

Introduction: American Anger

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The American author John Steinbeck once wrote: “[I]n the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage” (349). Today, these words ring as true as they did in the Depression-era America that they describe. Indeed, if the wrath or anger of the Great Depression stemmed from a lack of having, then the American Anger that we see today can, perhaps, be said to stem from a society of excess: too much ‘fake news,’ too many tweets, and too much confusion as to where the ideal that was the American dream has departed to. Looking at contemporary representations of and discourses within American society, be they fictional or nonfictional, reveals a world in which frustrations in the mind of the people in regard to politics, the economy, and their own culture seem to be growing rampant. Accordingly, in reading this year’s submissions for *aspeers*, it became apparent that anger permeates almost all of the contributions we received. The grapes of wrath were ripe for the picking, and many of the articles that constitute this issue explore the notion of American Anger in depth.

How does anger manifest itself, what does it mobilize in a society, how does it get expressed throughout history and in literature, culture, or politics—and, importantly, what makes it specifically American? These were some of the questions that the contributors to the thematic section of the twelfth issue of *aspeers* found themselves confronted with. Although the emotion of anger is generally perceived with negative connotations, we, as editors, were delighted to receive so many articles that insightfully used anger as a motivator in their work and looked for different understandings and expressions that can all be meaningfully related to

anger. In this sense, some of these contributions pick up the notion that anger seems to be a general sentiment pervading conversations in the contemporary US, particularly in the political sphere. Others, however, discuss how anger and related emotions have been dominating American society in myriad ways, at times in very different faces or guises. Accordingly, since the interpretation of this sentiment is so far-reaching and diverse, American studies' tradition to tackle its objects of inquiry from a multipronged and interdisciplinary vantage point is especially suited to arriving at a more nuanced understanding of American Anger. Indeed, this year's submissions are very much in line with this interdisciplinary and transnational orientation of American studies, exploring innovative ways to discuss racism, citizenship, and social justice; highlighting questions of gender and intersexuality; and rereading canonical texts according to current economical and political interpretations.

In fact, through a variety of approaches, all of our academic contributions add to an investigation of different facets of anger in one way or another, some more overtly than others. Specifically, the phenomenon of trolling, which might immediately come to mind when thinking about American Anger in contemporary US politics, is examined in depth in "Truth-Telling and Trolls," which looks at how it is used and abused by the masses from anonymous keyboard warriors to the highest office of the land. It is a mode of communication that is both strategic and driven by response when viewed through the prism of political discourse. Arguing, instead, from a historical angle, "Angels and Anti-Pornography Feminists" uncovers how social anger manifested itself in the formation of two ostensibly different but intrinsically connected social-reform groups, the Guardian Angels and Women Against Pornography, overall highlighting the potential of anger to serve as a catalyst of protest and reform. On a very different political level, discussions in the vein of postcolonialism about historical (and contemporary) imperialism are becoming increasingly important on both sides of the Atlantic, as extrapolated in this issue through an article on American Samoa titled "The Paradox of Liminality." Indeed, the treatment of the formerly colonized is a topic that resonates throughout most of our thematic submissions this year. An innovative approach to Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* told through the lens of Sylvia Wynter's theory of the hybrid human makes the reader pause and reflect on the very nature of colonialism itself.

In addition to these four thematic contributions, two further articles in this issue relate to anger more implicitly and highlight the disciplinary and methodological variety of American studies scholarship on the graduate level. “Of Pregnant Kings and Manly Landladies” presents a comprehensive examination of the language and sexuality expressed in the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* through a reinterpretation of intersex. Such productive challenges to established norms and topics are also visible in “I’m Not a Real Person Yet,” in which the reader is privy to a questioning of the notions of classification and genre through the film *Frances Ha*. Overall, the different inquiries and approaches in this issue probe into a multitude of understandings of ‘America,’ and many of them make these aspects visible and readable particularly through their engagement with American Anger. Throughout these writings, anger seems to elude one static definition or understanding, instead proving its analytic productivity exactly through its adaptability and the many other sentiments it is attached to.

ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The six academic contributions in the twelfth issue of *aspeers* serve to demonstrate the diversity immanent in the field of American studies and how strongly it is reflected in its graduate scholarship as well. The submissions we received—from, among others, Switzerland, France, Hungary, Germany, and the Netherlands—also demonstrated the international spread of European American studies graduate scholarship. While the contributions in the final issue, in turn, focus on authors from Central Europe, their methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches as well as the topical nature of the articles and the historical frameworks used still showcase the diversity of American studies. Taken together, the six contributions in this issue also constitute a balanced spread of investigating US culture through, on the one hand, examinations of American politics and history and, on the other hand, analyses of literature and popular culture.

