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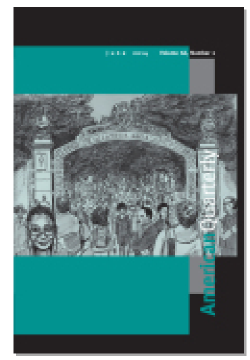

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Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State. **By Chandan Reddy. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011. 320 pages. $84.95 (cloth). $23.95 (paper).**

Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization. Edited by Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011. 384 pages. $94.95 (cloth). $25.95 (paper).

Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism. **By Jodi Melamed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 288 pages. $75.00 (cloth). $25 (paper).**

I sometimes wish that American studies contemplated its own cutting edge less insistently. The love of innovation and the thrill of timeliness are all to the good, but there are costs, too. Some are not our fault, as when young scholars rightly convinced that they are pushing boundaries just as they should within our field encounter collegewide tenure committees for whom the cutting edge is anathema. But even in matters over which we exercise some control, too insistent searches for the next big thing risk being counterproductive. At times a certain self-policing undoubtedly leads scholars doing important work to hesitate to submit it to leading American studies venues if it seems somehow not "cutting edge" enough. In an interdiscipline often raising profound, enduring questions requiring sustained inquiry from many angles, we can be too ready to move on and too self-effacing when we do not.

Still, if pushed to define a body of scholarship currently making the most exciting and generative impact in our field, I would focus precisely on the area defined by the three books under review here. To say as much is not to fetishize the cutting edge, as the books assert their connections to long-standing concerns within the field. The authors, in refusing to simply be the next thing, draw powerfully and respectfully on older traditions, including even those that they revise. It is true that two of the authors reviewed here, Roderick Ferguson and Chandan Reddy, helped recently to initiate and popularize "queer

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of color critique." However, in doing so they insisted that their innovation drew inspiration from a long tradition of women of color feminism, a tradition animating all the works considered here. Likewise generative are supple engagements with historical materialism, and specifically with what Cedric Robinson termed "Black Marxism," as well as critical deployments of the ideas of Gayatri Spivak, Michel Foucault, and Frantz Fanon.

The three books cohere around networks of scholars exchanging ideas. Their writers are in sustained dialogue with each other's work. Two of the books are in Duke University Press's Perverse Modernities series and the third, Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy*, is part of the newer Difference Incorporated series at University of Minnesota Press, under the coeditorship of Ferguson and of Grace Kyungwon Hong. Reddy and Melamed both contribute essays to *Strange Affinities*. Thus this review discusses not just exciting new work but an exciting new body of work.

The phrase "difference incorporated" especially signals how this body of work draws from the generative insights of the literary scholar Lisa Lowe, who coedits the Perverse Modernities series. In introducing her 1996 classic *Immigrant Acts*, Lowe demonstrated an appreciation of Marxism that nonetheless challenged the notion that capital's desire was always and everywhere to make labor homogeneous, interchangeable, and abstract. Instead in U.S. history, she argued, "capital has maximized its profits not through rendering labor 'abstract' but precisely through the social productions of 'difference,'. . . marked by race, nation, geographical origins, and gender."[1] While the call for a more-sophisticated materialism was profound, Lowe's equally sharp challenge to how we write about diversity is what most animates the books reviewed here. Far from simply standing on the side of the angels, multiculturalism could, as Lowe showed, underpin celebrations of difference useful to capital and empire. Such celebrations helped reproduce not only identity categories but also continued oppression along lines of race, gender, and nation.

In their varied ways all of the books considered here, and Ferguson's scintillating forthcoming study *The Reorder of Things*, explore complex and sometimes unexpected connections between difference and power. Melamed and Reddy especially insist that the period after what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call the "racial break," the adoption of formal racial equality and nationalist celebration of racial progress, saw the strategic embrace of some forms of diversity by elites who were not just striking poses but acting on their own interests. Nonetheless, the analyses of Melamed and Reddy utterly avoid the Left-sounding antimulticulturalism of fools exemplified by the recent work of Walter Benn Michaels, who argues that race no longer functions as a central axis of exploitation but rather as a strategy of rulers—and of complicit academics and activists—to derail and deflect struggles over economic inequality.[2] Melamed expresses the convincing counterposition running through queer of color critique by insisting that turns to diversity take place within an order she describes as a "new racial capitalism." Thus, as the geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes on the book's cover, "official antiracism has steadied, rather than dissolved, race as a structuring force of capitalism."

Because these books so cohere, my remarks adopt a thematic approach after a discussion of the parameters and arguments of each work individually. Reddy's previous work brilliantly spilled over disciplinary boundaries in ways that have made *Freedom with Violence* one of the most widely awaited first books in my memory. George Lipsitz's back cover assessment of it as "one of the most important books of our times" captures both the import and the timeliness of Reddy's contribution. Reddy uses texts that range from laws and court opinions to political speeches, the novels of Nella Larsen, and W. E. B. Du Bois's castigations of the "car window" social scientists who pronounced on the "Negro problem" based on glimpses they gleaned as trains shuttled them to southern vacations. *Freedom with Violence* positions itself in a long history of challenges to how race is known, placed, naturalized, and used. In discussions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Reddy shows how racial knowledge glorified the nation, in no small measure around its most brutal, racially inflected projects. In the period after the racial break, Reddy demonstrates how the state's claims to be a guarantor against racist violence underpin its power to decide who, at home and abroad, ought to be without rights and protections.

