americas less as monolithic traditions emerging in various geopolitical regions and more as overlapping arenas or zones of competing voices and dissenting histories embodying contradictory articulations of self, identity, and society. The implications for the conceptualization of American social and cultural history and the teaching and writing of American literature can be profound. While contesting the ideological biases and marginalizing tendencies of Eurocentrism in the formulation of a paradigmatic, transcendent, and trans-historical America, these models can help us develop new critical vocabularies and interdisciplinary forms of engagement to examine various forms of artistic and social expression in their inter-American, transborder, and global manifestations and linkages.

The next three chapters take up each of these models respectively in order to demonstrate the promising lines of inquiry they open up and how they may be used to reworld America. It is fitting for a project that contests traditional conceptualizations of American history to focus on New World encounters in order to foreground the differential manner in which America “developed from a complex, living process of exploration and interpretation.”⁶³ Therefore, in the second chapter I analyze three sixteenth-century chronicles: one by the Spanish explorer Bernal Díaz del Castillo (*The Conquest of New Spain*), who recounts the fall of the mighty Aztec empire in 1521; one by the French voyager Jean de Léry (*History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*), whose account of his journey to Brazil forms one of the most impressive ethnographic narratives of the New World; and one by the Spanish traveler Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (*Relación*), supposedly the first European to cross the U.S. Southwest from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast in Baja California, Mexico, and the first European to see the American buffalo and report it to his fellow Europeans. I argue that by effectively contesting the notion that America was a *tabula rasa* upon which Europe inscribed its consciousness, these chronicles dramatize the manner in which the “discovery” of America challenged Europe’s perception of itself and its relationship to the classical past and its medieval heritage, thus dramatizing Europe’s “desperate negotiation” with America’s “presence of otherness,” which it could “neither securely manipulate nor comfortably embrace.”⁶⁴

The third chapter broadens the Euro-American framework of the previous chapter to highlight the patterns of social and cultural exchange among the Americas, Europe, and Africa. My focus on the Caribbean archipelago as a site that registers the warp and woof of these exchanges revises traditional approaches to configuring a Caribbean poetics, which view the region as a cluster of separate island nations and its cultures as extensions of European practices. In my discussion of Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*, I focus on the urbanization of the city of Fort-de-France, Martinique. Emphasizing the ways in which the novel can be situated within a Pan-Caribbean nexus, I argue that the emergence of a black

Martinican feminist consciousness is central to the social efficacy of creolization as a strategy of resistance. I also study Russell Banks's *Book of Jamaica* and *Rule of the Bone*, which highlight the interhemispheric commerce of whiteness in the Americas. I argue that the novels' fetishization of black culture erases the history of slavery and racism and also dramatizes whiteness as an ideological construction that is inextricably linked to the construction of black identity and culture. This imbrication of whiteness and blackness also perpetuates the continuing exploitation of those countries that North America has historically defined as the Third World, in need of progress and modernization.

In the fourth chapter I study United States–Mexico border relations, a more localized arena of migration and displacement in the U.S. Southwest that is engaging a growing body of Chicano/Latino and Native Indian literature. In my study of Roberta Fernández's *Intaglio: A Novel in Six Stories*, I focus on the enduring presence of Mexican and Amerindian religious and cultural practices and icons—*curanderismo*, *la llorona*, *la bruja*—and the domestic spaces occupied by border women, in which they often refashion their gendered roles and identities through a process of cultural translation. Departing from established paradigms in border studies, which often neglect the presence of Native Indian tribes in the borderlands, my study of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* makes visible both the novel's weaving of Yaqui history and culture with the tumultuous histories of Euro-American contact and the impact of European colonialism and U.S. and Mexican nationalisms on Native Indian peoples in order to theorize on the formation of transborder subjectivities in the borderlands. Employing a range of critical methodologies drawn from postcolonial discourse, border theory, cultural studies, ethnography, history, and sociology, these chapters take a multidisciplinary approach to the reworlding of America. What follows, then, is a modest argument in response to the question, how shall we enact the labor of reworlding America?