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**WHICH AMERICA IS OURS?:  
MARTÍ'S "TRUTH" AND THE  
FOUNDATIONS OF "AMERICAN  
LITERATURE"**

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**Martí's "Truth"**

According to many critics of affirmative action and curricular reform, minorities have made overwhelming gains in higher education and completely taken over English departments.<sup>1</sup> The reconfigured canon, as demonstrated by the new "American literature" anthologies, surely demonstrates for these critics that inequality and discrimination are things of the past and that we should get back to just reading texts as texts rather than continuing to politicize education. Such criticisms of teaching "American literature" politically from a critical, multicultural perspective rely on a false and inaccurate assessment of the current state of US universities, something of which the *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently reminded me. In an article on affirmative action, the *Chronicle* notes that, "[t]aken together, African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian scholars represent only 8% of the full-time faculty nationwide. And while 5% of professors are African American, about half of them work at historically black institutions. The proportion of black faculty members at predominantly white universities—2.3%—is virtually the same as it was 20 years ago" (Wilson A10). Given that "Hispanics"

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make up 12.5% of the total US population and that blacks are 12.3%, our representation on university faculties is appallingly low (US Bureau of the Census 3).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, although there were 61,000 "Hispanics" with doctoral degrees in the United States in 2000 (Newburger and Curry 25),<sup>3</sup> there were *well over* 350,000 "Hispanics" incarcerated in the United States.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, there were 1,578,000 "non-Hispanic whites" with doctoral degrees and only 591,000 incarcerated (Newburger and Curry 7).<sup>5</sup> In other words, there are nearly three whites *with doctoral degrees* for every one behind bars, but nearly six Latinos *behind bars* for every one with a doctoral degree. This is the world I live in, and in this world I find offensive the injunction to not teach "politically" and to leave questions of identity and power outside of the classroom, especially when the subject of my teaching is the United States.<sup>6</sup> The university remains a site of struggle and controversy in part because it remains reflective of the struggles and controversies surrounding identity, power, oppression, and resistance characteristic of the nation and its history. A small part of those struggles and controversies have concerned the teaching of literature, the definition of "American," and the foundations of US literary history.

Those arguing for more inclusive and egalitarian definitions of "American" identity to inform teaching and scholarship in the university have turned to many sources, among them, the work of social critics in the United States such as nineteenth-century Cuban independentista, intellectual, and exile José Martí.<sup>7</sup> Martí has been attractive to such scholars because of his prescient understanding of the United States's coming role of hemispheric dominance in the twentieth century and because of his astute observations about the nature of US society at a crucial juncture in history. Indeed, in his 1991 book, *The Dialectics of Our America*, José David Saldívar offers a politically resistant "pan-American literary history" that begins with Martí (5). Saldívar chooses to begin with one of Martí's most famous pieces, the 1891 essay "Our America," because of its importance in signaling an awareness of the beginnings of US imperialism and of a great cultural, economic, and political polarization between the two Americas of the Western hemisphere.<sup>8</sup> Martí urges his fellow Latin Americans not to look toward Europe and the United States for models of culture and politics, but rather to value their own indigenous traditions. He cries, "Let the world be grafted onto our republics, but we must be the trunk [Injértese en nuestras repúblicas el mundo; pero el tronco ha de ser el de nuestras repúblicas]" (291; 18) and urges the peoples of our America to make "common cause" with "the oppressed" (292; 19). Above all, he urges his readers to be wary of the United States, "the seven-league giant" (289; 15). "Our America"

affords Saldívar an opportunity to map literary history across geopolitical borders in order to highlight critical perspectives on white, US hegemony and domination. In the wake of Saldívar's invocation of Martí to open up US literary and cultural studies to analyses of imperialism and to international and border studies scopes, numerous scholars have made similar efforts.<sup>9</sup> Others, such as Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease have also made significant contributions to this conversation. I want to begin here by taking a deeper look at another, less analyzed, essay by Martí. It is significant because of its critique of US culture and the advice Martí offers to the cultural critic.

Written in 1894, "The Truth about the United States" echoes Martí's earlier work but with a more sharply honed sense of the dangers presented by the US example. Martí's position as an exiled writer living in the United States gave him a vantage point from which to observe how the society functioned. Indeed, this essay represents a low-point in his estimation of the United States, a country about which he was impressively ambivalent throughout his lifetime. Rather than simply describing the country's diversity, Martí, as Rosaura Sánchez notes, links the US imperial project with its "internal contradictions" (119).<sup>10</sup> Martí goes so far as to write that "the North American character has declined since its independence, and is less humane and virile today" (332).<sup>11</sup> Thus, while he acknowledges the high principles contained within the US documents of revolution and the sentiments behind the abolition of slavery, he believes that the course of the nineteenth century has brought about a tragically unjust society in the United States. Martí, as usual, posits as his audience "our America," beginning by noting that "[it] is urgent that our America learn the truth about the United States" (329; 987). Martí thus seems to sound a warning to Latin America and the Caribbean, but it is not exactly on the same note as "Our America." Amplifying his call in "Our America" for Latin American nations to look to indigenous sources for models of education, culture, and government, Martí describes the "particular consequences" of the two distinct "historical groupings" of the United States and Latin America (329; 987). He wants not only to demonstrate the difference between the United States and its southern neighbors for the purpose of proving that different peoples should take the paths appropriate to their own circumstances but also to disabuse others of myths and generalizations that he feels have grown up around the US. He makes this point sharply: "It is a mark of supine ignorance and childish, punishable light-mindedness to speak of the United States, and of the real or apparent achievements of one of its regions or a group of them, as a total and equal nation of unanimous liberty and definitive achievements: such a United States is an illusion or a fraud [superchería]" (330; 988).

In dismissing the idea of the United States as a nation of perfect liberty, Martí unites an analysis of the imperialist exploitation of native peoples on the frontier with a critique of race and class prejudice in the rest of the nation: "The hills of the Dakotas, and the barbarous, virile nation that is arising there, are worlds away from the leisured, privileged, class-bound, lustful, and unjust cities of the East" (330; 988). What is most striking to Martí is not simply that there is injustice in the United States, but that, far from a melting pot in which different cultures have fused together or coexisted harmoniously, the United States has become a country whose essence is fundamentally one of conflict and cultural clash:

An honorable man cannot help but observe that not only have the elements of diverse origin and tendency from which the United States was created failed, in three centuries of shared life and one century of political control, to merge, but their forced coexistence is exacerbating and accentuating their primary differences and transforming the unnatural federation into a harsh state of violent conquest. [. . .] Rather than being resolved, the problems of humanity are being reproduced here. Rather than amalgamating within national politics, local politics divides and inflames it; instead of growing stronger and saving itself from the hatred and misery of the monarchies, democracy is corrupted and diminished, and hatred and misery are menacingly reborn. (330–31; 988)

Confronted by such an internally divided leviathan, Martí points to the duty of the cultural critic:

And the one who silences this is not doing his duty, while the one who says it aloud is. For silence would be a failure of one's duty as a man to know the truth and disseminate it, and of one's duty as a good American, who sees that the continent's glory and peace can only be ensured by the honest and free development of its different natural entities. (331; 988)

The United States is thus by definition a place constituted through increasingly extreme conflict and the inability to overcome it. Furthermore, as Sánchez appropriately notes, Martí "stresses the domination and subordination forced upon particular elements within the nation-state" in his analysis of the reasons for the nation's irresolvable conflicts (119).

What Martí's essay suggests to us is that, instead of a one-sided, celebratory vision of the rise of the nation or a distortion of

the reality of diverse cultures in unequal conflict, cultural critics should base the study of "American literature" on a more accurate, less celebratory vision. Martí's perspective on US society enabled him to eventually come to see the nation as first and foremost a site of violence, discord, and social struggle. He therefore positions himself in this passage as a "good American" who is acknowledging the truth of difference and discord in the United States, seeing this acknowledgement as in the interest of the "glory and peace" of the continent as well as the development of the nation's own diversity.<sup>12</sup> He goes on in the lines that follow this passage to say that it is also his duty as "a son of *our America*" to warn his people not to take the United States ("a damaged and alien [dañada y ajena] civilization") as a model (331; 988, 989; emphasis added). He repeatedly acknowledges that both Latin America and the United States have faults and virtues. However, as in "Our America," he is most troubled by the unquestioning admiration for the United States of those envious of its progress and luxury, on the one hand, and those ashamed of their own mestizo origins, on the other (332; 989). Announcing a new column in his newspaper, *Patria*, Martí concludes "The Truth about the United States" by promising to "reveal the fundamental qualities that in their constancy and authority demonstrate the two truths that are useful to our America: the crude, unequal, and decadent character of the United States, and the continual existence within it of all the violences, discords, immoralities, and disorders of which the Hispanoamerican peoples are accused" (333; 990).

