

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

Oklahoma
HUMANITIES

FALL 2015

INTERNATIONALISM

Aid, Alliance, and Going It Alone

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The Oklahoma Humanities Council (OHC) strengthens communities by helping Oklahomans learn about the human experience, understand new perspectives, and participate knowledgeably in civic life. The humanities—disciplines such as history, literature, film studies, ethics, and philosophy—offer a deeper understanding of ourselves and others by confronting us with the questions, values, and meanings of the human experience. As the nonprofit, state partner for the National Endowment for the Humanities, OHC brings people together to explore these ideas through programming and community grants that support book groups, exhibits, film festivals, teacher institutes, and more. OHC engages people in their own communities, providing forums for education, critical thinking, and productive civil discourse.

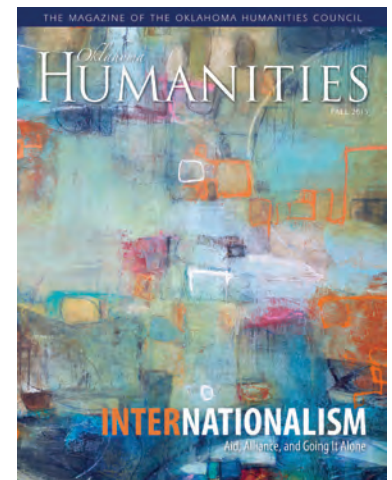
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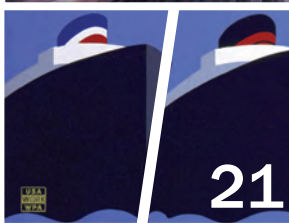
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ON THE COVER

Detail, *Crazy Love*. Mark Bettis paints in his studio/gallery in the mountains of Asheville, NC. His paintings are a synthesis of color, line, texture, and form, using multiple layers of oil paint, cold wax medium, marble dust, and other elements. He is an award-winning artist and exhibits in galleries across the United States. markbettisart.com





REACHING BEYOND NATIONAL BORDERS—to secure treaties, bolster economies, tackle global issues of hunger and health—is no longer the province of diplomats alone. From technologies that power banking, news, and social media to the international trade of oil, clothes, and cars, “foreign relations” is integrally part of our workaday world. Internationalism is a global web of interactions that (done well) requires cultural insight, historical perspective, and open dialogue. In this issue, we’ll explore the give-and-take of internationalism, finding identity in a cross-cultural world, and the considerations of aid, alliance, and going it alone.

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from our **PERSPECTIVE**

Humanities Inform the Debate

AS GLOBAL CITIZENS, we all have a stake in the world's affairs. Global issues require reasoned and informed debate. So too do intranational issues, those that occur within our own country's borders. In our polarized nation perhaps the only thing we could all agree upon is that there is a lot of disagreement, and an uninformed opinion doesn't add to the dialogue in any meaningful way. The humanities disciplines are critical in informing our opinions in both the global and local setting.

The Oklahoma Humanities Council is facilitating meaningful community conversation. We recently held programs on two issues of national interest: privacy in light of national security, and gender equality. We are considering holding a discussion about the First Amendment to the Constitution because of its timeliness to current events.

For instance, our country is engaged in conversations (arguments) about the Confederate battle flag, its meaning in history and its meaning today. On a recent visit to Oklahoma, President Obama was greeted by some of our citizens waving the Confederate flag. To them, the flag represents pride in southern heritage. To those who understand history, it's a sign of racism both historically and currently.

Distancing the flag from racism would be a challenge. The Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, in describing the foundations of the Confederacy, stated, "Its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and



ANN THOMPSON
Executive Director



SUSAN MCCARTHY
Chair, Board of Trustees

normal condition." During the bloody and painful Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s, the flag was resurrected and waved by those opposed to equal rights. No amount of revisionist history can erase the flag's connection with hatred and bigotry, but the act of waving it is not illegal.

Free speech is the cornerstone of the U.S. Constitution and it will be interesting to watch as the nation grapples with this issue. The U.S. Supreme Court has identified lewd, obscene, profane, libelous, and "fighting" words as unprotected under the First Amendment. Exploring its nuances will be not only interesting but essential.

EXTRA! | "Why do people believe myths about the Confederacy? Because our textbooks and monuments are wrong." James W. Loewen, *Washington Post*, July 1, 2015. Discusses the mythology and misinformation that infuses the history of the Civil War. washingtonpost.com

2015 MAGAZINE AWARDS

Our Winningest Year Yet!

Oklahoma HUMANITIES magazine took six awards in annual competitions honoring the best of the best. Thanks to the generosity of our authors, artists, and donors, we continue to be recognized for outstanding content and design.

SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS AWARDS

Oklahoma Pro Chapter

1st Place, Best PR Publication:

"The First World War," Fall 2014

1st Place, PR Publication Cover:

"American Humor," Winter 2014

2nd Place, PR Publication Cover:

"The First World War," Fall 2014

2nd Place, General Writing:

"Finding the Forgotten Generation," interview with author Richard Rubin by Carla Walker, Fall 2014

3rd Place, General Writing:

"The American Sense of Humor" by M. Thomas Inge, Winter 2014

GREAT PLAINS JOURNALISM AWARDS

8-state Regional Competition

Finalist, Magazine Feature Writing:

"The Color of Blood" by Joe Starita, Summer 2014



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INTERNATIONALISM AND THE COMMON GOOD

*Reflections from William D. Adams, Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)*

IN RECENT MONTHS, I've been giving a great deal of thought to the history of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the ways in which the agency has contributed to the cultural wealth and resources of both the United States and the global community. Over its first fifty years, NEH has dispersed more than \$5.3 billion in grants to scholars, teachers, museums, libraries, filmmakers, landmarks, universities, and other organizations, among them the state humanities councils. Those grants—more than 62,000 to date—have supported the preservation of important papers and documents, blockbuster documentaries on turning points and important figures in U.S. history, workshops for teachers, Pulitzer Prize-winning books, and the digitization of newspapers that represent the first draft of our country's history.



WILLIAM D. ADAMS
NEH Chairman

Without a doubt, many people across the country better understand who we are as a nation because of NEH's efforts to preserve our legacy and to support the telling of our stories. As we prepare to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary, we are undertaking a new initiative called *The Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square*, which will encourage humanities scholars and organizations to engage important challenges and issues in our public lives.

As we seek to make an important contribution to American life, it's important to note that, even from its earliest days, the Endowment never limited itself or its support to national interests and needs alone. It has instead kept faith with two important ideas: first, there are no national boundaries to the humanities and, second, there should be no geographical limits to the endeavors we support. NEH-funded scholars and organizations have studied the archaeological remains of the ancient world and worked to save the cultural patrimony of Egypt, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iraq. NEH-funded work in Latin America has revealed much about the workings of early civilizations in the Western Hemisphere. The international slave trade is better understood because NEH supported a collaboration that includes scholars in North and South America, Europe, Africa, and New Zealand. During the last decade, NEH (along with the National Science Foundation) has advanced efforts to document endangered languages around the world, and, in April, NEH held the Fourth U.S.-China Cultural Forum to discuss international collaboration on humanities projects.

Why does NEH consider projects with international perspectives, and why might *Oklahoma HUMANITIES* produce an issue on internationalism? The answer is straightforward—to deepen our understanding of other cultures and thereby enable us to grasp the truly global context of our lives.

We live on an interconnected planet where the differences between people's deep-seated beliefs can sometimes be profound and seemingly irreconcilable. The study of history, religion, and culture—and other humanities subjects—promotes cross-cultural understanding. When we enter the histories and fundamental beliefs of people from cultures different from our own, we have the starting point for conversation, mutual respect, and even friendship. When those conversations happen among nations, real internationalism becomes possible.

This issue of *Oklahoma HUMANITIES* is in keeping with the magazine's tradition of introducing readers to a complex theme through a multifaceted prism. I look forward to learning from these articles.

In closing, I would like to thank the Oklahoma Humanities Council for being a partner with NEH in nurturing the world of ideas, increasing our cultural capital, and advancing the work of the humanities across the Sooner State. I know that our partnership will expand and deepen over the next fifty years.

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**LET'S TALK ABOUT IT,
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EDITOR'S NOTE

“Americans do not like the word *multilateralism*. It has too many syllables and ends in an *ism*.” That humorous quip delivered by Madeleine Albright could easily apply to our topic at hand: internationalism. It’s another multi-syllable *ism*—a big-idea word that has something to do with policy, politics, and peacekeeping—an expansive subject to tackle. But, to expand on John Donne, no nation is an island. In this age of technology and trade, we are inextricably linked to people and places outside these United States.

In January of this year, the Senate Armed Services Committee hosted an historic gathering of foreign policy masterminds. Three former secretaries of state—Madeleine Albright, George Schultz, and Henry Kissinger—offered testimony in the Committee’s hearings to assess global challenges and U.S. national security strategy. “As we look around the world, we encounter upheaval and conflict,” Kissinger began. “The United States has not faced a more diverse and complex array of crises since the end of the Second World War.”

Weigh that assessment with recent findings from the Pew Research Center. According to its latest *America’s Place in the World* survey on foreign policy attitudes, Americans’ view of U.S. global influence is at a forty-year low. A growing majority (52%) agree that “the U.S. should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own.”

From our founding, U.S. enthusiasm for interaction with other nations has waxed and waned in direct proportion to world events and what best serves our interests. George Washington counseled for going it alone, staying out of the affairs of others—what foreign policy scholars call isolationism. It’s a popular stance when the alternative is war, foreign aid, or binding treaties. Among our writers for this issue, Wendy Whitman Cobb speculates on modern isolationism by posing the questions: *What if* we withdrew from the international stage? What consequences would Americans feel?

In other periods of our history, nation building was our watchword, expanding territory and resources to ensure prosperity and power. Enter more policy *isms*: imperialism, unilateralism, interventionism. As Bill Bryans notes, forging a continental nation was no easy task; it took finesse, diplomacy, and a fair amount of money. As a young nation intent on our own exceptionalism, we framed expansion in the ideological extreme: it was our Manifest Destiny to access territory and bring non-Americans into the fold of liberty and protection. Alan McPherson points to a time when we took American egotism too far—into Latin America, on missions to enforce order, to “rescue” countries perceived as “too weak or ignorant” to govern themselves. Latin Americans began to resist and, in another turn of the wax and wane cycle, the American public called for Congress to pull back.

World war would be the impetus for new foreign policy words: alliance, multilateralism, coalition. Nations banded together to leverage military might and the dollar diplomacy of markets. Alliances would give rise to the United Nations and NATO and, in time, would turn from peacekeeping to problem-solving, tackling transnational issues of poverty, disease, and, most recently, climate



ABOVE Using a tiny sword hatpin, Columbia (female personification of the United States) adjusts her bonnet, a battleship labeled “World Power” sporting guns labeled “Army” and “Navy” and spewing thick smoke labeled “Expansion.” *Columbia’s Easter Bonnet*, illustration by Samuel D. Ehrhart; c. by Keppler & Schwarzmann for *Puck* magazine, April 6, 1901. Library of Congress

change. Thomas Weiss explores the delicate balance of persuasion and power that underpins the U.N., and how its future depends on American leadership.

Even as America expanded beyond its borders, citizens of other nations ventured beyond theirs—sometimes by choice, sometimes as refugees—seeking opportunities in lands unknown. Influenced by travel and technology, immigration and exploration, borders are mercurial: shifting yet rigid. As we become more mobile, our sense of place, ethnicity, and culture both bloom and blur. Authors Philip Metres, Ibtisam Barakat, and James McGirk offer insight on their own cross-cultural search for identity and home.

Unprecedented historical insight and experience back up the advice that secretaries Albright, Shultz, and Kissinger presented to the Senate Armed Services committee [see transcripts and video at the link below]. Deciding exactly how to shape international affairs (and what is *beyond* our capability), noted Kissinger, requires “public debate and education.”

We hope our issue adds to that education and debate. As individuals, perhaps we can begin on a smaller scale, with simple conversation. Start with one of our articles and pass it on.

