A MOVEMENT IN THE MIRROR: AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE 1970S

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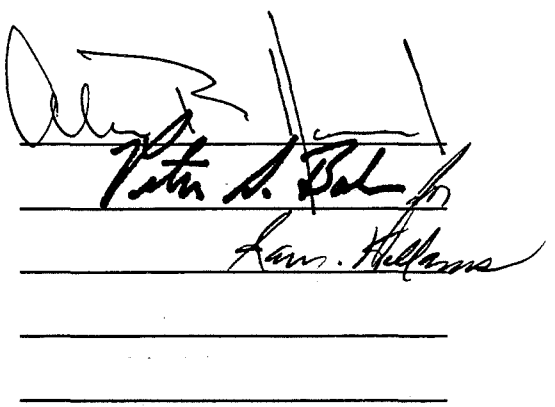

NOTE

This thesis was also produced to be available on the division of the internet called the World Wide Web. The Web version of the thesis includes two additional sections: an archive of three American Studies presidential addresses from the early 1990s, electronically scanned and produced with permission from the Johns Hopkins University Press to be available for one year, and a list of links to American Studies homepages and resources across the country. The address for the Web version and/or the disks on which it is stored can be found at the University of Virginia's Electronic Text Center under the direction of David Seaman.

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A Movement in the Mirror: American Studies in the 1970s

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Introduction

Imagine back to that self-conscious moment when one unknowingly walks by a mirror: the shock of unexpected recognition, the sudden need to pull oneself closer, stare down the pores, reconfigure the collar and smile for improvement. Twenty-five years ago the American Studies movement seemed to experience a similar moment of self-realization. At a time when American Studies programs were either expanding or getting started across the country, when the once-vanguard movement was now becoming established (and, even to some, old-hat), and when generations of breakthrough scholars were being replaced by generations of newer scholars hoping for their own breakthrough, American Studies was ripe for a period of self-reflection. The 1970s provided it. Henry Nash Smith's 1957 question, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?", may have released the first hints of introspection, but by the mid-1970s constant self-questioning, self-doubt and self-approval permeated the movement. Article and book titles alone reflect the mood: "American Studies--A Defense of an Unscientific Method" (1969), "American Culture Studies: The Discipline and The Curriculum" (1973), The Search for a Method in American Studies (1973), "Unity and Diversity in the Study of American Culture: The American Studies Association in Perspective" (1973), "American Studies: Struggle in the

DMZ," "American Culture Studies: A Discipline in Search of Itself" (1975), and "The Problem of American Studies 'Philosophy'" (1975).[1] Gene Wise's widely-read 1979 essay then topped the pile, as he paused to reflect on American Studies' self-reflection in "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies." Self-awareness, one might say, had reached a consuming extreme.

Part of the reason for the deluge in American Studies introspection, in the 1970s or otherwise, may be inherent in American Studies scholars themselves. As an American movement founded on self-analysis (Americans studying "America"), and as a field committed to putting events, trends or individuals in historical context, American Studies set itself up for its own unrelenting scrutiny. The sometimes brutal introspection, some may say, has not abated yet.[2] Yet the 1970s, in particular, stand as fertile

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[1] Leo Marx, "American Studies--A Defense of an Unscientific Method," *New Literary History* (October 1969); Robert Spiller, "Unity and Diversity in the Study of American Culture: The American Studies Association in Perspective," *AQ* (December 1973); Robert Scarola, "American Studies: Struggles in the DMZ," *Connections* (1973); Robert Merz and Michael Marsden, "American Culture Studies: A Discipline in Search of Itself," *Journal of Popular Culture* (Fall 1975); and Robert Sklar, "The Problem of an American Studies 'Philosophy': A Bibliography of New Directions," *AQ* (August 1975). For even more articles of this type, see Gene Wise's bibliographic calendar that follows his informative essay, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," *AQ* (Summer 1979): 411-447.

[2] Presidential addresses over the past decade cannot help but address the question of what American Studies is or should be. See "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies" (1988), "The Politics of American Studies," (1989), "Working the Levees: Building them Up or Knocking Them Down?" (1990), "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," (1991), "Whose America? Whose Studies?" (1992) and "Loose Change," (1993), each of which are available in the September issue of the following year of the *American Quarterly*. Also see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. "A New Context

ground for a look at why this self-reflection began and how it took hold. Both intellectually and institutionally, American Studies and its association underwent several changes in the 1970s; to several critics as well as insiders, in fact, the movement was in "crisis."[3] Examining the agents of these changes--and the reasons for this "crisis"--may shed light on the directions American Studies has taken since, as well as provide a microcosmic example of the intellectual debates occurring today within academic study as a whole. The crisis in the Humanities, the suspicion of objectivity, and the onset of postmodernism are all reflected in the corridor of mirrors set up by the American Studies movement in the 1970s. To gaze into those mirrors and beyond is to grasp, at least to some degree, the extent of the changes reverberating through intellectual thought over the past two decades.

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for a New American Studies?" *AQ* 41.4: 588-613.

[3] While exclamations of "crisis" exist in numerous sources, once specific example can be found in Jeffrey Louis Decker's essay, "Disassembling the Machine in the Garden: Antihumanism and the Critique of American Studies," in which he asks, "What has produced the so-called 'crisis' in American Studies methodology over the past 20 years?" (*New Literary History*, 23 (1992): 281-317.)