Notably, Martí's essay is a prism to refract the image of the United States for the benefit of viewers to the south, not a mirror intended to reflect that refracted image back to its point of origin. However, as I consider "American literature" and the teaching of multiculturalism in the remainder of this article, I want to take Martí's vision as a reflection to present back to "us" our national culture. If we, as scholars of the United States, want to be able to recognize conflict and to analyze its causes, then it would behoove us to eschew self-congratulatory approaches to US culture, history, and identity in our research and pedagogy. Martí recognized that acknowledging the existence of conflict and injustice is a necessary precondition to attaining "glory and peace" and the fostering of egalitarian diversity. Both "Our America" and "The Truth about the United States" resonate with Ralph Waldo Emerson's call in "The American Scholar" and "Self-Reliance" for "Americans" to turn toward their own realities rather than those of Europe in crafting their culture. Martí refutes Emerson's image of US exceptionalism, however, seeing it as standing in the way of a veracious and critical evaluation of US society. Instead, he positions "our mestizo America" as the hope

for a new and democratic civilization ("Our America" 292; 19). In doing so, he offers us a more objective reflection of identity in the United States and a better foundation for thinking about "American literature" than that offered by many of the traditional staples of the US literary canon. I contend that one of the reasons that Martí's view of the United States has been less canonized than those of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Emerson, or Alexis de Tocqueville is that it is less congratulatory.<sup>13</sup> As I will argue in the final section of this article, Martí's politically *interested* view proves to offer in the end a more *objective* account of the truth about the United States than Emerson's equally interested and no less partial perspective. It is therefore from Martí rather than from Emerson that I suggest we take our cue in assessing the foundations of "American literature."

### **Foundations of "American Literature" (I): What We Teach**

Why and how is Martí's perspective useful for rethinking the foundation of the category of "American Literature" as it is embodied in major literary anthologies?<sup>14</sup> I want to argue that Martí's rejection of the idea of US exceptionalism should prompt us, as scholars of "American literature," to do the same.<sup>15</sup> I want to suggest two issues that literary scholars might want to consider in this regard. First, there is a need to make explicit to ourselves and to our students the political as well as aesthetic criteria used in selecting literature for courses and anthologies. The criteria for determining what we teach as "American literature" must be based on a vision that is more objective rather than entirely one-sided, critical rather than just celebratory. Second, there is the question of how we teach. Later in this essay, I will argue that texts should be put into discussion with one another and that the social contexts in which they arise should be highlighted rather than ignored. Before dealing with that, however, I will deal in this section with the first issue—what we teach as "American literature."

Among the many questions regarding canon formation (that is, what we teach) that have arisen for me are how literary anthology editors determine what authors and texts count as "American." Overall, editors appear to use an inconsistent combination of citizenship, geographical location, language, and subject matter (that is, the subject of America and the United States). The first three of these become increasingly important in the contemporary period. Citizenship, in particular, has been used selectively the further back in time one looks; thus, the national citizenship of John Smith or Samuel de Champlain is irrelevant. Several anthologies have broken with the

trend of requiring citizenship for authors after the eighteenth century, and the most notable new inclusions are American Indian authors and orators, as well as some other "outside observers" such as Martí and Sui Sin Far.<sup>16</sup> For these authors, subject matter and geographical location suffice. Geographical location usually involves a projection of the present-day borders of the contiguous 48 states anachronistically into the past. While geographical location and subject matter allow Martí, Sui Sin Far, and Native Americans into the anthologies, Christopher Columbus and others like him are included by virtue of subject matter.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, while the inclusion of early authors is less constrained by a language requirement, more recent authors not writing in English, such as Tomás Rivera and Isaac Beshevis Singer, are almost never included in "American literature" anthologies, despite citizenship, geography, and subject matter.<sup>18</sup> Finally, subject matter has proven to be the most consistent (although far from universal) criterion. Indeed, much of the recent "canon busting" in US literature has been in the name of making the canon more inclusive and representative of the diversity of experiences and perspectives on what "America" and "an American" are. The highly charged ideological component inherent in defining the category explains why science fiction has rarely been viewed as "American literature"—despite the great number of wonderful science fiction authors on the US scene (for example, Isaac Asimov, Samuel R. Delaney, Ursula K. Le Guin, H. P. Lovecraft, Marge Piercy, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.).<sup>19</sup> Unless it can be shown to "actually be about" the United States, speculative fiction is rarely considered to be either "serious" enough or sufficiently topical to merit inclusion. Whereas much of the romantic and gothic fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe has accreted a long interpretive legacy establishing its concern with US history and identity, most twentieth-century science fiction has yet to achieve this kind of resonance among critics.

In light of such considerations, one can see that, even in the case of "undisputed classics," the canon of "American literature" has not been created on the sole basis of aesthetic value. It exists partly due to ideological determinations about the relative importance of citizenship, geography, language, and subject matter. Conversely, many works of great aesthetic value are not taught as "American literature" because they do not fit the ideological and political requirements of academics and publishers.<sup>20</sup> Anthologies prior to the 1980s focused on portraying a civic sense of what it is to be "American." They did this almost exclusively through works by white men, and they sought to put these texts into a continuous line of development that demonstrated the creation of "the American character" as an exceptional entity. Much has been made of how this involved, in

the early-twentieth century, the removal both of many women writers and of a number of "New England gentlemen" poets from the canon; in their place, such previously neglected writers as Melville and Thoreau were ensconced. Black, Latino, American Indian, and immigrant writers were left out altogether. The high-point of this period saw the elevation of *Moby Dick* to national epic in a sometimes explicitly ideological move of the Cold War.<sup>21</sup>

Beginning in the 1970s and gaining strength through the 1980s was a new phase of canon revision. Whereas earlier curriculum changes had eliminated the Greek and Latin classics in favor of English and American texts, or displaced "genteel" literature with literature reflecting the brash "spirit of the frontier" and rugged US exceptionalism, this new phase was motivated by feminist and minority identity politics. It grew out of a critical wave of scholarship that analyzed the historical and social connections between power and identity in society and described the links between social oppression and the devaluation of cultural contributions by women and people of color. Changes happened most quickly with regard to contemporary writers, but over the course of 40 years, from the early 1960s to the present, tremendous recovery efforts unearthed a wealth of neglected or suppressed literature, much of which was critically acclaimed even by white male critics in its day.<sup>22</sup>

