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Marcus Walsh-Führung



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- 1 Alfred Hornung, ed., *Obama and Transnational American Studies*
- 2 Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016. ISBN: 978-3-85253-6675-9
- 3 Marcus Walsh-Führung
- 4 The book, *Obama and Transnational American Studies*, is a monograph series that touches upon an important discussion in the discipline. Its theme centers on the challenge of the traditional understanding of American Exceptionalism and firmly adds a transnational dimension to the current discourse on America's role in the global context. With the nomination of Barack Obama as president, the country and the world were anticipating change brought about by the first African-American president and liberation from eight years of the Bush administration. Obama was the first national politician to excite the youth vote in a generation by instilling hope and change to an electorate looking for a national hero. In the end, critics from both political parties and society felt he fell short on his domestic and foreign policy and his approach to the national conversation on race and identity politics. This condemnation from his retractors has created rhetoric that has changed the understanding on how citizens and the world define and relate to the United States. *Obama and Transnational American Studies* provides a response to scholars that have defined the United States as a historical constellation in the global order and addresses the impact that this interconnectedness has on how the world is perceived. The monograph series consists of articles by various authors to address the relationship between Obama and transnationalism in the following sections: *Transnational Family and Life Writing*, *Transnational Literatures and Laws*, *Transnational Media*, and *Transnational Affinities*.
- 5 All articles are set in a post-9/11 America, focusing their attention on a transnational shift in our discussion of culture, history, and politics. As our understanding of past and present, pre- and post-national, and multiethnic and multilingual paradigms have been challenged, *Obama and Transnational American Studies* offers a fresh perspective on current affairs in the US. In highlighting transnationalism under President Obama, the

monograph series demonstrates the evolution of concepts of place, time, periphery, nation, race, personal and family relationships, resulting cultural insecurities and their interconnectedness. The connection and parallels between Obama's personal journey and current discussions on race, place, and cultural identity are highlighted throughout the book but are strongly argued in Birgit M. Bauridl's chapter entitled, *Auma Obama Transangular: Performing Presidency between Africa, Europe, and America*, and Glenn T. Eskew's chapter entitled, *Barack Obama and the American Civil Rights Movement*. Both articles discuss Obama's transnational upbringing and how social and political ideas, culture, and family shaped his understanding of himself and his place in the United States. Eskew connects Obama's understanding of his heritage to his identification with his father who migrated to the United States due to economic and social opportunities of change as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. To demonstrate how Obama places himself in the Civil Rights Movement, the author refers to Obama's speech, at the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in front of civil rights veterans, in which he compares the economic restraints and cultural divide of Apartheid South Africa to those of the Jeremiah and Moses generations of the Civil Rights Movement. In her chapter, Bauridl expands on the family aspect by demonstrating the transnational parallels and differences of gender, race, place, and cultural identity that are characteristic to the entire Obama family. In doing so, the author draws on the experiences of Obama's sister, Auma, as an African woman, mother, German academic, and founder of Sauti Kuu by comparing these to Obama's life journey.

- 6 American Studies scholars criticize its subfield, Transnational Studies, as recreating the wheel on linked issues of ideological interpellation and identity formation. Critics believe that the discipline focuses too heavily on fluidity and fails to recognize real depredation and the human costs of dislocation of global capital. As a rebuke to these critics, the chapter by Kristina Bross and Laura M. Stevens, *Before Nation, Beyond Nation: the Place of "Early" in Transnational American Studies*, strongly supports transnationalism and its possibilities by analyzing "comparative, collaborative, border-crossing research." The authors structure their chapter in four spatial paradigms: the Atlantic, the contact zone or middle ground, the western hemisphere, and the globe. By taking the reader through these abstract paradigms, the authors demonstrate the possibility of mapping American Studies by encoding both space and time with the ideas of the paradigms. In doing so, they challenge their critics and add to the discussion that Transnational Studies should incorporate pre-national understandings of space, boundaries, and the nation to provide a more holistic understanding of the shifting paradigms in American Studies.
- 7 The chapter by Elizabeth J. West, *We've Seen this Before: The Pre-Obama Transnational Figure in Early Black Atlantic Writing*, contributes to the chapter by Bross and Stevens by highlighting comparative border-crossing research. The article describes how Obama's heritage with a father from Kenya and upbringing by his Midwestern grandparents created his multicultural, multiracial, and multinational identity. This transnational background allowed him to create a translocal perception that would challenge the traditional understanding of race and place. West compares the developments of Obama's translocal perception to the experiences of three figures: Nicholas Said, Omar ibn Said, and Job ben Solomon. These three figures represented the elite and intellectual class of their African homelands and, with their experience of traveling through the western world, they defied racial stereotypes through their ability to form a translocal perception of the world and embody the status of their origin. As a result, West concludes that their

experiences have created a new narrative of Americanness, how we view the interactions amongst people and how we come to grips with our own origin stories.

- 8 In the chapter by Paul Giles, *Obama, Tarantino, and Transnational Trauma*, the author addresses the question of cultural politics in the Obama era through a “crosstemporal axis” approach by explaining the transitional dimension of the Obama administration trying to grasp its historical, political, and cultural trauma. This chapter illustrates temporal formations across historical boundaries that have been institutionalized within conventional forms of the current period. The author compares the complexity of the narrative in Tarantino’s postmodern filmmaking to the narrative of Americas’ past, and the trauma it has placed on the national psyche.
- 9 The challenge of embracing our past takes on a different form in Nina Morgan’s chapter on “*Laws of Forgiveness*”: *Mandela, Obama, Derrida*. The author uses the autobiographies of Mandela, “*Long Walk to Freedom*,” and Obama, “*Dreams from My Father*,” to demonstrate how Derrida compares the production of Mandela’s and Obama’s memory to that of the national memory. In a “post-racial” and “post-Apartheid” world, the aim is to practice forgiveness and reconciliation while politics focuses on the function to forget about the past. To understand these dynamics, the author analyses the autobiographies to explain their political use in our nation state and the connection between both stories in a globalized world.
- 10 *Obama and Transnational American Studies* serves as a reminder that the changing cultural, political, and historical dynamics as related to Obama’s role in transnationalism have challenged the status quo in the United States and how it is viewed by the rest of the world.
- 11 The transnational understanding of time, space and borders has created new questions for American Studies and has challenged how scholars view and perceive themselves and “others.” As the demographics and interactions change, new ideals and perspectives will be presented challenging already existing paradigms in American Studies that will allow the discipline to strengthen its empirical and methodological understanding. *Obama and Transnational American Studies* provides a comprehensive survey on the connection between transnationalism, the former president, and the current discussion in American Studies. As such, scholars of American Studies interested in the impact of President Obama on Transnational American Studies would benefit from this monograph series.