

AMERICAN LEGENDS:  
NATION, NATURE, NATIVES AND OTHERS, 1608 TO 2001

by

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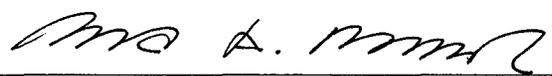
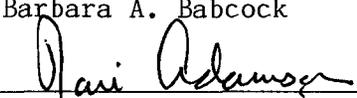
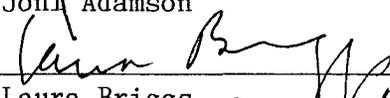
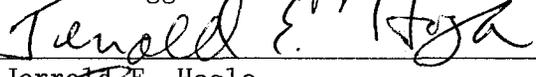
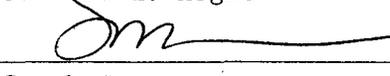
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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I explore the complex layers that constitute the many dynamic cultures that make America. These heterogeneous cultures inform personal experiences, shape national identities, and impinge upon the global order. Today, we still live with and within the legacy of conquest, which becomes the connection between the past and present. One manifestation of this cultural legacy at present is the legends within American public consciousness. These narratives have become legends through their wide circulation within and appropriation by and for diverse groups and purposes at different times. The conflation of myth and history is central to their appeal.

Situating this project within recent explorations of cultural globalization within American Studies, Cultural Studies, and the Environmental Justice Movement, I examine cultural narratives united by one colonial trope: the colonial conquest of natural resources through the subjugation of feminine body and feminized land (noble savage), and the retreat of the primitive ignoble savage in the face of civilization and progress. These narratives include Henry Adams and Everett Emerson's opposing representations of John Smith, the articulation of America as 'nature's nation' in Thomas Cole's art and the PBS program *Frontier House*, the Broadway show *Miss Saigon*, and the now infamous Wen Ho Lee case. I argue that these disparate narratives, at the intersection of discourses of nation, nature, race, and gender, accumulate a collective force even in their separate moments. Adams and Emerson demonstrate a linear view of American history that upholds progress in terms of industrialization and expansionism at the cost of nature, and racialized and gendered others. Cole and *Frontier House* romanticize subjugation in

terms of nature, race and gender, which is seen as an inevitable and necessary step of progress and civilization. In the Broadway musical *Miss Saigon* and media and political representations of the Wen Ho Lee case, such progress contributes to an American identity that plays a leading role within the current the globalized order. These cultural narratives demand our attention, not because they infuse ideology, but rather because they come together with historical events and vested interests in a process of convergence. This process is productive of a new 'common sense,' an understanding that helps people grasp cultural representations, solve social conflicts, and negotiate political realities. As such, cultural texts are integral aspects of history and politics.

## Introduction

*The past is not dead. It isn't even  
past.*

– William Faulkner

The ideas for this project began to take shape during the tumultuous year of 2001-2002. The attack on September 11<sup>th</sup> shook both the country and the world. In the aftermath of this event, the U.S. initiated its international ‘war against terrorism.’ The subsequent development of this long-term war has had a tremendous impact upon national and international affairs, as well as people’s daily lives everywhere. At this time, as an international student in the U.S. who shared the same visa status as some terrorists, I could not but notice changes in my situation and its relation to the larger scene. I first heard in December of 2001 that the FBI had gained access to all international students’ confidential files, due to the States’ increasing need to control foreigners’ activities within its borders. Around the same time, my best friend (an Anglo-American) informed me that our phone conversation during the past year might already be taped as she had been monitored by FBI agents due to her dissertation project on translating a Colombian guerillera poetess’ work. Later, when I filed my taxes in April 2002 as I had done every year before, I was required to fill out an additional form with an attached statement factually proving my pledge not to reside in the U.S. permanently. Presently, a form called “Alien’s Change of Address” is in my file because it would be illegal if I failed to send a completed one to the Department of Justice whenever I move. Moreover, after being stopped by the Border Patrol a few times on interstate highways and hearing others’ experience of it, I started following my friends’ advice in early 2002. Like those