In the wake of calls for curricular reform, anthology editors have seriously rethought many aspects of their job.<sup>23</sup> In addition to introducing women and minority authors, the new editions of most anthologies include unprecedented selections from oral culture (for example, Native-American oratory, slave songs, and work and folk songs), working-class and labor writers (for example, Rebecca Harding Davis, Hamlin Garland, and Upton Sinclair), white immigrant writers (for example, Emma Lazarus, Anzia Yezierska, and Abraham Cahan), non-citizen writers in the United States (for example, Sui Sin Far and José Martí), writers from "the West" (for example, Louise Amelia Smith Clappe, Bayard Taylor, and Harriet Prescott Spofford), and even writers outside the area of the 48 contiguous states (for example, Aleut tales, Bartolomé de las Casas, and James Grainger).<sup>24</sup> Today, the latest edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*—appearing in five volumes and totaling well over 5,000 pages—has dramatically changed from its first edition. Beyond its division into five volumes, the current state of the *Norton* is typical of other anthologies, which have scrambled to incorporate women and minority authors, but still lag behind the sweeping changes introduced in the 1980s and controversially extended by the first edition of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* in 1990.<sup>25</sup> The changes are particularly noticeable with regard to gender. However, much of the

change seems more dramatic than it is, simply because earlier editions were almost entirely white and male.<sup>26</sup> The 2002 edition of the *Norton* still devotes 4,432 pages to white and European authors (82.53%), but 572 pages to black authors (10.65%), 229 pages to Native-American authors (4.26%), 73 pages to Latino authors (1.36%), and 64 pages to Asian-American authors (1.19%). Tallies that count selections, rather than pages, also make the degree of change seem greater than it is. White authors make up 68.80% of the total, but their selections occupy 82.53% of the pages, while Latinos make up 2.99% of the authors, but receive 1.36% of the pages.<sup>27</sup> Thus, for example, volume A's "Native American Trickster Tales" includes six selections by Native Americans, but these combine to only 36 pages, compared to William Bradford's one selection (from *Of Plymouth Plantation*) at 40 pages. Furthermore, 180 of the 572 pages devoted to black authors are made up of selections from just two writers: Frederick Douglass and Nella Larsen. Excluding Spanish explorers, no Latino or Latin American authors appear in the first three volumes—which cover the periods of both the Mexican-American and Spanish-American wars! The only Latino author to appear prior to 1945 is William Carlos Williams, who accounts for 18 of the 73 pages devoted to Latino authors (another 25 are devoted to Gloria Anzaldúa).<sup>28</sup> (By contrast, *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States*, edited by Nicolás Kanellos, offers well over 300 pages of material dating before 1945.)<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, different teaching constituencies require different approaches. Yet, I want to briefly consider how unexplored assumptions about who our students are influence both what we teach and the reasons we provide for teaching it. In the critical material on the teaching of multiethnic US literature, a great deal of space is taken up by considerations of the best way to teach literature by nonwhites to white students. Of course, the majority of college students nationally (and at my own institution) are white. Still, many essays begin with the disclaimer that most students are white and then go on to consider them exclusively as the subjects of multicultural education, as if there were no need to consider students of color or as if the only purpose for teaching multiethnic literature were to sensitize our white students.<sup>30</sup> In *Cultivating Humanity*, for example, Martha Nussbaum criticizes both conservative approaches to teaching literature and what she calls "the spirit of identity politics": "an approach to literature that questions the very possibility of sympathy that takes one outside one's group, and of common human needs and interests as a basis for that sympathy" (109).<sup>31</sup> Of course, some dominant trends in literary criticism do tend toward a relativist approach to cultural understanding; however, Nussbaum misrepresents

the case when she implies that "most" literary criticism takes the position that African-American literature is only for African Americans or that "the argument in favor of *Invisible Man* [is] that it affirms the experience of African-American students" (110).<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Nussbaum's argument, which stresses understanding others across differences, runs the risk of placing whites at the center of the multicultural curriculum.

For Nussbaum, people of color are always an object to be understood by "us," although this happens through implication rather than directly in her text:

[I]t is hard to deny that *members of oppressed groups* frequently do know things about their lives that other people do not know. [. . .] In general, if *we* want to understand the situation of a group, we do well to begin with the best that has been written by members of that group. We must, however, insist that when we do so it may be possible for us to expand *our own* understanding—the *strongest reason for including such works in the curriculum*. We could learn nothing from such works if it were impossible to cross group boundaries in imagination. (111; emphasis added)

The referent in this passage for "groups" remains "oppressed groups," so that the referent for "we" becomes implicitly those outside such groups. Multiculturalism, for many critics like Nussbaum, is about understanding the other, without much consideration for what it is like to be the other within the context of multicultural education. While no one would argue that the strongest reason for including *Jane Eyre* in the English syllabus is so that African-American students (or any students, for that matter) can come to feel sympathy toward the experiences of nineteenth-century English women, a parallel argument about *Invisible Man* is commonplace. Much can be learned about the situation of nineteenth-century English women from *Jane Eyre*, but a more plausible reason for learning this would be to understand how gender, nation, and class have come together in shaping the world we inhabit today. This is something like Ellison's argument about *Invisible Man*: "our nation has a history of racial obtuseness and [. . .] this work helps all citizens to perceive racial issues with greater clarity" (qtd. in Nussbaum 110). While Nussbaum sees Ellison's point as incompatible with "affirm[ing] the experience of African-American students" (110), *Invisible Man*, among other things, affirms African-American students' experience of being perpetually misperceived by whites, of being made simultaneously indispensable and invisible to the project of multicultural US democracy. This affirmation is a necessary part of more clearly perceiving

racial issues in the United States. It enables one to understand, for example, how a theorist like Nussbaum can unintentionally turn a discussion about the inclusion of African Americans in the curriculum into a consideration of the best way to educate students (implicitly white) to become "world-citizens" (110). Nussbaum's mistake announces pressingly the alarum to rethink not only what is taught in the classroom, but how one teaches it, to whom, and why.

### **Foundations of "American Literature" (2): How We Teach**

I would like to avoid Nussbaum's error through an incorporation or awareness of structures of oppression within the teaching of multiethnic literature; I therefore suggest that courses should focus on portraying diverse experiences in US literature *in relation to* oppression and resistance. Martí's "truth" causes me to wonder what would happen if one were to take oppression and resistance as well as cultural diversity as the basis for reconstructing the canon. An honest and more truthful account of the United States, such as that provided by Martí—one that acknowledges the discord and violence at the heart of the US national self—can enable a much more radical reconstruction of the US literary canon than any suggested solely from the argument for diversification. Martí's vision of US society as first and foremost a site of violence, discord, and social struggle demands a transformed US literary landscape and methodology. This transformation accords with the opinions of many others, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, or William Carlos Williams, who wrote in a 1925 essay, "The Fountain of Eternal Youth," that "History begins for us with murder and enslavement, not with discovery" (39). Including perspectives like Martí's without making explicit the incommensurability between them and those that have organized the canon into which they are now being introduced results in a *de facto* cultural relativism. Cultural relativism discourages students from evaluating different positions as better and worse, as more and less truthful. As a result, students are not encouraged to take perspectives other than their own "seriously," that is, to incorporate them, or to engage with them at an emotional level.

Thus, one recurring problem with teaching multiethnic literature is that noncanonical texts are simply bought into the "American literature" classroom to set the traditional canon into relief.<sup>33</sup> This pluralist approach rarely makes a central issue out of the connections between cultures, the reasons why some cultural perspectives have been excluded from the canon, or new texts' possible incommensurability with the traditional ideological underpinnings of

"America" and "American literature." Additionally, it promotes tolerance and risk-free diversity without acknowledging the difficult examination of exploitation and injustice (as well as questions of blame) that have to be addressed openly before students can make decisions about the sources of racism, oppression, and exploitation or the current consequences of colonization, genocide, and imperialism. Many scholars have launched powerful critiques of pluralist approaches to multicultural education and argued for alternative *critica*/versions of multiculturalism.<sup>34</sup> Educational theorists Michael Apple and Linda Christian-Smith, for example, have deplored what they call domination "through compromise and [. . .] 'mentioning'" (10). This approach incorporates some material into the curriculum by or about nondominant groups in society (incorporations won usually after lengthy political struggle), but in such a way that the power of its political critique is diffracted or diffused.

Similarly, Paula M. L. Moya criticizes an additive approach to multiculturalism that decontextualizes texts and ideas (146). According to her proposal for a realist approach to multicultural education, an essential aspect of successful multicultural education is an understanding, not merely of different cultures' experiences, but also of how cultures are interrelated and connected by historical practices and systems of domination (156–58). Multicultural education must therefore proceed from the understanding that diverse cultural formations exist within a differentiated structure of hierarchical relations. It must also, Moya argues, acknowledge how diverse cultural "experiments" in the realms of knowledge and ethics are indispensable for the greater flourishing of humanity. This also means that students and teachers have to be able to make critical evaluations about culturally different conceptions of human flourishing (160–66).<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Moya makes the point that the study of different cultures will rarely be either easy or comfortable. Instead, she writes that conflict is "inevitable and necessary, as a potentially creative, and not always destructive force" (171). Indeed, this final and most important of Moya's points is crucial for the present essay and resonates with my appropriation of Martí's "truth" about the United States as a starting point for understanding "American literature." Students are already aware of the conflict and oppression in the world; they live in the world, after all. I contend that we as teachers do them no favors by encouraging them to think of literature as a utopian place apart from the violence and discord of the real world. Not only do we shield them from the "controversies" that make the study of literature interesting to many of us as scholars, but we deprive them of the educational and epistemological value of discomfort that arises from confronting new ideas and being forced to defend or let go of

old ones.<sup>36</sup> As Moya writes, "conflict [. . .] is absolutely necessary for epistemic and moral growth. [. . . W]e need to learn to work through it rather than attempting to cover it over or trying to avoid it" (171).

