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Statement of Purpose and Biographies

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A Foreword from Our Senior Seminar

In 2013, the National Council for the Association of American Studies, a loosely organized academic association for those engaged in the practice of American Studies, made a divisive decision. The council, against the desires of several past Association presidents, voted to endorse a resolution in support of the boycotts against Israeli institutions in occupied Palestine. This decision sparked a storm of controversy to surround the association as universities and members alike expressed their disapproval of the decision. In our Senior Seminar for American Studies, we started off this semester looking at the classic American Studies canon, which was most recently rocked by Dr. Simon Bronner's scathing journal article "The Death of American Studies," in response to the resolution passed in 2013.¹ Bronner contends that because the field is so interdisciplinary, it needs to avoid overly political conversations and identity politics. Those American Studies scholars who study identity, resistance, and community undermine, Bronner contends, the fundamental organization of the discipline.

To Bronner, it is clear that the culprit of the academic field's downfall is the more recently introduced politicization and analytical subjectivity of contemporary American Studies, that faction who encouraged and fought for

the Association's participation in the boycott. Bronner further claims that, during the era that included the 1968 Democratic National Convention riots and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the American Studies Association would have maintained stability had it avoided stands on political issues external to immediate professional concerns. However, this led us to wonder: Which political issues are actually external to the professional concerns of American Studies scholars and institutions? If the personal is indeed political² and American Studies claims to concern itself with 'the study of race, class, gender, and empire,'³ then--as far as we can see--an analysis of subjectivity and discussion around politicized identities fits entirely within the frame of American Studies.

While we take seriously Bronner's arguments against the division of his beloved discipline, we conclude that it is in fact our moral responsibility to take stances against the oppressive institutions of our time. The ASA's resolution in support of the boycott and divestment of Israeli institutions represents just such a stance. In this journal, with our scholarship and work, we each take explicit political stances, recognizing that our scholarship and academia at large do not exist in a world apart from human rights violations and systemic oppression.

¹ Simon Bronner. (2018). "The Death of American Studies?" *European Journal of American Studies*.

² Carol Hanisch. (1970). *The personal is political*.

³ American Studies Association. (2016). *theasa.net*.

It is our hope to create and reflect the type of work we believe American Studies scholars must engage in; work which grapples with this global political moment. We envision a future American Studies discipline that does not shy away from the harsh and violent realities of occupation, apartheid, and neocolonialism, and rather confronts these violences head-on.

During the process of crafting our final papers for our Senior Seminar class, we found that many of our papers were examining common themes of borders and border crossings. This issue has always been pressing, particularly in the land we now call the United States of America. As of December 2018, there is active violence occurring at the US- Mexico border as a caravan of 5,000 Central American migrants begins to arrive within border towns and cities. US President Donald Trump is pressuring Mexico to block the migrants before they reach San Diego. Closer to our academic home in Minnesota, Native nations are fighting the Line 3 Pipeline that violates their treaties and was approved without their consent.

At this violent border conflict, we are actively witnessing the building and reproducing of borders, both tangible and intangible ones. These are borders between countries, between races, between classes, and between other markers of social differentiation that are often difficult to cross. Borders, as theorized by Gloria Anzaldua, are more than geographical between nation states; borders divide people along lines of perceived difference in accordance to a

power differential. It is these borders that we are examining and in that examination, working to breakdown. This speaks to Mary Helen Washington's ASA presidential address, where she asks the question, "What do we really study in American Studies?" According to Washington, American Studies is about studying borders and those peoples borders force into the margins - those that are marginalized.⁴ In this address, she encourages that American Studies should make room for change and we, as a class, agree with Dr. Washington's approach. We are also inspired by Claudia Rankine's convocation speech, where she spoke to us about taking a stance. She explains, "Whatever affects one directly affects all directly." Here is where we place our scholarship, examining the margins and the borders to help understand us all. Furthermore, as made clear to us from our disagreement with Dr. Bronner's piece, it is important we take explicit political stances against these borders and the violence and exclusion they create.

Acknowledging our positionality is an important piece of practicing ethical scholarship. We in the American Studies Senior Seminar come from different genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, races, and lived experiences, which all affect how we see and move through the world. We aim not to separate ourselves

⁴ Mary Helen Washington. (1998). "Disturbing the Peace: What Happens if you put African American Studies at the Center?" Presidential Address to American Studies Association, October 29, 1997 *American Quarterly*.

from social issues, but to engage them in dialogue that leads to action. In doing so, remembering who we are, where we come from, and how we fit into the power dynamics of the country known as the United States is necessary. To that end, we must begin by saying that we write these papers and engage with these issues while occupying Dakota and Ojibwe land. The colonial powers of Europe and the US not only initially stole this land, but continue to colonize this land through dispossession and the systematic theft of resources. As senior American Studies majors and students of Macalester, we call for more than a recognition that this is Native land, but the actual material return of this land to Indigenous nations as a means of decolonization, drawing upon the work of Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang when they assert “decolonization is not a metaphor.”⁵

We are a community of difference, which means that we all have our own positionalities that come with varying degrees of privilege.⁶ Despite these different positionalities, we must recognize that we all come from the highly privileged space of Macalester. This gives us access to academic advising, databases, and the time necessary to think about complex issues and produce

self-invested work. As students at a private liberal arts institution, our education provides us with learning and economic opportunities both in and outside of the classroom that are not accessible to many. In addition to this, we understand that the work that we produce builds off of scholarship and theories that others have constructed before us. We are grateful for these opportunities to grow and thrive within our department and will strive to use these tools to critically examine the construction of borders and recenter traditionally marginalized voices.