CHAPTER ONE: THE MOVEMENT

The New Diversity of 1970s

The 1970s may be plagued by images of polyester pants and strobe-light disco, but it also stands a decade of radical social change. Fresh from the civil rights victories of the 1960s, African-Americans, and women especially, were making enormous inroads in improving their educational and professional status. Enrollment of undergraduate women increased from 38 percent in 1960 to 51 percent in 1979, while enrollment of graduate women jumped from 29 percent to nearly 50 percent in 1978.[4] Undergraduate enrollment for racial and ethnic minorities doubled from 6.6 percent in 1960 to 13.0 percent in the late 1970s.[5] While several improvements in the proportions of female and black faculty and minority graduate students remained to be seen, the 1970s unquestionably brought a drastic change in the complexion of campuses across the country. This new diversity would inevitably lead to changes in curriculum--and the American Studies movement was hardly immune to its effects. In fact, most American Studies insiders claim that the American Studies movement

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[4] Clark Kerr, "Postscript--1982," The Uses of the University, Third Edition, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982): 171. Excerpted from a table of data synthesized from various studies illustrating the changes in enrollments for women, racial minorities and low-income students.

[5] Ibid.

was one of the first to welcome and work with the influx of diversity. Women's Studies, many argue, was welcomed first by American Studies scholars,[6] and even before the grip of the Civil Rights movement, American Studies scholars were tackling issues of slavery, immigration and women's suffrage in *American Quarterly* articles and class syllabi.[7]

What emerged in the 1970s, however, was not only a new accommodation for once-ignored social groups and their histories, but a sudden acknowledgement of the limits of the historical, interdisciplinary and literary theories that had (intentionally or not) marginalized or disregarded minority perceptions. In American Studies, this acknowledgement took hold within the debate over method. For more than 20 years, the American Studies movement precipitated and crystalized a picture of American culture through its generally accepted "myth-symbol" approach to cultural products. By

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[6] The *American Quarterly* published several essays related to Women's Studies in the 1970s. For related articles, see Annette Baxter, "Women's Studies and American Studies: The Uses of the Interdisciplinary," *AQ* 26.4 (1974): 433-39 and Donna Gerstenberger and Carolyn Allen, "Women's Studies/American Studies, 1970-1975," *AQ* 29.3 (1977): 263-279.

[7] Evidence for the early acceptance of minority scholarship comes from Charles Basset's 1975 survey of American Studies programs showing that 46 percent of American Studies programs in the United States feature "black culture," while 37 percent feature "women in America." (Charles Bassett, "Undergraduate and Graduate American Studies Programs in the United States: A Survey," *AQ* 27.3 (1975): 306-330). A quick skim over the titles of essays in the *American Quarterly* throughout the 1960s offers substantial proof as well--slavery, discrimination and women's rights are common themes. As Linda K. Kerber noted in her 1988 presidential address, "Even in the 1950s and '60s," American Studies and the *American Quarterly* were "apparently hospitable" to African Americans and women. (Linda K. Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies," *AQ* 41.3 (1989): 419)

scrutinizing the way Americans absorbed and reacted to American myths, icons or figures, such as Andrew Jackson or the Wild West, American Studies scholars could extrapolate a composite of the "American Mind" or the "American Imagination," thereby issuing often insightful explanations of why Americans behaved as they do today and did in the past. Henry Nash Smith's book, Virgin Land (1948), is universally celebrated as the touchstone work of this approach.[8] As a journey into the political and literary minds of Americans ranging from Thomas Jefferson to dime-store novelist Erastus Beadle, Smith's book reveals the myths that stimulated Americans' attraction for the West and explains how stories of the West reverberated throughout the nineteenth century.

Virgin Land provided a creative, interdisciplinary model for a scholarly approach to studying the United States--and its example greatly advanced the American Studies movement intellectually--but by the 1960s and '70s, new students of American Studies began to see the myth-symbol approach as deplete of the complexity that truly marked the "American Experience." In fact, as the diversity of the United States began to be recognized finally

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[8] Gene Wise on page 307 of "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies" (*AQ* 31.3 (1979): 293-337) lists several other books that articulated the myth-symbol "paradigm in full form," including five works printed before Smith's Virgin Land: V.L. Parrington's Main Currents (1927-30), Perry Miller's Orthodoxy in Massachusetts (1933) and The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (1939), F.O. Matthiessen's American Renaissance (1941) and Ralph Barton Perry's Puritanism and Democracy (1944).

throughout academia, one had to ask, Is it really possible anymore to delineate one, true American Experience? The question quaked across the movement, while the ugly realities of the Vietnam War caused many academics--American Studies scholars included--to question to what degree America should be celebrated in the first place. Shifts in the intellectual, institutional and political bases of American Studies brought cries of "crisis" by some, "new paradigm" by others.[9] An article by Bruce Kuklick printed in the *American Quarterly* in 1972 entitled, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," signaled the extent of the method's collapse. "I must conclude," Kuklick writes, "that the humanists suppose what I shall call a crude Cartesian view of mind," a view that assumes that essential reason (or even truth) can be distilled from an analysis of human behavior.[10] Within his essay, Kuklick readily admits that his conclusions are "mainly negative," and declares without hesitation that "humanist scholarship in American Studies illustrates a set of classic errors."[11] To even attempt to

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[9] Regarding the cries of crisis, Linda K. Kerber provides one example. In her 1988 presidential address, Kerber noted that American Studies has been a "field in 'crisis'" ever since she can remember. (Kerber, 419). Regarding new paradigms, Jay Mechling, Robert Merideth and David Wilson call for a "transition to maturity" where a new paradigm--or perhaps even the first paradigm--can be discerned. ("American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum," *AQ* 25.4 (1973): 364-389.)

