



## Comparative American Studies

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# Inter-American studies or Imperial American studies?

Sophia A. McClennen

*Pennsylvania State University, USA*

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**Abstract** As inter-American studies gain greater academic visibility, we are now in a position to ask whether the field constitutes an imperial threat to Latin American literary and cultural study, or whether it provides a valuable basis for cross-cultural comparison. Do inter-American studies represent the latest variation on the Monroe Doctrine of policing the region? What do we make of the fact that inter-American studies blossoms just as Latin Americanism becomes increasingly more powerful in the academy? This article argues that while questions of empire and appropriation must be considered as we assess this burgeoning field of inquiry, an inter-American perspective also affords possibilities for studying cultural production. These possibilities include comparative studies of works that have been largely marginalized by scholars of the Americas, such as Brazilian and indigenous literatures. In addition, the inter-American approach is able to put pressure on nationalist and cultural essentialist epistemes by focusing on the ways that culture often transgresses borders, both geographic and identitarian.

**Keywords** American studies ● globalization ● imperialism ● inter-American studies ● Latin American studies ● postcoloniality ● post-nationalism

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'Inter-American studies' ought to signal greater awareness of the ways that the cultures of the Americas can be productively analyzed comparatively and it should represent a displacement of US culture as the central signifier in the region. For Latin Americanists who work in the humanities this should mean that the literatures and cultures of the region finally

find their comparative counterparts among texts from the United States. In literature, Machado de Assis is compared with Hawthorne and Melville; the poems of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Gregório de Matos are studied along with Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor; or the sermons and essays of Bartolomé de Las Casas and Antônio Vieira are placed against Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards. If inter-American studies are to effectively dislocate the United States from the center of the hemisphere's academic purview, then comparisons of works from within Latin America should also form part of the work of inter-American studies: examples of inter-American research might include a comparison of the feminist theories of Clarice Lispector, Luisa Valenzuela, Diamela Eltit, and Cristina Peri Rossi, or the political aesthetic of the Bolivian Grupo Ukamau and the Peruvian Grupo Chaski. For many of us who engage in comparative study of the Americas, more explicit academic attention to these cultural crossroads is long overdue.<sup>1</sup>

As inter-American studies enjoys a recent resurgence, we are in a position to ask whether it holds the promise of truly reallocating the existing academic and intellectual value system that privileges the United States over Latin America and that contains the study of the United States and of Latin America within traditional tropes. Do inter-American studies represent the latest variation on the Monroe Doctrine of patronizing Latin America? Is it possible for such a field of study, which is squarely located within US academic institutions and often practiced by scholars working in departments of English and History, to avoid a further replication of the unequal relations of power that have dominated the inter-American intellectual and cultural scene? What do we make of the fact that inter-American studies blossoms just as Latin Americanism becomes increasingly more powerful in the US academy?<sup>2</sup> In order for inter-American studies to signal any sort of serious restructuring of academic inquiry it will be necessary for scholars to address what I see as four interrelated obstacles that threaten the progressive potential of the field. These obstacles roughly break down into problems which are conceptual, semantic, historical and disciplinary, and they each find their sources in the history, especially the history of imperialism, of the Americas. Over the course of this article I will try to sketch the relationship between these impediments to the field as well as some ways that they might be overcome.

I wish that it were possible to describe these four issues discretely, but these issues circle back around each other, overlapping and intersecting. The first, and I would suggest most important, barrier to an anti-imperialist inter-American studies is at once conceptual and ideological, methodological and intellectual. Throughout the history of American and Latin American studies, and well before the advent of postmodern theory, scholars have cautioned that we need to be wary of master narratives that reduce the history and culture of the region to an *idée fixe*. A recent articulation of this problem can be found in Djelal Kadir's 2003 *PMLA*

article where he highlights the 1935 work of Americanist R.P. Blackmur as an early example of a challenge to the reigning regimes of truth or what Kadir calls the 'zealous disambiguation' that has attempted to control intellectual considerations of the United States (Kadir, 2003: 10). According to Kadir, zealous disambiguation is 'synonymous to simplified reduction or reification that leads to fundamentalist literalism and essentialisms'.<sup>3</sup> We might think of it as the principle of *E Pluribus Unum*, or 'Out of many, one'.<sup>4</sup> Regarding Latin American studies, a parallel critique confronts the way that the region is studied from within the US academy. Ostensibly, the notion of Latin American studies is a wholly US construct that served post-World War II, and perhaps more specifically post-Sputnik, US interests. Richard Morse, writing in 1964, suggested that many US Latin Americanists were unconscious of their own colonialist attitudes towards the region, and he claimed that their work often revealed a 'subconscious hostility' towards their object of study (Morse, 1989: 170). This conservative, reactionary form of area studies parallels the myriad overt and covert US operations that historically have been dedicated to containing and controlling Latin America. Alberto Moreiras, however, also points to a second tendency where Latin Americanism works not as a 'machine of epistemic homogenization but potentially against it as a disruptive force' (Moreiras, 2001: 87).<sup>5</sup> Moreiras's notion of 'epistemic homogenization' is on a par with Kadir's 'zealous disambiguation' – both highlight the problems of *E Pluribus Unum* and both authors describe American and Latin American studies as threatened by a monologism that serves US hegemony and imperialism.

