

*Is the "Post" in Postcolonial the
US in American Studies?
The US Beginnings of
Commonwealth Studies*

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IN AN EARLIER special issue of *ARIEL* on postcolonial studies (which actually is a composite of two issues, 26:1 and 26:3, January and July 1995), Peter Hulme laid out a suggestive three-point program for "including America" in the field of postcolonial studies: "1) the field of postcolonial studies *needs* to find a place for America; 2) the inclusion of America will, and should, affect the shape and definition of the field; and, 3) more positively, many of the misgivings about the role of America in postcolonial studies, on closer inspection, are misplaced" (119). Hulme's position paper, therefore, was one of the first to address the possible intersection between postcolonial studies and American studies (particularly a post-nationalist American studies that, like Hulme's, refuses to treat "America" and "the United States" as synonymous). From the side of American studies, in her introduction to the groundbreaking anthology *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Amy Kaplan offers her own three-point analysis, in which she focuses on "three salient absences which contribute to this ongoing pattern of denial [of the idea of an American Empire] across several disciplines: the absence of culture from the history of U.S. imperialism; the absence of empire from the study of American culture; and the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism" ("Left Alone" 11). Other attempts to conjoin the fields of American studies and postcolonial studies, or to supplement one with insights from

the other, in order to move beyond disciplinary and intellectual impasses, have included Jenny Sharpe's essay "Is the United States Postcolonial?", Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani's "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk," and Susie O'Brien's "The Place of America in an Era of Postcolonial Imperialism." Clearly, over the last five years or so, a significant, albeit still tentative, dialogue has been developing between these two most important fields of transnational cultural studies.

Here, in the interests of furthering this important dialogue, but also in the interests of questioning its presuppositions and recalling earlier debates that have been forgotten, I want to present evidence to support my own three-point argument. First, far from developing in isolation from the concerns of American studies, the field of postcolonial studies, from its earliest days in the 1960s discussion of "Commonwealth literature," was forged in, and bears the marks of, the encounter and rivalry between postwar US globalization and the declining European territorial empires. Second, far from ignoring international and imperial questions, the field of American studies was in fact founded at the moment of — and in conjunction with — the postwar internationalization of the US academy, so that US state support for American studies programs abroad was crucial to the establishment of those programs in US universities. Third, therefore, contemporary calls for rapprochement between postcolonial studies and American studies, welcome and intellectually exciting as they are, risk missing the fact that each field was, and is, a crucial constitutive component of the other. They have common roots in the institutional and intellectual history of the post-World War II, Cold War era. The resulting amnesia helps to maintain an artificial separation of the two fields rather than bringing them together. Padmini Mongia suggests, in the introduction to her anthology *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, that "a productive way to understand postcolonial theory is to attempt to outline how it has come to be formed at certain institutional sites" (3); what follows is a modest attempt to trace some of the institutional and historical outlines of both postcolonial theory and American studies, and to suggest ways in which those outlines already intersect.

I. The American Roots of Postcolonial Studies

In 1965, as part of a flurry of events in Britain celebrating the culture(s) of the Commonwealth, there took place in Cardiff a much anticipated Commonwealth Poetry Conference. The Sri Lankan poet Siri Gunasinghe, in his post-conference report, claimed that the Commonwealth "is the most complex political and cultural unit in existence, the UNO not excepted, for it consists of peoples of varying aspirations and experiences . . . trying to exist together with nothing like an agreed charter" (148-49). Such idealism, however, was hard to maintain at the conference itself; there, the lack of a plan or charter, indeed the lack of organization of any kind, reduced the literary events to "chaos" (149), marked by the "sudden appearance of a grunting pig amidst a gathering of poets" (150) and the subsequent disappearance of many of those esteemed poets themselves. The Australian poet James McAuley, in an article published in the *News Sheet* of the new Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS), provided more details: "A large fraction [of the conference] consisted of a contingent of American beats in loose alliance with their English counterparts. How these Americans had managed to rejoin the Commonwealth for the occasion is not clear. They circulated a petition to the Queen asking her to take the taboo off 'death, sex, and drugs.' . . . The last night of the conference included a 'happening' . . . [for which] a rather unspontaneous Vietnamese pig had been procured. . . . Doubtless its squeals were meant to symbolize something" (6-7). Luckily, some semblance of order was restored after "British experience in handling barbarians came to the rescue" (7).