[10] Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *AQ* 24.4 (1972): 437.

[11] Ibid, 450.

get at the essence of "America," it seemed by then, would undoubtedly fail. Kuklick's strike hit low, but it may have been anti-climatic. Even by 1972, American Studies veterans say, myth-symbol searches for "the" American mind were already as good as dead.[12]

The Postmodern Stroke

These reports of the "death" of humanist scholarship were (and still are) hardly unique to the movement of American Studies and in fact may still be in the process of imploding the Academy in general. Critics and philosophers today describe this doubt and questioning of humanism and modernity as a fundamental intellectual stroke of the postmodern age; the search for knowledge has turned from a quest for the objective "truth"--or at least consensus about this truth--to an interminable disbelief in the existence of this truth, a delegitimation of anything that tries to call itself objective, and a predilection for dissensus. The death of humanism has been the subject of often anxious discussion for nearly 20 years, and has sent a shiver down the spine of any traditionally operating educational institution. If there is no objective truth, what should be taught? If there is no body of knowledge that provides the most fundamental answers to life's questions, what is the

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[12] Gathered from a personal telephone interview with Jay Mechling of the University of California at Davis on June 29, 1995.

role of the professor?[13]

Zooming in toward a particular field--in this case, the American Studies movement--the questions hold even more urgency. American Studies provides an interesting case-study of postmodernism's symptoms and effects. Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of postmodernism--"incredulity toward metanarratives"[14]--encapsulizes American Studies scholars' distrust of the myth-symbol approach. Suddenly faced with not just one but innumerable narratives about the history and culture of America, most American Studies scholars are now unable (and unwilling) to hold down one method of inquiry, and some, as a result, grope blindly toward methods and theories too numerous to count. The myth-symbol approach is still considered by many to possess several fulfilling advantages,[15] but its humanistic, "essence"-finding method of inquiry has now been sideswiped by a new, invigorating, and exasperating postmodern realization that, in the face of so much diversity and so

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[13] This summary of postmodern thought on humanism was synthesized from several theoretical texts, including Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword by Fredric Jameson. France: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.); Linda Hutcheon, Politics and Postmodernism. (London: Routledge, 1989) and Gianni Vattimo, The End of Modernity (trans. and intro. by Jon R. Snyder. Italy: Garzanti Editore s.p.a., 1985; Baltimore: Polity Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) which includes a chapter entitled "The Crisis of Humanism," pp. 31-47. In addition, several of these thoughts were framed within a seminar course on postmodern theory taught by Professor Rita Felski at the University of Virginia.

[14] Lyotard, xxiv.

[15] See, for example, Kerber, 423.

many differing perspectives, that "essence" just might not be there.[16]

The Culturological Shift

How much of this postmodern shift was realized or acknowledged in the 1970s is uncertain, and fortunately for American scholarship, postmodernism's paralyzing tendencies did not halt American Studies scholars and their work, but it did, undeniably, rearrange their approaches. As the myth-symbol school declined, the introduction of a more culturological perspective began to take place. To definitively explain culturological approaches to American Studies may be impossible considering the multiple, varying and sometimes contradictory ways different American Studies programs discuss "culture," but in simple terms examining culture means examining the historical and social patterns that shape the lifestyle of a group. In a subtle but important way these new ideas of culture presented a new approach to study--not just in American Studies, but in departments across the disciplines. Looking at groups and the interplay between them widened intellectual inquiry to include more than a historical or literary approach. Anthropology, sociology, psychology and quantitative study entered the field as relevant culturological tools.

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[16] See also Decker's essay in which he takes an antihumanistic reading of what he calls the "humanistic problematic" of American Studies.

One particular approach to this type of study was launched by the American Studies program at the University of California at Davis, which coined the term "culture concept." In a 1973 *American Quarterly* article entitled, "American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum," authors Jay Mechling, Robert Merideth and David Wilson chided the American Studies movement for seeming to "lack a sense of itself, the academic environment and its subject."[17] Instead of performing "tinkers' work" (as they labeled the American Studies' contribution so far), Mechling Merideth and Wilson suggested placing greatest emphasis on teaching students to analyze and understand different cultures within the United States. The Davis authors were wary of teaching "stuff" like "conclusions, data" or even events, artifacts, places and people.[18] Rejecting the idea that students should be expected to "absorb a standardized body of information," the UC-Davis program hoped to build students' analytical skills first. Stressing (postmodernly) that there is no right answer to "What is American Culture?", Mechling et al hoped to create something similar to the University of Pennsylvania program which "confronted

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[17] Jay Mechling, Robert Merideth and David Wilson, "American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum," *AQ* 25.4 (1973): 364.

[18] Ibid, 371. Mechling et al refer to "stuff" on pages 380 and 387 as well. In the latter reference, "stuff" refers to some of the more concrete analysis that traditional history and literature professors commonly teach, such as the seven causes of the Civil War or an analysis of Moby Dick.

and translated into a curriculum the theoretical and methodological problems inherent in American Culture studies" and found coherence in theory, method and technique.[19]

As American Studies scholar Gene Wise was to remark six years later, "The Davis essay did disturb the existing order,"[20] and while the question of UC-Davis's actual success can still provoke debate, the fact that it was started at all indicates the scope of the changes shaking the American Studies movement in the 1970s. By getting away from an emphasis on now-questionable icons of American experience, the "culture concept" program was able to take a more postmodern approach, accepting the notion of multiple narratives of history and experience and rejecting the idea that an "American" culture might be derived from readings of classic literary and historical texts.