Full appreciation of these notions is absolutely central to any progressive inter-American intellectual enterprise, but I would like to focus on an interrelated inter-American conceptual crisis, what might be called *strategic multiplicity*. *Ex Uno Plura*, 'Out of One, Many', is the corollary, chiasmic, twin concept to *E Pluribus Unum*. By reading the motto on the US national seal, 'out of many, one', backwards we draw attention to the ways that hegemonic discourse has often multiplied, unfixing language and meaning in ways that support the prevailing power structure. What I want to suggest is that we need to not only pay careful attention to how difference, ambiguity, and complexity have been forcefully distilled into the master narratives of American identity, but we also need to attend to the ways that difference, ambiguity, and complexity have been stripped of their dialogism, shrouded in monologism, and productively deployed at the service of European and US hegemony. El Inca Garcilaso writing in the 17th century asked 'if the world is one or many' and, noticing the forces of imperialism driven by religious and economic fanaticism, he concluded that 'there is but one world' (quoted in Fernández Retamar, 1986: 22). But perhaps this image is incomplete. Perhaps the binary between conceiving of one monolith and a variety of dissenting voices obscures the multifarious modalities of inter-American power relations. Perhaps the monolith actually depends on a multiplicity of voices that all

ultimately work in unison to maintain the status quo and that strive to silence the countervailing multiplicity of oppositional voices.

Rather than official history, then, we have *official histories*, and if we want to counteract them we need to be vigilant of the ways that they are difficult to contain and to pinpoint. Arguably, deconstruction has led us to focus too keenly on the ways that meaning is fixed and controlled by knowledge regimes at the expense of recognizing that knowledge regimes are also served by multiplying meaning and loosening semantic fixity.<sup>6</sup> In an effort to undo the unity and multiplicity that lead to absolute power, we need to re-examine the ways that the world is both one and many, recognizing that this dialectic can be viewed from imperialist as well as anti-colonial vantage points.<sup>7</sup>

Discourses of opposition tend to engage in two distinct projects that respond to two common gestures used by discourses of power. First, in response to the efforts to distill meaning into a totalizing master narrative, opposition points to the multiplicity silenced by such monologism. So, when 'America' means the white, conservative, middle class of the United States, we disclose the ways that image masks the richness and complexity of American identity. Second, in response to strategic multiplicities, discourses of opposition attempt a resemanticization by rebuilding a ruptured link between signifier and signified, and redirecting meaning back to a signified at risk of being lost. So when the US government uses the term 'America' alternately to mean both the United States and also the entire hemisphere of which the United States is the center, voices of dissent like those of Jose Martí or José Enrique Rodó argue that 'America' means the America to the south. Their utterances and invocations of 'America' oppose both US deployments of the term.

The problem of America as one or many, as knowable or in process, as totalized or fragmented, equally affects the cognitive maps of the north and the south and reveals an important site of investigation for inter-Americanists. Both regions and the area studies that purport to represent and understand them suffer from the imposition and proliferation of rhetoric that depicts cultures as static entities strictly contained within specific geographical boundaries. But added to this it is important to register that there have been ways in which a looseness and multiplicity of meaning has been conscientiously ratified at the service of empire building. There are examples of this practice from before Columbus's first journey and they are found more recently in the rhetoric of George W. Bush's regime.

To give a concrete example of what I mean by a strategic monologic multiplicity I want to point out a second area where inter-American studies faces serious challenges: the semantic. What to do about the term 'America'? How to dislodge 'America' as a synonym for the United States of America? If we call the hemisphere 'America' and the United States of America the 'United States', don't we erase the notion that both Brazil and Mexico are also United States? I want to suggest that the problem of the

term 'America' – of its typical lexical application to the United States principally and to the entire region secondarily – is a problem that reveals far more than an unfortunate choice of name for a nation. Originating from the well-known designation by Martin Waldesmuller for South America in 1507, the term tactically shifts in the colonial period to refer to both the north and the south. All qualifiers used to exclude the United States and foreground the rest of America have been frustrating or frustrated. There is 'South America' which leaves Mexico and Central America out, or 'Latin America', which complicates the place of Haiti and the Antilles, or 'Spanish America', which excludes the largest nation in the region. A favorite has simply been 'Our', Martí's term for the America that refuses to be subsumed by the United States, but even Martí's 'Our' America, apart from creating lexical problems for those of us not born in Latin America, leaves out Canada. The etymology of 'America' is carefully parsed by Kadir, who points out that 'America' signifies an interesting tension between the 'new land' that is 'clear', 'bright', 'shining', 'ever young', 'ever fair' and 'Nowhereland', a utopia, a place that is no place (Kadir, 1992: 60).

How this term, signifying the New World, later morphed to doubly signify the hemisphere and the northern United States is yet another story, and it is a story of a semantic slippage that serves the interests of US expansionism and hegemony. The first official appearance of the designation 'The United States of America' appears in the Articles of Confederation of 1777, but there are two key documents that indicate some of the early linguistic twists that surrounded the naming of the hemisphere's most powerful nation. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, written in February of 1776, states that: 'The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind' (Paine, 1776: n.p.) – a clear indication of the way that the term 'America' had begun to be synonymous for what was to become the United States but also was used in a loose and vague way to refer to a far more extensive territory, here the entire globe. Paine's text exposes the variety of names in use at the time to refer to the budding nation-to-be and he refers to the region alternately as 'the Colonies', 'the country', 'the United Colonies', the 'American states', and, in his final line, he writes of the 'Free and Independent States of America'. While it should come as no surprise that the nation-to-be lacked a stable name, it is important to note that the 'plain' language of Paine's text is often considered to be one of the main explanations for why his arguments reached the 'common man'.<sup>8</sup> It is debatable whether the series of names used by Paine to refer to the colonies is an example of 'plain' language, but what remains clear is that, well before the official naming of the nation, 'America' was already enjoying a productive and open semantic field.