In the article “Truth-Telling and Trolls: Trolling, Political Rhetoric in the Twenty-First Century, and the Objectivity Norm,” Hedwig Lieback provides an exploration of the act of trolling. She engages in an analysis of the usage of trolling in the political sphere, taking into account both online and offline trolling strategies. The effectiveness of trolling in a political context is stressed as having the tendency to produce objective communication, appealing to people on an

emotional and discursive level while alienating and ‘triggering’ other groups. In an American political climate that is fraught with false claims and animosity in both left- and right-leaning groups, the methodologies that the article explains give the reader fuel to question the way in which we process antagonistic online comments, messages, and tweets.

Melanie van der Elsen’s “The Paradox of Liminality: American Samoa’s Attenuated Sovereignty in the Twenty-First-Century American Empire” provides an account of the paradoxical relationship between American Samoa and the US, stressing that the idea of decolonization in American Samoa must be examined beyond a simple either/or proposition. On the one hand, the insular territory counts as unincorporated and thus denies American Samoans basic American constitutional rights, such as voting and citizenship. On the other, this liminal status preserves and protects much of American Samoa’s indigenous system and culture. For instance, its system is built around communal ownership of land and resources, an ideological antithesis to American ideas of individualism.

Deborah Pomeranz explores how two 1970s activist groups committed to protecting fellow citizens in New York City’s harsh and tumultuous landscape were dichotomously perceived and, ultimately, how their collective service was tempered in an effort to secure resources. Both the Guardian Angels and Women Against Pornography occupied this landscape, despite their fundamental differences. By displaying a vivid picture of the ’70s mindset through these two groups, which took responsibility for enhancing and maintaining safety, she also presents the political zeitgeist, and how these organizations have been shaped by issues of gender, race, and sexuality. Revisiting their work, “Angels and Anti-Pornography Feminists: A Comparative Analysis of Civilian Public Safety Organizations” highlights the effect of these perceptions and their power to legitimize forms of activism that can help organizations to gain support and keep operating.

Anthony James Obst analyzes Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* through the lens of Sylvia Wynter’s theories on the ‘hybrid human’ in his article “Ceremony Found: Sylvia Wynter’s Hybrid Human and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*.” Wynter’s theory explores Western understandings of being human, referred to as ‘order-instituting cosmogonies,’ and the process of decolonization that occurs when the posited truths of these origins are seen for what they are: narratives. This article in particular places emphasis on one of over five hundred of America’s native tribes: the Laguna population, from which the main character of *Ceremony* belongs. As

this contribution elucidates, anger can often manifest in ways far from aggression and more closely resemble a humble, assiduous process of reclaiming one's ontological narrative from a lineage of ubiquitous oppression.

Annika M. Schadewaldt reads the 2012 film *Frances Ha*, often viewed as a coming-of-age story, as a queer rereading of the bildungsroman, highlighting how it adapts traditionally heteronormative male-coded tropes such as personal development, mastery, and spatial movement. Her article “‘I’m Not a Real Person Yet’: Queering Coming of Age in *Frances Ha*” thereby furthers this issue’s intersectional and interdisciplinary aspirations. The elusive nature of the meanings at the heart of this film leads the author to explore how this has the effect of ‘queering’ genre. Accordingly, the article challenges common genre conventions as well as enables a general discussion of how genres are developed and constituted, both in their poetics and in their politics.

In “Of Pregnant Kings and Manly Landladies: Negotiating Intersex in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*,” Mascha Helene Lange reframes the non-human beings in Le Guin’s novel within the concept of ‘intersex.’ The term is introduced through analyzing the aliens’ sex characteristics, the language used to denote sex, and a discussion of sexuality within the theoretical framework of ‘intelligibility.’ Furthermore, she engages with concepts such as ‘the freak’ and ‘androgyny’ to overall investigate how the novel constructs gender and renders it intelligible. The article thus uses a highly canonized text in American studies but refines existing readings and understandings of it through a novel theoretical concept, which in turn highlights how the perception and understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality have changed in the last decades.

ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTIONS

2018 has seen a year of socially engaged art exhibitions that vibrate with dissent and enliven alternative ways of seeing: from Jenny Holzer’s charged works at Tate London; to Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art’s Retrospective for Beatriz González; and Charles White’s retrospective at The Art Institute of Chicago, MoMA, and forthcoming show at LACMA. Charles White himself urged that “Art must be an integral part of the struggle. It can’t simply mirror what’s taking place. [...] It must ally itself with the forces of liberation” (qtd. in Elliot 828). Two artists presented in this issue of *aspeers* not only tap into a history of

channeling anger into creative production but also use the visual field as an expressive dialogue across texts. Together, the three pieces of art engage in a productive dialogue with our academic contributions, highlighting that a more comprehensive understanding of the affective potentials of anger should extend to both analytical and argumentative investigations as well as aesthetic and artistic engagements.