residents under Communist and totalitarian governments which I have only seen on TV or in movies (see Silko), now I always carry my SEVIS document and passport with me when I travel; my driver's license and student ID are insufficient to prevent Border Patrol agents from arresting and deporting me. Once on the highway, an agent told me he had to run my passport on their computer since I was from China. Although I explained to him clearly that Republic of China in Taiwan is different from People's Republic of China, he insisted on the checkup. Inside the U.S., I am frequently reminded of my status as a foreigner, and my privacy is not guaranteed for various national security reasons.

My experiences compelled me to explore the complex layers which constitute the dynamic and heterogeneous American cultures that inform personal experiences, shape national identities, and impinge upon the global order. From the beginning of my intellectual pursuits, I wanted to explore how American cultures function and play a role in the global context. Over the years, I came to realize that this cultural role is not one thing, but indefinite chaotic convergences of intricate cultural processes. American cultures, as we in academia understand, have never been a homogeneous, fixed or self-evident entity, but dynamic and diverse beyond the realm of our current knowledge and even our possible imaginations. At the same time, as cultures are embedded within the intricate web of representation, certain patterns in the discourses of Americanness are discernible. Cultural historian Patricia Limerick points out that today we still live with and within the 'legacy of conquest.' Precisely for that reason, it is crucial for us to grasp the 'unbreakable' "connections between past and present" (Limerick 18). Such connections are deeply embedded within our contemporary lives. Early Americanist

Karen Kupperman, for instance, indicates that America's relations with the world have been shaped by the United States' conquest of the West and the policies that were formed as part of that campaign (Bender: 117). In her work *The Legacy of Conquest*, Limerick also observes that the history of the West is one of interrelated conquests of land, natural resources and people, which continue to shape national policies, social relations, and environmental issues. Anthropologist Akhil Gupta elaborates that the apparatuses of global capitalist development and environmentalism have created new global regimes of governmentality that continue, in new guise, the structures and relationships under colonialism; within the global regimes of governmentality he analyzes, the U.S. has played a central role (1998, chapter 5).

One thread I want to focus on here that weaves past and present, national and international together in American culture, stems from conceptions of 'American exceptionalism.' The prevailing notion of America, since its inception, has referred not only to a specific geographic space, but also to the distinctive meanings and characterizations attached to this place. In *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800*, Jack P. Greene surveys how the development of this influential concept of exceptionalism shaped a changing and yet always distinct American identity throughout the early modern era. Within this cultural tradition, as Amy Kaplan suggests in her introduction to the *Cultures of the United States Imperialism*, the "aspiration of American uniqueness" has dominated centuries of cultural imagination. (Kaplan & Pease: 12). Such imagination of a "national self-image" has sharply distinguished the U.S. from the rest of the world, inspiring varying forms of

American exceptionalism within shifting national and international contexts

(Campomanes 134).

Contemporary scholars have not fully comprehended the complex ways in which our past and present lives have been determined by the conceptions of American exceptionalism. Yet this modern concept has served as the dominant “official doctrine” in the construction of U.S. nationhood (Pease, Kaplan & Pease: 23). This doctrine has been central both to America’s view of itself and to its cultural, social, and political realities. In the field of American Studies, for example, the focus after World War II has been closely associated with the conceptions of American exceptionalism. From the end of the war to the 1970s, many scholars’ critiques of frontier mythologies were used to “legitimize [a] hegemonic understanding” of a master narrative of American exceptionalism (Pease, Kaplan & Pease: 24). This trend tended to dominate American Studies during the Cold War era (Rowe 2000b; Lauter).<sup>1</sup> Since the mid 1970s, such exceptionalist ideas have been widely challenged and deconstructed on all fronts.