In *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*, Gerald Graff argues that teachers need to not make "a focused curriculum out of [the university's] lively state of contention" (11). Rather than a liberal pluralist approach to multiculturalism that would be "content to let cultural and intellectual diversity proliferate without addressing the conflicts and contradictions that result," Graff believes that pedagogy should bring different cultural and intellectual perspectives into conversation, "teaching the conflicts" (10). One thing that I find particularly useful about Graff's work is that he resists the impulse of many defenders of multiculturalism to conclude by mitigating the very real threat to one's sense of self sometimes posed by encountering difference. Rather than seeing diversity as a step toward a greater sense of unity, Graff prefers fostering a common debate to imposing a common culture: "We need to distinguish between a shared body of national beliefs, which democracies can do nicely without, and a common national debate about our many differences, which we now need more than ever" (45). He ends his book by looking at several examples of institutional efforts to create communities of conflict rather than commonality.<sup>37</sup>

My own first experience with a class based on the controversies in US literature was as an undergraduate in a course titled "Race and Ethnicity in American Literature," taught by Frann Michel at Willamette University. Michel began the course by teaching excerpts from Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (just published) and an article on the US literary canon by Paul Lauter (general editor of the *Heath*).<sup>38</sup> I do not know whether she was familiar with Graff's arguments (*Beyond the Culture Wars* was not yet published, but some of its main points had already appeared in journals). I do remember class discussions about these readings being highly charged and uncomfortable. However, in part because they were uncomfortable, I approached them with seriousness and took the often difficult and painful step of rethinking some of my own ideas. Knowing the disciplinary controversy also enabled me to see the texts we went on to read (by such writers as Nella Larsen, William Faulkner, and Ralph Ellison) as themselves participating in *debates* about the meaning and role of race, gender, and class in US society and letters rather than just espousing particular points of view. Again, I was invested in these texts at an emotional as well as intellectual level in part because the earlier readings had given me a sense of their relevance to contemporary, heated debates over education and social justice of which I saw myself as a part.

One limitation of Graff's project is that he at times focuses too closely on cultural debate over "differences" rather than material conflicts over, for example, unequal distribution of wealth, land, resources, and political power. For this reason, I think that his model risks lending itself to a reasoned "democratic discussion" in which participants do not feel themselves or their sense of self and well-being called into question (45). This comes through in several of Graff's hypothetical examples, in which professors holding differing positions simply argue for and/or revise their theories (47–52, 53). What is missing from these is what we all (students and faculty alike) go through whenever we learn something worthwhile: emotion, pleasure, pain, anger.<sup>39</sup> In addition to playing down the emotional character of conflict, especially necessary for the project of learning, Graff seems to undervalue the importance of an active teacher, demonstrating a suspicion of "radical pedagogy" and dismissively associating consciousness raising with "authoritarianism" (25). As a result, although he would certainly not endorse such an outcome, one could imagine a teacher simply presenting conflict and controversy in a way that lacks personal investment, thus encouraging students to participate disinterestedly. The examples he endorses in his final chapter veer away from this direction, but, as someone with a focused goal to teach against oppression, I remain wary of the liberal pluralist overtones that linger in his proposal.<sup>40</sup> A more critical approach to multicultural pedagogy must address material discrepancies in society and not shy away from students' and instructors' own investments (physical and emotional) in those discrepancies, that is, how many of us benefit from social inequality.

Moya's considerations about how knowledge is actually arrived at (not only through "positions" to be debated, but also through less coherent, more emotional "thinking through" at the individual and collective levels) should therefore be an important addition to Graff's model of controversy and conflict in multicultural education. Another important element here—also explicit in Moya's proposal—is the centering of students' and teachers' own identities in the educational process. As Moya makes clear, attention to identities in the classroom is not the same thing as cultural relativism or the uncritical celebration of identity (160–61, 169–70). The right kind of attention to identity can resolve the difficulties with teaching texts that Stephen Railton warns about in his essay on white audiences' reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Railton discusses how students, in particular white students, can respond to this novel in ways similar to how some white readers responded to the novel in its day. He charts how white readers can use an identification with Eliza's suffering or Tom's self-sacrifice to feel greater sympathy toward

blacks, but also (even perhaps to a greater degree) can use this identification in a "self-interested, excursionary way" to gain their own redemption: "Tom is not allowed to become a person who might want to live next door but remains a personification of what is missing in the Anglo-Saxon inner life" (108). Railton's map of possible white responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* records the danger I see in Nussbaum's discussion of *Invisible Man* as well. Again, one sees the white subject central to a project that was originally to be about the liberation of nonwhite subjects from racist oppression. Stowe's text presents African-American culture as more virtuous than European-American culture, suggesting that whites have something to learn from blacks. Such a gesture is laudable, but can obscure material questions about equality and social justice, allowing "whites to see themselves as the disadvantaged race" (Railton 109). Questioning this assumption through a constant reference from texts to material contexts is a first step, but students and teachers must also see themselves as materially invested in the outcome of debates over culture, identity, and power.<sup>41</sup>

### Which America Is Ours?

Everything I have argued for up to this point resists the impulse to attempt to bring about a better society merely by presenting students with a positive image of diversity in our course syllabi.<sup>42</sup> This impulse is either an ultimately ineffective shortcut or an easy out. Given the fact of an extremely rancorous diversity in society, the university, and the classroom that is punctuated by both personal and structural injustice, I want to consider what kinds of approaches to the teaching of literature (specifically "American literature") might work against oppression and injustice. Two primary implications follow from my argument at this point: first, students must be involved and feel something personally at stake in the conflicts motivated in and about literary texts in order for their education to truly challenge oppression and exploitation; second, texts must be put into relation with one another (historically, rhetorically, and ideologically), not simply included side by side in a smorgasbord of diverse experiences.

Consider an example of a text recently included into the canon: Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*. In the *Instructor's Guide* to the *Heath*, contributing editor Frederick Woodard makes numerous excellent suggestions for teaching Du Bois's text in relation to images of blackness, gender, African-American folk music, Hegelian thought, and terminology ("Negro," "black," and "African-American"). What's missing from these suggestions is the pain and anger directed toward

white people in Du Bois's text. My white students certainly pick up on that anger, which is why many come into class after reading the assignment disliking Du Bois and thinking of him as "racist" or "anti-white." To downplay the anger in Du Bois's text or to avoid the ways in which he *is*, indeed, "antiwhite" or to ignore his claims for epistemological privilege for blacks in the United States would be a disservice to both white and black students. All students need to hear and to engage with that anger and with Du Bois's claim that blacks understand something about white America that many whites do not. Chances are they have heard similar claims before from the Reverend Al Sharpton or from rap lyrics. Du Bois presents an opportunity to make sense of that claim and its limits, to give it context (for example through considerations of the lynching epidemic of the time), and (for white students) to understand why an intelligent, antiracist person might make it. The contributors to the *Instructor's Guide* are fine scholars and the intent of the *Heath Anthology* in including Du Bois is admirable; I think what can go wrong in the process of inclusion is that many critics and educators attempt to shield classrooms from anger and conflict and to predigest controversy and emotion, *making sense* of it before it is *felt*. Works intended to be radical additions to the curriculum can thus end up *sanitized*.