While it would be wrong to generalize that the change from myth-symbol study to cultural study was happening within all American Studies scholarship, or to suggest that "culturological" studies were not occurring before the 1970s, noting these examples opens a window onto the paradigmatic shifts that were being discussed, tried and in some cases dismissed in this decade. Intellectually, one might argue, the movement was in a state of flux--dynamic

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[19] Ibid, 367.

[20] Wise, 328.

enough to want to discard older versions of its methodology but not quite sure of what would be an adequate replacement. If conversations taking place on the internet today are any indication, the state of flux continues; the movement, even in the 1990s, is not entirely content with the direction it has taken since the fall of the myth-symbol school.[21] The late 1960s and early '70s stirred up ideas at the bottom of the American Studies movement which to this day have yet to settle.

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[21] For the past six months, several scholars who participate in the H-AMSTDY newsgroup have debated the direction of American Studies in both broad and more specific terms. For reviews of some of the conversations, access the internet and at the system prompt enter gopher gopher.uic.edu. Then go to submenu Researcher/History/H-Net/H-Amstdy.

CHAPTER TWO: THE INSTITUTION

The full drama of the intellectual debates of the American Studies movement cannot be entirely appreciated without some inkling of the political and institutional history of the American Studies Association (the "learned society" of the field), and its official journal, the *American Quarterly*. The 1970s brought its share of dramatic change to these two institutions as well. The theoretical and methodological changes instigated by the growing diversity of the Academy and its students caused several institutional tremors, including the establishment of several new programs, a shift to a more representative and equitable association, and the creation, via a new American Studies committee, of a more reader-oriented journal.

Unavoidable Politics

First, however, the connection between the movement's intellectual changes in the 1970s and its political and institutional shifts must be placed within the context of a larger American Studies ancestry. From the beginning, American Studies sprang from various political agendas which are, of course, inextricably tied to and most often motivated by intellectual ones. The inner politics of starting a new department or academic field, for example,

cannot be ignored. Gene Wise, in "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies," brings to light the institutional and departmental struggles that are inevitable results of unsettling change.[22] The very first American Studies scholars shook the frame of academic order by rebelling against Anglo-centric departments of history and literature and boldly endeavoring to free themselves and the study of America from their marginalized positions.[23] Once accepted and allowed to take form within the institution, however, the vanguard was no longer vanguard. Or, as Wise writes,

> ... many saw American Studies not as a vanguard movement of the frontiers of scholarship--the movement's prior image--but as an overly timid and elitist white male Protestant enterprise which tended to reinforce the dominant culture rather than critically analyzing it.[24]

The cycles of radicalization that have always shaped the American Studies movement also forever serve to topple it, forcing departments and scholars through painful yet creative episodes of change.[25]

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[22] Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," *AQ* 31.3 (1979): 293-337.

[23] Wise, 304. See also, Cathy Davidson, "'Loose Change': Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 4, 1993," in the 1994 volume of the *American Quarterly*, page 127 in which she writes that the ASA was founded "partly as a refuge for historicist literary critics professionally marginalized by the academy of New Criticism."

[24] Wise, 312.

[25] ASA President-Elect Elaine Tyler May's yet-unpublished 1995 presidential address, in fact, will explore the effects of the radical roots of American Studies, according to ASA Executive Director John Stephens.

Outside the walls of offices and institutions, political agendas behind the American Studies movement cannot be overlooked either. As critic Frederick Crews would argue, intellectual study can never be completely divorced from ideology.[26] Since the inception of American Studies, its founding fathers have been criticized for carrying with them a political agenda they themselves may not have clearly realized. Vernon Louis Parrington and his 1927 Main Currents in American Thought emerged from the Progressive Era with a nativist and progressivist approach championing the virile Walt Whitman and Mark Twain, an approach which today might be derided as conjuring ideal fathers of an idealized America. F.O. Matthiessen's 1941 book, The American Renaissance, has been retrospectively labeled as a prime example of Cold War ideology and "liberal consensus," a subtle thumping of the chest during a time when many Americans were eager to trumpet their democratic pluralism over rigid totalitarianism.[27] And today, cries of distress over what some call ideologically-driven scholarship reverberate throughout the movement. Debates today rage over the role and place of politically-loaded academic quests. Can Queer Theory, for example, be taken as

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[26] Frederick Crews, "Whose American Renaissance?" *The New York Review of Books*, 35.16 (October 27, 1988): 68.

[27] Crews, 74. Crews writes, "Matthiessen thought he was forwarding the Popular Front program of international cultural pluralism, but his post-war successors found they could turn his book to nationalistic ends with no difficulty at all."

objective inquiry? When does opening up the canon to once-marginalized groups bleed into blatant advocacy of liberal agendas? And what, many ask today, is so wrong with acknowledging, probing and exploring the existence of these political agendas in the first place?[28] Whatever one's stand in the quagmire of ideological academia today, it becomes exceedingly clear that politics played, and continues to play, a critical role in shaping the American Studies movement.[29]

Agents of Change

Above the confusion of institutional and ideological politics, however, one aspect of the institution's development requires no debate: the sheer growth of the movement during the 1970s. From 1970 to 1980 the number of American Studies programs in the United States climbed at a phenomenal rate. In 1970, 168 programs existed within higher education institutions; in 1975, the number hit 306 and by 1980, 329 programs were running across the country.[30]

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[28] These questions and many others have been actively considered by American Studies scholars on the H-AMSTDY newsgroup. Several of the debates are accessible via the internet: type gopher gopher.uic.edu at the system prompt and then go to submenu Researcher/History/H-Net/H-AMSTDY.