Now that the countercultural impulses of the 1960s can themselves be consumed as nostalgia and now that the lessons of cultural studies have taught us to be skeptical of the claiming of the moral high ground in defense of "high" culture, the reader may be tempted to dismiss the gentlemanly outrage of McAuley and Gunasinghe with a chuckle and move on. However, the incidents in Cardiff, and their subsequent reporting in the most prestigious publications of the newly emerging field of

Commonwealth literary studies, represent an important interruption, one that reveals the mutually constitutive beginnings of postcolonial studies and American studies. For the scandalous presence of “America” is in fact registered, and just as systematically disavowed, in almost every document of Commonwealth studies. My contention here is that Commonwealth studies, which provided one of the most important intellectual/institutional streams from which postcolonial studies flowed, cannot be understood without examining this persistent engagement with, and rejection of, the figure of “America,” the first postcolony of the anglophone world. Helen Tiffin, in trying to refocus attention on the important legacies of Commonwealth literary studies, is right to be suspicious of what she calls “the current amnesia in relation to the extensive work already done [in the field of postcolonial studies] by 1978 [that is, before the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*]” (“Plato’s Cave” 159). In this essay, however, I want to ensure that curing one amnesia (the roots of postcolonial studies in Commonwealth literary studies) does not result in another, symptomatic amnesia: forgetting the central place of the US in the foundation of Commonwealth literary studies.

Conventionally, the founding moment of what came to be called — always uncomfortably — Commonwealth studies, or Commonwealth literary studies, was a conference at the University of Leeds, September 1964, which led to a volume of essays, *Commonwealth Literature: Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture*, and the establishment of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. A. Norman Jeffares, a Yeats scholar and a charismatic power-broker in the postwar British academy (and also the first editor of *ARIEL*), was the driving force behind these initiatives, as many of the contributors to the *Festschrift* for Jeffares, published on the 25th anniversary of the Leeds Conference, have amply catalogued.¹ However, telling and retelling the story of the originary moment of Commonwealth studies does not necessarily make it true. Although the Leeds conference may well have been the first large-scale academic conference devoted to Commonwealth literature, the field itself had already been defined institutionally and intellectually in the 1950s — in the US. The first

book to address Commonwealth literature in any systematic way was the anthology *The Commonwealth Pen*, which was published by Cornell University Press in 1961, edited by Alan McLeod, one of the first scholars in the field in the US. Looking back on the early days of the field from the vantage point of the late 1980s, McLeod remembered “the somewhat chauvinistic decision not to invite any Americans to the 1964 Leeds conference, on the theory that they might ‘over-run’ the field” (“Commonwealth Studies in the U.S.” 12). The high-minded eloquence of Jeffares’s opening address at Leeds, with its call for “a wider and deeper general understanding” of Commonwealth literatures and “what they have contributed, and are contributing, to our common culture” (Jeffares, “Introduction” xii), begins to sound like an attempt to carve out a non-US dominated intellectual space in a postwar world increasingly under American economic, military, and cultural influence, in which “our” common culture is anachronistically and paternalistically identified as the (British) Commonwealth. For example, in citing the presumed benefits of writers in English in India, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and the West Indies catering to “an outside and overseas audience,” Jeffares’s exclusion of the US from this overseas market is remarkable, and strategically crucial, even if unthinking: the Commonwealth writer should not write specifically for “readers in Heckmondwike or Helmsby rather than those in Wagga Wagga or Enugu,” but “he must not become incomprehensible in *any* of these places. He can bring a special flavour; he can make a distinctive contribution to our common heritage” (xiii). The “common culture” or “common heritage” links provincial and rural England with the African and Australian hinterland, bypassing completely the English publishing capital, New York (and even London, it seems).²

Thus the Leeds conference, and the subsequent development of Commonwealth literary studies, were predicated — just as in the responses to the Cardiff poetry conference — on the careful exclusion of potentially disruptive American influences. This historical omission allows contemporary scholars not to remember that the first course in Commonwealth literature was taught by Bruce Sutherland at Penn State College