EXTRA: | Video and transcripts of testimony by former secretaries of state Albright, Shultz, and Kissinger before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, Jan. 29, 2015. Includes observations on U.S. military readiness and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (to limit Iran’s nuclear capabilities) currently under review by Congress. armed-services.senate.gov (select the *Hearings* tab and search: *Global Challenges and U.S. National Security Strategy*)



AMERICAN DIPLOMACY

Forging a Continental Nation

By Bill Bryans

★ *The America built by international relations* ★

The depiction of the American West as a product of fiercely independent individuals who disdained government interference simply does not hold up to historical scrutiny—so asserted Texas historian Joe B. Franz in a 1963 address to the American Historical Association. Instead, he noted, the West benefited from the largesse of the federal government: economic stimulus from the frontier military, government-sponsored exploration of the region, homestead laws that put large swaths of acreage under the plow, and public lands where cattlemen grazed their stock. Franz highlighted other examples, with one notable omission: The American West was fundamentally a product of international relations.

Along with the explorers, mountain men, traders, miners, farmers, and ranchers commonly associated with the opening of the West, there stand American diplomats whose international negotiations made possible the acquisition and expansion of U.S. territory.

At the end of the American Revolution, the United States stretched from the original thirteen colonies to the east bank of the Mississippi River. As a remnant of colonial period competition, Spain, France, and Great Britain still laid claim to the western expanses that would eventually become the contiguous forty-eight

states. Though often overlooked, it was American foreign policy that forged a continental nation spanning from Atlantic to Pacific.

The Great Plains and Rocky Mountain States



As Americans poured over the Appalachian Mountains after independence, the Mississippi River became especially important to the young nation's economy. The Mississippi and Gulf of Mexico provided a far cheaper and faster avenue of commerce than routes over the mountains, but required unfettered access to New Orleans, the key port leading to the Gulf and the world beyond. Spain controlled Louisiana and New Orleans, and American merchants enjoyed a "right of deposit" at the port. The U.S. considered Spain weak and doubted it would ever interfere with its access to New Orleans. But when France acquired Louisiana in 1800 as part of Napoleon's dream of a North American empire, and New Orleans was closed to American interests in October 1802, Thomas Jefferson and his administration became alarmed. War with France seemed a possibility. Diplomacy ultimately prevailed and the results were unexpected—and spectacular: the Louisiana Purchase.

In January 1803, Jefferson sent Secretary of State James Monroe to Paris to join U.S. Minister to France Robert R. Livingston in seeking resolution to American concerns. Monroe carried instructions to offer up to \$10 million for the purchase of New Orleans and its environs to the east if possible. When Monroe arrived, Livingston shared news that Foreign Minister Charles Maurice de Talleyrand had hinted that France might sell all of the Louisiana Territory. A slave revolt and the outbreak of yellow fever among French troops in modern-day Haiti, coupled with the likelihood of war with Great Britain, prompted Napoleon to abandon his hopes of a North American empire. Louisiana became expendable. The two American diplomats seized the unexpected opportunity and, on April 30, agreed on behalf of the United States to purchase Louisiana for \$15 million.

The exact boundaries were not specified, but the territory encompassed an estimated 828,000 square miles, doubling the size of the nation. For Jefferson, the purchase marked a hallmark achievement. He had long pursued an interest in the West and, even before the acquisition, set in motion plans to explore the region. In January 1803, he asked Congress to approve an expedition to the Pacific. While not a direct result of the Louisiana Purchase, the Lewis and Clark expedition revealed much about the land and the people encompassed by the bargain with France.

The Dakotas and Florida (And Tentative Claims to the Northwest)



President James Monroe's administration secured two treaties that further shaped the borders of the Louisiana Purchase and advanced American claims to the Pacific Northwest. The Treaty of 1818, negotiated for the U.S. by Albert Gallatin and Richard Rush, addressed conflicting commercial interests between the United States and Great Britain in the Oregon Country. U.S. claims to Oregon dated back to Lewis and Clark wintering at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1805-1806. Faced with growing competition from John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, the British Hudson's Bay Company sought to control the region as part of its fur empire. The Treaty of 1818 provided for joint occupancy of the Oregon Country for a period of ten years, only a temporary solution for the disputed region. It also clarified a portion of the border between the Louisiana Purchase and Rupert's Land, part of present-day Canada. To settle past mapping errors, Great Britain relinquished portions of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, while the U.S. ceded a small piece of territory lying north of the forty-ninth parallel above present-day Montana.

The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 brought Spanish Florida into the United States. Spain's control of the territory grew shaky as Americans pushed south for more land and began to dispute East and West Florida borders. In addition to ceding Florida, the agreement reached by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and Spanish minister Don Luis de Onís also defined the western limits of the Louisiana Purchase. This border extinguished any claims Spain had to the Oregon Country, strengthening U.S. claims to the region and to the Rocky Mountain West. In return, the pact temporarily secured the northernmost reaches of New Spain.

Texas (Moving West)



Mexico's successful independence from Spain in 1810 brought new challenges to U.S. expansion. To populate and economically develop the northern frontier of the new nation, Mexico used generous land grants to entice Americans into Texas, for which American immigrants agreed to become Mexican citizens and convert to Catholicism. These settlers clearly expected that the United States would soon annex Texas. Southerners, especially, pushed for annexation to expand the area practicing slavery.

The movement to join Texas to the U.S. gained serious momentum once John Tyler became President in 1841. Tyler's Secretary of State, Abel P. Upshur, began secret negotiations with Texas Minister to the U.S. Isaac Van Zandt in 1843. Upshur tragically died late in the discussions, but new Secretary of State John C. Calhoun successfully completed a treaty that was presented to the Senate for ratification in June 1844. It was overwhelmingly rejected, a victim of growing partisanship between the Democratic and Whig parties and the increasing volatility of the slavery issue: would Texas enter as a slave state or free state? Undeterred, Tyler issued an offer of annexation to Texas the day before handing the presidency over to James K. Polk, all but forcing Polk, a pro-expansionist, to take action once he took office. Following a series of political maneuvers, Polk signed a joint Congressional resolution that made Texas a state as of December 29, 1845. The territory gained included all of present-day Texas and portions of Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado, and Wyoming.

The Pacific Northwest



The growing expansionist mood of the nation drew on the emerging concept of Manifest Destiny, the idea that the United States was divinely ordained to become a continental nation. The rationale for Manifest Destiny was not simply for the sake of geographic expansion, but the belief that it would spread the benefits of liberty. With the annexation of Texas accomplished, Polk and the pro-expansionist Democratic Party began pushing for sole American occupancy of the Oregon Country. American missionaries arrived in the region in the 1830s, and in 1841 the Oregon Trail began bringing settlers to the Willamette Valley. The presence of permanent settlers bolstered American claims to the area. Great Britain, with only a precarious hold, seemed receptive to relinquishing at least part of the Oregon Country. Polk and his allies welcomed the diplomatic opportunity.

Initially, Polk engaged in a bit of deception in negotiations with Great Britain, seemingly pressing for all of Oregon up to the southern border of Russian Alaska. In reality, he sought the forty-ninth parallel as the international border, continuing the precedent set in the Treaty of 1818. Polk hoped overstating this desire would facilitate a compromise. More militant expansionists in his party, however, took Polk at his word and advocated war if necessary to acquire the entire Oregon Country. With a war with Mexico unfolding, the prospect of engaging in two wars simultaneously prompted Polk in July 1845 to instruct Secretary of State James Buchanan to respond to a

recent British request to settle the Oregon dispute. Negotiations were heated and even suspended as Buchanan and Polk, at least formally, continued to seek all of the contested area. Finally, in the spring of 1846, the British submitted a treaty ceding all of the Oregon Country south of the forty-ninth parallel, except for Vancouver Island. Polk directly forwarded the proposed treaty to the Senate, which ratified it unchanged. Polk's hardball policy was a success.

The Southwest



The annexation of Texas strained relations between the U.S. and its neighbor to the south. The U.S. adopted the former Texas republic's position that the Rio Grande River formed its southern border. Mexico contended the border

was the Nueces River, farther north, leaving a 125-mile wide strip of land in dispute. Mexico broke off diplomatic relations with the U.S. and prepared for war. Polk mobilized troops and sent John Slidell to Mexico City in an attempt to persuade Mexico to sell New Mexico and California, a concession that was unacceptable to Mexican officials and citizens. After American and Mexican forces clashed in the disputed area south of the Nueces in April 1846, Congress declared war.

From an American military perspective, the Mexican-American war unfolded rapidly and successfully. In little more than a year, U.S. troops controlled most of northern Mexico and occupied Mexico City. As General Winfield Scott advanced toward Mexico's capital, Polk assigned Nicholas Trist to accompany the troops with authorization to negotiate a peace treaty that would recognize the Rio Grande as the international border and relinquish highly desired New Mexico and California. Despite its military defeat, Mexico refused to accept such terms and a frustrated Polk recalled Trist. Fortunately, the diplomat ignored his order and finally fashioned an agreement with General José Joaquín de Herrera in February 1848.

With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Rio Grande was established as the border between the two nations and the U.S. acquired New Mexico and California—approximately 500,000 square miles of territory enveloping, eventually, all or parts of seven states (Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming)—a twenty percent increase in the nation's size. In return, Mexico received \$15 million and concessions that settled American citizens' claims against Mexico. Mexican nationals within the new boundaries became U.S. citizens. In Washington, the treaty received opposition from both anti-expansionist Whig Party members and a faction of the Democratic Party that believed all of Mexico should be seized as a result of the war. Polk censured Trist for disregarding his recall, but endorsed approval. The Senate ratified the pact on March 10.

Linking Texas and California



The barren southern landscape of the newly-acquired Mexican Cession attracted American interest after an 1849 railroad convention in Memphis advocated a southern transcontinental railroad linking Texas and San Diego.

James Gadsden, a South Carolina railroader, businessman, and staunch states' rights proponent, became the leading champion of this idea. He realized the increasing national importance of

California, especially after the 1849 gold rush and statehood in 1850, and wanted to assure the South was linked to the new far western state. After Franklin Pierce became President, Gadsden found an important ally in Secretary of War Jefferson Davis.

In May 1853, the pro-expansionist Pierce appointed Gadsden to negotiate with Mexico for new territory. The Mexican government was plagued by internal turmoil that complicated negotiations, but Gadsden eventually secured an agreement with Mexican President Santa Anna for 9000 square miles just south of the Mexican Cession for a cost of \$10 million. Ratification in the Senate was ensnared in the debate over the expansion of slavery in the new western territories, but the Gadsden Purchase was approved by both the U.S. and Mexico in early June. Sectional conflict and the Civil War stalled completion of a southern transcontinental railroad until 1881.

America, Coast to Coast



The Gadsden Purchase marked the culmination of an amazing process that created a continental nation. When the U.S. acquired Louisiana in 1803, few envisioned that Americans would be living on the Pacific coast within two generations. The expanding American frontier is usually attributed to transportation improvements, the rapidly growing population, and efforts of hearty homesteaders and risk-taking entrepreneurs. Less obvious is the role of diplomacy.

For all the contributions by Lewis and Clark, military explorers like Stephen F. Long, mountain men like Jim Bridger, the thousands who traveled over the Oregon Trail, and the flood of California gold seekers in shaping a nation, there first came men like James Monroe, Robert Livingston, Albert Gallatin, Richard Rush, John Quincy Adams, Abel P. Upshur, John C. Calhoun, James Buchanan, John Slidell, Nicholas Trist, and James Gadsden, as well as the presidential administrations they served. Their patience, skill, and negotiations to acquire new territories are why the building of a continental nation was as much a product of international relations as the heroic exploits of pioneers.

BILL BRYANS is Associate Professor of history at Oklahoma State University, where he teaches the introductory U.S. history survey, Oklahoma history, and directs a graduate program in public history. His doctoral work focused on the history of the American West.

EXTRA! | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "The Nation Expands," Annenberg Learner. Interactive exhibit showing U.S. expansion from 13 colonies to 50 states through wars, treaties, and land purchases. learner.org (search: *United States history map the nation expands*)
- Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State. Find biographies of U.S. Secretaries of State and history about U.S. foreign relations. Click on the *Milestones* tab to explore the historical events and resulting treaties rendered by U.S. negotiations for expanded territory. history.state.gov



The United Press fed news to more than eighty Latin American newspapers by the 1920s, expanding international communications and piquing Americans' curiosity about its neighbors to the South (Harris & Ewing, c. 1905-1945).

IMPERTINENT QUESTIONS

Internationalism against American Empire

By Alan McPherson • Images, Library of Congress

Why are we in Nicaragua, and what the Hell are we doing there?
—Will Rogers

Whether we talk about Iraq, Afghanistan, or the Islamic State, one of the more confusing aspects of U.S. military missions abroad today is how anti-U.S. resistance brings together multinational fighters who unite against the “infidels.” Solidarity is a powerful tool. One way of thinking about this is through the perspective of internationalism. The atrocities committed by the Islamic State, Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups cast a shadow on a far brighter social justice tradition of internationalism against American empire. In the Americas, that tradition contributed to ending years of oppressive occupation by U.S. forces.