The *Harper* anthology has perhaps gone the furthest in rethinking the nature of the anthology itself so as to avoid the pattern of isolated "great works" presented as points along a continuum of tradition. Through numerous short sections (many called "Cultural Portfolios"), this anthology presents competing voices together, as part of a debate. These sections present brief excerpts from US Supreme Court decisions, popular journalism, diaries, speeches, and poetry. While the *Heath* certainly has the greatest diversity of authors, the *Harper* shows the least reticence to present "American literature" as a series of material conflicts; it includes, for example, racist texts, loyalist texts opposing the War of Independence, anti-American texts, and nonliterary and visual sources such as illustrations and political cartoons.<sup>43</sup> These texts, worth studying in their own right, also provide invaluable context for understanding the writings of abolitionists, revolutionaries, patriots, and other, "literary" authors. What I am really interested in, however, is not just context but debate—not debate for its own sake, but with the understanding that different positions can and must be evaluated for what they can tell us about what is "American," what is "literary," and what is "right." In this, the *Harper Anthology* surpasses the *Heath* by breaking with the tradition of organizing texts solely around "great" authors. Thus, selections by Du Bois or Franklin appear in multiple locations, as parts of different conversations. Aesthetic, social, and political issues play as much

of an organizing role in the *Harper* as do authors and chronological concerns.

None of the anthologies I examined for this study, however, includes the highly moving text of John Brown's statement to the court at his trial for treason or his rhetorically brilliant "Declaration of Liberty by the Representatives of the Slave Population of the United States of America," yet they all discuss the importance of Brown for other writers. How useful might it be to present not only poems about Brown by other authors, but also his own words? How might his defense of violence to free slaves as a patriotic duty rather than treason offset Lincoln's defense of war a decade later in his "Second Inaugural Address"?<sup>44</sup> After assigning Brown's text, I asked my students why they thought Brown was not included in "American literature" anthologies. They hypothesized that his inclusion would make the government look bad for executing someone we would today all agree was in the right and therefore risk undermining students' faith in their country, rather than making them "feel good" about it. (I think that a desire to make students feel good about their country is the same reason, ironically, that proslavery texts are today usually omitted.) Also, my students suspected that someone who was executed for treason might not seem to anthology editors sufficiently "American" to be included. Both of these hypotheses seem to me to point to a bigger problem with cultural pluralism as an ideology guiding the conceptualization of "American literature" anthologies. Through the avoidance of controversy and conflict, a pluralist approach hopes to give an impression of consensus and community in the anthology and, ideally by the end of the term, in the classroom. The idea that answers to questions such as "what is American literature?" can come tied up in a bow at the end of one or two semesters is ludicrous and does not do justice to the complexity of the human mind or the complexity of literature.

Martí's *Letters from New York* can provide an excellent teaching opportunity regarding the "messy" intractability of conflict, although the method in which they are usually presented can stand in the way. Martí offers a superb example of the conflicted nature of belief on the personal level. It is not the case that Martí was an unequivocal opponent of the United States. Many leftist critics writing about Martí do their best to ignore or to explain his views on race (often problematic from a contemporary viewpoint) and his contradictory stance toward the United States. Perhaps the most common way of acknowledging Martí's shortcomings is to compartmentalize them into the "early" period of his exile in the United States.<sup>45</sup> When critics, even those who present Martí's complexities, encourage us to think of him as having or developing *a position* (albeit one that is

partly right and partly wrong)—rather than contradictorily trying to sort out several incompatible beliefs to which he partially adheres—they do us and students a disservice. A linear developmental narrative (Martí gradually comes to consciousness through his experiences in the United States) may be comforting, but it is not entirely accurate. This narrative gives us a great anticolonial hero, but hides from us the conflicted and self-contradictory human intellectual. James W. Loewen, criticizing the tendency for history textbooks to create heroes out of historical figures, attributes heroification to, among other things, "the wish to avoid ambiguities, a desire to shield [students] from harm or conflict, the perceived need to control [students] and avoid classroom disharmony, [and] pressure to provide answers" (35). Resisting this tendency with Martí could enable us to ask difficult questions about his portrayal of "ignorant or wild Indians" (not in 1880, but in 1894, the year before his death) or, in "Our America," the persistent glorification of indigenous cultures while minimizing the far vaster inheritance from Africa in his native Cuba.<sup>46</sup> If we teach Martí as an intellectual who sorts through his ideas throughout his life, students could see, for example, how he became a victim of the press-induced panic over anarchism following the 1886 Haymarket bombing, wholeheartedly supporting the death sentence given to those who were tried for the incident, and how he flip-flopped (along with the majority of American popular sentiment) the following year.<sup>47</sup> Even on the level of the individual author, then, foregrounding conflict, controversy, and debate can tremendously enrich the study of "American literature."

What I most like about Martí's characterization of the United States as a model for teaching "American literature" is that it keeps in view all the things that traditional approaches to literature and "American identity" suppress: violence, conflict, discord. Far from making students feel bad about the nation, this approach enables them to have a more accurate assessment of what it has accomplished and how. Do teachers benefit students by pretending that these things do not exist, that the United States is a harmonious "salad bowl" of difference or that injustice and violence do not have identifiable agents, victims, and resisters? Take Martí's numerous discussions of lynching, for example. I have found that students have very little sense for the importance of lynching in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Often, students believe that a lynching was "just" a hanging, that only black men were lynched, that lynching only occurred in the South, and that a lynching was an isolated incident perpetrated by a few white men. Although this matches the common Hollywood portrayal of a lynching by masked Ku Klux Klan marauders in the woods in the dead of night, the truth about lynching is

somewhat different. Men, women, and children (of many races, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds, although overwhelmingly black) were lynched from Oregon to Minnesota to California to New York to Florida. Additionally, lynchings were often huge spectacles, sometimes announced in advance by the press. Horrible torture, mutilation, and burning of the victims were common, and crowds of white men, women, and children would collect "souvenirs" from victims' bodies and pose (wearing no masks) for photographs with the corpses. Such photographs were sometimes made into souvenir cards. Furthermore, throughout the final decade of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, lynching occurred with alarming frequency: according to Ida B. Wells-Barnett, at least 241 blacks were lynched in 1892 alone ("Red Record" 157).

Martí's writings on lynching attempt to convey some of the irrationality and horror of US chauvinism and racism, as well as their quotidian character. In an 1891 essay, for example, Martí describes the lynching of 11 Italians in New Orleans. He is at pains to stress the fact that the men who participated in the lynching are ordinary and unremarkable members of US society:

From this day forward, no one who knows what pity is will set foot in New Orleans without horror. Here and there, like the last gusts of a storm, a group of murderers comes around a corner and disappears, rifles on their shoulders. Over there another group goes by, made up of lawyers and businessmen, robust blue-eyed men with revolvers at their hips and leaves on their lapels, leaves from the tree where they have hung a dead man. ("The Lynching of the Italians" 297)

Another central concern for him appears to be the official and public approval of the lynching. After noting that four of the Italians had, a few hours earlier, been found innocent of the crime for which they had been accused, he describes the events leading up to the lynching:

[A] committee of leading citizens named by the mayor to assist in punishing the murder, a committee led by the chief of one of the city's political factions, convokes the citizens in printed and public appeals to a riot to be held the next day [. . .] then attacks the parish jail with only the most minimal interference, meant only to preserve appearances, from the police, the militia, the mayor, or the governor [. . .] rushes bellowing through the corridors in pursuit of the fleeing Italians, and with the butt-ends of its revolvers smashes in the heads of the Italian political leader, the banker, and the consul—consul of Bolivia [. . .]. Three

more of those who, like the banker, had been absolved, along with seven others, are killed, against the wall, in the corners, on the ground, at point-blank range. Returning from this task, the citizens cheer the lawyer who presided over the massacre and carry him through the streets on their shoulders. ("The Lynching of the Italians" 297)

This description evokes a sense of surreal horror in a contemporary reader, as it probably also did for many of Martí's Latin-American readers. Clearly, however, the lynching was not seen as an unusual break with decorum by the population of New Orleans.<sup>48</sup>

In "A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire," Martí goes even further to portray the extent to which racism pervades every aspect of US society. This brief essay describes three scenes. The first is a cakewalk in New York City, a spectacle put on by black couples dressed up in "elaborate getups with patent-leather shoes, the women in dancing pumps and the men in frilled shirts, so they can be mocked, ridiculed, whistled and shouted at, and have coins thrown at their heads by frenetic, curly-haired players from the gaming dens, by the gamblers on the stock market who are called brokers, and by students from the two great colleges" (311). The last scene is that of a lynching in Arkansas that culminates with a woman approaching a black man she has accused of assaulting her, after he has been tied to a tree and doused with kerosene:

"Get back, everyone, get back, so the ladies can see me." And when Mrs. Jewell, in a triangular scarf and hat, came out from among the crowd, on the arms of two relatives, the crowd burst into a round of cheers: "Hurrah for Mrs. Jewell!" The ladies waved their handkerchiefs, the men waved their hats. Mrs. Jewell reached the tree, lit a match, twice touched the lit match to the jacket of the black man, who did not speak, and the black man went up in flames, in the presence of five thousand souls. (313)

Included between these two accounts is one of blacks "fleeing" the United States for Liberia. A powerful portrayal of the "nation of immigrants," Martí's account of the United States dramatically challenges the ideology of idealism that was being forged by writers like Emma Lazarus during his own time. The example of blacks emigrating to Africa hones the point established by the other two examples: the racism of the United States is pervasive and possibly incorrigible to the point that the only solution for blacks is to flee for their lives.