(later University) as far back as 1942 (McLeod, "Commonwealth Studies in the U.S." 8); that since 1959 a Conference on British Commonwealth Literature had been meeting annually at the MLA convention in the US (it was later to become the Division of English Literature Other Than British and American); and that it established a *Newsletter* in 1962 (which later became the journal *World Literature Written in English*), edited by Joseph Jones at the University of Texas at Austin (Jones, "Letter"). To remind ourselves of these movements is not to celebrate uncritically those US, Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand "pioneers" of the 1950s and 1960s in the US. No doubt some of them shared the attitude of Robert Robertson, a New Zealander who taught in Austin in the 1950s and 1960s, and who, in pointing to Commonwealth literary studies in the US as the prehistory of the field elsewhere, claimed implausibly that the "fate of the American Commonwealth scholars and teachers was that of all 'Hussites.' They were swamped first by Black studies, then women's studies, then Gay literature, neo-Marxist critiques, and other fashions in the American academic whirligig" (6-7). However, to ignore the development of forms of Commonwealth literary studies at these various sites in the US is to perpetuate a blinkered version of intellectual and literary history in which the territorial outlines of the British Empire (post-1793) anachronistically determine postwar (and, precisely, postcolonial) academic disciplines. This exclusion of "America" flies in the face of any materially grounded analysis of intellectual production, a blindspot that, in its own small way, in fact allows the global process of Americanization (which in the US is called "globalization")³ to continue apace and relatively unchallenged.

In the 1960s, however, the spectre of America haunted the Commonwealth all too visibly: the editorial of a special issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* on the Commonwealth in 1965 noted the beginnings of Commonwealth literary studies in the UK, but saw that "as one has come to expect, the Americans are already in the field" ("Editorial" 787). The author notes the publication of McLeod's *The Commonwealth Pen* in 1961, and declares, "matters have not looked back since and we can certainly

expect that the Americans will take a large hand, even if they do not annex the subject" (787). Elsewhere in the same issue of the *TLS*, a writer complained of the loss of British publishing trade to Soviet presses, and, "a much more serious matter . . . to those friends, and utterly ruthless rivals, the publishers of the United States, whose operations are often backed by massive government spending" ("An Interest" 808). This hegemony of the professionalized US over the gentleman amateurs of Britain is cause for concern in the academic arena too: "It is likely that many American academics, seized of the need to publish, and aware that a new subject and new courses [that is, Commonwealth literature] may offer a less *angst*-ridden rise to the summits of specialized superiority, will see the need for field work and the looming support of foundations and publishers: and the commercial machine will follow closely in the steps of these grant-attracting bodies" ("An Interest" 808).

More recently, some critics and intellectual historians have tried to insist on a disciplinary, and roughly chronological, "break" between a non-Americanized Commonwealth studies, and a strictly American academic discipline called "postcolonial studies"; ironically, therefore, such debates simply recapitulate this earlier distinction by displacing it onto the field of history, and ignore the fact that "the Americans [were] already in the field" from the beginning, as the *TLS* editorial put it, rather than outside it. Jeffares sounded this anti-professionalism theme back in 1975, when he proclaimed himself baffled by "the American question: 'What is your field?'" and saw Commonwealth literary studies as a hopeful area because "as yet, there is not too much tired professional thesis-style criticism around" ("Opening Address" 13). More recently, Diana Brydon celebrated the history of Commonwealth studies, which, in her account, "never reached Americans" (104); its "strong sense of community and commitment" (104) is opposed to postcolonial criticism, which "has largely developed as an American response to decolonization and neo-imperialism" (104). The "old Commonwealth studies . . . encouraged long lists of publications like those in the Heinemann African and Caribbean series," whereas postcolonial studies is dominated by "a few stars

picked up by international conglomerates and aggressively marketed as 'transcultural' in appeal" (105). And Bruce King, in 1996, praised "the Commonwealth critics' network . . . [which] remains important in exchanging news about up-and-coming writers, in sharing ideas, and in resisting the takeover of the new literatures by American and Americanized intellectuals whose vision is limited to their own 'post-colonial' cultural wars" ("New Centres" 15).⁴

What we witness again and again, therefore, from the responses to the Cardiff poetry conference to Gareth Griffiths's 1996 claim that "the power and size of the U.S. academy acts [sic] as a vortex into which the specific claims of cultural difference that are so vital to the post-colonial societies themselves are sucked" (167) to Terry Eagleton's already notorious 1999 review of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, are crude versions of institutional history in which "America" or "the American academy" function as the monstrous limits against which Commonwealth literature or postcolonial studies have defined themselves. To point out the banality of such arguments, in which "America" plays the role of Evil Empire shorn of all specificity and historical grounding, is not to deny the often deleterious effects of the corporatization and globalization of the US academic industry. However, the political impulses that produce diatribes against "America" (often in the interests of claiming a space apparently uncorrupted by "politics") all too rarely produce careful, reflective institutional and disciplinary histories, of the kind that are absolutely necessary if the power and size of the US academy are to be challenged or channelled in different directions.

