

# Introduction: Hello from the Other Side

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The publication of this issue inaugurates the establishment of the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies as a shared, “second editorial home of *JTAS*” next to its American home base at Stanford University in California and confirms the journal’s move to Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. Our longtime Editor-in-Chief Nina Morgan had announced this change in her “Introduction” to the last issue and explained it as “Turning a Transnational Corner.” After all, American Studies looks different from the other side of the Atlantic or the Pacific. Our research and teaching at the Obama Institute is inspired by Barack Obama’s transnational vision of the United States and the world as reflected in the title of his recent autobiography *A Promised Land*, rather than *The Promised Land* of Puritan settlers.<sup>1</sup>

The Obama Institute’s role as the editorial home of *JTAS* represents another response to Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s question, raised in her presidential address at the ASA convention in Atlanta in 2004: “What would the field of American studies look like if the *transnational* rather than the *national* were at its center?” and takes up the collaborative basis of Transnational American Studies we practice today.<sup>2</sup> If any further proof of the success of transnational collaboration was needed, the competition in the search for a vaccine in the current Covid-19 pandemic has furnished it. The global application of the BioNTech vaccine, developed by a Turkish German couple and research team affiliated with our very own medical school here at Mainz University, professors Uğur Şahin and Özlem Türeci, required a global distribution network and hence the cooperation with Dr. Albert Bourla, the Greek CEO of the New York-based American pharmaceutical company Pfizer, a firm originally founded by German immigrants in the nineteenth century.

Such a collaborative road to transnational health could also be taken to implement future projects and visions for social welfare and equality. It is the collaborative work of underprivileged groups which promises fundamental changes to long-

held hegemonic positions. Witness the recent transnational repercussions of the Black Lives Matter Movement as powerful examples of self-determination in the face of violent oppression and systemic racism, calling for the empowerment of under-represented and repressed peoples worldwide. Leading this issue of *JTAS* is an analysis by *JTAS* editor **Kevin K. Gaines**, Julian Bond Professor of Civil Rights and Social Justice at the University of Virginia and past president of the American Studies Association. Gaines's essay focuses on George Floyd's death as a publicly performed execution in front of courageous protesters and aligns powerful national reactions with transnational voices of outrage and manifestations of solidarity, as exemplified in a piece by the Nigerian writer-critic **Ben Okri** and an essay by the Indonesian writer-critic **Goenawan Mohamad**—both offered here for *JTAS* readers. George Floyd's videotaped final nine minutes and his repeated plea to let him breathe broadcast worldwide is testimony to an outrageous act of violence which chillingly recalls the long history of racism in the United States and elsewhere. Ben Okri and Goenawan Mohamad evoke scenes of racist repression, such as the dreadful public performances of lynching in front of non-protesting white audiences. Along these lines, Kevin Gaines sees the current BLM movement as a continuation of the “unfinished business of the Civil Rights movement” of the 1950s and the 1970s, which had been framed by the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. We are very grateful to *The Guardian* for permission to reprint Ben Okri's essay and to Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Stanford University for having made it possible. We would also like to thank the powerful critic of Indonesian and worldwide authoritarian politics Goenawan Mohamad, founder and editor of the influential magazine *Tempo*, for granting permission to republish his essay, which was translated from Bahasa Indonesian by Jennifer Lindsay.

Clearly, there is a radical difference between transnational repercussions of the Civil Rights movement of the mid-twentieth century and the current Black Lives Matter movement that accelerated in the wake of George Floyd's murder. In the 1960s, after the introduction of transnational broadcasting, televised images of police violence against Black Americans and leaders of the Civil Rights movement were viewed in households all over the world. However, these broadcasts did not inspire the same kind of massive response, and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Martin Luther King Jr. was read in some quarters as a gesture of compensation for the lack of conscience and public reaction throughout the world. Isolated events did not turn into a consistent response; instead, the protests in favor of civil rights were channeled into the anti-Vietnam movement and the opposition to the capitalist war machine of the United States. Angela Y. Davis's two-year stay in Frankfurt (1965–67) while a doctoral student at the Frankfurt School of Social Research at Goethe University is a case in point. She complemented her studies of German philosophy with Herbert Marcuse and with Theodor W. Adorno by participating in the political rallies of the Socialist German Student League (SDS) in Frankfurt and Berlin against the Vietnam War. Following a request by an American colleague at the University of California, San Diego, Adorno wrote a letter of recommendation for Davis, testifying to her excellent qualification for

a PhD dissertation on Kant, which she eventually submitted at Berlin's Humboldt University in the German Democratic Republic in 1973.<sup>3</sup> Adorno bluntly focused on the academic topic without giving any reasons for Davis's transfer to the American institution and return to the US. In her autobiography, Davis writes: "I had thought mine was the perfect dilemma: the struggle at home versus the need to remain in Frankfurt until the completion of my doctorate ... . But each day it was becoming clearer to me that my ability to accomplish anything was directly dependent on my ability to contribute something concrete to the struggle. ... I wanted to continue my academic work, but I knew I could not do it unless I was politically involved."<sup>4</sup> Davis does not communicate to her readers how Adorno reacted when, while meeting in his office hours, she explained to him her decision to return to the racial battlefield in the US. Interestingly, his praise of Angela Davis's academic excellence in his letter ignores her clearly stated need to combine academic work and political engagement in the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