In my experience teaching American literature, background knowledge of lynching and racial conflict in the late nineteenth-century United States is invaluable for understanding such otherwise

stale academic debates as that between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Yet, while most American literature anthologies include both Du Bois and Washington, none include the kinds of graphic accounts of lynching contained in Ida B. Wells-Barnett's "Southern Horrors" or "A Red Record" or in Martí's writings on lynching. As a part of my classes, I have found that teaching Wells-Barnett before Du Bois and Washington enables students to place the two male writers into a social and historical context that reveals the serious stakes implicated in their rhetoric. (It also introduces students to a preeminent nineteenth-century, black, female intellectual, activist, and journalist, disabusing them of the belief that the great black intellectuals of the time were all men.) One possible reason why Martí's and Wells-Barnett's accounts of lynching are not included in anthologies may be that they are not "pro-American," in the sense that they do not argue that the true nature of US society lies in egalitarian ideals that have been betrayed by Southern racists. They thus contrast with many abolitionist writers who see themselves as defenders of the true US character against corrupt slaveholders. Instead, Wells-Barnett and Martí present an unflattering view of the United States, suggesting that its true nature is violent and racist, and that there is no simple way to correct this by appealing to its own noble legacies. Such selections make for difficult reading, especially for white students, providing no "easy way out" and no way to shunt the responsibility for racism onto "un-American" social outsiders.

What is therefore necessary in the "American literature" classroom is to teach about social divisions, knowing that they already exist in the classroom (so there is no real need to worry about "replicating" them there through teaching about them). The emphasis in some multicultural programs on always "ending on an upbeat" can obscure the downside of US life both in the past and in the present. Many critics have stressed that an incomplete canon that does not highlight conflict is not only politically suspect but also quite simply inaccurate.<sup>49</sup> There is, furthermore, no reason to think that focusing on conflict and "political" questions in texts should obscure questions of "literariness." For one thing, the question of what is literary itself is one of the conflicts at the heart of "American literature." For another, as Graff discusses in his consideration of teaching Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, putting texts within social contexts of debates over what humanity and universality mean, for example, can actually increase students' appreciation of the aesthetic depth (or lack thereof) of classic texts, as well as nonclassics (25–33).<sup>50</sup>

The nineteenth-century United States presented in Martí's *Letters from New York* or Wells-Barnett's "A Red Record" is completely unlike that presented in "American literature" anthologies. Yet Martí's

perspective on the United States can help us to restructure "American literature" not by suspending aesthetic evaluation of texts as better and worse, but by requiring that we reconsider the criteria by which we make such evaluations. Satya Mohanty argues in "Can Our Values Be Objective?" with regard to aesthetic knowledge, that new possibilities for aesthetic experience become possible "[w]hen new social relations become imaginable" (825). As with ethical knowledge, we are therefore wise to open ourselves up to the widest number of possibilities for what might count as beautiful. Furthermore, he makes a case for believing that, if "aesthetic responses are not simple but complex, and even the accurate detection of beauty is itself dependent on feelings and ideas that are in themselves not aesthetic [. . . then] the traditional aesthetic isolation [. . .] of beauty blinds us to the objective nature of beauty" (827). According to this model, "aesthetic experiences are unavoidably linked to ethical and metaphysical values and perspectives, and they can enlarge our conception of what it means to be more fully human—that is, they can radically deepen and alter our existing conceptions of human flourishing" (830). Given the inextricability of aesthetic and ethical perception, then, one can see why a more *truthful* account of US history, society, and identity must be a factor in making not only political but also aesthetic decisions about "American literature."

Rethinking "American literature" should, therefore, entail the kinds of judgments of which cultural relativism does not permit. According to *political* criteria, the essays of William Apess, Du Bois, Martí, or Wells-Barnett may be better than those of Emerson, insofar as Emerson's ethnocentric, partial perspective with regard to American identity impairs his ability to accurately perceive the texture of American letters.<sup>51</sup> However, one might also argue that "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man," *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Our America," and "A Red Record" could be demonstrably superior in *aesthetic* terms to Emerson's essays once one no longer perceives these essays apart from the material human misery and joy they refer to, ignore, or obscure. Once we have freed ourselves from the fallacy that a text's aesthetic value lies *in the text itself*, then social context and what texts tell us about "possibilities for human flourishing" become essential knowledge for evaluating them rather than external considerations to be banished to the headings and footnotes.<sup>52</sup>

I would like to end this essay by briefly considering a poem whose aesthetic value could be entirely missed without a deep understanding of the conflictive and violent history of US society. Michael Harper's poem "American History" begins with an invocation of one of many famous acts of white-on-black terrorism in the United States,

the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama during the Civil Rights Movement. Harper immediately connects this incident to a much longer history of racial oppression. What is most striking to me about the poem, however, is how he then makes the submerged nature of African-American history itself the subject of the poem, ironically suggesting that the reason the middle passage is less known than the War of Independence is because murdered blacks have hidden *themselves*:

Those four black girls blown up in that Alabama church  
remind me of five hundred  
middle passage blacks  
in a net, under water  
in Charleston harbor  
so *redcoats* wouldn't find them. (lines 1–7)

The title of the poem ensures that readers do not miss the irony. It demands that they acknowledge not only that blacks have been victimized by whites for centuries in the United States, but also that the history of that victimization has been suppressed. The poem ends with another, playfully ironic twist: "Can't find what you can't see / can you?" (lines 8–9). It thus repeats a central claim of my essay, that an understanding of the reality of US history is critical for accurately perceiving the present. It also demonstrates my claim with regard to the inclusion of literature by racial and ethnic minorities: not only can you not find what you can't see (the question of inclusion in the canon), but you can't learn from what you can't understand. For this reason, it is imperative that we engage in the pursuit of more truthful and enabling accounts of the foundations of "American literature." Otherwise, we will fail to perceive the truth—and beauty—even of what is directly in front of us.

## Notes

1. Two useful overviews of these charges (the "culture wars") are Graff (16–25) and Jay (1–12).
2. These percentages are overlapping and do not include those persons indicating more than one race. On distinguishing between representation of minority writers in the curriculum and representation of minority persons in the university, see Gates 178–83 and Guillory 4–5. See also Palumbo-Liu (5–9) on the co-optation, accommodation, and "containment" of multiculturalism.
3. I am counting here only those who are native-born or naturalized citizens; 42,000 of these are men (Newberger and Curry 27).