A few months after *Common Sense* was published the 13 colonies signed the 'Declaration of Independence', which did not formally name the region, but which also signals some early concerns over its future naming. In this document two names are used, one right after the other: 'the Thirteen Colonies' and 'the thirteen united States of America'

(‘Declaration of Independence’, 1776: n.p.). Interestingly, in the passage from Colonies to States, the number 13, in shedding its capitalization, ceases to function as part of a name and becomes merely an adjective alongside ‘united’. We might wonder whether this change suggests the early hope that the number of states might soon expand. The fact that the number 13 as a modifying adjective would be dropped from later documents certainly suggests that it was no longer deemed useful to quantify the number of states in the confederacy.

Next, in the Articles of Confederation the territory receives its first post-colonial name, and the two available drafts to the final document expose the debate over naming the new nation. Article one of Ben Franklin’s draft reads: ‘The Name of this Confederacy shall henceforth be the United Colonies of *North* America’ (Franklin, 1775: n.p.; my emphasis). For the same section John Dickinson writes: ‘The Name of this Confederacy shall be THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA’ (Dickinson, 1776: n.p.). But, in the final ratified version of the document, article one reads: ‘The *Stile* of this Confederacy shall be “The United States of America”’ (Articles of Confederation, 1777: n.p.; my emphasis). Note the purposeful erasure of Franklin’s qualifying *North* to America as well as the semiotic shift from naming to fashioning or styling. Here the style is also a stylus – a sharp, pointed pen that accompanies the sharp, pointed arms that will later support US expansionism, an early prophesy of the ideology of manifest destiny. The naming, or styling, of the United States of America is an example of strategic multiplicity at the service of enforcing and rhetorically enacting the sphere of its power.

The fact that the United States has no name or that the name slips over both the most powerful country in the region and also over a hemisphere of more than 20 nations demonstrates how the term ‘America’ means at once everything and nothing. It would be worthwhile to research the semantic variations of the way that America, the Americas, inter-America, pan-America and other variations of ‘America’ have historically been enlisted for political ends. We read again and again of efforts by the Americans to the south to redirect the power and meaning of the term. Texts from Simón Bolívar, José Enrique Rodó, and José Martí strive to redirect ‘America’ both semantically and conceptually. Bolívar’s ‘Carta de Jamaica’ (1815) refers repeatedly to ‘América’ and, while he occasionally qualifies the term by using the adjective ‘meridional’, in general his usage purposefully decenters and excludes the United States, especially when he calls Nueva Granada ‘el corazón de la América’ (n.p.). In fact, as Sara Castro-Klarén points out, Bolívar ‘never referred to the Spanish colonies by the colonial appellation current at the time: “Indias Occidentales.” He always spoke and wrote of “América”’ (2003: 35). Rodó, like Martí, also places the United States under erasure in his use of ‘América’, although he does not play with the word with the art of Martí, who in a lecture on Bolívar begins by indicating the ways that the term ‘America’ signifies differently according to one’s place in the power structure: ‘Con la frente

contrita de los americanos que no han podido entrar aún en América' [With the contrite minds of Americans who have not yet been able to enter America] (n.p.).<sup>9</sup> These intellectuals and statesmen try to reground 'America'; first unlatching it from its connection to the *idée fixe* that promotes the centrality of the United States and then channeling its meaning away from the strategic multiplicity that has enlisted a loose term in order to expedite US hegemony. In fact, the examples from Bolívar, Martí, and Rodó demonstrate efforts to reground hegemonic linguistic multiplicity into a specific cultural context. In the face of power that runs from the militarily material to the semiotic it is not useful for meaning to be multiple and free floating, but it can be multiple and grounded. In such cases the apolitically ludic consequences of poststructuralist practice are reversed and deconstruction becomes a tool for regrounding and reorienting the meaning of words in a way that allows them to have a purposeful fluidity, one that resists fluidity at the service of hegemony. The flow of meaning across signifiers is not helpful in countering hegemony if it is completely unmoored, because official rhetoric easily twists the meaning of decentered language. Loose signification is ultimately hostile to projects invested in reallocating power.

These struggles become manifest when we consider the competing semanticizations of 'America' across contemporaneous documents. For example in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which refers to the United States repeatedly as the 'United States', 'America' appears only once: 'With the movements in this hemisphere we are of necessity more immediately connected, and by causes which must be obvious to all enlightened and impartial observers. The political system of the allied powers is essentially different in this respect from that of America' (Monroe Doctrine, 1823: n.p.). In keeping with the logic of the document, 'America' in this instance means both the United States and the rest of the hemisphere. Moreover, when 'America' does mean the entire hemisphere, the United States continues to function as the central signifier. In contrast, Simón Bolívar attempts to redirect such usage of the term 'America' in his invitation to participate in the Panama Congress of 1826 written in 1824:

Después de quince años de sacrificios consagrados a la libertad de América, por obtener el sistema de garantías que, en paz y guerra, sea el escudo de nuestro nuevo destino, es tiempo ya de que los intereses y las relaciones que unen entre sí a las repúblicas americanas, antes colonias españolas, tengan una base fundamental que eternice, si es posible, la duración de estos gobiernos' (Bolívar, 1824: n.p.).<sup>10</sup>

[After fifteen years of sacrifice dedicated to the freedom of America, in order to obtain a system of guarantees that, in peace and war, can be the protective shield of our new destiny, it is due time that the interests and relationships that unite the American republics, which were previously Spanish colonies, had a fundamental base that perpetuates, if possible, the duration of these governments.]