Melamed's *Represent and Destroy* complements Reddy's book aptly. It analyzes three successive political and representational regimes about race in the post–World War II U.S. past: racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism, and neoliberal multiculturalism. A literary scholar, Melamed situates literary texts in changing moments, arguing that they did not merely bespeak changing configurations of difference and power but were and are deployed to teach new forms of hegemonic racial knowledge. In the period of racial liberalism, for example, fiction and social science dovetailed to emphasize the reparative possibilities of modern racial knowledge, the long-term association of the U.S. state with freedom, the premodern ignorance of bigots, and the damage supposedly done by history to African American psyches. Highly constrained "protest novels" stood as the prescribed form of black creative writing. After the legislation of formal equality in the 1960s, and for a time with the pressure of mass movements, university-based struggles for equality matured. Liberal multiculturalism often narrowed these insurgencies into attempts to expand the canon, so that integration and antiracism could be seen, as Hazel Carby observed, to center on constructing reading lists and on "knowing each other through cultural texts" (91). In the twenty-first century, Melamed finds neoliberal multiculturalism championing fiction that valorizes commodity flows and Western ideals, even and especially when those ideals rationalize violence. Her provocative discussion of the push to elevate Azar Nafisi's *Reading "Lolita" in Tehran* might be productively paired with Ruth Tapia's deeply interesting reflections in *Strange Affinities* on Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films in which residual and emergent racisms, fully tied to commodity forms and to histories of violence, sell images of liberation that never stray far from their opposites.

Strange Affinities, with more than a dozen contributors, lends itself less well to easy summary. Its exciting essays take up another theme of *Immigrant Acts* and of women of color feminism generally, that of difference within difference. In an essay in this volume, Kara Keeling quotes Audre Lorde as saying that "our place" is in "the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference"; if so, the challenges of making such a home safe, adventuresome, and findable are profound (53). *Strange Affinities* considers threats to such a house and assesses strategies deployed for building it, past and present. While it is impossible in a short review essay to mention all of the contributors, their many pieces convey both an astonishing range of insights and a tone that takes differences within difference as salutary, if not always comfortable. Care to historical detail often matters greatly in the essays, as in Helen Jun's fine study "Black Orientalism: Nineteenth Century Narratives of Race and U.S. Citizenship." Jun notes that a post–Civil War acceptance of orientalist tropes by some African Americans at times gave way to opposition to state policies of Chinese exclusion by black Americans who had their own recent and ongoing experiences of statist coercions about race. Likewise wonderful, for its ability to show not just a gap in the scholarship but how filling that gap changes the whole story, is Martha Chew Sánchez's "Deconstructing the Rhetoric of Mestizaje through the Chinese Presence in Mexico." Ferguson's own *Strange Affinities* essay, "Lateral Moves of African American Studies in a Period of Migration," systematically engages Lorde and the possibility of coalition. It asks us to imagine the subject of black studies as personified by someone young, immigrant, and queer. Such a subject, facing what Reddy and Natalie Bennett jointly write of as the combined pressure of family-based immigration policies and limitations on welfare benefits of racialized workers who are not citizens, necessarily struggles to locate a habitable house of difference and, indeed, to find housing.

Lisa Cacho's "Racialized Hauntings of the Devalued Dead," the arresting lead article in *Strange Affinities*, mourns the death of a cousin, Brandon Jesse Martinez. Martinez was killed in a car wreck in San Diego, and for Cacho, all of our theoretical brilliance offered too little to frame a tragic ending to his unsettled life. Neither a "race rebel" nor a "bad subject," he was a citizen, and not without economic advantages. However, he remained displaced, uninterested in middle-class strivings or the world of couples. Martinez could not be easily slotted into a "queer of color" category, but Cacho, drawing on the work of Judith Halberstam, experiments with placing him in a "queer time and space" (*Strange Affinities*, 47) outside the logics of production and reproduction.

Not surprisingly, writing profoundly about differences within difference and about a society structured by race and simultaneously also by disavowals of racism requires that a productive sense of contradiction runs through much of the work under review. Although none of the writers represented teach in a history department, they are strikingly attentive to change and continuity over time in addressing these contradictions. Reddy, for example, begins and ends *Freedom with Violence* with close attention to contradiction. He details how legal protections against homophobic hate crimes came to be attached to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) covering 2010. Thus victims of domestic violence Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. had their names connected to legislation that expanded the funding for U.S. state violence in the "global war on terror" to unprecedented levels. This contradiction becomes more explicable, and unsettling, when placed by Reddy in long patterns of nation-making on frontiers, of U.S. desires for Cold War hegemony, and of torturous post-9/11 imperial logics.

