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Editor's Introduction

Ginetta E. B. Candelario

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Ginetta E. B. Candelario

Editor's Introduction

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An eruption of hatred, an outbreak of violence, or overthrowing of an entire social order can shock us by its surprising force and fury, but the surprise comes largely because its long fetch remains hidden from view. . . . The long fetch of history [is] manifest in relentless waves of transnational and interracial antagonisms, alliances, identifications, and affiliations.

—George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark*

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This volume's publication coincides with the one hundredth anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which *Meridians* readers likely know was the culmination of nearly a century of women's organizing for political and civil rights. However, as our cover art "Layers" by Preetika Rajgariah alludes, the "long fetch"¹ of this "first wave" of U.S. feminist history is often hidden in plain sight, and the racism within suffragist organizing and in "the waves rubric" deployed by white feminists periodizing the history of their activism "remains hidden from view" (Lipsitz 2007: viii; Hewitt 2010). Yet "historical knowledge reveals that events that we perceive as immediate and proximate have causes and consequences that span great distances" (Lipsitz 2007: viii). Likewise, world-systems analysis reminds us that just as tides rise and recede, "progress is . . . possible, but so is regression" (Wallerstein 2009: 19). As the selections in this issue illustrate, when the state allocates rights on the basis of a hierarchically organized social order, women and racialized minorities pursuing self-determination must navigate dangerous

waters, moving between participating in, complying with, contesting, resisting, and/or undermining their nation's agendas.

Thus, despite its removal of the supposedly final barrier to women's political rights and its appreciable improvement of White women's life chances, the Nineteenth Amendment arguably changed the lives of women of color for the worse due to the White supremacist violence that ensued following its passage. This was so notwithstanding the Fourteenth Amendment's earlier promise of equal treatment under the law without regard to race or national origin which, together with the Nineteenth Amendment, should have ostensibly removed the final legal barrier to all citizen's participation in the formal political system (Dudden 2014; Newman 1999; Sneider 2008; Terborg-Penn 1998). Instead, the facts on the ground varied dramatically for different women based on their place in the racial, settler-colonial, and/or geopolitical order still in place. For example, despite the promises of the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments, it was not until the 1965 Voting Rights Act unequivocally removed legal racial barriers to the franchise that Black women and men alike would continue to be disenfranchised *de jure* by Jim Crow laws, and *de facto* by White supremacist racial terrorism that ran the gamut from lynching to sexual violence to mob-led massacres of entire Black communities.

We open this issue, therefore, with Rachel Marie-Crane Williams's "Elegy for Mary Turner." This epic poem is part of a larger performance art piece that Williams debuted online on October 31, 2016, and performed live at Iowa City's Englert Theater in August 2018 with an accompanying dance choreography and exhibit of linoleum block prints—some of which we are pleased to include here. As Williams explains in her blog, *The Red Magpie*, the performance coincided with the one hundredth anniversary of a historic days-long rampage of white racial violence in Brooks County, Georgia (Bright 2017). During the final days of May 1918, mobs of White men identified, hunted, kidnapped, murdered, and lynched over a dozen Black men with impunity, including Mary Turner's husband, Hayes. When Mary Turner—who was eight months pregnant—publicly protested his lynching, she too was hunted down, viciously tortured, and ultimately murdered, along with her unborn child.² Most White suffragists were silent about this instance of racist and misogynist terrorism, as they were about the thousands murdered before and after Mary Turner.

In fact, in June of 1919 as White suffragists were celebrating the Senate's passing of the Nineteenth Amendment, Black women such as Ida B. Wells—who had labored ceaselessly for universal suffrage both alongside