Bolívar's vision of an American union stems in large part from his desire to counteract the vision of America promoted by the Monroe Doctrine. Furthermore, when we read these two documents carefully we see that, in fact, the term 'America' has greater linguistic fixity in Bolívar's use than in Monroe's, which underscores the fact that Bolívar felt compelled to create a counter narrative persuasive enough to challenge the linguistic polyvalence articulated by US expansionism. In a similar fashion we might read the essays of Martí from the end of the 19th century against the language of the first Pan-American Congress held in Washington DC in 1890, or Rodó's *Ariel* (1900), with its subtitle 'a la juventud de América', and the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1904), which deploys the term 'America' in a variety of ways all of which ultimately serve the logic of US military intervention.<sup>11</sup>

Lest we fall into a trap that creates an epistemological break between voices of dissent from the south and voices of hegemony from the north, semantic considerations of the battle over 'America' require attention to the nuances of voices in favor of and against the status quo. Foucault reminds us that power and its discourse cannot be divided into two comprehensive categories of dominant and dominated and that discursive power emanates both from within institutions and in opposition to them (Foucault, 1976: 92–102). Alongside the voices of dissent from Latin America are those of consent, such as those of Gerardo Machado, Rafael Trujillo, and Augusto Pinochet, all of whom echoed similar rhetoric to that of the US government and functioned not only as puppets, but also as parrots. These voices of consent deserve careful consideration, especially if we agree with Lars Schoultz's thesis in *Beneath the United States* that underlying the history of US policy towards Latin America 'is a pervasive belief that Latin Americans constitute an inferior branch of the human species' (Schoultz, 1998: xv).

In addition, it is useful to register the history of attempts to reappropriate 'America' from within the United States, even if these reappropriations tend to limit 'America' to US territory at the expense of the hemisphere's other Americans. Edward Said writes that: 'Dissenting literature has always survived in the United States alongside the authorized public space' (Said, 1992: 287). The history of these oppositional voices is extremely long and rich, but I would like to point to a couple of key examples that illustrate an effort to readdress the meaning of 'America'. The first is from Langston Hughes who repeatedly used his poetry to call attention to racist language by first showing the inherent segregation in the US lexicon and then by resignifying key symbols of US identity. Here I am alluding to the power of his words in 'A Dream Deferred' or 'I, too, Sing America'. In 'Let America be America Again' he carefully deconstructs 'America', revealing the ways that the ideology of American exceptionalism, of America as the land of the free and of opportunity, depends on extremely violent social marginalization: 'O, yes, / I say it plain, / America never was America to me, And yet I swear this oath

– / America will be!’ (Hughes, 1993: n.p.). Here, Hughes skillfully opens up the last line to doubly signify that the United States will become the ideals that have shaped the ideology of America and that America will be his – that is, it will belong to those he represents.<sup>12</sup> A similar voice of protest over the meaning of ‘America’ from within the United States is found in Martin Luther King’s 1965 Independence Day speech on the ‘American Dream’:

Now ever since the founding fathers of our nation dreamed this dream in all of its magnificence – to use a big word that the psychiatrists use – America has been something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against herself. On the one hand we have proudly professed the great principles of democracy, but on the other hand we have sadly practiced the very opposite of those principles. (King, 1965: n.p.)

King’s emphasis on the schizophrenia of ‘America’ highlights my point about the way that the rhetoric of ‘America’ has been used by the US establishment in a loose way, yet always with a clear caste system of privilege, one which King was dedicated to breaking down. Inter-American studies would benefit from more cross-territorial comparative attention to the intersection of the variety of American voices of dissent.

Such comparative projects draw attention to the need to recognize the importance of history and historicizing in inter-American studies. But how is this history best recovered? How can we preserve its complexity and ambiguity without succumbing to perverse dislocations? How can we be grounded without being monologic? In Martí’s 1891 essay ‘Nuestra América’, he makes a plea against presentism when he calls for careful attention to pan-American history from the Incas to the 19th century, and analogous appeals run throughout the recorded history of the region. And yet historical amnesia plagues inter-American relations and, perhaps most poignantly, the USA’s own institutional memory. Arguably the rhetoric of US policy encourages and depends on such amnesia, for without it Latin American nations would never sign another inter-American treaty. A recent example of such historical amnesia from the authorized public space of academia is Janice Radway’s 1998 presidential address to the American Studies Association, where she suggests that in response to the problematic name of her field of study it might be appropriate to rename the association the Inter-American Studies Association:

The name Inter-American studies would have the advantage of comparatively connecting the study of US history and cultures to those of North, Central, and South America and to the countries and cultures of the Caribbean as well. By focusing on trans-national American social and cultural relations, inter-American studies could foster the investigation of regional cultural flows, of peoples, ideas, institutions, movements, products, etc. (Radway, 1999: 19)