[29] For an extensive look at the history of politics in the American Studies Association, see Allen F. Davis's 1989 presidential address, "The Politics of American Studies" (*AQ* 42.3 (1989): 353-374.)

[30] Taken from the "American Studies Programs in the United States: A Quantitative Survey," in the *American Quarterly*'s summer issues, volumes 22 through 32. Charles Bassett of Colby College directed and analyzed the data in the early 1970s through 1974, at which

Undergraduate degree programs more than doubled as well.[31] Some of this growth spurt was surely due to the new attention paid to interdisciplinary programs within higher education institutions at this time.[32] Independence from other departments also grew. In 1956, only 5 percent of programs functioned independently with tenure-track lines specifically in American Studies, independent budgets and curricular control. In 1973, 13 percent of departments reported that degree of autonomy, and the latest study shows continued growth: in 1992, 26.3 percent of programs considered themselves independent.[33]

New money may be part of the reason for such pronounced program growth. The American Studies Association received several grants from the National Endowment of the Humanities

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point John Hague, director of the National American Studies Faculty, took over the task until 1978. 1978's survey was compiled by James R. Nesteby, also of the NASF, and then in 1979 the *American Quarterly* opted to publish the survey on a biannual basis. In 1980, Vera Bessi, a research assistant for the American Studies Association, took over the role.

Please note the data quoted by no means represents a scientific count. Sample sizes, methods of inquiry and definitions of American Studies programs varied throughout the years. For the most part, an American Studies program was defined as a program independent of or within a traditional department that offered some means of interdisciplinary scholarship. Undergraduate degree programs were defined as those which offered a bachelors of arts degree specifically labeled American Studies.

[31] In 1970, Basset's survey listed 210 undergraduate degree programs. By 1980, that number had escalated to 271.

[32] Interdisciplinary programs began to gain respect and attention in the 1960s and 1970s. For more information on the growth of interdisciplinary departments, see the AAHE-ERIC higher education report no.9, "Interdisciplinarity: The Mutable Paradigm," by William Mayville.

[33] D. Melissa Hilbish, "Institutional Research: The Structure and Administration of American Studies Programs," *American Studies Newsletter*, (March 1994): 1.

in the 1970s, one of which was used to organize faculty into a body known as the National American Studies Faculty, modeled after the National Humanities Faculty.[34] Members of the NASF acted as American Studies consultants and were charged with gathering syllabi from departments and faculty members across the country as well as compiling and recording data on as many American Studies programs as possible. Under the direction of John Hague, the NASF also developed innovative programs for high schools and inner-city students, brought expertise to local museum exhibits and enlisted some of the more disgruntled members of the American Studies Association (those involved in what was called the Radical Caucus) to teach summer conferences, thereby somewhat quelling potential storms of division. Through its work across the country, the NASF was able to bring added recognition and new interest to the movement.

Beyond new money and program growth, the 1970s brought an influx of women into the American Studies profession and a stronger voice for those already there. Charles Bassett's 1975 survey of American Studies programs highlights several of the advancements. "Beginning in 1971," Bassett writes, "more women than men began receiving American Studies bachelor of arts degrees, and by 1971, 57 percent of bachelor's degrees went to females, up 20 percent from the

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[34] This brief history was compiled from Davis, 365-367 and Mechling, 364.

late 1950s."[35] In 1975, 37 percent of American Studies programs featured women in America and women taught in 58 percent of American Studies programs.[36]

Gaining entry into the field did not necessarily mean gaining a voice of authority, however, until the Women's Committee (an ad hoc committee which became a standing committee in 1972) and another American Studies subset called the Radical Caucus began to voice dissent and eventually call for a resolution on the status of women. The resolution, which was printed in the *American Quarterly* in October 1972, noted that "women have been conspicuously underrepresented in chapter offices and on the ASA executive council," and resolved to "amend the ASA constitution to increase the representation of women to approximate the percentage in the organization." The resolution also called for more women on the *American Quarterly* editorial board and the major committees of the organization, as well as the formation of a standing committee on the status of women and the expansion of women's studies courses. Prior to the resolution, women had never held positions as officers of the American Studies Association or members of the *American Quarterly* editorial board, only one woman had ever been seated on the ASA Council (Betty Chmaj of Wayne State) and

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[35] Charles W. Bassett, "Undergraduate and Graduate American Studies Programs in the United States: A Survey," *AQ* 27.3: 321.

[36] Ibid, 321.

female contributions represented a small fraction of the material printed in the journal.[37]

Dramatic changes like the resolution on the status of women where choreographed to a large extent by the Radical Caucus, another significant agent of change of the 1970s. Born at a 1969 ASA meeting in Toledo, Ohio, during an era of ubiquitous unrest and pushes for radical reform, the Radical Caucus was founded by two graduate students, Nancy Bannister and Robert Scarola, and led by Robert Merideth, Robert Sklar and Betty Chmaj. For two years in the early 1970s, the Caucus held two week-long summer workshops (encouraged by John Hague and funded by the NASF) and asked for a widening of intellectual and social boundaries, hoping to open the field to black studies, women's studies, urban studies, popular culture studies, quantitative studies, material culture studies and others.[38] Fortunately for the long-term health of the association, the executive council of the American Studies Association moved to accommodate the Caucus as early as 1971, and in the fall of that year President Robert Walker applauded the avoidance of conflict:

> A year ago the American Studies Association, along with other professional groups, faced the possibility of an involved and destructive confrontation between factions

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[37] In 1969, for example, only four of the 33 essays (not including reviews, of which one was written by a woman) published that year appear to have been written by women.