With a Jewish American upbringing and emigration to Israel as a secular Jew, Emily Drew Miller adds a distinct voice to the collective narrative of American Anger. *Fascist Desert Dessert* and *Jerusalem Stone Rooms* illustrate the physical structure of American oppression and settler mindset beyond the US border. By portraying the architecture of occupation and its main actors, Miller's work provides a visual framework for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its structures of power.

Likewise, Seda Erdil's inclination towards a surrealist approach invites the viewers to create a narration around their imagination, using the image as a starting point. Erdil's use of charcoal drawings allows her to stay true to an expressive approach without jeopardizing the desire for detailed realism; what results is an interplay between rigorous technique and charcoal's inclination to blur boundaries. *Silent Rage* tries to capture the gloomy atmosphere of anger and to illustrate its dimensions by reimagining incidents in American history as they converge and transform in her work. Ultimately, we hope that the inclusion of these pieces in *aspeers* 12 inspires new perspectives, sparks questions, and refreshes the sites for cross-cultural dialogue across mediums.

PROFESSORIAL VOICE

The topic of American Anger cannot be explained without looking at the numerous manifestations of oppression in the United States. Thus, for a professorial voice that, in the tradition of *aspeers*, joins the conversation begun by the graduate contributions, the editors of this year's issue were particularly interested in a contributor who is able to encapsulate the entanglements between oppression, anger, and resistance. Simultaneously, we were looking for someone who transcends the realm of academia in dealing with these phenomena. In "Viva the Scholar-Activist!" Chicano scholar Alvaro Huerta summarizes his experience in academia and elaborates on the meaning of being a so-called academic-activist. Having one

foot in the academy and the other in the community “means being a bridge between these asymmetric spaces: institutions of higher education and racialized/working-class communities. It means for the former, with its privileged members, to serve the latter—not vice versa, as is the norm.”

Thus, the editors are proud to feature Derek R. Ford as the professorial voice for the twelfth issue of *aspeers*. After obtaining a bachelor’s degree in Peace Studies, he went on to receive a master’s degree as well as a PhD in Cultural Foundations of Education from Syracuse University. He is currently working as Assistant Professor of Education Studies and Director of the Peace and Conflict Studies program at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. His current research foci are the underlying educational logics in political, social, and economic systems and what educational theory can offer contemporary political movements. He has written and edited eight books and published in numerous academic journals. What distinguishes Derek R. Ford from many other scholars is the fact that he is active both in the academy and in the community. Indeed, he was an activist and organizer before entering the realm of academia. He is part of several activist and grassroots organizations, such as the Answer Coalition (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) and the Hampton Institute, a working-class think tank named after Fred Hampton, in which Derek R. Ford serves as chair of the educational department. Through these and other organizations, he is involved with many domestic liberation movements in the US.

In his academic work, Derek R. Ford has not only theorized moments of American Anger, such as the rebellions or insurrections in Ferguson (2014) and Baltimore (2015), but also provided a much needed pedagogical perspective on these events. His article “A Pedagogy for Space: Teaching, Learning, and Studying in the Baltimore Rebellion” illuminates his ability to encapsulate the manifold factors inherent to such uprisings and to combine them with an educational outlook. To him, the rebellion was as much about the police brutality that sparked it as it was about the system and the property that they serve to protect. He writes that

[i]n Gray’s neighborhood over 50% of people between 18 and 65 are unemployed (Justice Policy Institute, 2015). Yet on May 18, 2015, the state of Maryland voted to spend US\$30m on a new jail for youth in Baltimore. And two days later the Governor took US\$11.6m from Baltimore school aid. It’s not that the resources and materials needed to employ, educate, and house people aren’t there, it’s that they are

privately owned. It's the capitalist mode of production that has produced this reality and the radically uneven spaces of Baltimore, and the city isn't unique in this respect. (190)

In his contribution to this issue, "The Struggle of 'American Anger': In Defense of Extremism," he calls for a reconsideration of the current political outrage, one that has become depoliticized by what he calls 'outrage about outrage.' Drawing on affect theory and Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, the essay outlines the necessity of extreme responses to extreme conditions and offers ideas about how to channel the current American Anger into genuine political struggle against capitalist exploitation in the Trump era.

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This year's topic of American Anger has not only inspired many of the aforementioned contributions but it also led to insightful discussions throughout the editorial process of how anger can be expressed and become visible. For instance, contributions we planned to group into a general section suddenly offered, on deeper contemplation, a strong narrative of emotional conflict regarding national processes, expanding our understanding of what both terms can encompass separately and combined. We hope that our readers, when exploring the different elements of this twelfth issue of *aspeers*, will see similarly surprising and innovative takes on understanding and uncovering facets of American Anger.

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