Instead of registering that the American Studies Association effectively studies the United States and suggesting that the association be renamed

to account for the specific territory under its academic purview, she turns the problem on its head and suggests a name that widens the territorial realm of US Americanists. Latin Americanists might see such a move as signaling a transition from covert to overt invasion of the rich Latin American canon – escalating a struggle already in process that has been characterized by fierce boundary disputes over who has the right to teach such texts as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In addition, Radway's proposition assumes that inter-American studies does not already exist, that it is a field available for exploration and development and that the members of the American Studies Association could simply rename themselves inter-Americanists. While the field might be experiencing a resurgence and a renewed timeliness in the light of globalization and of reconsiderations of area studies, it is by no means a new field of study. Radway's remarks reveal the strategic monologic multiplicity that can only emanate from the center at the same time that they reiterate the fundamental power imbalance between scholars of America who concentrate on the United States and those that do not. For American Americanists, inter-American studies can be casually considered among a list of Radway's other possible name changes in a way that is unthinkable for Latin Americanists who consistently assess their field vis-à-vis the historical, cultural, and literary activity of the United States. How would the American Studies Association respond if the Latin American Studies Association considered a similar move? Radway's remarks, however unwittingly, reveal the need for an inter-American studies committed to disarming the intellectual hegemony of the United States. Her statement, read from my perspective, that of a Latin Americanist inter-Americanist, exemplifies the passage from *E Pluribus Unum* to *Ex Uno Plura*, since her comments, given their audience, seem to suggest that language training and knowledge of the cultures of America are not necessary for inter-American work. While she speaks of how such a name change would require that they contact 'sister' organizations like the Latin American Studies Association, she fails to give serious thought to how such a name change would require reconsideration and reframing of the epistemological assumptions that structure American studies. What would an inter-American studies housed in English and History departments in the United States and taught by monolingual faculty be, if not an example of US intellectual expansionism? Isn't this yet another case of strategically deploying multiplicity in order to contain and control the flow of knowledge?

Radway's comments also need to be read in light of recent shifts in American studies, or the 'New' American studies, that represent themselves as post-national, but which ultimately have no cultural referents beyond the borders of the United States, and consequently are not post-national in any meaningful way.<sup>13</sup> That these shifts take place as the United States increases its global power and as Latin American studies becomes more influential in US universities cannot be overlooked. Are

these intellectual shifts indicative of a desire to be critical of globalization or are they an example of globalization?<sup>14</sup> In analyzing Radway's proposal it might be useful to remember what might be considered a corollary gesture of US signifying supremacy: New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia renamed Sixth Avenue the Avenue of the Americas in 1945 in order to encourage New Yorkers to support the US interests in the establishment of the Organization of American States.<sup>15</sup> Once again, we see a name change at the service of US advancement: in Radway's case academic, in LaGuardia's political, where a new name that has broader applications is sought to replace a more specific signifier.

To suggest such a facile change of course for American studies also negates the very real history of academic work dedicated to the topic. Historians tend to map inter-American relations according to five main phases (see Holden and Zolov, 2000). While these periodizations are limited by the problems attendant upon such generalizations, they are useful markers for understanding the corollary phases of inter-American studies that academics practiced in the United States. The first historical phase follows the colonial period and US independence and is marked by the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the struggle for Latin American independence, and early 'transitions of empire' between the United States and Latin America. Next, beginning in 1890 with the first Pan-American conference, inter-American relations enter into a heightened period of US intervention and imperialism. Formal academic inter-American study begins in the third historical phase of the Good Neighbor Policy (1933–45), a period of heightened interaction and reduced US interventions. This brief opening up of inter-American relations is followed by the Cold War period, which translates in academia into the rapid expansion both in area studies pertaining to the Americas and in the study of Latin American literature. The fifth phase, ushered in by the official end to the Cold War in 1989, is the moment of the globalization of capital, the imbalance in global superpowers, neoliberalism, and of increased US economic, political, and cultural hegemony in Latin America.<sup>16</sup> For instance, NAFTA is ratified in 1994 with significant consequences for inter-American relations. Correspondingly, this fifth phase has led academics to speak of post-national American studies, of multiculturalism, of US ethnic studies, etc., and it has also witnessed the proliferation of inter-American studies. It may be too soon to be sure, but I would suggest that we are entering a sixth phase of inter-American relations – post 9/11 – characterized by the war on 'terror', the details of which are still being written.<sup>17</sup>

Limited by the confines of this article, I would like to simply highlight some major moments in the development of inter-American studies within US academies.<sup>18</sup> Roughly during the period of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy (1933–45) and on the eve of the official foundation of the Organization of American States in 1948, the first formal academic inter-American studies took place within US institutions. In 1932, Herbert E. Bolton delivered the presidential address of

the American Historical Association on 'The Epic of Greater America', in which he urged historians to think beyond the borders of the United States and understand the Americas hemispherically:

There is need of a broader treatment of American history, to supplement the purely nationalistic presentation to which we are accustomed. . . . In my own country the study of thirteen English colonies and the United States in isolation has obscured many of the larger factors in their development, and helped to raise up a nation of chauvinists. Similar distortion has resulted from the teaching and writing of national history in other American countries. It is time for a change. The increasing importance of inter-American relations makes imperative a better understanding by each of the history and the culture of all. (Bolton, 1933: 448)