In the first third of the twentieth century, the United States intervened militarily dozens of times in Latin America, especially in the small, poor nations of Central America and the Caribbean. Some reasons for these interventions—such as keeping imperial Germany out of the region—were completely different from today’s U.S. policies in the Middle East. Others—such as protecting U.S. investments, keeping sea lanes open, and promoting political stability—were eerily similar. In Nicaragua (1912-1933), Haiti (1915-1934), the Dominican Republic (1916-1924), and elsewhere, U.S. Marines stayed to govern, transforming short-term interventions into long-term occupations. In the process, they crushed political systems, destroyed the livelihoods of thousands of families, censored the press, and tortured many who protested.

Oklahoma’s Will Rogers, arguably the best-traveled person in the world at the time, was not alone in asking impertinent questions of this flourishing U.S. empire. Joining him were thousands of other anti-occupation activists. They were internationalists before the word existed, in that they sought to foster common interests and pursue social justice while minimizing the barriers posed by the nation-state. These men and women were highly educated and well-traveled and, as a consequence, they enjoyed friendships and kinships around the globe. These were citizens of the world.

Internationalism against the expansion of U.S. power in Latin America created a chain of resistance that began in the smallest, poorest countries and ended in Washington, D.C. In Latin American occupations, links forged in Santiago de Cuba, Tegucigalpa, Mexico City, New York, and elsewhere allowed those living under occupation to communicate their grievances to the Americas and beyond. Spurred by the growth of education, the war in Europe, improvements in communications and transportation, the progressive movement (to limit the worst excesses of capitalism and plutocracy), and, of course, the acquisition of U.S. overseas possessions such as the Philippines and Cuba, internationalist networks of writers, scholars, religious leaders, and government officials argued that the era of occupations should come to an end. Their immediate concerns were regional, focused on Latin America, but their ideology was global. Internationalist networks played a critical role, largely neglected by historians, in ending occupations.

Why and how did this internationalism arise?

New media contributed to fostering communication and solidarity in the Americas. By the 1920s, International Telephone

and Telegraph inaugurated the first radiotelephone communications between the United States and Latin America. United Press fed news to more than eighty Latin American papers and the Associated Press could send a cable to Latin American capitals in two to three minutes. Direct steamship lines to both coasts of South America departed from San Francisco and New York. And Pan American-Grace Airways inaugurated direct flights between New York and Buenos Aires and flew mail to and from Latin America.

The U.S. public also grew hungry for knowledge about Latin America. In 1910, a mere 5,000 U.S. high schoolers studied Spanish; a decade later, 260,000 did. Many U.S. citizens moved permanently

ENDING U.S. MILITARY OCCUPATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

to Mexico and further south as part of what scholar Joseph Freeman called “an exodus of bored and unhappy Americans south of the Rio Grande.”

There were also increasing numbers of Latin American students in the United States. In 1919, several private institutions created the Institute for International Education (IIE) and by 1930 almost 1,500 Latin Americans were studying in U.S. universities. The following year, the director of IIE found that South Americans increasingly traveled northward for education rather than to Europe, their traditional destination.

Faith-based organizations decried the ethical costs of U.S. military occupations. “We believe,” read one protest, “that moral and humanitarian considerations rather than purely political and financial should hold the dominant place in the determination of our relations to the Republic of Haiti and to the Dominican Republic.” Secular pacifists shared this vision and were perhaps more effective. *The Nation* judged that Dorothy Detzer of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom did more to end Nicaragua’s occupation than any other U.S. citizen.

THE FIRST LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRY TO BENEFIT FROM internationalism was the Dominican Republic, occupied since 1916. During and immediately after World War I, activism abroad was the only option for anti-occupation activists because of censorship in Santo Domingo. After the Marines forced French-educated Dominican President Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal from office in December 1916, he spent a few weeks in New York, then traveled to Washington where he presented the Department of State with a detailed proposal for withdrawal. Washington, focused on war in Europe, gave no response. The next stop was Santiago, Cuba, where Henríquez’s family and medical practice awaited.

The end of war in Europe signaled a renewed “Indo-Spanish campaign,” as Henríquez called it, to end U.S. occupations in the Caribbean. On Armistice Day 1918, Dominicans and Cubans formed several Pro-Santo Domingo Committees. These held concerts, lectures, and other entertainments, and Cuban papers advertised them vigorously. Leaders included respected Cubans such as historian Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring and rum magnate Emilio Bacardí, both of whom resisted the U.S. presence in their

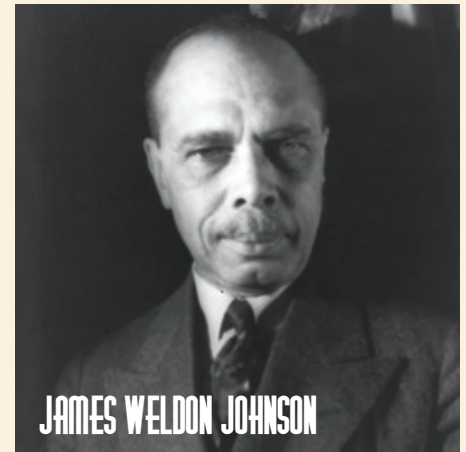
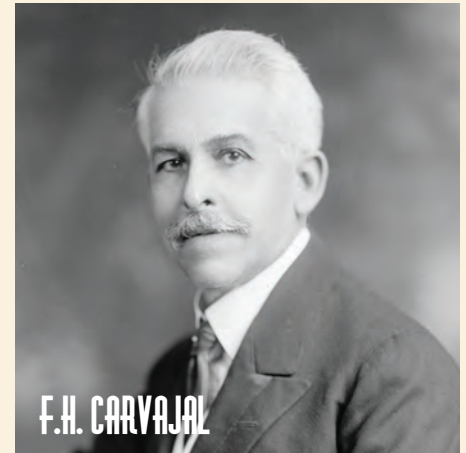
own country and considered themselves bound to Dominicans by “the powerful ties of blood, religion, and language.” Henríquez and his Cuban friends seized on Woodrow Wilson’s wartime promotion of self-determination in Europe to question the U.S. president’s scuttling of that very thing in the Americas.

In late July 1919, Henríquez founded his Dominican Nationalist Commission and it acted simultaneously in New York, Cuba, and Washington. “On the international scene there has now appeared a new actor: solidarity,” said Tulio Cestero, Henríquez’s deputy. “No nation, no people, can realize by itself its destiny.” To Cestero, “nationality” encompassed international identity. “We are citizens of twenty nations,” he said to other Latin Americans, “but in one language, with the same soul, we feel nationality.”

Latin American and European organizations responded favorably to Dominicans’ pan-Hispanic rhetoric and to postwar notions of international solidarity and self-government. U.S. officials often complained about the effectiveness of “the sympathetic underground advice from the Spanish speaking countries” in sustaining Dominican anti-occupation activity. U.S. friends of Dominicans were also crucial: they drew the attention of *The New York Times* and other newspapers to Dominican matters, organized a major rally in Carnegie Hall, and helped convince the Warren Harding presidential campaign to make a statement in favor of the Dominican Republic. A U.S. decision for withdrawal from the Dominican Republic came in mid-1922. Withdrawal itself followed in 1924.

In next-door Haiti, two U.S. internationalist institutions proved especially helpful. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) contributed most to making Haiti a U.S. cause. From 1915 on, the NAACP’s co-founder W. E. B. Du Bois, whose grandfather hailed from Haiti, editorialized against the occupation. In 1916 the NAACP hired its first black field secretary, the writer and former diplomat James Weldon Johnson. With a great-grandmother from Haiti, facility in Spanish and French, formative days in France, and diplomatic experience in Venezuela and Nicaragua, Johnson felt a kinship to Latin America. Johnson headed to Haiti in March 1920 and stayed two months. He talked to Marines who admitted, for instance, to abusing prisoners and scuttling democracy. Johnson’s resulting exposés in *The Crisis* and *The Nation* and his speeches got the attention of the U.S. public.

The Nation magazine, an anti-imperialist voice since the Spanish-American War, played perhaps as weighty a role. It was one of few U.S.



Impertinent voices in the push for internationalism in Latin America. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Dorothy Detzer of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom testified before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and was a key figure in the push to end U.S. military occupation of Nicaragua (Harris & Ewing Collection, 1939). Dominican President Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal led what he called an “Indo-Spanish Campaign” to compel U.S. president Woodrow Wilson to extend the principles of European self-determination to the Americas and end U.S. occupations in the Caribbean (Harris & Ewing Collection, c. 1905-1945). NAACP field secretary James Weldon Johnson, a writer and former diplomat, visited Haiti in 1920 to investigate reports of abuse, racism, and the imperialism of U.S. occupation policy (photo by Carl Van Vechten, 1932). Senator William Borah was a staunch internationalist and led resistance to U.S. interference in Latin American countries, going so far as to learn Spanish so he could speak directly with foreign diplomats and officials (Harris & Ewing Collection, 1937).

publications during World War I that spoke out against the Dominican intervention. It helped found the Haiti-Santo Domingo Independence Society and housed its headquarters in *The Nation*’s New York offices. In 1920, following the Johnson articles, some





Haitians founded a newspaper called *La Nation*, which reproduced articles from the New York magazine. When a U.S. Senate investigation of U.S. abuses took place in Haiti, *Nation* editors organized the presentation of the Haitian case. By 1920, largely because of the work of the NAACP and *The Nation*, the majority of U.S. publications swung from pro-occupation to anti-occupation.

U.S. MARINES WITHDREW FROM NICARAGUA IN 1925, BUT quickly returned to quell a civil war, only to face insurrectionist leader Augusto Sandino in 1927. Sandino had lived throughout Central America and Mexico and built a redoubtable internationalist network, writing: “Among us [Latin Americans] there should be no frontiers, and that all of us have the clear duty to be concerned with the fate of each of the Hispanic American nations, because all of us face the same danger before the colonizing and absorbing policy of the Yankee imperialists.” He then famously declared, “Sandino is Indo-Hispanic and he has no frontiers in Latin America.”

Sandino filled his ranks with sympathetic Latin Americans and other foreigners. He labeled the non-Nicaraguans among his top staff “the Latin American Legion” and called them “eloquent proof of the immense value of the ties of blood, language, and race that unite the Latin American peoples.” One former Sandinista tallied, just among Sandino’s officers, eleven Hondurans, six Salvadorans, three Guatemalans, three Mexicans, two Venezuelans, two Colombians, two Costa Ricans, one Peruvian, and one Dominican.

Arguably as useful to Sandino were the intellectuals and activists who formed a network of sympathizers in Honduras, Mexico, and New York City. Froylán Turcios was the Honduran owner and editor of *Ariel*, a magazine published twice monthly in Tegucigalpa. Sandino wrote to him repeatedly and made Turcios his official spokesperson. *Ariel* was “read over the whole of Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Costa Rica.” Editors throughout Latin America, Europe, and the United States reproduced its articles.

Mexico was the source of much of the funds and propaganda that bolstered Sandino. Mexico City was the only major city in Latin America that was both truly international and radically leftist at the same time. Sandino himself said in early 1928 that he received \$25,000 per month from a prominent Mexican friend. The Hands Off Nicaragua Committee and other organizations in Mexico City, all internationalist and interrelated, also raised funds—and a little hell. Hands Off Nicaragua organized the largest pro-Sandino rally ever as five thousand assembled in Mexico City, listened to various speakers, and raised \$1,000. It also printed flyers and sold postcards reproducing Sandino’s writings.

New York City became the third vital link in Sandino’s transnational network because, like Mexico City, it contained a multinational mass audience in an era where urban workers were far more radical than today. New York had a Latin American population of some 40,000 in 1927 and a daily, *La Prensa*, to service them. The few Sandino loyalists in town, such as Salomón de la Selva and journalist José Román, imbibed tequila and mescal with the likes of artist Diego Rivera, poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, novelist Sherwood Anderson, and social critic Waldo Frank.

U.S. policymakers eventually grasped the damage done to military occupations by internationalism. Through media and direct correspondence, internationalism made its way to the U.S. Congress.

The senator most enmeshed in internationalist resistance was William Borah who, as far back as 1913, opposed the U.S. presence in Nicaragua. He would learn Spanish to speak with Latin Americans.