[38] This brief summary of the ASA's Radical Caucus was gathered from page 313 of Gene Wise's "'Paradigm Dramas'" and pages 361-363 of Allen F. Davis's "The Politics of American Studies."

> of the membership with differing definitions of what the association was and should be. We may now, I think, congratulate ourselves that a wasteful and destructive confrontation was avoided, that the Council and the officers listened sympathetically to their radical critics, and that the critics themselves put the good of the association above the act of protest.[39]

The Radical Caucus's demands, and the council's willingness to listen to some of those demands, markedly changed the way the American Studies Association reached and represented its members. After hearing the concerns of the Caucus, the council voted to subsidize the publication of a Radical Caucus newsletter, later to be called *Connections*, and to accommodate at least one voting representative of the Radical Caucus on the Council.

Fair representation, in fact, emerged as yet another pressing issue throughout the early 1970s. National elections began in 1972, perhaps an offshoot of the Radical Caucus's demands and certainly a result of more money coming into the association. Before then, chapter officers acting as delegates voted for the officers of the American Studies Association--individual members had no true say. Walker's "Report from the President" of 1972 hailed the first national election's effect on the communication between members and the authorities within the association, asking cordially "We are in better touch, are we not?"[40] Since

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[39] Robert H. Walker, "Report from the President," *AQ* 23.2 (1971): 260.

[40] Walker, "Report from the President," *AQ* 24.1 (1972): 116.

that time, national elections have become a mainstay of the American Studies Association.

Yet even with national elections, the levels of participation by members still needed a substantial boost. Some of the problem was the vehicle of communication: the *American Quarterly*. In his 1971 presidential report, Walker noted that 1970's annual meeting disclosed a "considerable expression of discontent concerning the relationship between the association and its official journal."[41] Although Walker failed to detail precisely what caused the displeasure, part of the reason may have been the lack of newsletter-type material sent to the membership. At that time, the *American Quarterly*'s more formal essay format left little room for business updates.

But another likely factor was the *American Quarterly*'s unusual relationship with the association. Here is where some of the greatest conflicts occurred within the 1970s. While most academic associations, such as the Modern Language Association or the Organization of American Historians, establish and own their journals, the American Studies Association and the *American Quarterly* sprouted from two different roots. The association was started in 1951, two years after the 1949 founding of the journal, and adopted the *American Quarterly* as its official journal in the same year. Since the fledgling association could not

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[41] Walker, "Report from the President," *AQ* 23.2 (1971): 260.

afford to finance its own journal, the adoption of the *American Quarterly* did not translate into an ownership of it. Instead, by the 1970s, the University of Pennsylvania owned the journal with practically absolute control over its editorial content. Editors, assistants and managing editors were culled from the University of Pennsylvania, and only the chairman of the American Studies department at Pennsylvania could nominate the editor. The ASA played no part in editor selection aside from ratifying Pennsylvania's decision. Essentially, then, the editorial decisions of a few University of Pennsylvania scholars dictated the entire content of the American Studies Association's mouthpiece.[42]

Needless to say, the University of Pennsylvania's concentration of control did not necessarily sit well with the membership. The perspective of the broad range of members, both regionally and intellectually, was lost. Members far outside the University of Pennsylvania wondered if their needs were being met. As one ASA member put it, "The magazine itself appeared unwilling to address some of the issues" about which members wanted to learn.[43] On the other hand, one cannot lay blame entirely with the University of Pennsylvania and its editorial board, for they

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[42] The above history was condensed from personal interviews with several American Studies Association members, including ASA Executive Director John Stephens.

[43] Personal telephone interview with Robert Fogarty, former member of the bibliography committee and current editor of the *Antioch Review*, July 13, 1995.

had little to no control over the submission of material and were not expected to request specific articles or writers. Regardless of the underlying reasons, many ASA members (*including* editors from the University of Pennsylvania) were not content with what some might call the inaccessibility of the *American Quarterly*. Considering the climate of introspection and unrest surrounding the movement, change appeared inevitable.

The Bibliography Issues

The most powerful vehicle for change in the journal turned out to be the seemingly innocuous bibliography issue, a summer supplement to the regular four issues of the *American Quarterly*. In fact, a look at the bibliography issues and their founding may provide the most insightful mirror yet of what the American Studies movement was experiencing in the 1970s. Prior to the *American Quarterly* editorship of Murray Murphey, a key player in the campaign to strengthen the University of Pennsylvania's American Studies program, the bibliography issues included brief synopses of articles and books that reached into American Studies scholarship as well as a survey of programs and lists of dissertations. When Murphey took the helm in 1970 he realized two things: the bibliography issue was the most expensive issue, and, as far as he could see, it was not worth much to its members.