Bolton's address scrutinizes the intersecting histories of the Americas from Canada to Tierra del Fuego and he provides careful points of comparison and connection. He articulates what might be understood as an inter-Americanist methodology, grounded in comparative methods and in an inter-American perspective:

Our national historians, especially in the United States, are prone to write of these broad phases of American history as though they were applicable to one country alone. It is my purpose, by a few bold strokes, to suggest that they are but phases common to most portions of the entire Western Hemisphere; that each local story will have clearer meaning when studied in the light of the others; and that much of what has been written of each national history is but a thread out of a larger strand. (1933: 449)

Almost synchronous to the changes taking place in the field of American history, key articles on inter-American studies written from the perspective of Hispanists began appearing in journals such as *Hispania* in the mid 1940s.<sup>19</sup> Henry Grattan Doyle's 1943 article on 'Effective Inter-American Cooperation' highlights many of the major points being made by inter-Americanists today: he emphasizes the need for language skills and careful knowledge of the region, for dialogue between South American and North American scholars, for interdisciplinary approaches, and for an end to US inter-American bullying, both intellectually and militarily.

It should come as no surprise that the first academic inquiry that called itself inter-American emerges precisely at this historical moment. The Good Neighbor era had ushered in a renewed sense of the fraternity among all Americans and the non-intervention policy of FDR had fostered a great deal of inter-American cooperation. Academic inquiry had not yet been divided according to Cold War logic and regional study had not been specifically coded as a practice at the service of US 'defense' as it would be in the years to come. Interestingly, these first inter-American interventions appear at the same time as Blackmur, who I cited earlier, was calling on Americanists to avoid seeing their field of study in terms of an *idée fixe*.

The next significant phase in inter-American studies takes place in the 1960s, during the Cold War. Well after the Good Neighbor era and on the threshold of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress (1961), the University of Florida's program in Inter-American studies, with funding from the Pan American Foundation, founded the field's first interdisciplinary journal in 1959 with an editorial board that included Victoria Ocampo and Gilberto Freyre. An editorial note for the first issue of the *Journal of Inter-American Studies* states:

The communication of ideas between the different parts of the Western Hemisphere has never been adequate. It is believed, therefore, that an effort to add to the means for the interchange of ideas will be widely accepted. The *Journal* will publish on all aspects of the Americas. These may be submitted in any one of the official languages of the American republics. ('Editorial', 1959)

The interdisciplinary nature of the journal, its commitment to languages other than English and its belief that inter-American studies signal an important intellectual endeavor ought to sound familiar to those advocating inter-American studies today.<sup>20</sup> While it's arguable whether or not the early 'pioneering' work of these inter-Americanists achieved their goals, it seems clear that they should form part of our institutional memory of the field of inter-American studies.

Simultaneously, in the early 1960s, following Title VI appropriations that were part of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 and the newfound US interest in Latin America as a consequence of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, US universities witnessed a rapid expansion in area studies pertaining to the Americas, which led, in part, to the official founding of the Latin American Studies Association in 1966.<sup>21</sup> In the same timeframe, in 1965, a group of businessmen led by David Rockefeller founded the Center for Inter-American Relations, now named the Americas Society, which was dedicated to disseminating the cultural achievements of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada in the United States. The Cold War politics of academic inquiry in the 1960s that charted the globe into friendly and hostile territories began to overshadow academic enterprises that considered regions relationally. While inter-American work did continue during this period, as in the case of the journal cited above, the cultural exchanges of the Center for Inter-American Relations, and with such studies as Edmundo O'Gorman's *The Invention of America*, which was translated into English in 1961, this period marks a substantial split between inter-American studies and area studies pertaining to the Americas, where area studies eventually overshadows inter-American studies.<sup>22</sup> This period also marks rapid Latin American literary expansion and the 1960s represent an explosion of academic interest in Latin America, boosted to a certain extent by mass exile and the establishment of a diaspora by Latin American intellectuals in US academic institutions following the Cuban revolution and the

dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>23</sup> Countering the conservative, imperialist tendencies of area studies in this period, Latin American studies in the 1960s also had a vibrant leftist contingent that grew out of the student activism of the Viet Nam era.<sup>24</sup>

Then in the mid 1980s and early 1990s, during the phase of globalization's conceptual lift-off, a new wave of inter-American research, with books by Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia (1986), Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1990), Earl E. Fitz (1991), José David Saldívar (1991), and Djelal Kadir (1992), rearticulated the need to understand the cultural production of the Americas hemispherically. The growth of this academic field today, as evidenced by publications and academic programs, is a continuation of these earlier projects as well as a response to current events and global developments, which demand cross-cultural comparison and intellectual worldliness.