Anti-occupation senators advanced riders and resolutions against all U.S. occupations. They demanded cuts or wholesale elimination of occupation budget lines. They also called for investigations into alleged atrocities or for the handover of executive documents. The key victory came in 1932 when the Senate cut off further funding for troops, making it impossible for the Marines to oversee a Nicaraguan vote.

In December 1928, former State Department official Sumner Welles said that military occupation “inevitably loses for the United States infinitely more, through the continental hostility which it provokes, through the fears and suspicions which it engenders, through the lasting resentment on the part of those who are personally injured by the occupying force, than it ever gains for the United States through the temporary enforcement of an artificial peace.” In a December 1933 speech, President Franklin Roosevelt explicitly repudiated “armed intervention” as a hemispheric policy.

By the 1930s, the Latin American internationalist network achieved its basic goal of ending U.S. military occupations. Never again would Washington occupy the region—at least unilaterally.

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EXTRA! | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- “The Truth about Haiti, An N.A.A.C.P Investigation,” James Weldon Johnson, *The Crisis*, Sept. 1920. Johnson’s article, reproduced on the *History Matters* website, notes the abuses and ultimate failure of American military occupation in Haiti. historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5018
- “Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Exiles: Mexico City in the 1920s,” Barry Carr, *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies*, Fall 2010. Discusses Mexico City as a hub for transnational revolutionaries, activists, and artists “bound together by membership in common networks of politics and sociability.” clas.berkeley.edu



Where We Find Ourselves: The GPS of Poetry

By Philip Metres • Art by Roger Disney

AUTHOR'S NOTE: In a globalized world, we are connected in ways that are both visible and invisible—through the Internet, through other people in this “country of immigrants,” through international travel, and through often-obscured economic, political, and military systems. Poetry can help us leap beyond thinking that humanity ends at the national border. In this essay, I’ll quote from my own work (*To See the Earth* and *Sand Opera*) and the work of other poets to show how poetry can help us not only imagine the lives of others but also to grow into an empathic understanding of our deep connectedness, to see that our fates are bound with others’.

A year ago, I found myself in the busiest airport in the world. People swirled in a hectic river past me as I sat awaiting a flight home. A young man sat down across the way. “Excuse me,” he said, “did you teach English at John Carroll?” He looked vaguely familiar, though thicker than the lanky, quiet boy who had slouched at the back of my class. He was an actuary now, which has something to do with predicting the future, but all he wanted to do was talk about the past.

“I still remember the poem,” he said. In the hurtle of human beings he recited the poem he’d memorized ten years before:

A guidance system of words and empathy

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow. . . .

As Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" dramatizes, we are all trying to get home. But the journey is where we find ourselves.

Recitation is ancient, crazy, and beautiful: to hold and share words by heart. To use your mouth, your whole body as instrument for the unfettered music of words. It hearkens back to when people carried words that reminded them of where they came from, where they were, and where they were going. Like the speaker in Frost's poem, we need to remind ourselves where we are and where we need to go. Stitched deep in us there is this need to remember. Even today, aboriginal peoples in Australia can navigate the land through songlines called dream tracks, a kind of poetic GPS: the song anchors the singer in the landscape and helps them figure out where to go.

I first fell in love with poetry as a lost soul in high school, reading "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T.S. Eliot. Reading Prufrock I wondered how the hell Eliot knew exactly what I was thinking—how I felt trapped in my own consciousness, hyperaware yet unable to act. How I wanted to be wakened from the nightmare of my own solipsism. I can still recall standing in a bookstore, reading Rainer Maria Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo" and getting to the final lines in which the poet exhorts: "You must change your life." At that age I harbored the notion that every poem, every film, every book could change my life. It seems a kind of craziness now, but I was experimenting with the idea of radical openness, what John Keats called Negative Capability, to live the questions (to echo Rilke) without "irritably reaching after fact and reason."

What am I trying to say? Reading and writing poetry made me feel less alone. Or, perhaps, that my loneliness was part of a great communion of being-with-others on their own journeys, throughout human history, all over the world. Writing poetry made me feel as if I were author and character of my own story. As my five-year-old daughter once said (which I would later repeat in a poem in *Sand Opera*):

Someone is telling the story of our life. I don't know who it is, but they are telling it. They will be telling it our whole life.

Writing is a way to ignite curiosity in myself and others, to create a space for listening to the words that will come. Call it Muse, call it Self-reliance, call it God—whatever you call it, call it: It is in the space of listening and visioning and envisioning—imagining—that the gift of poetry comes.

What brought me to poetry during those early years were the classic primal experiences: falling in love, grieving a death, and encountering otherness, particularly through travel. When my Grandpa died after years of suffering from Alzheimer's, only poetry could help me find a way of grieving that loss.

Matryoshka, Memory

Excerpt, from *To See the Earth*

Inside, where bay opened past bay
windows, Grandpa sat, rocking himself

like a mother and child. My mother recalled
our day to him—awakening to salt breezes,

the bleached white shoreline churches
against the almost painful glitter of breakers.

Unmoored from words, his face still spoke—
the waves stinging his eyes to tears.

Soon, in the wake of his brain, he will lose
the harbor, a daughter's face. His sea legs leave.

His hands will anchor to his lap. Soon, the world
will narrow to a bed, bread taken through a tube.

Mercy, mercy when he forgets, at last, to breathe.

To write that poem was to understand for the first time that it's sometimes a mercy to let go to death.

Traveling to Chichén Itzá and walking around the remnants of that once-great civilization, I was struck by the transience of all civilizations, the illusion of eternity that our present offers us. I thought back to Percy Blysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias" and was reminded how poetry could be bigger than personal effusions of the heart; it could be a testament to the liberation of art, of art outlasting tyranny: "Its sculptor well those passions read / Which yet survive."

In the pop poetry of the 1980s, worlds were opened to me and in me. From Peter Gabriel's "Biko" I learned about the fight against Apartheid in South Africa. From U2's "Sunday Bloody Sunday" I learned about the Troubles in Northern Ireland. From R.E.M. I learned about the burning of "Cuyahoga"—the exotic river just miles from where I now live in Cleveland.

Given that our contact with distant peoples has very real consequences, we need literature and arts that suture that emotional distance. We need poetry and literature that can span the distances that we already travel physically and virtually. Like the aboriginal people and their songlines, we need to imagine the ground where we find ourselves, a ground that is both physically local and metaphysically global.

After a year spent living in Russia and translating works by the great Russian poets Sergey Gandlevsky, Lev Rubinstein, and Arseny Tarkovsky, and later through *To See the Earth* and *Sand Opera*, I have found my work has constantly thrust me (and my readers) both inward into the soul and outward into the world—a double-movement that unsettles easy confidences about the boundaries of self and other.

Homefront/Removes

Excerpt, from *Sand Opera*

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You look at me / looking at you. How close the words *creation* and *cremation*. How in Hebrew, Adam is kin to *dust*, how the stars swam in Abraham's eyes, his profligate future. Uncountable windows of light, flashing open-eyed. The towers burned down into themselves—*just like a cigarette*, the poet laureate wanted to say, and did, on air, knowing that distance makes metaphors terrifying and the world less so, dividing the night from night. How to describe the twisted angles and planes? Picasso: *a picture is a sum of destructions*. The wind draws dust into us. Thus, E— who held klieg lights at Ground Zero carries the towers in lung roots. A kind of seeding, this seeing. We are windows, half-open, half-reflecting, trying to impersonate someone who can breathe.

Sand Opera began out of the vertigo of being named but unheard as an Arab American. After 9/11, Americans turned an ear to the voices of Arabs, though it has often been a fearful and selective listening. While Orientalism has long marred our understanding of the Middle East, it became worse after 9/11. Jack Shaheen's book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* found that only a handful of American films, out of one thousand that he analyzed, contained nuanced or positive representations of Arabs. Even director Errol Morris chose to interview only Americans for his film on the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in which Iraqi detainees were subjected to torture.

Sand Opera, as a kind of anti-American *Sniper*, tells the story of the post-9/11 wars from excluded points of view: the curator of the Iraq National Museum sharing slides of devastation to his cherished museum; two lovers exploring their bodies at a time when people in Iraq are identifying beloveds' bones in mass graves; a drone operator who isn't sure who he may be killing; the wife of a soldier entering the armored tank where her husband died; the traumatized voices of the abused at Abu Ghraib; an Arab-American child playing a Gulf War video game with his military father; an innocent Yemeni national tortured in a secret U.S. prison—voices that embody our common humanity and the dehumanization of war. *Sand Opera* is the sound of my listening. Sometimes it is the listening to my own experience, including a rather awkward international flight in the months after the Richard Reid shoe-bombing episode.

Homefront/Removes

Excerpt, from *Sand Opera*

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On the flight overseas, the rows dotted with isolatos, each an island of eyes. I was looking (for), looking (like). Ivan Zhdanov: *what outside is a cross, inside is a window*. A white woman across the aisle eyed me the entire flight. Her gaze widened and neck craned as I (her eyes) slowly removed (her eyes) my shoes. What could I say? Sometimes I'm afraid I'm carrying a bomb. That I'm a

sleeper and don't know when I'll awaken. I should have said: Identity isn't an end—it's a portal, a deportation from the country of mirrors, an inflection within a question, punctuation in the sentence of birth. I said nothing. Later, visiting a Quaker meeting, I sat among scattered chairs. On the shores of breathing, all eyes shut, I waded. Silence our rudder, silence our harbor.

I recall the way that woman looked at me and I still feel some anger and sadness; I am sad not only for her and the fear that made her think I was someone I am not, but also for my own inability to say anything, to be able to leap outside of the silencing of her gaze. It is the opposite of the silence of communion embodied by the Quaker meeting; I hope that the poem recovers some of that possibility.

Literature, poetry, and the arts have always been a place of the leap, the empathic leap into other selves and worlds to experience a bit of what it feels like to be someone else, human as ourselves. I think of Mohamedou Ould Slahi, still held in Guantánamo Prison, who has never been charged with a crime. This year his *Guantánamo Diary* was published. He was subjected to "enhanced interrogation" procedures (many of them designed to attack the psyche) that included constant exposure to light and sound, including, perversely, children's songs like the *Barney & Friends* and *Sesame Street* theme songs.

Hung Lyres

Excerpt, from *Sand Opera*

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In the cell of else / in the pitch-white
someone's hands shackled between ankles

in the nights & *sunny days keeping the clouds*
shaking the rib cage & no way

to keep the music from entering & breaking
the bodies hit / Let the bodies hit the / Barney

is a dinosaur / this is the touching without being
touched / this is the being without

silence / *from our imagination* / in wave upon
wave / in a shipping container & *I love you*

in a box of shock *you love me* / in a cemented
dream / *we're a happy family* /

with a great big hug and chains that leave no mark
Won't you say you love me too?

Critical thinking is an essential element of global citizenship; but critical thinking without imaginative *empathy* risks producing cynics—people who can criticize but have no basis of hope, no vision of our common humanity, our shared future on this fragile planet. We need, alongside critical thinking, an ethics of the imagination to engage our creativity, our empathy, our capacity to love.



© Roger Disney

At the heart of *Sand Opera* is the question of love; to love requires listening. I am reminded of this every time my children speak. Once, when she was five, my daughter became suddenly oracular, as I note in this final poem of “Hung Lyres.”

Hung Lyres

Excerpt, from *Sand Opera*

@

What does it mean, I say. She says, it means
to be quiet, just by yourself. She says, there’s

a treasure chest inside. You get to dig it out.
Somehow, it’s spring. Says, will it always

rain? In some countries, I say, they are
praying for rain. She asks, why do birds sing?

In the dream, my notebook dipped in water,
all the writing lost. Says, read the story again.

But which one? That which diverts the mind
is poetry. Says, you know those planes

that hit those buildings? Asks, why do birds sing?
When the storm ends, she stops, holds her hands

together, closes her eyes. What are you doing?
I’m praying for the dead worms. Says, listen:

The poetic imagination, far from being an escape or distraction from reality, can become a way of mapping ourselves back home, back to the child’s primal wonder—a GPS to steer us from the Scylla and Charybdis of fear and brutality toward a greater union with each other.