Similarly, drawing on the examples of Siobhan Somerville and George Chauncey, Reddy offers meticulous renderings of complex histories as one key to avoiding loose, triumphalist, and statist analogies between the 1967 Loving case in which the Supreme Court overturned Virginia's bans on interracial marriage and contemporary struggles for the rights of sexual minorities to marry. Melamed, meanwhile, is as productively attentive to periodization as any historian in seeking to explore the coproduction of antiracism as ideology and racial capitalism as political economy.

An emphasis on the transnational, and its place as both refuge from U.S. realities for those aspiring to construct counterhegemonies and as a realm in which capital plays out its market-based fantasies, is likewise shared by many of the authors. In the best moments of Reddy's book, home and away fascinatingly interpenetrate. Some of the analysis is rightly committed to applying to contemporary Western nations, especially the United States, John Stuart

Mill's commentary on nineteenth-century England—"a democrat at home and a despot abroad" (quoted in *Freedom with Violence*, 244). However, there is likewise a realization that any domestic democracy dialectically shaped by imperial violence carries its own limitations and miseries, even on the home front. Thus the budget priorities described in the NDAA deliberations simultaneously inflict violence on the neglected, often racialized poor at home and those on the receiving end of U.S. bombs abroad.

Reddy apprehends Larsen's novel *Quicksand* as turning to the Pacific to explore difference within difference, assembling Orientalist objects in tableaux that recur in the novel, and making a precocious contribution to queer of color critique from a vantage of old constraints and new possibilities. This reading meshes well with the sympathetic and rigorous explication of Du Bois's romance of South Asia in his novel *Dark Princess* that Sanda Mayzaw Lwin contributes to *Strange Affinities*. Lwin's essay ends with vital reflections on Du Bois's realization of the inescapability of the U.S. nation even when the frame of the narrative becomes global.

The ways in which all of these works draw energy from contemporary activist campaigns and from longer histories of struggles for more justice and less violence can hardly be overstated. The books potentially tell a bleak set of stories in which even the most glorious freedom movement triumphs get pressed rapidly into the service of empire, the reproduction of inequality, and even the accumulation of capital. The very conception of multiculturalism is constituted by such tawdry concerns. Very early in *Freedom with Violence* Reddy appropriately registers concern over matters of tone. He laments, "Even as I write these words the United States continues its assaults," causing "grievous and unimaginable loss of life" and making it potentially "seem like little more than an intellectual exercise to speak of the limits of violence" (ix–x). However, the reader is quickly reminded that resistance is also ubiquitous, and Reddy's sprawling chapter on the coincidence of the election of Barack Obama in 2008 and the referendum results assaulting gay marriage in California that same election day insists on avoiding both any claiming of easy victories and any imagining of ourselves as destined to lose forever.

Melamed likewise balances description of an extremely agile ruling class able to make the racial break pay off for empire and capital with attention to a powerfully important "race radical" tradition that refuses to be tied to the formulas of protest novels, to ornamenting a more marketable canon, or to applauding military adventure. She offers exceptionally challenging and hopeful readings of Chester Himes's *End of a Primitive*, of Tony Cade Bambara's *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, and of the edited anthology *This Bridge Called*

My Back by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in this connection. More remarkable still is a full chapter on the challenges presented to regimes of representation and of property being mounted internationally by indigenous people's movements.

I share this striving for an optimism of the will even when a pessimism of the intellect is inescapable. However, it does seem apposite to offer a closing comment on how we might build on this exciting new scholarship to ground meaningful further optimism. It may be that Lowe's continuing emphasis on the labor process is yet another area into which scholars might follow her lead. In a recent essay on transnationalism, for example, she framed matters in terms of the consideration of "the global intimacies out of which emerged not only modern humanism but a modern racialized division of labor" (quoted in *Strange Affinities*, 190), continuing a long emphasis in her writing on work. In referring to this fruitful part of Lowe's emphases, I am not (only) wishing that my own research specialization on labor were a concern more widely shared but am arguing that the point of production is critical in race-making. It is a site where soaring rhetoric about freedom starkly confronts cold, hard facts of exploitation. Capital's contradictory, understandable desire is to produce, as the anthropologist Paul Silverstein has written, "socially disunited abstract labor." Its brutality in doing so unmasks neoliberal multiculturalism spectacularly in the pork processing plants of the U.S. countryside, the galleys of cruise ships, the sweatshops of many continents, the hotels of the overdeveloped world, the provisioning of U.S. war zones and beyond.[3]

Notes

1. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 27–28; see also Grace Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Thanks to Elizabeth Esch and Jennifer Pierce for comments on this review essay.
2. Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Diversity," *New Left Review* 52 (2008): 33–36; Benn Michaels, "What Matters," *London Review of Books*, August 27, 2009, 11–13. Cf. David Roediger, "The Retreat from Race and Class," *Monthly Review*, July–August 2006, 40–51.
3. Paul A. Silverstein, "Immigrant Racialization and the New Savage Slot: Race, Migration, and Immigration in the New Europe," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 364. See also Elizabeth Esch and David Roediger, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).