patriarchal Black activist men and racist White suffragists—were coping with the wake of devastation left by the “Red Summer” of 1919. The Red Summer began with the Elaine Massacre in Arkansas and culminated in nine additional White-led massacres of hundreds of Black men, women, and children by the end of that year. In every case, mobs of White people outraged at Black economic success and political claims-making murdered, raped, tortured, and set fire to anything and anyone in their path with impunity, and at times with the open support and participation of local and federal authorities. Likewise, the following year when White women were marking the Nineteenth Amendment’s final ratification by voting in the presidential election of 1920, their Black peers were subjected to a new wave of terror when yet another White mob massacred dozens of Black men and women who had the temerity to exercise their right to vote on Election Day in Ocoee, Florida. This was followed in May 1921 by the utter destruction of the “Black Wall Street” community of Tulsa, Oklahoma, again by White mobs that murdered three hundred Black people and leveled forty square blocks of Black-owned businesses and residences without compunction. In other words, time and again the whiteness of the “universal” franchise was viciously and unequivocally asserted by White men and complicit White women, including suffragists and feminists (Feimster 2011; Giddings 2009; Hunter 1998; Madigan 2003; McWhirter 2011; Ortiz 2010; Woodruff 2019).

The context that saw Mary Turner lynched, an era subsequently considered “the nadir” of American race relations (Logan 1954), must have deeply affected the coming of age experience of a Black woman named Elmira “Toosweet” Moody Davis. Her daughter, iconic civil rights movement activist Anne Moody, wrote a now famous memoir, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. In this memoir Moody contrasts her life as an empowered Black woman with her mother’s life of struggle, fearfulness, and pain, and concludes that the notable differences between them are due to her mother’s weakness of character. However, in her essay analyzing the younger Moody’s memoir, Tracey Jean Boisseau argues that Toosweet’s resignation and Moody’s “empowered sense of self ownership” were due less to their respective inherent character traits than to Moody’s benefiting from the long fetch of Black organizing and community development that followed the nadir. Thus, the historically new subject-hood that Anne Moody exemplified was a latent byproduct of the segregated yet puissant educational opportunities that allowed “for the rising up of a generation of Black daughters in a celebration of life against a system that often sought their

degradation if not their deaths” (36). That is, the “[segregated schools fostered] Black female subject-hood [that] . . . prompted civil rights activism rather than, as is often imagined, was produced wholly by it” (35).

Contemporaneously, for Latin@s—the majority of whom were structurally positioned as second-class citizens who “belonged to” but were “not a part of the United States” —the nadir meant that they too were often barred from exercising the universal right to vote supposedly also granted to them under the Nineteenth Amendment, or found that their “right” to vote was limited by virtue of their residential territory’s status (Burnett and Marshall 2001). For example, the largest Latin@ subgroup, Mexican-heritage Americans,³ were prevented from actualizing their civil and political rights for over one hundred years after “the border crossed them” when the aftermath of the Mexican-American War of 1848 made what had been the northern third of Mexico part of the United States (Acuña 2014).⁴ Despite being categorized as “white by law” (Haney López 2006), and despite having U.S. citizenship imposed upon them in 1848 under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexican Americans were also subject to racial terrorism, from lynching to torture and sexual violence, to white-mob-led destruction of their communities. Indeed, terrorizing Mexican (im)migrants was officially sanctioned, such as during the infamous Matanza of 1915 in which Texas Rangers slaughtered more than three hundred Mexican (im)migrants in the Texas borderlands (Lenthang 2019). Two decades later, during the Great Depression tens of thousands of Mexican Americans were forcibly removed to Mexico despite their birthright entitlement to remain in the United States (Alanis Encisco 2017). Together with everyday racist and nativist practices by Anglo-Americans, this massive “repatriation” and sundry other formal policies in effect made Mexican Americans citizens whose political and civil rights were guaranteed by the Constitution in theory only (Balderrama 2006; Carrigan and Webb 2017; Villanueva 2017).

Similarly, although U.S. citizenship was administratively imposed on Puerto Ricans via the Jones Act of 1917—notably nearly twenty years after the island, together with Guam and the Philippines, was made an unincorporated territory subject to U.S. rule under the terms of the Treaty of Paris (1898)—Puerto Rican women on the island were not enfranchised by the Nineteenth Amendment, and did not receive the unqualified and universal right to vote until 1935.⁵ Moreover, regardless of that new “right” to