PHILIP METRES is professor of English at John Carroll University in Cleveland. He is the author and translator of numerous books, including *Sand Opera* (Alice James Books, 2015); *I Burned at the Feast: Selected Poems of Arseny Tarkovsky* (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2015); the chapbook *A Concordance of Leaves* (Diode, 2013); and *Behind the Lines: War Resistance Poetry on the American Homefront* (University of Iowa Press, 2007). His work has appeared widely in journals and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry*, and has garnered awards including: two NEA fellowships; the George W. Hunt, S.J. Prize; the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship; the Beatrice Hawley Award; and two Arab American Book Awards.

ROGER DISNEY resides in Tulsa and exhibits throughout North America. Influenced by the Impressionists and Expressionists, his work is diverse, including print and web design, illustration, custom furniture, photography, and oil paintings on stretched canvas. We featured his “slanted” side (pun intended) in our Winter 2014 issue on American Humor. rogerdisney.com

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- American Academy of Poets and The Poetry Foundation. Find poems and biographies of poets quoted in this article. poets.org and poetryfoundation.org
- *Guantánamo Diary*. Website for author/detainee Mohamedou Ould Slahi’s newly-published book. Includes images of the redacted, handwritten manuscript and an 8-minute video. guantanamo diary.com
- “The Songlines,” National Film & Sound Archive of Australia. Video on First Australians, whose clan groups linked across the continent through networks of song. dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/1566
- “John Keats and ‘Negative Capability,’” Stephen Hebron, British Library. Explores Keats’s concept of embracing uncertainty. bl.uk (search: *John Keats negative capability*)



THE U.S. AND THE U.N.

A Call for Multilateral Leadership

By Thomas G. Weiss

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the United Nations appears remarkably ill adapted to the times. The organization was founded on a forward-looking vision that was very much ahead of the curve in 1945, but is hardly apt for today, let alone tomorrow. Both World War I and II gave rise to groundbreaking efforts resulting in the first two generations of universal international organizations—the League of Nations and the United Nations. At the end of the Cold War we all heaved a collective sigh of relief as the East-West confrontation ended with a whimper, not a bang. As a result, however, this conflict did not lead to the creation of a “third generation” of multilateral institutions, which we desperately need.

Me-First International Decision-Making

All countries and the governments that represent them are loath to accept elements of overarching central authority and the inroads that it might make into their capacities to act autonomously. Noninterference and nonintervention in the internal affairs of states are firmly held and defended principles that are spelled out in no uncertain terms in Article 2 of the U.N. Charter. State sovereignty remains sacrosanct even as the reality of globalization, technological advances, and interdependence, along with a growing number of trans-boundary crises, should place planetary interests more squarely on the agenda.

Former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan coined the apt expression “problems without passports.” Many of the most intractable challenges facing humankind are transnational. That is, acid rain does not require a visa to move from one side of the American-Canadian border to the other, and neither do a host of looming threats, ranging from climate change, migration, and pandemics to terrorism, financial flows, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Effectively addressing any of these threats requires vigorous approaches and actions that are not unilateral, bilateral, or even multilateral, but rather global.

Ironically, the policy authority and resources for tackling global problems remain vested individually in the 193 member states

★★★
A strong
United Nations
requires a
committed
United States.

★★★

of the United Nations rather than collectively in the universal body. The fundamental disjuncture between the nature of a growing number of global threats and the current inadequate structures for international problem-solving and decision-making goes a long way toward explaining fitful, tactical, and short-term local responses to challenges that require sustained, strategic, and longer-term global thinking and action.

For all of its shortcomings and weaknesses, the United Nations—and its system of specialized agencies and programs—is the closest approximation that we have to a central institutional presence on the world stage. The U.N. urgently requires strengthening. We require a universal body to formulate global norms, make global law, and enforce global decisions. Anything less constitutes wishful thinking to escape from the complexities of daunting global challenges.

Washington and the United Nations

Seven decades after its establishment, the United Nations is perpetually in crisis, and part of the explanation is the ambivalence toward the world organization by its most important member, the United States. It was not that long ago that the Cold War's end supposedly signaled the “renaissance” of multilateralism when there was nothing that we could not do, which was followed by the Somali debacle and then Rwanda when there apparently was nothing that we could do. Ironically, the U.N. system itself reflects American values and design—a history of ups and downs that former professor and U.N. Assistant-Secretary-General Edward Luck calls “mixed messages.”

U.S. leadership and participation, or at least acquiescence, have long been prerequisites for significant change or initiatives at the United Nations. Conventional wisdom has it that the United States often has virtually no interest in multilateralism, and in election years, even less. While revitalizing the United Nations may strike readers not only as far-fetched but also as a peripheral priority in the midst of massive domestic problems and the 2016 presidential race, it should not be. Strobe Talbott, the president of the Brookings Institution and former deputy secretary of state, wrote that “mega-

threats can be held at bay in the crucial years immediately ahead only through multilateralism on a scale far beyond anything the world has achieved to date.” Such a change would require American leadership like that in evidence in the aftermath of World War II, when the United States boldly led the effort to construct a second generation of international organizations on the ashes of the first, the League of Nations.

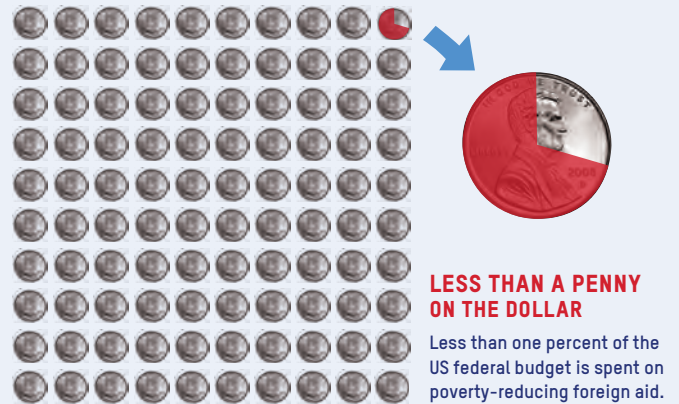
Expectations of the Obama presidency were as impossibly high internationally as domestically, including reviving U.S. multilateral leadership. His rhetorical contributions have been appreciable—his 2009 Cairo speech on tolerance, and numerous others, indicated the United States was rejoining the planet, prepared to reengage with both friends and foes, and considered multilateralism essential to U.S. foreign policy. Many of his first specific steps were in the right direction, including repaying American arrears to the U.N., funding programs for reproductive health, joining the Human Rights Council, moving ahead with nuclear arms reductions, and preparing to initial the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

In 2011, American participation in the air war against Libya and the effort to overthrow the brutish Qaddafi regime represents one of the rare successes of the administration’s foreign policy—it would have been even more impressive had the follow-on been more robust and created breathing space for a new regime as had been the case in Kosovo. Speaking in Brazil after Security Council resolution 1973 to establish a no-fly zone in Libyan airspace, Nobel laureate Obama saw no contradiction with his prize—one can favor peace but still authorize force to halt the “butchering” of civilians. The president’s decision provided no political advantage but prevented massacres that would have “stained the conscience of the world.” The much-scorned “leading from behind” actually meant complementing essential U.S. military assets with those from NATO partners backed by a U.N. decision and regional diplomatic support from the Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council, and African Union. Given the massive cuts in defense appropriations resulting from the 2013 U.S. budget sequestration, similar multilateral diplomatic and operational efforts undoubtedly will be required.

Before leaving office, it was already obvious to the bipartisan secretary of defense Robert Gates that “the United States cannot kill or capture its way to victory” and “is unlikely to repeat another Iraq or Afghanistan—that is, forced regime change followed by nation building under fire.” The sobering experiences of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the limits of U.S. military and diplomatic power, a realization that is akin to the equally obvious and mammoth shortcomings in Washington’s inability to go solo and address the ongoing economic and financial crisis.

Multilateralism must reemerge as a priority. In addition to the security arena, the global financial and economic meltdown should have made clearer what previous crises had not—namely the risks, problems, and costs of a global economy without adequate international institutions, democratic decision-making, or powers to bring order and ensure compliance with collective decisions. No less a towering commentator than Henry Kissinger, whose realist credentials are intact, wrote: “The financial collapse exposed the mirage. It made evident the absence of global institutions to cushion the shock and to reverse the trend.” After an initial expansion of the G-20 (the Group of 20 countries, expanded from the original G-8, that meet to encourage and ensure global financial stability) and decisions to provide additional reserves for the International Money Fund (IMF) with additional representation for development countries there and in the World Bank, business as usual has returned.

HOW MUCH DOES FOREIGN AID COST?



The US spent \$30.55 billion on official development assistance in 2012.

HOW MUCH DOES THE US GOVERNMENT SPEND ON DEVELOPMENT AID PER PERSON?



COMPARE THAT TO HOW MUCH AMERICANS SPEND ON:

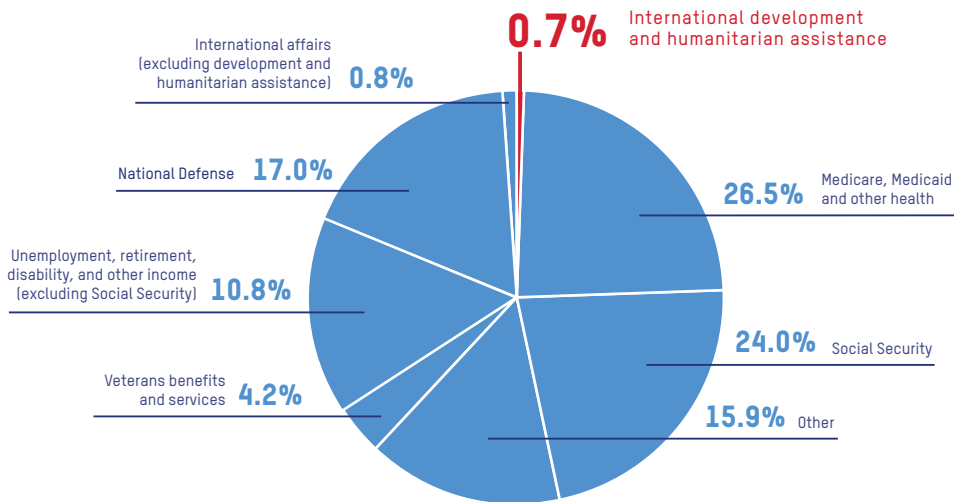


Courtesy OXFAM America: oxfamamerica.org/foreign-aid-101

Third-Generation Problem Solving

What other trans-boundary problems should be on the sensible priority list for this or any U.S. administration? Most informed Americans would acknowledge that, when it comes to spotting, warning, and managing international health hazards—for example, the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, the avian flu and Ebola more recently, and AIDS perennially—the World Health Organization is indispensable and unrivaled. Monitoring international crime statistics and the narcotics trade, policing nuclear power and

HOW MUCH DOES THE US GOVERNMENT SPEND ON DEVELOPMENT AID COMPARED TO THE REST OF THE FEDERAL BUDGET?



Courtesy OXFAM America: oxfamamerica.org/foreign-aid-101

human trafficking, and numerous other important global functions are all based within the U.N. system. Washington's short list for the United Nations would include not only post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also fighting terrorism (for instance, sharing information and monitoring money-laundering activities), confronting infectious diseases, pursuing environmental sustainability, monitoring human rights, providing humanitarian aid, addressing global poverty, rescheduling debt, and fostering trade.

But perhaps we can learn from history? In a book about the origins of American multilateralism, Council on Foreign Relations analyst Stewart Patrick makes a persuasive case: "The fundamental questions facing the 1940s generation confront us again today. As then, the United States remains by far the most powerful country in the world, but its contemporary security, political, and economic challenges are rarely amenable to unilateral action." While he sees promise in informal networks, or "good-enough global governance," such an informal institutional sprawl is hardly adequate.

The creation of a third generation of intergovernmental organizations should be moved toward the top of the American foreign policy agenda. The next generation would have world-class and independent executive leadership with more centralization and better funding. Like the European Union, community-wide calculations of interest for a substantial number of issues would replace those exclusively based on narrowly conceived national interests. While not a world government by any stretch of the imagination, the new generation of international institutions would nonetheless have elements of overarching authority and enhanced mechanisms for ensuring compliance—indeed, the World Trade Organization already has some.

Le machin is what Charles de Gaulle famously dubbed the United Nations, thereby dismissing international cooperation as frivolous in comparison to the red meat of international affairs, national interests and *Realpolitik*, or what goes by the label of *raison d'état* or Machiavellian self-interests. He conveniently ignored that

the formal birth of "the thing" was not the signing of the U.N. Charter in June 1945, but rather the adoption of the "Declaration by the United Nations" in Washington in January 1942. The twenty-six countries that defeated Fascism also anticipated the formal establishment of a world organization as an essential extension of their wartime commitments. These were not pie-in-the-sky utopians but pragmatic idealists. The U.N. system was not viewed as a liberal plaything to be tossed aside every time the going got tough, but rather a vital necessity for postwar order and prosperity.