In other words, the dominance of the discourse of the "postcolonial" after the late 1980s cannot be rewritten as a simple narrative of the American colonization of a kinder, gentler field named Commonwealth studies. Instead, taking seriously Arif Dirlik's "partially facetious," and now infamous, statement that the postcolonial begins "when Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe" (294), we would do well to trace exactly the routes those intellectuals travelled, and, in particular, to analyze the way in which the US

gradually overtook Britain as the destination of choice for students from the anglophone world seeking overseas higher education credentials. (Dirlik himself does not provide this detailed analysis.) Any full-fledged history of postcolonial studies might well begin with the US government-sponsored Fulbright scholar program. The funding from the British government's Commonwealth Relations Office that helped to finance the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* in its early years (Ravenscroft 2) and to establish visiting professorships at Leeds for Commonwealth scholars must be seen in the context of, and in competition with, the US State Department and US Information Service funding for American studies programs in the UK in the 1950s (and the appointment of a professor of American literature at Leeds in 1959 with US federal government support [Johnson 20] — see below, part 2).

It is this institutional growth of American studies both within the US and especially abroad after World War II that explains why so many scholars in Commonwealth literary studies acknowledged the importance of the emergence of "American literature" as a separate sphere of literary study (initially in North American universities in the first half of this century, later in American studies programs abroad). Joseph Jones, for example, noted that

the rapid growth of American literary study affords a none-too-leisurely parallel [to the growth of new literatures in English after World War II]. Eighty years ago there would have been little cause for imagining that in a few brief decades the obvious pre-eminence of that body of writing directly associated with the British Isles would be open to challenge. But it was. (*Terranglia* 13-14)

C.D. Narasimhaiah, president of ACLALS between 1974-1977, states that "one of the major academic events in the literature of the twentieth century is that the Eng. Lit. [sic] syllabus 'from Chaucer to Hardy' has often made room for 'Literature in English' in which Eng. Lit. has slowly acquiesced in the loss of pride of place[,] with American Literature and Literature of the Commonwealth sharing the front rank in world literature" ("India and the Literature of the Commonwealth" 30). Gerald Graff, in his institutional history of English studies in North

America, shows how American literature studies constituted a powerful challenge to traditional philological and aesthetic approaches to literary study, since “from its inception [it] was peculiarly tied to the project of overcoming the gulf between literature and its sociohistorical contexts” (211). Despite the anti-American impulses of Commonwealth studies, therefore, American literature often proved to be an attractive model to those scholars of colonial and postcolonial literatures who recognized that academic and intellectual attention directed at such writing shattered the myth of a British-dominated canon, as Joseph Jones argued at the fourth ACLALS conference in Delhi in 1977: “Commonwealth language and literature study demonstrates, conclusively, the impossibility of perpetuating a closed system of instruction, restricted to a predetermined sequence of English ‘masterpieces’ arbitrarily so defined. . . . Unless I read the signs altogether wrongly, we shall be called upon, very soon and very imperatively, to examine the structure of our English curriculum along with the methods through which we present it” (“Method or Madness” 409).

Thus scholars of Commonwealth literature — sometimes the same ones who decry the influence of the American academic “machine” — routinely cite the importance of US literature in clearing the disciplinary and critical ground for the displacement of British literature as the default “English” literature. Helen Tiffin, for example, who deplors the influence of US-style “identity politics” in postcolonial studies (“Plato’s Cave” 161), nevertheless makes a similar historical argument to the one I make in this essay, stressing that the history of postcolonial studies must go back before the Leeds conference to “the initiation [in the 1950s and early 1960s] of American literature courses in a number of Commonwealth universities,” which, together with the rise of postcolonial nationalism, “interrogated and destabilized” both the centrality of British literature and “the notion of ‘literary universality’” (“Plato’s Cave” 160). Elsewhere, Tiffin notes that in her own intellectual development, reading Wilson Harris and Chinua Achebe in the 1960s produced a “‘shock of recognition’ which reverberated back to those earlier courses in Australian and American litera-

tures" that she had taken as an advanced undergraduate student ("Lie Back" 119). (She does not note, however, the fact that American literature courses and programs were often established as an explicit aspect of US foreign policy — on which, see part 2 below.) D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, recounting the post-war history of English studies in Sri Lanka, noted that the

literature syllabus at Ceylon's single university after Independence in 1948 was confined to British literature[,] but soon, in the 1950s, there came an expansion with the introduction of American literature whenever there were foreign lecturers capable of handling the subject. . . . The impact made by American Literature helped to bring about a further expansion of the English syllabus to include Commonwealth Literature. (1)

