

Forward Editor's Note

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In the first issue of the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, I referred to the “Forward” section as a sneak preview of works in the field. I might also have mentioned that it is a kind of showcase for transnational American studies, revealing not only the quality but the diversity of the field. This issue features three works that underline the extraordinary variety of subjects and approaches. The first piece is by Konomi Ara, the distinguished Japanese scholar of American studies. She has long been renowned for her work on African American culture and literature and even won prizes for an encyclopedia of Toni Morrison, but until the recent publication in translation of her study *Ralph Ellison and Individuality*, her work remained generally unavailable to English-language readers. This excerpt is from her newly published biography of Josephine Baker, *A Fighting Diva*. It tells the intriguing story of Baker’s travels to Japan, her close friendship with the Japanese humanitarian Miki Sawada, and her adoption of a pair of Japanese orphans. Even after she achieved celebrity in France, Baker’s experience as a black American led her to develop an antiracist philosophy at a worldwide level, and she combined political militancy in the public sphere with a personal commitment through the formation of an international multiracial household of children, the “Rainbow Tribe.”

The second excerpt is from Belinda Edmondson, professor of English and of African American and African Studies at Rutgers University in Newark, and is extracted from her new book, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009). Her study of “the Caribbean Middlebrow” is a dazzlingly virtuosic study of the ways in which the debates over high vs. low culture get played out in a Caribbean context, where skin color, nationalism, and ethnic pride are all independent variables. Aspects of culture as diverse as beauty culture, cricket, and reggae music become centers of pride as well as sites of political contestation in remarkable ways. In particular, Edmondson raises fascinating questions about the central role played by women’s popular culture, especially literature, in establishing and reaffirming the self-image and ideologies of readers.