One of the first persons recruited by the United Nations in 1946 after having fought in the war and undoubtedly the most widely respected commentator on the world organization, Sir Brian Urquhart, recalls the "remarkable generation of leaders and public servants" who were the U.S. leaders during and after World War II. And what was their orientation?

These pragmatic idealists were "more concerned about the future of humanity than the outcome of the next election; and they understood that finding solutions to postwar problems was much more important than being popular with one or another part of the American electorate."

That same informed but visionary realism is very much needed again.

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EXTRA! | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "Charting a Future for the United Nations," Bathsheba Crocker, address to the Council on Foreign Relations, March 12, 2015. Crocker reflects on the legacy of the U.N. as the institution marks its seventieth anniversary, noting that "transnational challenges are only growing in scope, scale, and variety." Video and written transcript available. cfr.org
- "The League of Nations and the United Nations," Charles Townshend. Discusses the creation of the League of Nations and its role in world affairs, transition to the modern-era United Nations, and current threats posed by terrorism. bbc.com

ISOLATING AMERICA

Wendy N. Whitman Cobb • Images, Library of Congress



Recently I took some of my students to a Model United Nations conference. Over three to four days, students take on the roles of U.N. representatives and attempt to work through some of the world's most intractable problems. They work 18-hour days, forgo meals, negotiate, and placate. They write resolutions addressing topics such as the use of unmanned drones, cyberattacks, human rights, and the fight against HIV/AIDS. In Security Council simulations they

The United Nations is but one example of how the United States is intricately involved in world affairs. Not only is the U.N. headquartered in New York, but the United States holds one of five vetoes on the Security Council and contributes twenty-two percent of the U.N. annual budget. U.S. involvement in the U.N. is a microcosm of U.S. involvement with the rest of the world: a whole lot of politics and a little bit of action. Critics are apprehensive about the U.S. funding the United Nations at such a high level when it

THE CONSEQUENCES OF WITHDRAWING FROM THE WORLD STAGE

argue about sanctions and peacekeeping operations. All the while we, their faculty advisors, must sit back and watch our students run the world.

Believe it or not, the students are actually quite successful, coming up with unique solutions that bring a majority of countries on board. In any given session, one can see Israel and Iran, or Pakistan and India negotiating agreements. Even though vetoes might be threatened or some resolutions voted down, these students demonstrate the successes that diplomacy might have if only given the chance.

Admittedly, Model U.N. simulations are not carbon copies of the world as we know it. Most of the students (at least in regional conferences) are Americans and have little conception of what it's like to live and grow up in an impoverished country. They do not face the same pressures that U.N. diplomats are under from their home governments. Their lives do not depend on success or lack of it.

receives little benefit and other countries do not contribute money in similar proportion. In fact, the United States has gone so far as to withhold its dues in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a response to UNESCO's decision to allow Palestine to become a Member State in the agency.

The controversy over U.S. actions in the U.N. and abroad is not a new one. From the beginning of America's history, prominent leaders have cautioned against getting too involved in world affairs. Although his Farewell Address is more often remembered for its caution against party politics, George Washington also warned against extensive relations with the rest of the world: "The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little political connection as possible." Washington's warning would always be difficult to abide by, evidenced within years by another war with England in 1812 and James Monroe's declaration in 1823

that the U.S. would intervene in any further European attempts to colonize the Western Hemisphere.

The rhetoric of isolationism would always seem greater than America's commitment to it; and yet we find modern politicians arguing that America should recede from world affairs. *What if* American leaders implemented a full policy of isolationism? What consequences would emerge? What effects would everyday Americans feel?

Defining Isolationism

Isolationism is a foreign policy directed to limiting interactions with the rest of the world, primarily in two policy areas: military/diplomatic relations and economics. While nearly always invoking military withdrawal, variability comes in the area of economics. It can be viewed along a continuum—extreme to “light”—depending on the degree of cooperation with the world at large.

In the most extreme version, the United States would bring home military troops stationed abroad, retire from world organizations such as the United Nations and NATO, reduce our diplomatic presence across the world (if not outright recalling ambassadors from their posts), end trade agreements, and shut down ports to international commerce. Needless to say, this type of isolationism would not only be dangerous to undertake but almost impossible to implement.

On the other end of the spectrum, isolationism “light” would withdraw the United States from diplomatic and military world affairs while remaining involved economically: troops would be recalled and treaties abandoned, but relationships that the U.S. and global economies rely on would be generally preserved.

We can also envision a third isolationism option (falling between these “extreme” and “light” versions) that combines military and diplomatic withdrawal with *some* economic retraction. This idea would be subjective and difficult to craft, to consider *how much* to pull back. Would it expand industrial manufacturing here at home and encourage exports but not imports? How connected would we be with global markets? Would we continue to be a part of free trade agreements such as NAFTA?

The answers to these questions come from isolationists themselves. Those who support isolationism argue from one or both of the following principles: economic protectionism (expanding industry and the home economy while limiting trade relations with the outside world) and non-interventionism (avoiding entanglements in the affairs of other countries). Both of these principles stem from the essential fear that if a country finds itself involved with other countries, its destiny and history will not be of its own making, but at the whims and desires of others.



W.P.A. Federal Art Project poster, Jack Riviotta, 1937

The Upside

For the purposes of our exercise, suppose that in the near future American politicians support middle-ground isolationism, whereby America withdraws militarily but continues limited economic engagement. The easiest results to imagine are those in the diplomatic and military sphere: reducing the amount of money the U.S. spends on defense would free it up for other purposes. According to National Priorities Project, in 2015 the U.S. will spend \$609 billion on the military; while this is less than the categories of Medicare and health-related spending (\$1 trillion) and Social Security and unemployment (\$1.28 trillion), it is still far more than other areas, including interest on the debt (\$229 billion), veterans' benefits (\$160 billion), and education (\$102 billion).

Imagine what we could do with nearly a trillion dollars in re-appropriated funding: bridges and roads could be repaired, airports and infrastructure projects could be completed, education spending could be doubled. We could also pay down U.S. debt to other countries, significantly aiding isolationists in the pursuit of economic disentanglement from the world.

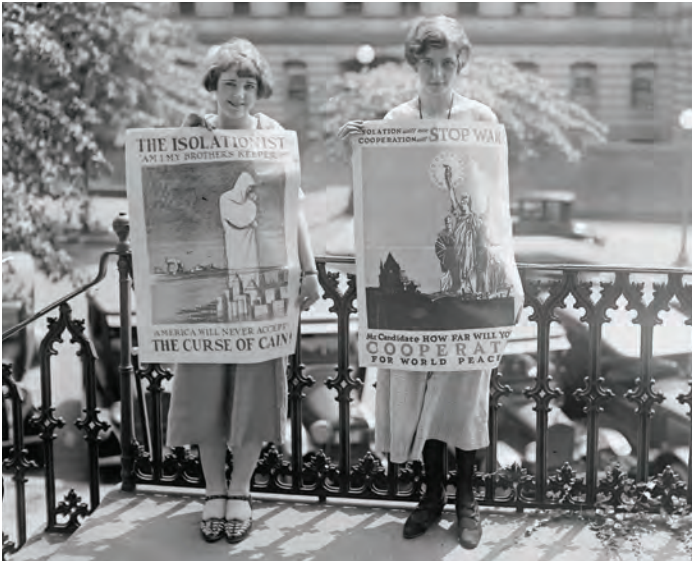
But what are the costs of such drastic moves, ending all U.S. military operations and recalling thousands of troops currently stationed overseas? Isolationists see only opportunity: our involvement in the conflicts of Afghanistan and Iraq would finally be over, expensive bases overseas would be eliminated, and American troops and their families would no longer endure painful separations. Strategic interests abroad would be better protected because we no longer antagonize countries with the placement of troops and weaponry in contested areas. Savings would also be realized by ending diplomatic missions, eliminating the need for ambassadors or funds to maintain and protect compounds in dangerous areas like Pakistan, Iraq, or Libya. These moves would drastically reduce the size and scope of the U.S. government, including the Department of Defense and the Department of State, two of the oldest bureaucracies in America.

To this point, implementing middle-ground isolationism seems rather easy and cost effective; prescriptions in military and diplomatic policy are easily understood and attained. It is in the *economic realm* where plans become more difficult. How much economic involvement with the rest of the world can U.S. isolationists stomach? In a middle-ground approach, lawmakers would adopt economic protectionism policies that encourage industry at home (via tax incentives or grants and loans) and punish industry abroad (with high tariffs that dissuade consumers from buying imported goods, perhaps placing them completely out of reach).

America would have to seriously rethink its relationship with the world banking industry. Almost certainly we would have to stop borrowing money from abroad and suspend direct foreign investment. If combined with savings from reduced military spending, such a strategy might be possible. If we applied the entire savings from defense, essentially \$600 billion, we could just about pay off debt owed to China, which in 2014 stood at \$1.27 trillion. Theoretically, with a booming economy at home, federal tax income would rise, allowing all debt to be paid off in due course.

On the Other Hand . . .

This depiction of isolationism is not all flowers and rainbows. In addition to the 1.3 million active duty troops currently employed by the United States, the Defense Department employs 3 million Americans and the State Department 18,000. If we reduced their numbers by 75 percent, we would suddenly find 2.26 million



A recurring theme of isolationism spans U.S. history. LEFT Following WWI, the overwhelming American sentiment was to reduce arms and find alternatives to war for settling international disputes. The National Council for Prevention of War (NCPW) distributed information and transported carloads of advocates to rally for peace at political party conventions. Shown here, Goldie Dunn and Louise Hiatt with posters stating: “Isolation will not Stop War, Cooperation will Stop War” (July 13, 1924). RIGHT Eight hundred protestors from Women Strike for Peace hold a demonstration near the U.N. building in New York City, calling for peace during the Cuban missile crisis (photo by Phil Stanziola, 1962).

Americans out of work. For comparison, currently 10.3 million Americans are unemployed. But it is not just unemployment that would take a hit. Military bases here and across the globe serve as economic boosts, bringing people, employment, and industry to often out-of-the-way places. The loss of such bases would impact Americans around the world.

Other U.S. strategic interests could also be harmed were we to suddenly disappear from the global scene. We might imagine the Islamic State (also known as ISIS and ISIL), in concert with other terrorist groups like Boko Haram, taking over significant territory in the Middle East and Africa. Given safe harbors from which to operate, terrorist actions against the U.S. or other countries might not be far behind.

There is also diplomatic damage to be considered. Historic allies such as France and the United Kingdom would no longer see the U.S. as a reliable partner. European countries might pursue different courses in their own foreign policies, such as obtaining nuclear weapons. An arms race could ensue, putting the global balance of power dangerously in peril—and that’s just in Europe.

Isolationism also has dangers economically. Upon announcing such a policy, it is likely that China and other holders of U.S. debt would call it in, causing great harm to U.S. monetary policy. Isolationism requires investment in the economy at home; to see the catch-22, one need only visit a Wal-Mart and examine where products are made to know that a significant percentage of consumer goods are not made in the U.S.A.

Access to natural resources would also be restricted. While natural gas and oil are the most obvious imports on which we rely, minerals such as silver, iron, gold, uranium, and lithium would also be hard to come by with few natural mines within U.S. territories.

Is It Possible?

While many politicians and voters claim to want to return to isolationism, the downsides of enacting such a policy would be all-encompassing and formidable at best. Commentators

have extolled its virtues through the twentieth century, but the reality is that America has never been truly isolationist. From the Barbary Wars in the early 1800s to the Spanish-American War and Philippine-American War at the turn of the twentieth century, and American involvement in various South American conflicts, the United States has always been *internationalist* at heart.

This internationalism has led to American involvement in conflicts as recent as Iraq and Afghanistan under the banner of promoting American ideals, ideals that have varied throughout American history. At the end of the day, America has balanced interventionism with a focus on conditions at home; in the wake of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, the reemergence of an isolationist stream in American politics is a typical American reaction to typical American actions.