Given these interlocking institutional and intellectual histories, it should come as no surprise to observe that the most frequently cited critical essay of the early days of Commonwealth literary studies, D.E.S. Maxwell's "Landscape and Theme," which inaugurated the now familiar and still contested analytic distinction between settler-invader and non-settler colonies, begins with a brief analysis of US literature.⁵ The claim for the importance of Maxwell's essay, therefore — Helen Tiffin gives it pride of place in her account of postcolonial studies ("Plato's Cave" 159; "Lie Back" 119); the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, who include Tiffin, analyze Maxwell even before they move on to Fanon and Memmi in the genealogy of the discipline (Ashcroft et al. 24-27) — is an unwitting recollection of the simultaneously paradigmatic and disruptive presence of "America" in postcolonial studies. It is precisely from the US "landscape" that Maxwell initially derives his analytical framework; at the same time, he has to exclude the US from the "two broad categories" of Commonwealth writing: "In the first, the writer brings his own language — English — to an alien environment and a fresh set of experiences: Australia, Canada, New Zealand. In the other, the writer brings an alien language — English — to his own social and cultural inheritance: India, West Africa" (82).⁶ In a similar way, the text that is still probably the most used and most cited introduction to postcolonial studies, *The Empire Writes Back*, also positions the US as simulta-

neously central *and* peripheral to the concerns of postcolonial studies. In a now notorious passage emphasizing the breathtaking but implausibly broad definition of the “postcolonial,” which covers “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al. 2), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin list numerous Commonwealth literatures as postcolonial literatures and then add, “the literature of the USA should also be placed in this category” (2). Here the US functions as a kind of afterthought; however, two sentences later, the authors are arguing that the US’s “relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literatures everywhere” (2). I hope I have shown that this paradoxical double movement, of engagement with and disavowal of “America,” while it has occasioned little comment thus far, is in fact a significant constitutive component of what has come to be labelled postcolonial studies.

II. The Postcolonial Roots of American Studies

C.D. Narasimhaiah declared in the *ACLALS Bulletin* (1974) that the history of the study of American literature offered “valuable guidelines to those who seek to promote Commonwealth literature” (“A Note” 2):

American literature . . . had behind it immense political power and the international prestige that flowed from it; and, on the organizational side, the agencies of the State Department (e.g., the USIS [US Information Service]) spread all the world over to reinforce the work of official and private educational foundations which, to speak for one country, India, witnessed the expansion of American literature as an academic discipline from mere scratch in 1957 to an independent status in almost every one of its eighty-odd universities in the beginning of the 1970s. It witnessed, too, the flow of hundreds of young Indian teachers to American universities and a considerable number of the senior American faculty in the opposite direction to Indian universities; the organization of local, regional and national seminars; a national network of USIS libraries, distribution of book gifts, reissue of inexpensive editions of classics, the founding of American Studies Research Centres with sophisticated research materials, [etc.] (“A Note” 1-2)

By now, the interconnections between American studies and Commonwealth studies ought to be clear enough; in this section of the essay, I want to address the development of American studies in an international context, to see it as part of the history of the postwar, postdecolonization period (instead of as a discipline that developed along entirely separate lines from postcolonial studies). While Narasimhaiah sees the development of American literature courses in India as a model and guideline, both intellectually and institutionally, I would prefer to analyze the process he describes as a postcolonial instrument of US foreign policy remarkably similar to the British uses of literary education in India during the nineteenth-century colonial period that Gauri Viswanathan has so carefully uncovered in her *Masks of Conquest*. And the analogy can be pushed further. Just as Viswanathan's study shows that the roots of "English" as an institution must be traced to the colonies, from where it was re-exported back to Britain, the history of American studies shows that its institutionalization outside the US in many cases predated its development in the US itself.