Translating those seemingly objective realizations into an improved journal was not as easy as Murphey anticipated, however. Politics, personalities and individual opinions have always driven the American Studies movement alongside its intellectual endeavors, and the year 1970 would be no different. Murphey first called for an end to the current bibliography issues, a move that the current ASA bibliographer, Donald Koster understandably resisted. In place of the old bibliography issues, Murphey asked for a review issue that brought to the membership useful essays evaluating and explaining new trends in the field. In the end, Murphey received what he asked for, though tender relations among Murphey, Koster, the ASA and the *American Quarterly* ensued for several years as a result.[44] By the August 1973 issue, Murphey announced the changes he envisioned respecting book reviewing and bibliography. By the next issue, a committee had been formed to evaluate the bibliographic needs of the American Studies Association and published its report, recommending that

> Because of the increasing diversity of the bibliographical media and the quantity of relevant material to be considered, that the position of bibliographer be replaced by an American Studies Standing Committee on Bibliographical Needs and

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[44] The history detailed above was culled from interviews with several former and current members of the American Studies Association who were close to the event.

Policies.[45]

In addition, the committee urged that the issues supply "better research tools," including, as Murphey suggested, "[c]ommissioned topical review essays which include surveys of books, articles and other media."[46] One important editorial change was noted as well: the content of the bibliography issues would not be dictated by the *American Quarterly* editorial staff, but instead by the standing committee comprised of ASA members. In a stunning reversal of policy, the editorial control of this one annual issue of the *American Quarterly* would be wholly out of the hands of the University of Pennsylvania.

Far beyond the significance of the institutional groundings of the bibliography issues, however, stands their intellectual contribution. The bibliography issues came to be known as "access" issues, opening doors onto new areas of scholarship and providing much-needed surveys of available methodological approaches. Jay Mechling, whose 1973 UC-Davis article had already publicly endorsed change in American Studies scholarship and who had just recently finished his graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania (yet another indicator of the University of Pennsylvania's dominant role), was chosen to chair the first bibliography committee.

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[45] "Report of the Committee on Bibliographical Needs of the American Studies Association," within the "Editorial Statement," *AQ* 25.3 (1973): 259.

[46] Ibid, 260.

As Mechling remembers it, with the new currents of diversity underrunning the American Studies movement, scholars badly needed a map of the disciplines surrounding them. Thinking of the movement visually, Mechling saw scholars standing in the middle of a number of different approaches to cultural study: "There are literary approaches, sociological approaches, quantitative approaches, anthropological approaches, etcetera," Mechling explains today. "Scholars need to be able to gaze out onto all of them and see what is useful."[47] Being interdisciplinary, Mechling adds, does not mean that you need to learn the exact details of every discipline or master the specialized language; you simply need to grasp the main ideas coursing through their thought.

Deciding to map these main ideas, the bibliography committee began to seek essays from the top scholars in specialized fields, and the content of the bibliography issues soon reflected the change. An essay on the social sciences in American Studies headlined the first issue in 1974, followed by a review of the use of quantitative theory in American Studies, writings on the theory and teaching of American Studies, an essay on the role of material culture studies and a piece on the use of film. A year later, the bibliography issue carried Robert Sklar's essay, "The

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[47] Excerpted from a personal telephone interview with Jay Mechling on June 29, 1995.

Problem of American Studies 'Philosophy'," a self-reflexive look that turned out to be one of several essays throughout the decade in which the movement looked in the mirror and studied itself.[48] 1975's issue also offered a status report on American Indian Studies and commentary on the use of oral testimony within scholarship. In the next 10 years, the bibliography issues would span the expanse of American Studies scholarship, highlighting the advantages of psychoanalytic theory; the importance of American folklore; the study of biographies; the entrance of women's studies; the use of photographs; American Studies' expansion into community colleges; the fundamentals of structuralism; the contributions of Afro-American theater, art and fiction; the significance of mass media; the complexities of studying ethnicity; the importance of exploring everyday life; the study of the city and suburbs; the theories of marxism; and a probing look at race relations.[49]

In addition to these "maps" of various fields, the bibliography issues sometimes focused on specific themes and brought research from different areas together under one umbrella. In 1979 (in addition to Wise's popular "Paradigm Dramas" essay), the bibliography issue examined "Religion in

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[48] Robert Sklar, "The Problem of American Studies 'Philosophy': A Bibliography of New Directions," *AQ* 27.3 (1975): 245-260.

[49] Each of these topics was covered in at least one (and sometimes more than one) essay in the bibliography issue of the American Quarterly from 1975 to 1986, volumes 27 to 38.

America," while the 1984 issue centered on Americans at War. Although it may be impossible to chart cause-and-effect, the publication of theme issues seemed to gain respect within the *American Quarterly* as a whole after the bibliography issues tested the waters.[50] Theme issues began to appear in the pages of the regular journal: special issues on "Death in America" (1974), "Reassessing Twentieth-Century Documents" (1977), "Women and Religion" (1978), "Film and American Studies" (1979) and "American Culture and the American Frontier" (1981) seemed to follow, quite similarly, the path laid by the bibliography issues. Before the dawn of the bibliography issues, material within the *American Quarterly* was often considered to lack focus.[51] Now, with the publication of five special issues within eight years, the journal may have been repositioning itself on a more responsive track.

Some veterans of the *American Quarterly*'s editorial board still consider the bibliography issues to be of trivial importance to the American Studies Association and or to the advancement of American Studies, and even some former members of the bibliography committee downplay its

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[50] The *American Quarterly* was not, however, the first to attempt to collect essays under one theme. The *New Literary History*, founded and still edited by Ralph Cohen of the University of Virginia, launched its first issue in 1969 with the ambition to shape each issue around one area of debate or scholarly inquiry.