4. Since the US Census Bureau has not made available incarceration demographics for 2000, this number is a rough extrapolation from different sources: according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' *Profile of Jail Inmates 1996*, 18.5% of the approximately 567,000 inmates of local jails in 1996 were "Hispanic" (Harlow 3), and according to its *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 2000*, 47,023 "Hispanics" were in federal prisons in 2000 and 17% of the over 1,059,000 state prisoners in 1997 were "Hispanic" (US Dept. of Justice 524, 519).
5. In 1996, 37.3% of local jail inmates were "non-Hispanic white" (Harlow 3) and, in 1997, 33.3% of state prisoners and 29.9% of federal prisoners were "non-Hispanic white" (US Dept. of Justice 519). No numbers are available for "non-Hispanic whites" with regard to federal prisoners in 2000.
6. Numerous critics have discussed how teaching "American literature" has always been exceptionally political rather than ever "merely" aesthetic. See, among others, Cain 3–14; Graff 145–63; Fetterley xi–xxiv; Foster 194–95; Jay 146–57; Lauter, *Canons and Contexts* 22–47; Mohanty, *Literary Theory* 5–9; Palumbo-Liu 3–9; Kaplan, *The Social Construction*; Spanos; Warren, *Black and White* 71–108. See also Harriet Pollack's brief but superb testimonial in "Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade?" 1–5.
7. Born in 1853 in Cuba, José Julián Martí y Pérez came of age during Cuba's first war of independence, the Ten Years War (1868–1878). Martí spent much of the 1880s and early 1890s in New York, chronicling continental affairs for numerous newspaper readers throughout Latin America and assisting in the development of a revolutionary movement among Cuban exiles.
8. All parenthetical citations to "Our America" refer first to the English translation, followed by the Spanish original. This will enable readers who would like to check the citation in the original text to do so easily. Additionally, when I found the translation ambiguous, I have provided a quotation from the Spanish original in brackets.
9. See, for example, Belnap and Fernández. Another important collection of essays examining the United States in relation to imperialism is Kaplan and Pease's *Cultures of United States Imperialism*; see especially Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture."
10. Martí's account of the United States could, therefore, answer some concerns that view multiculturalism as opposed to an internationalist framework (see, for example, Spears).
11. All parenthetical citations to "The Truth about the United States" refer first to the English translation, followed by the Spanish original. "The Truth about the United States" does not appear in the Cuban edition of Martí's complete works. Spanish citations to this text are therefore from the Venezuelan edition. Additionally, when I found the translation ambiguous, I have provided a quotation from the Spanish original in brackets.

12. Interestingly, critics disagree over Martí's view of national identity in general and whether or not he advocated a unified, coherent (nation-type) identity or a looser, more diffuse notion of identity for "our America." Pease, for example, argues that Martí is an antinationalist, resisting the power of the state to create subjects by the fusion of "interest groups" into a national core. Pease casts Martí as a kind of proto-poststructuralist, opposed to state power and national identity in all their forms (44). By contrast, Rotker sees Martí as an exile preoccupied with the construction of a "home" in the remembered nation. She writes that "Martí [. . .] was able to assemble a sort of unity out of fragmentation in a space of condensation" through his *Letters from New York* (66).
13. Crèvecoeur's "What Is an American" and Emerson's "The American Scholar" and "Self-Reliance" are reprinted in all major anthologies of "American literature." I discuss Emerson at greater length later in this essay. Although Tocqueville is generally not included in "American literature" anthologies, Pease discusses the influence of his views on the United States, particularly in contrast to those of Martí.
14. Anthologies I have consulted for this study include the following: *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Nina Baym et al.; *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Paul Lauter et al.; *Anthology of American Literature*, edited by George McMichael et al.; *Harper American Literature*, edited by Donald McQuade et al.; and *Anthologie de la Littérature Américaine*, edited by Daniel Royot, et al.
15. On the politics of this particular vision of "American literature," see the works cited in note 6. Cain, in particular, argues that this vision presents a view of "American literature" that is flawed, inadequate, and wrong, and demonstrates how the inclusion of noncanonical texts and contexts can force us to revise our opinions about traditional texts (3–5, 7–8).
16. American Indians were specifically denied citizenship in the US Constitution and did not receive the ability to claim citizenship until the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act by congress in 1924. José Martí is included only in the *Heath*, while Sui Sin Far, resident of the United States from 1898 to 1912, appears in both the *Heath* and the *Norton*. Richard S. Pressman notes that there have been experiments since World War II at "giving an international perspective through the use of foreigners (mainly British) to comment on American life" (58), although these voices were eventually eliminated along with those of women and minority writers.
17. Authors from Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the past possessions of Cuba and the Philippines are nearly always ignored; as, traditionally, have those from entire regions of the mainland United States, like the Pacific Northwest. Both the *Heath* and the *Harper* have begun to break these traditions: the *Heath*, by including Inuit poetry, the *Harper*, by including an Eskimo story. Beyond US borders, Prentice Hall's *Anthology of American Literature*

offers only Columbus, while the *Norton* includes numerous European explorers who did not reach the present-day United States. Going further, the current *Heath* and *Harper* editions add writings and oral narratives by indigenous peoples in Mexico and Central America. The *Harper* even includes Icelandic and Norse sagas about the Viking arrival in the Americas.

18. Rivera is now included in the *Heath*, as is much bilingual poetry by Latinos. Nobel prize-winning Yiddish-language writer Singer is found only in the *Harper*. Marc Shell's and Werner Sollors's new *Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations* is a monumental challenge to the concept of the United States as an English-language nation with an English-language literature. Unfortunately, the anthology is not easily teachable to undergraduates and has, in my opinion, an undue focus on European languages. See also Sollors and Shell's *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*.
19. Notably, the *Norton* has come to include both Vonnegut and Le Guin, although the selections, while fine, are not representative of the science fiction work both authors are best known for.
20. See note 6, above. Beverly Peterson has described her experiences introducing students to works like Poe's "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" in order to disrupt their expectations of how canons are formed, including the role of individual beliefs, entertainment, and "social values."
21. See Spanos's excellent study of the mid-twentieth-century appropriation of *Moby-Dick* as an allegory for US exceptionalism in response to the Cold War with the Soviet Union.
22. Lauter provides an excellent account of some of the changes that took place in the canon in the early part of the twentieth century (*Canons and Contexts* 22–47). For a useful chronicle of changes from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth, see Pressman 57–60.
23. Karen L. Kilcup, in "Anthologizing Matters: The Poetry and Prose of Recovery Work," provides an excellent overview of the various pressures influencing editors of anthologies, from aesthetic criteria to political concerns to the demands of the publishing industry. See also the thoughtful forum reassessing anthologies and "American literature," "What Do We Need To Teach?" especially Banta 330–34 and Warren, "The Problem of Anthologies" 338–42.
24. Writing in 1993, Jay Fliegelman provides one of the best and most concise overviews of the kinds of literature that are still underrepresented in "American literature" anthologies, from pro-slavery and temperance literature to nineteenth- and twentieth-century sermons to illustrations and manuscript facsimiles. Some of his concerns have been (albeit unevenly) addressed by recent editions of the *Heath* and *Harper*.

25. Carla Mulford notes that Heath issued an anthology in four volumes in the early 1970s, but that the experiment proved unmarketable (348).
26. Lauter is useful for considering the dire state of anthologies into the 1980s:

In the three best-selling anthologies of 1982, women were 3 of 41 nineteenth-century writers in the Norton text and 6 of 40 in both the Macmillan and Random House volumes. [. . . ] In its 1985 second edition, [the *Norton*] included the work of thirty-five women and sixteen black authors. [. . . ] Women are here 22 percent of the authors included and occupy 15 percent of the page space; blacks are 10 percent of the authors and occupy 4.5 percent of the pages. [. . . ] The *Norton* and *Macmillan* anthologies] concentrate on presenting the work of eleven white men: they take up nearly 41 percent of the total pages in the Norton text and, in the Macmillan volumes, a whopping 49.2 percent. [. . . ] Franklin, James, and Emerson each have about as many pages devoted to them as all the black writers combined; both Cooper and Twain are allotted more space than all the women writers (apart from Chopin) taken together. (Lauter, *Canons* 100)

Lauter also notes that the 1990 *Heath* first edition included "work by 109 women writers of all races, twenty-five individual Native American authors [. . . ] fifty-three African-Americans, thirteen Hispanics [. . . ] and nine Asian-Americans" (101).

27. Black authors account for 12.24% of the total, Native Americans for 12.82%, and Asian Americans for 2.14%. For the purposes of these statistics, I have included Indian-European mixed-race authors of Latin America prior to 1848 as "Native American" and counted Spanish explorers and missionaries as "white."
28. Williams's mother, Raquel Hélène Hoheb, was Puerto Rican, of the same generation as the Cuban Martí. Lisa Sánchez González discusses the implications of considering Williams as a poet shaped by the Puerto Rican diaspora (42–56). It is probable that the propensity not to think of Williams as Puerto Rican is related to his long-established presence in the canon.
29. *Herencia* will surely be the standard bearer in the field of US Latino literature. Its 638 pages of multilingual writings from wide-ranging ethnic groups and five-century-plus scope towers over *The Prentice-Hall Anthology of Latino Literature's* mostly contemporary 544 pages of primarily-English-language selections from the three dominant US Latino ethnicities. *Herencia's* association with the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage Project and respected editorial board also lends it an academic legitimacy that cannot be claimed by Norton's forthcoming anthology.