There are now significant moves in contemporary American studies to broaden its scope beyond the US: to situate the US within a global context; to study the Americas rather than the US; in short, to "internationalize" American studies. The argument of this section of the essay is that calls for "critical internationalism" (Desmond and Domínguez) or the "internationalization of American Studies" (Cowan and Sandeen) are risky if they do not properly engage with the international history of American studies; indeed, perhaps they are doomed to repeat that history. For example, international exchange programs — of the kind noted by Narasimhaiah in the early 1970s — feature prominently in the blueprints for international American studies provided by Jane Desmond and Virginia Domínguez (486), Michael Cowan and Eric Sandeen, and Emory Elliott, the latter being particularly enthusiastic about the "exceptionally positive benefits [that] have resulted from these links" between the American Studies Association (ASA) in the US, the US Information Agency (called the US Information Service outside the US), and the Council for the International Exchange of Schol-

ars. Elliott notes approvingly that, "in order to handle its international responsibilities more effectively, the officers of the ASA voted last year [that is, 1993] to move the offices of the ASA into Washington, D.C., to facilitate contacts with the USIA and other government agencies" (Elliott n.pag.). Even John Carlos Rowe, convenor of an important seminar on post-nationalist American studies at the University of California, Irvine, in 1996, and anxious to distinguish "new" Americanists from "older Americanists, who more obviously 'exported' American culture 'abroad'" (Rowe n.pag.), hopes for a more positive engagement with the US Information Agency, which "has just recently been in the position to develop international exchanges that would be more mutually beneficial than the more one-sided cultural exchanges of the past" (Rowe n.pag.).

My skepticism about the overall benefits of this kind of state/university relationship does not mean that I doubt the importance or local efficacy of individual exchanges. However, proponents of a cosy relationship between the ASA and federal agencies in Washington ought perhaps to go back and examine the substance and rhetoric of debates over exchange programs, and international cultural programs in general, in US government circles in the immediate postwar period. Charles Johnson, for instance, head of the International Information Agency, testified before a Senate subcommittee in 1955 that educational exchanges were the "hard core" of US information programs, and gave those programs — which had developed during World War II, and had therefore become associated with US propaganda — "greater strength, greater respectability, and greater credibility" (qtd. in Frankel 33). From the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, L. Natarajan's 1970 Indian pamphlet describing the USIS and the Peace Corps as *America's Two Pincers* comes to very similar conclusions: "The USIS staff fulfill tasks that tally little with their publicised task of spreading truthful information about the United States. . . . [They] play the role of Washington's 'fourth hand' abroad" (3). Natarajan quotes Theodore Sorenson, USIS deputy director under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, as describing the agency as "a psychological instrument of the United States government

overseas, just as the State Department is the diplomatic instrument . . . and the CIA the intelligence instrument" (qtd. in Natarajan 3).

Senator J.W. Fulbright, whose name is now indelibly associated with the exchange programs he helped to develop, laid out the stakes clearly in a foreword to Philip Coombs's book claiming international educational and cultural affairs to be *The Fourth Dimension of Foreign Policy*:

The importance of the human element in foreign policy becomes quite obvious. . . . We may not be able to buy friends even if we tried — and our policies have at times invited such criticism — but we can win them through programs which allow foreigners to get to know us and us to know them. . . . Educational exchange is not merely a laudable experiment, but a positive instrument of foreign policy, designed to mobilize human resources just as military and economic policies seek to mobilize physical resources. (Fulbright ix, xi)

The echoes of the language of the "civilizing mission" are evident here. Coombs, the first ever assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs, takes up this language while at the same time showing how American ideals validated abroad might renew Americans' self-confidence at home:

Perhaps Americans today have forgotten the power of the ideas of their own revolution — liberty, equality, human rights, democracy, progress, the dignity of the individual, due process of law, the responsibility of the government to promote the general welfare. But these ideas, carried now to the remotest nations and oppressed peoples, are shots still heard around the world. (12)

An exported American studies, in other words, will function simultaneously as an instrument of US postwar hegemony and as a source of cultural renewal in the US itself. Just as Amy Kaplan has shown how Perry Miller's groundbreaking American studies classic, *Errand into the Wilderness*, owes its provenance to Miller's experiences in the Congo in the 1920s (Kaplan, "Left Alone" 3-11), the statements of Coombs and other academic/government advocates of American studies programs abroad in the 1950s and 1960s show why we need to situate the growth of American studies after World War II in an international context.