In the more recent past, since 9/11, we have entered a new phase of American identity, one which promises to distance the United States even more radically from other American nations.<sup>25</sup> George W. Bush's presidency and the reigning xenophobia post 9/11 associated with the 'war on terror' have had particularly damaging consequences for the possibilities of cross-cultural debate and dialogue in and about the Americas. Since George W. Bush came to power, higher education has come under scrutiny by Congress and the Senate in three main arenas that affect scholars working on inter-American relations: Title VI or the International Studies in Higher Education Act of 2003, the Academic Bill of Rights, and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni founded in 1995. All of these activities put increasing pressure on Congress to adopt legislation that will regulate the materials taught in higher education and the professors allowed to teach them. These initiatives have ominous potential for inter-Americanists. First, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, founded in 1995 by the Vice President's wife, Lynn Cheney, and Joe Lieberman, began a systematic attack on university professors, especially those that taught 'American' studies shortly after 9/11. In an inflammatory report written by Lynn Cheney's colleagues Jerry Martin and Anne Neal, 'Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America', ACTA argues that 'colleges and university faculty have been the weak link in America's response' to 9/11. It also asserts that 'when a nation's intellectuals are unwilling to defend its civilization, they give comfort to its adversaries' (Martin and Neal, 2002: n.p.). The report names names, cites specific incidents, and attempts to create a culture of fear that far exceeds that of the McCarthy era for professors who dare to ask questions about what led the United States and the world to the events of 9/11. With similar reactionary and 'proto-fascist' rhetoric, advocates for the re-appropriation of Title VI funds used to support area studies and foreign language training have named postcolonial theory as dangerously anti-American, referring specifically to the late Edward Said as a source of treacherous academic practice.<sup>26</sup> In order to correct what conservative

critics like Stanley Kurtz consider as the anti-American, anti-military bias of the programs that disseminate these funds, a board of censors was proposed, which would provide vetting for all potential grantees. It is important to bear in mind that Title VI funds originated in the National Defense Higher Education Act of 1958 and they were created with the precise intention of serving national interest in the climate of the Cold War. And yet, today's rhetoric surpasses that of the Cold War. In fact, the original legislation stated:

Nothing in this act shall be construed to authorize any agency or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution or school system. (National Defense Higher Education Act, 1958: n.p.)

Consequently, the oversight board represents a substantial departure from US educational policy and it also fosters an intimidating environment for critical thinking, especially in relation to inter-American identity.<sup>27</sup>

In a related attack on higher education that has also enjoyed congressional support, David Horowitz has introduced the Academic Bill of Rights. Similar to the appropriation of 'political correctness' by the right in earlier debates on curricular reform, Horowitz has captured the language of 'diversity' and redirected its meaning. Perhaps more than the previous two examples, Horowitz provides us with an example of an authoritative public rhetoric's use of a strategic multiplicity of meaning designed to undercut efforts to open up a space for intellectual critique and reflection. Stanley Fish points to this purposeful semantic slippage when he analyzes Horowitz's use of 'intellectual diversity' as 'taking a phrase that seems positively benign and even progressive (in a fuzzy-left way) and employing it as the Trojan horse of a dark design' (Fish, 2004: n.p.). Under Horowitz's Academic Bill of Rights, faculty would have to be hired according to a political quota system and any faculty-led discussion of politics in a class not on politics would be grounds for disciplinary action. Even more disturbing is the fact that critics of Horowitz have to take great care to avoid appearing as though they are critics of 'diversity'. Taken together, these three developments suggest the extremely hostile environment faculty find themselves in today. Any faculty engaged in research, such as inter-American studies, that is dedicated to critically examining the ways that disciplinary knowledge has been used to support hegemony is necessarily caught in this web and will be forced to negotiate their work in an atmosphere of state-sponsored intellectual antagonism.

Attention to this past and present history and to the historical forces that enabled these institutional formations leads next to a reconsideration of the notion of area studies and of disciplinary boundaries. Inter-American studies, at its best, signals a post-area studies and post-national view of the region and its global relations. The separation of the areas of

the globe into cohesive regions of study and the division of the methods used to study them constitute a breakdown of knowledge that ultimately serves to reinforce the status quo. One of the key contributions of a critical field that is not driven by ties to a nation-state lies in the possible foregrounding of comparative methods. As Julio Ortega has argued in reference to trans-Atlantic studies, cross-regional comparative frameworks offer a number of advantages over academic studies bound by geographic territories because they 'do not require a set program or canon: instead, they are an open exploration and a proposal for the reconstruction of dialogue' (Ortega, 2004: 145). One of the most important legacies of the late Edward Said should be careful scrutiny of the disciplinary formations that attach culture to geography and link intellectual production to empire building. Comparative in method and trans-regional in scope, inter-American studies could avoid some of the pitfalls of area studies. Because inter-American studies as it is currently practiced in the United States is not housed in institutions that receive state support and has little, if any, structural limitations, it is relatively free of the types of pressures placed on American and Latin American studies. The fact that inter-American studies lacks these formal arrangements allows scholars a critical distance that can be highly productive and must be conscientiously encouraged. The trick is how to create a community of scholars and a visibility for the field that will not lead to institutional oversight and censorship, and how to gain strength as an area of inquiry without acquiring the institutional baggage attached to imperial knowledge structures, as has been the case with American and Latin American studies. Currently, the International American Studies Association, dedicated to studying the Americas hemispherically and to displacing the United States as the center for study of the Americas, is the only worldwide, independent, non-governmental, international association for scholars and students of America. A young organization, its future is as yet unwritten, but it does suggest a hopeful venue for inter-American scholarly collaboration.

In light of the recent congressional legislation discussed above, it will be important for inter-Americanists to combat the tyranny of imperial truth regimes and to negotiate spaces for critical reflection that simultaneously expose the fanaticism of the US 'war on terror' and carve out a space for dissent. In de-emphasizing the location of culture and resisting the notion that history and literature are bound by regional borders, it is equally important not to lose sight of the very real territories of existence that are under attack. Progressive inter-Americans studies should stress complexity in the face of zealous disambiguation while rejecting the use of strategic multiplicities that redirect all meaning back to the United States. Mathematics describes this problem as a determinant relation: a one-fold relation between parameters determining a nodal point. If the United States is the world's nodal point and if all parameters, from nation-states to ethnic groups to cultural identities, are being

defined through this nodal point, then it is necessary to expose the danger of such equations.