vote and their U.S. citizenship, to this day, Puerto Ricans on the island do not vote in the presidential election, and do not have elected representatives in Congress (Azize-Vargas 1985; Barceló-Miller 1998).⁶ At the same time, throughout the twentieth century, Puerto Rican attempts to decolonize their island were met with swift and brutal responses from the United States that ranged from the sweeping arrests of average citizens, to the detention and torture of nationalist *independentista* leaders such as Pedro Albizu Campos, to the bombing of entire towns, and even to surveillance activities targeting the general population under the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) (Denis 2016; Erman 2018). The consequences of Puerto Ricans' second-class U.S. citizenship—of which “nearly half of Americans” on the U.S. mainland remain unaware (Dropp and Nyhan 2017)—were brought into sharp relief on the centennial of its imposition when Hurricane María devastated the island in 2017 and ultimately caused the death of nearly three thousand residents, largely due to a purposefully lax Federal Emergency Management Administration response (Milken Institute School of Public Health 2018).

The material destruction wrought by Hurricane María in 2017 also made visible the damage already being caused to the island's political economy in the wake of the United States federal government-imposed Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) in 2016. Despite its “promising” acronym, with its imposition of “extreme austerity measures” on an already impoverished population, PROMESA has done more harm than good for the majority of the island's people (Vega-Ramos 2019). Thus, in the context of PROMESA's failure, when the current president of the United States cavalierly tossed paper towels at the Hurricane María survivors who gathered at the Calvary Chapel to greet him during his four-hour visit to the island, he made the United States' callous disregard for Puerto Rican lives viscerally clear (Watson 2017). The long fetch of this disregard is the subject of Laura Briggs's Counterpoint, “Debates in the Field: Debt and Transnational Feminist Analysis.” In this piece, Briggs offers a critical intervention that deftly puts the ongoing impact of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico into the broader Caribbean and transnational context. “It also places the current wave of debt and immiseration alongside a history of slavery, with its particular kinds of forced migration—from the depopulation of Africa in wars and raids to slave ships to the coffle that took loved ones sold away—its sexualized and racialized violences” (72).

Similar waves of conflict and collaboration between colonizers and colonized abound across world-systems as patriarchal, white supremacist, settler-colonial, and decolonizing “states all sought to become or to be thought of as nation-states. . . . [and, in turn,] political ‘internationalism’ was precisely inter-national and presumed the existence, indeed encouraged the strengthening, of the states as the loci of sovereignty” (Wallerstein 2009: 17). Lauren E. Shoemaker argues here that rather than offering the possibility of transcending these abiding conflicts as other scholars have claimed, Jamaica Kincaid’s collection of nonfiction essays, *A Small Place*, is a “narrative of irony and anger [that] reveals tourism as belonging to a structure of terror” (89). That structure of terror is buttressed by colonial epistemologies in which “the Caribbean must be a location of forgetting history to be enjoyed by white tourists; *A Small Place* interrupts this forgetting . . . [alluding] to the overwhelming poverty that many Antiguanians suffer at the hands of not just the local banking system, but the international politics of debt and structural adjustment” (97). What is more, Shoemaker notes, Kincaid is equally critical of Antiguan peoples complicity with colonialism’s erasures, writing “. . . they are governed by corrupt men, . . . [and] these corrupt men have given their country away to corrupt foreigners” (Kincaid [1988] 2001: 50). Put simply, the nation-state has long been not only an unreliable source of justice—especially for women of color, and Black women in particular—but more often than not, the source of injustice, as well as of oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and violence.

Returning to the U.S. mainland, we can thus trace the long fetch of current Islamophobic and anti-Latin@ federal immigration policy agendas back to anti-Asian policies and practices of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beginning with Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino (im)migrants, for over a century Asian Americans were prevented legally and extralegally from accessing the citizenship, civil, and political rights available “on arrival” to Euro/Anglo-Americans (Guglielmo 2004). For example, during the California Gold Rush (1849), Whites—whether U.S. born or recent arrivals from Europe—subjected Chinese immigrants to assault, lynching, and mob violence. Twenty years later, although Chinese men played a central role in the completion of the Pacific Railroad in 1869, they were once again subjected to extralegal Sinophobic violence that came to be known as the “driving out.” In over 150 documented instances, mobs of White men lynched, murdered, tortured, and forced hundreds of

Chinese men to flee the communities they had established along the rail lines in the western and midwestern states (Nokes 2006).