We invite you to engage in this work that, as individuals and a collective, we have passionately crafted over the course of the last 14 weeks. As students of race who, like everyone, constantly interact with borders, we firmly believe that for social change to occur, everyone must engage in resistance. In producing this body of work, our purpose was to create scholarship that is accessible and approachable. Social change and the creation of a more just and liberated world is an ongoing process; we see our work as one piece in a liberatory project paved by the revolutionary thinkers who have come before us. We hope you will join us in collective action to critique, fight, and dismantle the borders that divide us.

⁵ Tuck, E., & Yang, K. (2012). Decolonization is Not a Metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40. Retrieved from <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630/15554>.

⁶ Our positionalities shape the way we conceptualize and construct our papers, which we address in our individual papers.

Author Biographies

Maddie Schumacher (they/them) is a graduating senior at Macalester College from Madison, Wisconsin. They are an American Studies major with a concentration in Urban Studies, a minor in Environmental Studies, and a particular affinity for ceramics. They are very interested in urban social policy, movement theory, placemaking, and how individuals express their identities. They are so grateful to their queer siblings, radical friends, amazing partner, and all of the other people who understand.

Theodore Bennett Twidwell (he/him/his) is a graduating senior at Macalester College from Nevada City, California. He will be graduating with a double major in American Studies and Educational Studies. Academically, Theo's interests include border studies, liberatory education models, critical whiteness studies, and localized histories. As a first-generation college student, Theo hopes to work in educational advocacy in the future to help support others in the same way so many have supported him to and through graduation, all of whom (family, teachers, professors, friends) he thanks profusely.

Isabel (Izzy) P. S. Ryde (she/her/hers) is a graduating senior at Macalester College from Concord, Massachusetts. She is an American Studies and Geology double

major. Her research interests include hydrology; disability studies; women's, gender, and sexuality studies; and the intersection of science and society. She extends her thanks to those who have helped her get to the cusp of graduating, even when reaching this point was uncertain.

Suzanna Jack (she/her/hers) is a graduating senior at Macalester College from Brookline, Massachusetts. She will be graduating with an American Studies major and minors in Music and Geography. Her research and interests are focused around Urban Studies with a concentration on placemaking and public memorials, public history, and late 19th century constructions of nationalism in the United States. She holds unprecedented gratitude for her professors, family, friends, fellow majors, and every single person who has encouraged her as a thinker, change maker, and coffee drinker.

Sophie Nadler (she/her/hers) is a graduating senior at Macalester College from Piedmont, California. She is an Educational Studies and American Studies double major, with interests in youth and family programming, comprehensive sex education, and museum studies. She is unsure of what her future holds, but knows that as long as her wonderful family and friends continue to support, she will find happiness and success.

Lydia Koh-Krienke (she/her/hers) is a graduating senior at Macalester College. As an American Studies major with a biology minor, she plans to attend graduate school for a dual nursing and masters of public health degree. While her passions include bioethics and engaging race in order to promote culturally-competent healthcare, all she really wants to do is eat her mom's traditional Korean food. She dedicates this paper to her Grandfather, who immigrated to the United States from South Korea in order to escape war prison, but would like to thank her family for always being a constant in this ever-changing world.

Madeline Schmitt (she/her/hers) Madeline is a graduating senior at Macalester College. She majors in American Studies and has taken a variety of Educational Studies, Hispanic Studies, Political Science, History, and dance courses. She is from Minneapolis, Minnesota. She could not have completed the project without the help of mentors, friends, and family who helped with processing ideas and editing in the final days. She would like to thank family and everyone involved in making it possible for her to attend college with a supportive community around her. Every person that she has learned from—teachers, peers, friends, and community members—has helped her to grow in a multitude of wonderful ways.

Luz María Ramírez Cruz is a graduating senior at Macalester College from Escondido, California. She is an American Studies major also minoring in Educational Studies and Studio Art. Her current goal is to work in education advocacy as to positively impact the lives and schooling of students with similar life experiences to her own. She dedicates this project to her family and the endless unconditional support they have shown through the years. It is truly a privilege to spend life searching for purpose and for this gift, *les debo la vida y todo mi corazón Mamá y Papá.*