WENDY N. WHITMAN COBB received her Ph.D. in political science from the University of Florida. She teaches political science at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma, and is author of the recent book *Unbroken Government: Success and the Illusion of Failure in Policymaking* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

EXTRA! | READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- “Global Challenges and U.S. National Security Strategy,” Henry A. Kissinger, statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Jan. 29, 2015. Notes that in the changing world order, the U.S. is positioned to “shape international affairs.” Kissinger further states: “The consequence of American disengagement is greater turmoil.” csis.org
- “Empire?” Global Policy Forum. Articles analyze how the U.S. has historically used economic, political, and military power in global relations. globalpolicy.org/empire



Being ME (Middle Eastern)

By Ibtisam Barakat

Art by Denise Duong

A Palestinian perspective

Francis Foster, the legendary children’s book editor for Random House and later for Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Macmillan, passed away last summer. She will always be part of my creative journey. When Francis and I talked about *Tasting the Sky*, my memoir about childhood and war in Palestine, she said, “The Middle East is always in the news, but that does not mean Americans know much about Middle Eastern people.” She recalled the Native American proverb that one cannot empathize with the journey of another without walking in their moccasins. “Can the two sides of a notebook stand for a pair of moccasins?” I mused. She took a book that was on her desk, opened it, and put it on the floor like a pair of shoes. We both laughed.

From this empathy-encompassed proverb, and the expansive light of Frances’ smiling blue eyes, I shall proceed by offering you my pair of moccasins. They are size ten medium, European size forty. They are sewn from memories and language and threaded with the string of a *rababah* instrument playing a Middle Eastern tune. I was often teased for the size of my feet, and I replied that I have big feet because I have a big journey.

I invite you to become me for the duration of this essay—take a walk in my moccasins as a person from the Middle East.

Identity

You are Palestinian, a woman, and a poet. Your language is Arabic. You write from right to left. Your religion is Islam. People in your culture pray to Allah, the Arabic word for God. They fast in Ramadan, a month in the Islamic calendar. Many of your female relatives wear the hijab. The color of your eyes is coffee brown. Your name means “a smile,” but few people outside the Middle East know that or can say your name easily. Your IQ is high. IQ stands for *I Question everything*.

War and Words

You are three years old when war happens in your country. Your mother has cooked a lentil-and-rice meal. You and your siblings are waiting for your father to come home so that you can eat together. But when he arrives, his first words are, “Hurry. Tell your mother the war has started!” In the chaos that follows, you are separated from your family for a night. The war ends with Israeli military occupation of your city and other Palestinian cities.

So you blame lentils for how you feel. Without knowing it, you take out all the anger of the Middle East on one tiny lentil seed to make it understand how powerless and small you feel. The mention of lentils makes you unhappy. Luckily, a lentil is resilient, rolling away on the plate like a tiny planet in its orbit.

During the war you learn to write your first letters of the alphabet. Language becomes your family. You are certain that if another war happens, the letters will not leave you behind, nor will you leave them. You play with language. The chalk first, then the pencil, becomes almost one of your fingers, an integral part of your hand. The lines on the page become a ladder. You can climb out of anything in the presence of a pen. The lines of the page are sometimes made of barbed wire. You write anyway.

Letters to Freedom

You wake up every day dreaming of *al-hurriyya*, freedom. You do not want to live in the Middle East under a crushing military occupation that denies you so much, including the freedom to say the name of your country—Palestine. Saying the word *Falasteen* in Arabic, or *Palestine* in English, or writing either down can lead to prison. The Israeli army changes the Palestinian names of many towns and streets around you. All Palestinian ways of life have become occupied, and that makes your need to say the word even more desperate, because you live under conditions that deny you to belong to yourself.

The minute you learn about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, you copy it by hand and carry it in your pocket, until your mother washes your pants with the paper inside; all is pulp. But you have memorized your rights and personalize the Declaration to sing it with wishful joy to yourself:

Tens of nations got together to agree,
that Ibtisam Barakat the girl from Falasteen,
has the right and has the left, has the up-yup-yup,
and someday will have the dawn to be free.

You turn the word *down* to *dawn* and feel grateful for what one letter can do.

As an avid pen pal, you write letters to many people—and to freedom. You write replies from freedom to you. She asks: *Are you willing to pay the price?* You write back in big letters: *Dear Freedom, Whatever you take, even if it were my soul. I do not want to die before knowing what real freedom means. Please teach me all about how to be free.*

Allah’s Promise

Sometimes, the news describes your people’s desire for a homeland as something objectionable. You fight to hold onto hope. You want to believe that nations will not allow the plight of your people to go on forever, but you are not certain. Each time you are in that cage of despair, you hear your father’s voice quoting teachings from the holy book of Islam, *The Qur’an*:

Fa inna ma’a al usri yusran
Inna ma’a al usri yusran

After every hardship comes ease.

Surely after every hardship comes ease.

(*Al-Insbirab* 94.6)

Allah emphasizes the promise by repeating it twice. Your dad says that Allah is to be offered gratitude for the good—and for the pain and suffering. Without despair, he explains, a person forgets that people are limited; the spiritual journey is where answers are found. He makes despair sound like a gift.

“But how can one be thankful for suffering, Dad?” you ask impatiently. “Nothing meaningful ever happened without overcoming

Table of Continents

Ibtisam Barakat

to Naomi Shihab Nye

The war broke me,
gave me a map of myself
like that of the continents of the planet –
separate . . .
calling each other foreign . . .
Arab identity, woman identity,
refugee, Muslim, immigrant, poor,
even beautiful . . .
identities . . . dent after dent . . .
the water separating my continents is not tears . . .
the sharks devouring my desires are not fish . . .
they are feelings with dropped jaws
hungry for the ordinary . . . not finding it . . .

water is wasted time . . .
water is wasted waves at good-byes
water is the sweat of crossing from here to there,
from there to there . . .
and from here to hearing . . .
I embrace my continents strongly . . .
I say if Atlas could carry the globe,
I can carry myself . . .
I embrace my world, hard
H and *Ard* . . . hard!
to push the continents closer together
but they stay far . . .
I think it is the gravity of the condition . . .
or maybe as a female facing the aftermath of war
I do not have enough upper-body strength . . .
to give the world a hug with my arms
after the armies were here . . .

each continent now has a climate,
a language, animals,
a shape in the distance, and a culture . . .
only poems are the native trees
on which birds put nests and eggs and write songs,
and only the migrant birds know that
all the continents are equally home . . .
so I feed the birds in the South
I feed them in the North . . .
I feed them wherever they sing of hunger for self
and of fear of flight . . . and fight,
and of frozen weather in the heart . . .
every season I count them as they return
to see if any had died along the journey
and to say hello to the new ones . . .
every spring, I count their feathers made of faith . . .
I dream of having all people on the planet
help me embrace the globe from all sides
and push the world back together

as one table – of continents . . .
and we sit around it and eat . . .
break bread, chains, barriers, and silences –
not worlds, not hearts, not meaning, not connections –
and tell stories and remember that love
can remind a stone that someday in the past
it was soft like muscles and skin tissue –
it can also remind the raging water that it was
only a drop of rain on the eyelashes
of a smiling child . . .
who loves to jump in puddles and
puts his tongue out to catch a drop of rain.

From the ongoing "Poetry Diary of a Palestinian Woman" and first published in *World Literature Today*. Bilingual note: The word *Ard* in Arabic means "land."

a hardship," he says, "not a child walking, not a mother giving birth, not a people becoming free." He advises that you remember this word *yusran*, ease. So you repeat it to yourself like a mantra. But you cannot wait; panic invades all aspects of your life. When an opportunity opens, you leave for America.

Ameri-can

On the nineteenth anniversary of the Six-Day War, the event that overwhelmed your childhood, you see the Statue of Liberty for the first time from the plane window. She is a woman! She has what looks like a book in her hand. *Al-ḥamdu Lillāh!* you say to yourself. *Thanks be to Allah; she must love reading!* She raises a torch and you see it as a symbol, a big pencil burning with desire for new knowledge.

A fellow passenger explains that the torch is held up so that immigrants can find their way to the shore. You hide your eyes and weep thinking that she is there to welcome you too. You, the one

who has never felt truly safe or welcome as a Palestinian anywhere on Earth all of your life, not even in your mother's lap because your mother herself never felt safe. If you could embrace the Statue of Liberty, offer her a chair to rest while you carry her book and torch, as long as she desired, you would. The first thing you do in New York is buy a miniature statue and put it in your pocket. It is your first American passport.

You think of the word *American*, which you hope to become someday. American ends with *can*. You also see the *Am* in the beginning of American and instantly turn your name to Ibtisamerican. Now you can do so much that you could not do before. As a Palestinian you come from a people obsessed with education as much as they are obsessed with liberation, so you know that you must do everything you can to enroll in graduate studies. The voices of your people are crammed in your heart, all waiting for you to breathe out and tell their stories.



Becoming Visible

You study journalism because you know it is a field where you can interview strangers and they will answer your questions. With the tools of this profession, you can find information about your new home and learn how far the *can* of American may reach. The invisibility, the fear of being shot at or harmed for resisting subjugation is reversed. You become visible. And there is democracy. It rests on freedom of speech, you are assured by many. You must learn a new language of responsibility, so you begin to conjugate new verbs: I decide. He chooses. They initiate. She leads. We vote. We have rights.

Still, it is a jungle of new experiences. Your conflicted realities are like predators that devour much of your day and night. The fireworks of the Fourth of July send you hiding under your bed with images of war. Stylish army boots in shop fronts unleash hours of trauma. A helicopter transporting someone to a hospital takes you back to where helicopters flew to drop bombs.

UN-related

You find that many people have never met a Palestinian, never knew that Palestinians have a story. They don't know that Palestinians were forced into diaspora to create the state of Israel on Palestinian lands. You explain that great numbers of Palestinians now live in refugee camps rented with assistance from the United Nations and its largest agency dedicated to this one uprooted people, the United Nations Refugee Works Agency. Without the UN, you would not have had the chance to go to school.

If a person's tears could run out, you would have run out of tears a long time ago on this journey to freedom. Because they have never lived under occupation, most Americans tell you that they cannot relate to what you say. Some call your people terrorists. "What?" you ask. "Have you seen our lives? We are prisoners in our home." You begin to expect discrimination from people with limited views of humanity and little knowledge of history, those who do

not seek a broader perspective. You expect discrimination like you expect harsh winters in Missouri: one wears the right clothes and survives. Some insist that the word *Palestine* is controversial; others feel your sorrow, whisper that England considered George Washington a terrorist. You thank them for their empathy.

Over time, many of your Middle Eastern friends change their names to sound Italian or Greek or American. But you cannot do so. To change your name would be comparable to death. You would no longer recognize yourself. You could not say Palestine growing up and now you would not be able to say Ibtisam! *No*, a big shout from the depth of your soul declares to you, *Ibtisam I am, green cheese and lamb. Dr. Seuss can eat ham, but I am Muslim.*

Hardship

Your journalism education proves a big *yusran*—the word your dad emphasized, the word promised by Allah as the twin of all hardships. You seek friendships with people from varied backgrounds: Catholics, Protestants, and Mormons. They too have stories of war and displacement and have suffered for religious beliefs. You hear about the legacies of slavery from African Americans, and the astonishing losses on the Trail of Tears from Native Americans. You speak with Italians, Mexicans, Irish, Asians, and others and they tell you about their history outside and inside America. The stories repeat one thing: there is a Trail of Fear we create for one another in all places on Earth. Freedom is often defined as freedom *from* others, not freedom *with* others.

You want to know why the Jews of Israel, who wanted freedom and have suffered much, put your people through captivity and exploitation in the name of God or in the name of their suffering. So you speak with Jews. You learn about the Holocaust and that Palestine mainly was given away by European nations as part of reparations. You hear a huge range of views. Your circle of understanding continually widens. You learn that there are some Jews who believe Israel has the right to displace Palestinians, and others who distance themselves from Israel and want to see Palestine and the Palestinians free. Still you ask: *Is the pain of millions erased by a treaty, a signature on a paper?* At times, you think that French philosopher Sartre was right to declare, “Hell is other people.” But you also know that *help*, much help is other people.

History that you memorized in school but never understood comes into focus: Britain, Italy, Portugal, Russia, and other powerful countries around the world, all violently occupying vast lands and peoples, drawing random lines to divide groups, leaving generations of trauma behind, before being forced to leave. You wonder: *What nations narrate the true violence of their history?* To you, it seems that the violence of the privileged is classified differently than the violence of the non-privileged.

You now see that the Judeo-Christian tradition is actually Judeo-Christian-Islamic, but Islam is being excluded. A hundred years ago, Judaism was the target of exclusion. The current attempts at exclusion of Islam are no less violent than previous attempts at excluding Judaism.