For instance, Robert Spiller, principal author of *American Literary History*, the standard textbook for decades, and one of the pioneer figures of American studies in the US, was a Fulbright scholar in Norway and India in the early 1950s, and stressed the importance of the international aspect of the discipline. He described the evolution of the American studies movement as taking place in four chronological stages: the founding of the MLA and the American Historical Association in the 1880s and the move away from the classics; the founding of the American Literature group within the MLA in the 1920s; the founding of the American Studies Association between 1949-51; and lastly, "the fourth stage . . . when American studies went international with the cultural exchange programs of the State Department, the Fulbright and ACLS [American Council of Learned Societies] programs" (Spiller, *Late Harvest* 185). However, the evidence of Spiller's own career shows that stages three and four occurred simultaneously, and that "going international" was constitutive of postwar American studies. In the same essay that contains this four-stage history, Spiller describes the founding of the American Institute in Oslo in 1949, and his own Fulbright exchange trip to Norway in 1950. Elsewhere, Merle Curti, another important figure in early American studies, describes a US government-sponsored trip to India in 1946 (42). Rockefeller Foundation and US government grants enabled the organization of four conferences at Cambridge and Oxford universities in the summers of 1952-55, which led rapidly to the development of the British Association for American Studies (Johnson 23-28). By 1962, two years before the Leeds Commonwealth Studies conference, ACLS and US government funds had already established readerships or chairs in American studies at the universities of Cambridge, Hull, Manchester, Leeds, and the London School of Economics (Johnson 20). In India, positions were established at the University of Osmania in Hyderabad, the University of Bombay, and Jadarpur University in Calcutta (Johnson 16-18). This pattern was repeated in many countries around the world. As Spiller himself declared in 1975, "In 1945 the United States was quick to realize its opportunities for creating a favorable image world-wide

by expanding its foreign aid programs from the military, intelligence, and economic areas into the cultural" ("Fulbright Program" 5).

In 1966, at the height of the Vietnam War, Spiller worried about the outcome of government-sponsored exchange programs, and in the process, made the connection to colonial forms of cultural hegemony explicit:

Certainly the attempts of the British over many years in India, of France in Indo-China, and even of the United States in Cuba to acculturate an alien people in the interest of mutual economic and political benefit have not been reassuring. Perhaps their motives were impure, and the more recent foreign policy of the United States has been pure, but, in any case, the decision of our government after World War II to add a program of cultural exchange to its military, economic, and political commitments overseas deserves close scrutiny at a time when the chant "Yankee Go Home!" is echoing from Djakarta to Havana and from Tokyo to Santiago. (Spiller, *Late Harvest* 231-2)

While we should of course be wary of collapsing the differences between the cultural and economic policies of European (and US) territorial colonialism of the nineteenth-century variety and those of postwar US neocolonialism, it would be equally unwise to ignore the similarities and analogies. Some recent historians of American studies have attempted to split off such US cultural imperialism from a strain of American studies that inherited "Progressive and New Deal concerns for social betterment and engaged criticism" (Cowan and Sandeen, n.pag.).⁷ However, the work of Penny Von Eschen and Nikhil Pal Singh has clearly demonstrated that left-liberal democratic politics and a civil rights agenda were not only compatible with US foreign policy during the 1950s and 60s, but that US global hegemony was in fact partly established in the early Cold War period by an international projection of democratic ideas and by a domestic consensus that ruled out international coalitions, especially of an anti-imperialist nature.

The tub-thumping report of the US Advisory Commission on International and Cultural Affairs of 1963 on exchange programs, entitled *A Beacon of Hope*, certainly appropriates the language of radicalism in its plan for the containment and

assimilation of radicals abroad. The exchange programs, the authors argue, should not merely confine themselves to comprador elites, but should seek out those “who are sufficiently vigorous and restless to help promote desirable social and economic change,” even if those people are radicals and leftists, because “they must be given the opportunity to learn that there is a democratic road to reform” (US Advisory Commission 4). The vigor and restlessness that Americans wrote into their own history, which formed the central thematic of early American studies works of the “errand into the wilderness,” “city on the hill,” and “new frontier” variety (Kaplan, “Left Alone”), and which enabled Robert Spiller to equate the US and India as postcolonies,⁸ masked the vigorous appropriation of colonial-style cultural policies after World War II, as the United States challenged and surpassed the European colonial powers as the Cold War got under way.