Grounded in a comparative method and in a regional concern that is not strictly tied to specific frontiers, inter-American studies holds the promise of destabilizing the United States from the center of all meaning production regionally and globally. Its post-national and post-area studies perspectives, when attentive to imperialism, belie cultural reification and reorganize the ways that the notion of America is produced and understood. While questions of empire and appropriation must continue to form a central area of inter-American research, it is important to explore the linkages afforded by studying cultural production in inter-American perspective. These include comparative studies of works that have been largely marginalized by scholars of the Americas, such as Brazilian and indigenous literatures. In addition, inter-American studies is able to put pressure on nationalist and cultural essentialist epistemes by focusing on the ways that culture often transgresses borders, both geographic and identitarian.

### Notes

- 1 As a consequence of my training and current research interests, my comments will focus on the United States and Latin America. The absence of discussion of Canada's potential contributions to inter-American studies is not intended as a value claim. Understanding Canada's role in America is essential to inter-American studies. For analysis of its literature in inter-American context see Fitz (1991).
- 2 For more on the growth of Latin American studies, see Román de la Campa (1999).
- 3 This quote comes from email correspondence.
- 4 Kadir's use of 'zealous' also artfully highlights the 'In God We Trust' component of US ideology.
- 5 For a more detailed analysis of this history, please see McClennen (2004).
- 6 Michel Foucault points to a related, yet different, notion of multiplicity in his analysis of the 'tactical polyvalence of discourse' where he cautions that discourse should not be analyzed according to a binary of dominant and dominated and where he argues that: 'Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy' (Foucault, 1976: 102).
- 7 George Yúdice (1992) explores a similar notion in his article on the US appropriation of 'multiculturalism'.
- 8 See the brief introduction to the text at US History.org <<http://www.us-history.org/paine/commonsense/>> accessed 4 March 2004.
- 9 <<http://www.analitica.com/bitbliblioteca/home/contenido.asp>> accessed 4 March 2004.
- 10 <<http://www.analitica.com/bitbliblioteca/bolivar/panama.asp>> accessed 4 March 2004.

- 11 See Sara Castro-Klarén's brilliant article on the way that the United States appropriated pan-Americanism for the first Pan American Congress. Her analysis pays careful attention to the ways that the United States romanticizes the term (Castro-Klarén, 2003).
- 12 Langston Hughes's poem might be read productively against Rubén Darío's 'A Roosevelt'.
- 13 See Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (1993).
- 14 For more on American studies and globalization, see John Muthyala (2001).
- 15 New Yorkers resisted putting the name change into practice.
- 16 See Henry Giroux (2001, 2004) on neoliberalism in US culture.
- 17 Giroux (2004) maps out some of the key characteristics in US ideology of this most recent phase.
- 18 I would like to point out that, while I focus in this article on the history of US academics, the contributions to this debate from scholars working in Latin America are fundamental and plentiful. Many of the Latin American scholars who analyze inter-American relations are historians or social scientists such as Lorenzo Mayer, Aníbal Ford, Daniel Mato, Ricardo di Salvatore, and Nestor García Canclini. In addition there are cultural and literary critics like Nelly Richard, Beatriz Sarlo, Zulma Palermo, Tânia Franco Carvalhal and Eduardo Coutinho, to name only a few. Moreover, while we tend to draw a line between the North and the South, many of the scholars working in the field are actually Latin Americans who have emigrated to the United States for a variety of reasons or are US-born with strong ties to Latin America, making the distinction between United States and Latin American scholarship extremely fluid and flexible, however tangible it might seem.
- 19 See Umphrey (1943) and Grattan Doyle (1942).
- 20 The journal is still published today, but has undergone two significant name changes that can be productively read in light of intellectual and political shifts. First, the journal became the *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* in 1970. Next it became *Latin American Politics and Society* in 2001. It is still published through the University of Miami.
- 21 The history of the Latin American Studies Association and of the early fits and starts of formal Latin American studies in US universities is summarized by Howard Cline (1966).
- 22 A major reason for the disparity between inter-American studies and area studies pertaining to the Americas relates to issues of funding. Title VI, Fulbright, and other major granting institutions invested in area studies, whereas comparative area studies, especially those that included the United States, did not have an official funding source.
- 23 See Deborah Cohn (2003) for more on US interest in Latin American literature in the 1960s.
- 24 For more on the legacy of these scholars on Latin American studies see Neil Larsen (1995).
- 25 See Kadir (2004) for more on the consequences of 9/11 on American studies.
- 26 My use of 'proto-fascism' to describe the current environment comes from Giroux (2004).
- 27 While the bill passed the House of Representatives during 2005, at the time of this writing it has not yet passed the Senate.

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**Sophia A. McClennen** is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Spanish, and Women's Studies at the Pennsylvania State University, University Park, where she teaches inter-American literature, women's world literature, media studies, and comparative cultural studies. Her first book, *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time Language and Space in Hispanic Literature* (Purdue, 2004), is a comparative study of exile literature from Spain and Latin America. Address: Department of Comparative Literature, Pennsylvania State University, N435 Burrowes Building, University Park, PA 16802, USA. [email: sam50@psu.edu]