Ease

Gradually, you no longer feel alone and different as a Middle Eastern person. And you realize that there is nothing inherently wrong with the Middle East in the way many media point to that region as though everything is right with the rest of the world. It is simply a ravaged place acting ravaged. It is an injured person bleeding, a body beaten for decades, if not centuries, outraged and violent. The Middle East is shouting for help. Most of what it receives, however, is weapons and hostile stereotypes.

You see that there is something wounded in humanity as a collective, that people create massive suffering for one another. Nations do to other nations what was done to them. Families break under wars. Parents try to cope, but without help they often fail; they pass on the legacies of war to their children.

You ask without expecting answers: How can we heal generations of damage and centuries of emotional wounds? As more pieces of history are considered, you at least ask clearer questions. You see destructive conditions that must change, narrow perspectives that must open.

You close your eyes and see planet Earth as the Apollo astronauts saw it: “Earth Rising,” every inch of it loved as home.

Lentils Three Ways

You never stop working on healing the hurts of war in your life. You even succeed in eating lentils. It takes four decades to heal that taste, but you celebrate. You reshape the meaning of lentils by creating artwork with the seeds. You create hummus from them. At some point, you simply mix them with chocolate and ice cream.

You have heard that soldiers practice the command to kill-kill-kill to triumph over enemies. You see that to triumph in humanity you must tell-tell-tell, and you hope that the telling will help all of us heal-heal-heal. You now call those seeds *len-tells*.

You and ME

We’ve come to the end of our walk, so I’ll take back my moccasins. I wish you happy travels and will leave you *Fee Aman Allah*, in the gracious protection of God. I hope that being Middle Eastern (ME) for the space of this reading has enriched your experience, helped you see a bigger picture—one that includes *everyone* in the family of humanity.

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Detail, *Solitaire*

© Janice Mathews-Gordon

THE STRANGER

By James McGirk

Art by Janice Mathews-Gordon

The Delhi Metropolitan Area is home to roughly twenty million. It's a riverine city; the Yamuna, a sluggish tributary of the Ganges, oozes through. Delhi has existed for over a thousand years in various incarnations. The skyline is a potpourri: onion domes and crumbling crenulations clash with neoclassical British grandeur and an occasional bit of modernity like the pink concrete pinwheel built for the 1982 Asia Games or an antennae-bristled office block rumbling with air conditioners. It's a different kind of compression than a vertical city like Manhattan

ASSEMBLING AMERICAN IDENTITY FROM AFAR

or Hong Kong. More like a stockyard, crowded thick, reeking of humanity and cooking smells and burning plastic, particularly the mega-slums seen from the elevated ring roads circling the city: from a distance, concealed in the bluish haze from cooking fires and burning garbage, they look empty, like expanses of sun-baked mud, until a closer look reveals seams teeming with people, fresh arrivals to the city, adventure seekers and refugees who scabble a living begging and sifting waste for valuable scraps.

Which was not so different than how I assembled my own identity as an American teenager growing up in India. For seven years I orbited New Delhi's city-circumnavigating ring roads in the backseat of a Maruti Suzuki Gypsy 4x4. Like most capital cities, Delhi's roads are eternally congested; in my day—the 1990s—this flow consisted of an anachronistic hodgepodge of ox carts and rusting bicycles and motorized trikes and Vespa scooters, Leyland lorries and locally-manufactured Morris Oxfords (called Hindustan Ambassadors), old-fashioned autos with bulbous headlamps, a scowling grill, and more often than not a pair of fluttering flags on the bonnet denoting the occupant's status as a brigadier general or Member of Parliament or other muckety-muck. Those ancient cars sent me into fugues of sorrow. I pined for the West. That the rare foreign makes I did see wore bright blue *corps diplomatique* license plates only reinforced that I was trapped in a different, slower clock cycle than what I imagined my teenaged, techno-savvy U.S. peers living in. I longed to escape and to return to a homeland I had never known.

I grew up as a “third culture kid,” an atrocious term borrowed from the international relocation industry. My folks were foreign correspondents, which meant we didn’t belong to a diplomatic mission or other pre-fab expatriate community. I was born in London, received a “Certificate of American Birth Abroad,” and grew up in Spain and India without ever living in the United States. Yet, despite never having lived there, to our Indian hosts I was American above all else and thus the focus of intense anxieties and desires.

I suspect that the Internet and the outsourcing of minor customer service to India by American multinationals has eroded much of the West’s mystique, but while I lived there—between 1990 and 1997—it was a kind of collective madness, one I was particularly afflicted with as I tried my damndest to seem above it all. The root of it was India’s controlled economy. Foreign goods were tariffed at a high rate to protect India’s manufacturers, which meant foreign goods were prohibitively expensive and thus deeply desirable. The insulated economy kept people from earning as much as they could elsewhere, so many of India’s well-educated, English-speaking middle and upper classes were desperate to emigrate. They called it the Brain Drain. Locals queued for days outside the American Embassy for a chance at a work visa, while the local papers’ opinion pages were filled with rants about America’s arrogant atomic imperialism and the CIA’s sinister machinations with India’s hated rival Pakistan.

At the American Embassy School we learned about slavery and the Indian Removal Act, but I never got the sense of how riven the United States really was by race and inequality until I actually lived there. From a distance, all Americans seem rich and culturally homogenous and comfortable. Outside the States, America looks like a monolith. You can’t avoid transmission of American culture, yet the picture is garbled, there’s no sense of how granular it really is. That said, although outsiders see America as a unified front, they each manifest their own version of it.

In my case, the Hollywood glamour (which came in the form of bootlegged action movies handcammed in Hong Kong cinemas and smuggled in) and post-Cold War martial majesty of the 1990s were joined by a wobbly-card-table, church-bake-sale, homebrewed-respect-for-the-stars-and-stripes propaganda. Growing up in London, my mom was concerned I was becoming too British, so she signed me up for Cub Scouts at the Royal Oaks Air Force Base outside of Madrid. I kept at it in India, where I joined a Boy Scout troop attached to the American Embassy. The Americans I met through scouting all belonged to close-knit communities which gave them an *esprit d’corps* even stronger than the scouts, plus they were clean-cut and good at things like camping and repairing motors, which my father and the decadent Europeans and upper-crust Indians my folks were friends with (mostly journalists, photographers, and artists) never were. Only recently have I realized how artificial that sense of community I admired and felt estranged from really was. New Delhi was considered hard duty and embassy personnel mostly lived on the compound, a transplanted suburb complete with white picket fences and stores selling American goodies: a Boeing 727 arrived every month, loaded with delicacies like beef jerky and Pringles and Cheerios.

Confoundingly, outside of the Embassy’s bubble, I was treated as a living avatar of America. In urbane settings I’d be cornered and peppered with questions about life in the West—“What is your opinion of Cincinnati?” In the countryside we’d be mobbed by villagers who

wanted to touch our skin or rake fingers through our hair. Even Delhi’s ferocious hawkers would be overcome with a kind of lust for Western paraphernalia. I remember a souvenir seller once offering to trade me his entire inventory for a Ferrari t-shirt I was wearing. But other than an occasional, brief summer vacation to the States, my homeland remained as mysterious to me as it was to our hosts.

Because my being American was such an integral part of how I was perceived and treated, I felt I had to come up with a coherent Americanness I could draw from. One that was better than the embassy folks were getting. The few fragments of Americana that filtered through India’s tariffs were estranged from their original context and reinterpreted through Indian corporations for domestic consumption, and thus had a kind of uncanny, creepy weirdness to them: like a distorted Donald Duck head leering down from a billboard or Michael Jackson’s “Beat it” performed off-tempo by locals on television. I took elements that appealed to me—science fiction novels, advertisements, my experiences as a Boy Scout and the American Embassy—and tried to assemble my own image of America.

I was conscious of how important belonging to a subculture was to American youth, so I figured this would be the most fruitful area for me to lodge myself; however, music, the foundation of most occidental youth subculture, was difficult to find. Only the biggest Western bands were available and even they were a few years out of date (in the mid-1990s you might find Vanilla Ice but not The Cure or Nirvana). So I looked elsewhere.

My father signed up for what turned out to be the thirty-third domestic Internet connection in New Delhi. It was text-only, so navigation was difficult, but I soon found links to what are now known as textfiles, silly pseudo-subversive drabs of information about sabotage and bomb-making and psychoactive chemicals. Then a friend of mine, the son of a British United Nations Development Programme worker, gave me a copy of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984) and I became so obsessed with its aesthetic—a kind of nerd noir called cyberpunk—that I read the book more than forty times, basically trying to brainwash myself into living between the covers. The book is about cyberspace (it’s credited with coining the term), layered with the author’s knack for technological points of view. So it filled the gaps between the weird texts I was reading online.

I decided that dressing like a hacker in William Gibson’s novel was what cool teenagers in the States were probably up to, and began exploring New Delhi’s open-air medical and technology bazaars and decorating my sneakers and jeans with circuit board schematics. I grew my hair long and wore a tool belt weighed down with surgical instruments and salted my conversations with barely-understood computer jargon. After a while the book and the stream of Internet technoise became a palimpsest: high-tech nonsense washed over everything, like a trail of purple phosphanes when you look away from a bright white light. I imagined that the United States would be a technological utopia hardwired into the Internet.

My creation was horribly garbled. When I finally moved “home” for college, I couldn’t find anyone who cared about the things I was thinking about. I dropped out of college. I moved in with my hoarder grandparents in Southern California and became so anxious I couldn’t focus on a television show let alone school. My enthusiasm for cyber noir was snuffed by loneliness and nothing took its place. I was like the malevolent HAL computer at the end

of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, my mind slowing and degrading as my circuit boards were torn out.

For years I couldn't speak without stammering. Part of it was the unbearable realization that my homeland was not at all what I thought it would be and part of it was because I hadn't learned any coping skills growing up in India: paying bills, credit scores, applying for jobs, laundry, fitting into an office environment were totally bizarre experiences (and continue to be). In India, perhaps as a legacy of the caste system and the British Raj's obsession with class, social class and decorum are at the surface of every interaction, while in the States these things are more of a background murmur, yet are no less important. Growing up with domestic servants didn't much help either. Eventually a friend convinced me to cut my hair and I stopped jabbering about cognition and consciousness and started dating and moved to New York City and slowly became a somewhat normal human being.

Until recently, that is. Twenty years later, I catch glimpses of India in Oklahoma. Walking through the Tahlequah Wal-Mart déjà vu will wash over me. It's like hearing a discordant but beautiful symphony, the aisles filled with wood pallets and workers in stained blue shirts and families pushing past each other. Chaos barely contained. You sense logical systems generating peculiar outcomes: shopping carts inexplicably reversed, salamis left beside sweat socks, cheeses glued together from the heat. And there's something about the fabrics, the acres of bright colors on cheap Chinese synthetics, the smell of the dye, the glint of pot-metal in housewares, the lack of windows reminds me of an underground bazaar we'd frequent. Delhi's shopping was always either totally luxe (lush carpets, gilt fixtures, veiny marble, and ice-cold air conditioning in the brass-polish-scented bowels of a five-star hotel) or else barebones and bottom-line cheap. There were no liminal places, no equivalent of SuperTarget where the shopping experience was partially mediated through design and the prices slightly higher to compensate.

Futurist philosopher Venkatesh Rao describes America's economy as coming to resemble a Whole Foods, where a vast industrial backend of logistics and industrial farms support a frontend (web-speak for the part of a website a consumer sees) illusion of a farmer's market, his point being that the more expensive the store, the more money is spent to keep logistics hidden and the consumer interface aesthetically appealing. To him, coastal cities like New York and San Francisco are illusionary oases pumping out marketing and metaphors meant to ease consumption, supporting and supported by a continent's worth of machinery. Which is what I expected to find in the States, outside of these cities. I thought everything would be clean and orderly and humming with electricity and quiet purpose. But it isn't like that at all. It's as wonderful and strange as the India I left behind.

I've figured out where this residual weirdness is coming from. Living in a small town in Oklahoma, I feel like an expat all over again. My wife, Amy McGirk, makes dramatic abstract paintings and looks the part of the sophisticated painter. We stick out in our small town and feel like outsiders in a way we never did in New York City. But it's not that I feel like a foreigner again so much as I feel that slight estrangement that I did around the embassy personnel: American citizen but still a stranger.

But anymore, I don't mind.

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