The irony, therefore, in addressing the mutually entwined histories of postcolonial studies and American studies, is that it might only be the insights of postcolonial studies that could properly assess this postwar development of US cultural policy overseas, and yet postcolonial studies itself has failed to take account of its own origins in relation to postwar US cultural policy. The numerous gestures towards bridging the gaps between these two fields that are now beginning to be made are signs of a developing debate that is welcome and potentially generative; nevertheless, such interventions will remain merely gestures so long as they fail to return to the connected institutional and intellectual histories of the fields on which, paradoxically, the claims for their inability to speak to each other actually lie. Desmond and Domínguez produce a rather caricatured version of postcolonial studies as a potential source of enrichment for American studies — although postcolonial critics, they claim, “often focus on cultural formations in the region of their family origin or on their particular postcolonial status of hybridity” (478). Hulme, as cited at the beginning of this essay, sees “including America” as crucial for the future development of postcolonial studies. For these two positions to produce genuine interdisciplinary dialogue, rather than

functioning as disguised defenses of current disciplinary boundaries, they will have to pay more attention to the fact that, as Desmond and Domínguez quite rightly point out, “if all knowledge is situated, that is, produced ‘from somewhere’ as poststructuralists have argued, we must move beyond a monocular vision to one refracted by numerous simultaneous perspectives” (483). I have tried to show, by adopting at least a bifocal perspective in this essay, that the knowledges of postcolonial studies and American studies have been produced from places that have always been in fact closely connected, although those common roots have also been denied, displaced, and occluded from the very beginning.⁹

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Bruce King’s autobiographical essay “How with the Help of Derry Jeffares I (an American) Became a Commonwealth Literature Specialist.”
- 2 Compare George Lamming’s belated recognition of his own dismissal of the cultural, although not of the economic, power of the US publishing industry, in *The Pleasures of Exile*. “I remember how pleased I was to learn that my first book, *In the Castle of My Skin*, had been bought by an American publisher . . . I was going to be launched, so to speak. I started to make the most modest calculations about its sale. . . . It was the money I was thinking of to the exclusion of the book’s critical reputation in America. The book had had an important critical press in England; its reputation here was substantial; so it could make no difference what America thought” (26). Ironically, one of the sources of funding for the first Leeds Commonwealth Studies Conference was the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was later revealed to be a CIA-backed, US-funded anti-communist front organization.
- 3 I owe this parenthetical, but crucial, point to Alys Eve Weinbaum and Brent Edwards, from their essay included elsewhere in this issue of *ARIEL*. John Carlos Rowe also makes a similar argument about discourses of globalization in the academic context: “The current vogue of the term ‘global’ and interest in the process of ‘globalization’ is understood by many international scholars as a code-word for the postmodern cultural colonialism of the United States” (n.pag.).
- 4 King elsewhere in the essay attacks the contributions to the *PMLA* special topic on “Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition” (1995), since the essays are concerned primarily, he claims, with “theory, literature in other languages [that is, other than English], and the ‘homoerotics’ of Orientalism. Many readers might feel that the new English literatures were better served when they were marginal to the academic profession and before criticism was assumed to have a political purpose” (21).
- 5 “Critics exhorted writers [in the nineteenth century] to describe the grandeur and variety of the American scene. I do not know that anyone has actually counted the number of comparisons between American forest and European cathedral, often to the detriment of the latter, but the tally must be high. . . . We find the comparison again in Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, where it suddenly comes alive” (Maxwell 83).

- 6 On the equally problematic exclusion of South Africa from Maxwell's influential formula, see Ashcroft et al. (27) and, especially, Jolly (370-72). On the exclusion of South African literature from the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Arthur Ravenscroft, the first editor, commented later, "I always enjoyed the maximum of editorial freedom, subject only to the exclusion of South African literature while the Commonwealth Relations Office subsidy lasted, on the bureaucratic grounds, vigorously but vainly argued against, that South Africa was no longer in the Commonwealth" (3). The exclusion of South Africa from the *JCL* was first protested in its pages by US-based critic John Povey (UCLA) in issue #2 (1966), arguing that it "expose[d] the dangers of making literature depend on exterior political concerns" (152).
- 7 "On the one hand, as a byproduct of American political and economic hegemony, 'American Studies' was aggressively marketed throughout the world, often with active government support. On the other, foreign scholars often joined domestic counterparts in a frequently ironic critique of American culture. On the one hand, American Studies could support messianic Americanism. On the other, it could reveal the contradictions of the democratic project and contest Cold War mentalities" (Cowan and Sandeen, n.pag.).
- 8 "Americans have much to learn by seeing their literature through the eyes of a people who share their experience of a new-found independence and their faith in human freedom" (Spiller, at an American studies conference in Mussoorie, India [1962]; qtd. in Mulder 1).
- 9 I want to thank Alan McLeod for his generosity in sharing with me, and allowing me to cite from, some of his own extensive research into the early days of Commonwealth literary studies.

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