[51] From private correspondence with committee members in June and July 1995.

role, but just as charting the appearance of "special issues" indicates change, the comments of several committee members point to some vital contributions of the bibliography committee, particularly in the 1970s. For the members themselves, serving on the committee was an invigorating, pleasurable experience. "We had quite lively discussions about these issues," remembers Robert Fogarty. "The committee was comprised of a broad range of people all engaged with their field."[52] Those receiving the issues seemed to appreciate them too: readership began to climb.[53] The committee (which became a sub-committee after 1979) received a flurry of fan mail.[54] Michael Marsden, now Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Northern Michigan University, remembers the special thematic issues and bibliography issues as his favorite elements of the journal in the 1970s, while Harvard professor Werner Sollors notes that with the establishment of the bibliography issues the way the readers felt about the *American Quarterly* changed

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[52] Excerpted from a personal telephone interview with Robert Fogarty, July 13, 1995.

[53] Some committee members with whom I conducted interviews or corresponded by electronic mail noted that the bibliography issues were widely read. Hard data on the percentage of American Studies scholars actually reading the *American Quarterly* in general does not exist since subscription rates simply mirror the number of individuals and groups in the American Studies Association. Every member of the ASA, in other words, received the *American Quarterly*; whether they actually read the journal with varying attention throughout the 1970s may be impossible to know.

[54] Electronic mail correspondence with Werner Sollors, chairman of the committee from 1984 to 1986, June 1995.

for the better.[55]

Into the 1980s, the bibliography issues continued to publish substantial and apparently useful essays appreciated by their readers. But in 1986 the bibliography issues were abruptly discontinued. Sollors, chairman of the then *sub*-committee on bibliography, remains relatively puzzled as to why the issues were halted, questioning whether money, internal politics, discontent with content--or all three--stopped the presses. Executive Director John Stephens provides the American Studies Association's answer: the bibliography issues were "merged" into the regular issues of the *American Quarterly* for financial reasons. The University of Pennsylvania's Dean of Arts and Sciences hoped to reduce the "rather generous subsidy" it allocated to the journal and opted to stop distributing a fifth issue. At roughly the same time, the American Studies Association was able to take control of the *American Quarterly* and set up a national office, finally shedding itself of the once-desperately needed but always uncomfortable control of the University of Pennsylvania. The association decided at that time to continue with its usual four issues under Johns Hopkins University Press management, which Stephens says was "in retrospect in the best interest of the publication and

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[55] Excerpted from written correspondence with Michael Marsden dated June 28, 1995 and an electronic mail message from Werner Sollors on June 22, 1995.

the association."[56]

[56] Electronic mail correspondence with John Stephens, June 26, 1995.

Conclusion

Despite their discontinuation, the bibliography issues in the 1970s opened channels of access and interdisciplinary communication that were sorely needed within the movement as a whole. Looking back on those issues, placing them in the context of the 1970s and its currents of change, proves how much they have to tell about where--and how--the movement was reconsidering itself. As Gene Wise wrote as early as 1979,

> More than any other single forum, the bibliographical issues have stimulated critical self-consciousness in the movement; they have also given substance and direction to that self-consciousness.[57]

In effect, the bibliography issues supplied the tool for introspection that the American Studies movement needed at a time when method, inclusiveness, direction and objectivity were simultaneously being questioned. Reading through the bibliography issues, in fact, feels a bit like watching the American Studies movement watch itself. Serving as a mirror to the shifts of the 1970s, the bibliography issues reflected movements of change in two ways. American Studies could look at itself in this mirror and glimpse its own movements, note its changes, and witness its shifts. But it could also see, on its very face, the need for self-reflection and the hunger on the part of its members for a

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[57] Wise, 329.

longer, deeper, more fulfilling look at where the movement might be going and how to get there.

Self-consciousness has often been considered one of the tell-tale symptoms of postmodern thought,[58] and the American Studies movement in the 1970s exhibits itself as a prime case example. Looking in at itself--with an everpresent understanding for the need for context and an unshakable tendency toward radicalization--the American Studies movement exemplifies how intellectual thought and all its interchanging parts (political, psychological and sociological) can move within a postmodern space. For those who have felt the tremor of change for decades, instability may be, after all, a settling notion. Maybe asking a version of Henry Nash Smith's 1957 question, "Does American Studies Have a Method?" will always be the best approach, irrespective of an answer.

In 1993, then-President Cathy Davidson posted an ideal of what she called "loose change" within the association: "inconsistent, multivalent, uneven, unstable, [and] indeterminate."[59] Maybe, in fact, indeterminacy is the ideal the American Studies movement has been striving for since its first startling, exciting, unsettling and self-

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[58] One specific reference can be found in Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism, (London: Routledge, 1989): 1. She writes, "Postmodernism in general terms takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradiction, self-undermining statement."

[59] Davidson, 137.

demanding look in the mirror. The fact that Henry Nash Smith's question has reverberated throughout the movement for so long proves the sustainability of the question itself--and the impossibility, and perhaps irrelevance, of settling on an answer. And, if the rapid growth, the influx of diversity, and the creative publications that shook the movement are any indication, the 1970s stand as the decade in which the American Studies movement first realized the power behind constant self-questioning and its accompanying inclination toward change, and fully understood the myriad, even contradictory ways, to use them to its strongest advantage.

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