This “driving out” was followed by the Page Act of 1875’s initiation of origins-based immigrant exclusion policy at a federal level. The Page Act, in turn, set the stage for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was followed by a series of Alien Land laws, and ultimately by Executive Order 9066 in 1942, which authorized the internment of Japanese Americans in concentration camps—including tens of thousands who were citizens by birth—during World War II. Adding insult to injury, all Japanese American internees were asked to declare their loyalty to the United States and men were made eligible to be drafted into the armed forces of the same country that deprived them and their families of their freedom, property, political, and civil rights. Those who refused to sign loyalty oaths or to serve in the U.S. armed forces—known as “no-no boys” because they answered “no” to two loyalty questions—were jailed in federal penitentiaries (Lee 2016; Lew-Williams 2018; Luibheid 2015; Ngai 2003; Takaki 1998). They rightly refused to abide by the federal government requirement that Japanese Americans prove the loyalty that was presumed inherent to immigrants from Europe—including those from Germany and Italy, with whom the United States was also at war at the time.

Viewed in this light, the U.S. government’s Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program initiated post-9/11 illuminates the fact that current “events that seem to appear in the present from out of nowhere in actuality have a long history behind them” (Lipsitz 2007: vii). Azza Basarudin’s and Khanum Shaikh’s essay in this issue, “The Contours of Speaking Out: Gender, State Security, and Muslim Women’s Empowerment,” analyzes how the CVE program recruited Muslim American women to act as “anti-terrorist” agents because of their central roles in families and communities. Basarudin and Shiakh argue that the CVE program is part of a broader Islamophobic ideological agenda that presumptively criminalizes U.S. Muslim immigrants, refugees, and citizens alike, and requires them to proactively and repeatedly prove their allegiance to the United States while non-Muslims and their descendants are not similarly presumed traitorous. The CVE program also “reveals the easy co-optability of feminist empowerment discourse by an imperial nation” in that it “empowers” Muslim women to act as agents of a state that subjects their communities, their families, and ultimately themselves to unwarranted surveillance and the racialization of their religious faith (131).

States coopting women's empowerment agendas is evident also in the first of two In the Archives selections in this issue, "Commemoration of Kartini-Day." As the introductory notes by the former *Meridians* intern Callan Swaim-Fox explain, political regimes that ran the gamut from the Dutch colonial authority to those that subsequently ruled independent Indonesia freely interpreted the arguably feminist ideas and agendas of Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879–1904) so that they better aligned with their respective political agendas, rather than on Kartini's own beliefs. Regardless of whether they were Dutch colonial, nationalist, or internationalist, Indonesia's rulers shared a patriarchal commitment to circumscribing women's activities to domestic and maternal spheres, and accordingly considered Kartini a malleable icon. Moving from one Dutch colonial sphere of influence to another, Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan's poem, "Minor Planet 2986," pays homage to Indian performance artist Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918–2016), in whose honor minor planet 2986 was named by Dutch ex-patriot astronomer/scientist C. J. van Houten. Apparently van Houten visited Ahmedabad, where Sarabhai's performing arts company Darpana was founded in 1949, and was so taken with her performances that he named minor planet 2986 in Sarabhai's honor. Far from being a minor player in her universe, however, Sarabhai was "single-handedly responsible for taking classical Indian dance beyond the shores of India and making Bharatnatyam a dance form that is revered and respected throughout the world."⁷ While having a star named in Sarabhai's honor can of course be interpreted in a positive light, one could also argue that colonial paternalism imbued the gesture.

Exploring the paternalism hidden even within ostensibly laudatory projects is central to Alyssa Garcia's essay, "*Federada Testimonios* on the Ground: Revealing the Gendered Limits in Operationalizing the Cuban Revolution's Campaign against Prostitution." Garcia considers how the Cuban revolutionary state's "gender-based identity politics [were] utilized in ways that would add legitimacy to the state's larger agenda," (156) often at women's expense. In the case of sex workers targeted for reeducation and incorporation into the new socioeconomic order, the revolutionary state developed a multistage policy that involved establishing trust and securing the cooperation of these marginalized women. To that end, members of the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (Cuban Women's Federation)—*federadas*—were recruited to act as "revolutionary" workers in the anti-prostitution campaigns. As Garcia explains, the *federadas* were typically

women with class and color advantages that they were invested in sustaining in both pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba. Accordingly, while *federadas* who volunteered in the literacy campaigns undermined their privileged class's patriarchal gender order to a degree when they undertook literacy work with known sex workers, they simultaneously engaged in what sociologists call *boundary work* in order to sustain their status rank above the sex workers they were educating. In other words, the *federadas*' "revolutionary" work was imbued with the same state-sanctioned paternalism that sustained detrimental patriarchal rankings of good and bad women.⁸