30. See, for example, Foster 195–96.
31. Although Nussbaum claims that "[m]uch teaching of literature in the current academy is inspired by the spirit of identity politics" that "celebrates difference in an uncritical way and denies the very possibility of common interests and understandings, even of dialogue and debate, that take one outside one's own group," she fails to offer an example (110). Her gesture is not at all uncommon. Many critics, both left and right, use the bogey man/straw man of "Balkanization" or "tribalism" to discredit their opponents. Usually, this claim is either asserted as fact without argument (as with Nussbaum) or established through a slippery slope fallacy (for example, Bryant 10). When examples are given, they are often colloquial or anecdotal (as in, "I have a colleague who once said . . .") rather than scholarly books or essays (for example, Spears 6). One of the many problems with the gesture toward Balkanization/tribalism is that it conjures a specter of the United States degenerating to the state of ethnic violence found "elsewhere in the world." This specter presupposes an innocent United States that is free of violent ethnic conflict. The threat to peace is then made out to be minorities rather than the dominant groups who have exercised an unremitting legacy of ethnic violence against people of color for more than 200 years. If Marti's nineteenth-century observations can teach us anything, it is that the United States prior to "multiculturalism" has always been among the most Balkanized, tribalist, and violent societies in the world.
32. For my own critiques of cultural relativism in contemporary theory, see "Who Are Our Own People? Challenges for a Theory of Social Identity" and "How to Tell a Mestizo from an Enchirito®: Colonialism and National Culture in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*."
33. For example, Graff's otherwise excellent model can lend itself to slowing down change through a "teach one classic text, teach one nonclassic text" approach. His "teach the controversies" model, in fact, is presented as a possible compromise between the left and right insofar as it guarantees the inclusion of both conservative and radical voices in the debate (25–33, 51–52). Lois Rudnick, with the best of intentions, also embraces a "one classic, one nonclassic" approach. One might also usefully contrast such models of contesting the classics externally with Eve Sedgwick's justification for preserving the Western canon so that one might critique the internal contradictions that hold it together (48–59). On the use of multiculturalism to bolster the traditional canon, see Palumbo-Liu 16–17.
34. On critical versions of multiculturalism, see, among others, Banks 237–43; Chicago Cultural Studies Group; Goldberg; McLaren; Moya; Palumbo-Liu 2, 5, 9–14; Pryse 186–90; Shohat and Stam; Sleeter, "Introduction: Multicultural Education and Empowerment" and *Multicultural Education as Social Activism* 91–134.
35. Also important for Moya's realist position is the work of Mohanty (see esp. *Literary Theory* 210–11, on the epistemic importance of

- emotion, and 240–47, on multiculturalism as "epistemic cooperation"). Sean Teuton, drawing from Mohanty's conception of cultures as laboratories in which different experiments are worked out, also stresses the importance of political sovereignty and equality as a precondition for cross-cultural exchanges of knowledge.
36. Some commentators are very critical of the use of anger in the classroom and even use their feelings of discomfort and/or the discomfort of students as a justification for refusing to teach about groups other than their own to members of that group (see Spears 4–5, 2–3). Clearly instructors should not set out to traumatize students and should take care to avoid trauma themselves. Avoiding all discomfort and unpleasantness, however, harms the educational process more than it helps.
  37. He argues that multiculturalists "are not rejecting the idea of a common culture so much as asking for a greater voice in defining it" (45), but later notes that "The current attack on 'divisiveness,' 'Balkanization,' and so forth is really an attack on the unpleasant fact of social conflict itself while fobbing off the responsibility for it on somebody else" (46). Many conservative and liberal critics seem to be most fearful of losing some (imagined) sense of community, glossing over the fact that such community has never existed and has typically been posited through domination. Schlesinger's and Gitlin's titles (respectively, *The Disuniting of America* and *The Twilight of Common Dreams*) illustrate this, implying as they do the reality of a "good old day" when unity and commonality reigned, despite their fictional nature (see also Bryant 10; Spears 3). For refutations of this myth, see Cain 3–11; Graff 47–51; Jay 39–43; Pollack 1–5.
  38. Lauter's essay was an earlier version of the second chapter of *Cannons and Contexts*.
  39. This may partly have to do with the fact that his vision of the teaching of literature often remains bound to texts and authors, rather than issues. As James S. Laughlin notes, the emotional aspect of learning is most present in Graff's autobiographical anecdotes (Brannon and Greene 231–48, 233–34). Laughlin criticizes Graff for not recognizing sufficiently the need to introduce controversies in a way that affects students viscerally and gives them a reason to be invested in the conflicts taught. His point is partly a Freirian one about the need for students to generate and explore questions from their own initiative, rather than having information (even controversy) brought to them by a teacher. I agree with Laughlin's prescription for pedagogy, but think that Graff's method may be in fact closer to his own than he admits.
  40. See, for example, note 33, above.
  41. Several critics have raised questions about the possibility for aligning multiculturalism with materialist or class critique. Pressman, for example, sees multiculturalism, identity, and "identity politics" more

peessimistically than I do. His concern with class difference and material inequalities develops into a late-Marxist critique of identity that lacks nuance. While I believe there is much of value in his final conclusions that anthologies and canons may not ultimately be salvageable and that diversification of the canon is at high risk of co-optation by neoliberalism, I think that he moves too quickly to an anti-identitarian gesture. This includes making the absurd claim that ethnicity is not a great issue in our society (because on the campus on which he teaches "hardly an eye bats when an Hispanic and an Anglo pair off") but that class should be our primary focus (64). Guillory also argues for an increased attention to class, claiming that "the critique of the canon does indeed belong to a liberal pluralist discourse within which [. . .] the category of class has been systematically repressed" (14). I of course agree that more attention should be paid to class in the study of US literature, especially in its interrelation with other factors of identity, but Pressman and Guillory present too reductive and unitary a notion of "multiculturalism" and "identity politics." For a better and subtler consideration of multiculturalism's complex relationship to capitalism and to class, see Palumbo-Liu 9–14.

42. See Graff's account of how the university fosters its self-image as a "conflict-free ivory tower" (6). Sleeter also rejects models of multiculturalism that simply seek to create "an unoppressive, equal society which is also culturally diverse" in the classroom without addressing structural oppression and inequality in society ("Introduction" 10).
43. See Fliegelman's criticisms of the *Heath* in note 24. For these reasons, I am in agreement with Banta that the *Harper* presents the most advantageous "American literature" anthology currently available (333).
44. Brown's writings can be difficult to find, but are worth the effort. See Brown; Webb 216–19.
45. This is true of a number of otherwise fine essays (see Pita 130–33; Rotker 69; Sánchez 118).
46. On Martí and race, see Ferrer; Gillman 96–104; and Helg.
47. See Martí, "Class War in Chicago: A Terrible Drama."
48. See also Wells-Barnett's "Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to the Death" 253–322.
49. See, for example, Cain 3–5 and Moya 174.
50. See also Cain 7–8. Mulford notes how student interest in early American literature has revived with the inclusion of Native American literature and questions of colonialism and cultural conflict alongside the traditional Puritan canon (342–48).
51. On Emerson, see Jenine Abboushi Dallal's excellent essay exploring the continuity between 1840s expansionist discourses and Emerson's

individualist and aesthetic ideologies. On the further relation of American letters to expansionist discourses, see also Frederick Wegener.

52. Although I am not in complete agreement with his conclusions, Jonathan Arac offers a thoughtful consideration of these issues, taking *Huckleberry Finn* as an occasion to reconsider the meaning of the aesthetic. His essay offers somewhat of a counter-point to Mohanty's essay on aesthetic value. Cain offers the insightful observation that conservative critics of multiculturalism rarely define "literary value" (9).

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