This lacuna ties in with Goenawan Mohamad's reference to Adorno and the Frankfurt School critic's depreciative evaluation of Black music in Goenawan's contribution to this issue's special section on the 2020 global uprisings. Adorno's classification of jazz "as a mass commodity" rather than its recognition as medium for emancipation and freedom—at a time when he had escaped Nazi Germany to find refuge as a Jewish intellectual in the United States—requires further explanation. On the one hand, Adorno had started using his mother's Italian surname, Adorno, instead of his father's Jewish name, Wiesengrund, which was reduced to his middle initial, "W." The frequent association of racism and antisemitism in the United States did not really register in his reaction to the public forms of discrimination in American society. The alliance of African American freedom fighters—such as W. E. B. DuBois in the formation of the NAACP in 1909—with Jewish immigrants, also did not figure in his evaluation of American society. On the other hand, Adorno's elitist academic position led him to categorize the cultural achievements of American artists as products of a culture industry. This commercially guided concept of American popular culture contrasted with his Eurocentric understanding of an elitist *Kultur*, in which expressions of African American music did not have a place either.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to the young German generation who flocked to his courses and embraced jazz as a medium of freedom and emancipation from the fascist past, he continued to reject African American music and distanced himself from the social activism in the university and in the streets.

The circulation in 2020 of the final nine minutes of Georg Floyd's life sparked reactions worldwide in a political and demographic context very different from that of the 1960s. Migrations from the Middle East and Asia, as well as Africa, have recently transformed predominantly white European societies into multiethnic ones. During her guest professorship at the John F. Kennedy Institute of the University of Berlin in 1984, the African American poet and critic Audre Lorde recognized Black students in her class and identified them as Afro-Germans.<sup>6</sup> Scholars of minority literature and culture prefigured this transformation of the population in publications such as

*Blackening Europe*.<sup>7</sup> In this context of ethnic consciousness, members of the second and third generations of Turkish guest workers started to identify with African Americans, embraced their popular culture, and in response created the now popular German Turkish rap music.<sup>8</sup> The increasing public visibility of difference and the formation of associations for underrepresented groups have presented a powerful challenge to white hegemony and have accelerated the institution of diversity and equity programs in the past decades. The solidarity protests in Germany and across Europe in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder have directly addressed the confluence of this deadly display of systemic racism in the United States and the concurrent racist features of European nations and their colonial legacies.

The three individual articles in this issue cover aspects of migration, colonization, and rescue missions between Africa, Europe, and the United States. **Suzanne Enzerink**, in her essay "Black Atlantic Currents: Mati Diop's *Atlantique* and the Field of Transnational American Studies," analyses the Senegalese-French filmmaker Mati Diop's 2019 film *Atlantique* as an example of the persistence of slavery in the contemporary lives of Senegalese in search of a better life in Europe. The French title of the film calls up the space of the Black Atlantic that connects the continents of Africa, the Americas, and Europe as the parameters of the economic triangle. According to Enzerink's compelling discussion, the continuation of this historical capitalistic basis of traffic across the Atlantic reemerges in the distribution and marketing of the film from an underrepresented country, a phenomenon which intervenes in the international film industry.

**Jonathan van Harmelen's** "Lessons from a Different Shore: Japanese American Incarceration and the Redress Movement Portrayed in Western European Newspapers," resituates the reaction to the historical mistreatment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War in Europe by investigating the coverage of their incarceration and their efforts to achieve reparations in the Redress Movement in Dutch, British, West German, and French newspapers. Unearthing the cases of Japanese residents in Europe, he reconstructs the discussion of the repressive North American measures against Japanese Americans as perceived in European newspapers, which often used comparisons to the German concentration camps. This comparative method is also applied to the analysis of forms of compensation for the infringement of personal and human rights suffered and thus displays a very productive example of Transnational American Studies, with the added advantage of a multilingual approach to sources in four different languages.

In his "Hasty Departures: The Evacuation of American Citizens from Europe at the Outbreak of World War II," the encounter of American tourists with various European cultures at the outbreak of the Second World War provides the background to historian **Gavin Wilk's** analysis of the transnational organization and implementation of policies to bring American citizens safely back home. The account of individual stories of young people breaking off their summer vacations to embark on the rescue ships alternates with descriptions of communication lines between authorities in the

US and captains of ships, as well as of the conditions onboard and security measures to avoid encounters with hostile forces.