A similar dynamic becomes clear in our second In the Archives selection, "The Struggles for Women's Suffrage" by Nayla Saab. As Saab recounts, upon the establishment of the newly independent state in 1943, women in Lebanon organized immediately for political rights, including suffrage, and they did so with the support of conservative and right-wing nationalists who formed part of a regional Arab Federation. The introductory notes by current *Meridians* student intern Emma Schubert offer a brief historical context for the activities Saab narrates, and for what Saab advisedly leaves out. As with the other national contexts explored in this issue, Lebanese feminists and women's rights activists had to navigate complicated colonial, decolonizing, nationalist, and conservative regimes in pursuit of their own agendas. At times that meant acquiescing to patriarchal ideologies that ultimately worked against women's liberation and empowerment.

Taking up the challenges inherent in pursuing empowerment within oppressive national circumstances, we close this issue with "Harvesting Hope: Building Worker Power at the Pioneer Valley Workers Center" by historian Diana Carolina Sierra Becerra. This In the Trenches report explains the political philosophy, organizing strategies, and accomplishments of the PVWC, a progressive Western Massachusetts community-based organization dedicated to fostering the empowerment of our region's most vulnerable residents—documented and undocumented immigrant workers, families, and youth. In the five years since its founding, the PVWC has organized in favor of initiatives at the local government level that address some of the worst aspects of the current U.S. president's anti-immigrant, anti-labor, racist, and misogynist agendas. They have done so "in solidarity with all victims of state violence, past and present" (214). Although there have been setbacks along the way, there have also been victories and seeds of hope planted and harvested by the PVWC.

Meridians joins the PVWC in following “la estrella de la esperanza / the star of hope” (229) visible on the horizon of our “journey into a realm populated with masses of people and cultures, gathering, converging, and unifying” (Rajgariah, 237). We believe that Meridians’s *grano de arena* / grain of sand contributes to the long fetch that turns the tide toward justice once again.

Notes

- 1 Sociologist George Lipsitz used the metaphor of the “long fetch”—the distance between a wave’s point of origin and its point of arrival” to illustrate the historical forces that propel seemingly sudden and new social facts and systems (Lipsitz 2007: vii).
- 2 The Mary Turner Project, <http://www.maryturner.org> (accessed September 27, 2019).
- 3 I use this term advisedly in light of the multiplicity of terms used by these women themselves—*Mexicana*, *tejana*, *Californía*, *Chicana*, *Latina*, *raza*, *Mexican American*, etc.
- 4 Over the eighty years that followed, the ceded territory became the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Texas, and Utah.
- 5 Literate women were granted the right to vote in island elections in 1929; this meant that it was largely white, upper-class Puerto Rican women who were enfranchised. It wasn’t until 1935 that “all” women (i.e., Black and “of color” Puerto Rican women) could vote (Barceló-Miller 1998).
- 6 As many scholars have noted, it is the island’s status that limits its residents’ political and civil rights; once Puerto Ricans leave the island and migrate to the U.S. mainland, Hawaii, or Alaska, they can participate in all—local, state, and federal—elections *except* those held in Puerto Rico.
- 7 The Darpana Project, web.archive.org/web/20110708233437/http://darpana.com/about_us_mrinalini_sarabhai.php (accessed September 27, 2019).
- 8 As I was writing this introduction, Cuban novelist Wendy Guerra published an editorial in the *New York Times* that calls out this paternalism under revolution: “I was born and raised in a system that exerts control under the guise of paternalism—a system that caresses you as it beats you, that teaches you but also inhibits you, enlightens you and censures you. We are hostages to a government that behaves like an abusive, old-fashioned and sexist father, from whom we must seek consent and forgiveness” (Guerra 2019).

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