In this issue of *JTAS*, we are delighted to share news of the winner of the 2020 Shelley Fisher Fishkin Prize, **Christopher B. Patterson**, Assistant Professor at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice at the University of British Columbia. Patterson's study directs our attention to the transpacific as an area of negotiation of identities between South East Asia and the United States. In *Transitive Cultures: Anglophone Literature of the Transpacific* (Rutgers UP, 2018), he relates the literature of writers from Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines to that of South East Asian migrants in Canada, Hawai'i, and the mainland United States of America to reveal new forms of chameleonic identity constructions that question models of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, identity formations which he reads as legacies of the imperial governmentality of colonial times. In the reprinted excerpt offered here, Patterson traces the transplantation of American concepts of diversity to South East Asian countries as part of the enforcement of colonial and neocolonial rule. The writers selected for his analysis resist these cultural implants and use their Anglophone novels to transgress racial, gender, and sexual boundaries, establishing a transpacific connection between South East Asian homelands and American diasporas. The reprinted Chapter 4, "Just an American Darker than the Rest: On Queer Brown Exile," exemplifies Patterson's new transitive correction to what was previously called minority literature with an interpretation of queer mobility in works by South East Asian diasporic authors R. Zamora Linmark and Lawrence Chua.

The Shelley Fisher Fishkin Prize is awarded by the International Committee of the American Studies Association to recognize international scholarship in Transnational American Studies and to honor the former ASA president Shelley Fisher Fishkin for launching this transnational collaboration and cofounding the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*. As editors of *JTAS*, we are grateful to Elisabeth Maselli at Rutgers University Press for permitting us to reprint this excerpt, and *JTAS* would also like to thank Christopher Patterson, who demonstrated generosity and agility in negotiating RUP's fee requests, which were then covered by the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at Mainz University.

Since the publication of the last *JTAS* issue, a number of personnel changes have taken place. On behalf of the Editorial Board, I would like to thank Nina Morgan for her more than ten years of service—first as the editor of *Reprise* and then as Editor in Chief. Her dedicated commitment to the journal and wide-ranging TAS expertise have intensified the impact of *JTAS* and raised the number of readers to a new level. We would also like to thank Erika Doss for her service as Special Forum editor and would like to welcome Pia Wiegink as the new editor in this position. Pia Wiegink, as a graduate of the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies, has just begun her chair professorship at the Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies at the University of Bonn. The Editorial Board enthusiastically invited Dr. Jerrine Tan, a US-

educated, Singaporean-born scholar and Assistant Professor of English at the City University of Hong Kong, as a new member on our Advisory Board.

Finally, as the new Editor in Chief of *JTAS*, I would like to speak for all of the members of the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany as we welcome and accept the offer of transnational collaboration extended to us by our American, Canadian, and Japanese colleagues to administer the editorial responsibility for *JTAS*. In our own research, we have been guided by the transnational range of ideas inspired by the Obama legacy in Asia, Hawai'i, Africa, Europe, and the continental United States for our current projects on “Disruption and Democracy: Challenges and Potentials of Transcultural and Transnational Formations,” “Transnational Periodical Cultures,” “Global Evangelism,” and “Medical Humanities and Transnational American Studies.” We look forward to pursuing and supporting the important research in Transnational American Studies by publishing more work by scholars at institutions in and outside of the United States. Special thanks go to all contributors to this issue as well as the fruitful collaboration with our anonymous reviewers. Hello—and welcome, *JTAS* readers—from all sides!

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York: Penguin 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40068248>.

<sup>3</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Gutachten für Angela Davis,” Theodor W. Adorno Archive, Frankfurt am Main, 1966. A digitized version is viewable online at the Deutsches Literatur Archiv Marbach, 1968: *Conflicts of Ideas in Global Archives*, <https://www.literaturarchiv1968.de/content/theodor-w-adornos-gutachten-fuer-angela-davis-2/?lang=en>.

<sup>4</sup> Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (1974, reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1988), 145.

<sup>5</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Kultur und Culture” (“Kultur and Culture”), in *Hessische Hochschulwochen für staatswissenschaftliche Fortbildung* (Hessian University Weeks for Continuing Education in Political Science) (Bad Homburg: Max Gehlen, 1958), 246–59; see also Mark Kalbus, “Transatlantic Negotiations on “Hell”?: W. E. B. Du Bois’s Visit to Fascist Germany and Theodor W. Adorno’s Exile in the Land of the Culture Industry,” PhD dissertation, University of Mainz, 2009; and Mark Kalbus, “A Short Introduction to Adorno’s Mediation between *Kultur* and Culture,” *Social Text* 27, no. 2, issue 99 (Summer 2009): 139–42, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2008-027>.

<sup>6</sup> Audre Lorde, *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Heike Raphael-Hernandez, ed., *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Heinz Ickstadt, "Appropriating Difference: Turkish-German Rap," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 44, no. 4 (1999): 571–78, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41157976>; and Feridun Zaimoglu, *Kanak Sprak: 24 Misstöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft*. 1995; Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 2000.

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