In the late twentieth century, “globalization” became a buzz word, ringing in academe, pop culture, and other arenas in many parts of the world. Since the last years of the twentieth century, scholars across disciplines in the U.S. have contextualized their work in terms of globalization. Americanists discussed how to internationalize American Studies, American historians rearticulated American history in a global context. As the divisive shadows of the Cold War era gradually passed, since the late 1980s and 1990s, scholars in transnational studies and postnationalist studies, among others such as borderland studies, have moved away from the emphasis on American exceptionalism to

explore cross-cultural, transnational, racial, gender, global and local issues through comparative approaches (Appadurai, Gupta, Gupta and Ferguson, and Rowe 2000b). At the same time, intellectuals in the environmental justice movement, incorporating ecological literary criticism, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and activist movements, convincingly argue the close connections between the degradation of nature evident in the worldwide environmental crisis and the subjugation in terms of race, gender, class (Adamson, Murphy, Stein, and Gaard). Among these scholarly efforts, I situate my project within the most recent study of cultural globalization in American Studies and Cultural Studies, Literature-and-Environment Studies, and the Environmental Justice Movement.

This project is situated where a number of discourses on nature, race, gender, and U.S. nationalism and globalization merge, converge, and diverge. For instance, the influential transnationalist scholar and anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues in *Modernity at Large* that people's imagination has been transformed via the media in contemporary world. He thus sees cultural globalization in the boundary-crossing imagination and movement as operating beyond the nation-state. From his perspective, "the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes" (1996, 31). On the other hand, many scholars still see the U.S. role in the emerging global order as a hegemonic (see Duong, and O'Brien and Clesse), or imperial power (see Rowe and Campomanes). At any rate, in transnational processes, "America's national symbols and myths [such as the frontier and the West] have been translated into an international

iconographic language, a visual lingua franca. They have been turned into free-floating signifiers, internationally understood, free for everyone to use” (Kroes, Bender: 304). Behind the considerable distance that those so-called American symbols and myths travel, is the question of the American political, economic, and cultural power that makes their internationalization possible. Moving beyond the debate on the nation-state’s downfall or persistence, I want to look at the dialectical processes through which the U.S. state structural, national and transnational forces enmesh and mutually constitute one another. As Rob Kroes, an Americanist based in Western Europe, comments,

In...areas of cultural production, we can discern a moving American frontier.... The appeal of [a cultural “deep structure” that is characteristically American]...is worldwide. In that sense, we have all become Americanized. We have grown accustomed to a specific American mode of cultural production, or rather to the ways in which American culture reproduces itself through endless variation and recombination. Not only have we cracked American cultural codes and can read them flawlessly, we have also appropriated those codes. They have become part of our collective imaginary repertoire. (Bender: 305-6)

It is this cultural appeal of the ‘characteristically American’ symbols and myths both in the U.S. and worldwide that particularly piques my interest.

The characteristically American cultural narratives are oftentimes rooted in the cultural past. One manifestation of American cultural legacy is the lively legend within contemporary American public consciousness. Among them are such long-lived stories as George Washington and the cherry tree, Benjamin Franklin and his kite, John Smith and Pocahontas, and Daniel Boone and the American frontier. These cultural narratives, widely circulated and appropriated by and for diverse groups and purposes at different times, have become legends, straddling the fence between the historical and mythical.

They are recurrently re-evoked and re-narrated so that their “cultural deep structure” warrants our attention.

What follows is a series of case studies uniting a wide range of narratives through one colonial trope that connects the past and present, national and international, local and global: the colonial conquest of nature through subjugating and associating nature/land to and with women, indigenous people, and other minorities. From the beginning of the colonial enterprise to today’s globalization, the conquest of natural resources has been the primary motif of colonialism. In the United States, race, gender, and nature have been intrinsic to the articulation of nationalism in modernity. The intersecting discourses of race, gender and nature are manifest in the fraught legends between white men and brown women, one of the most well-known among them being John Smith and Pocahontas.<sup>ii</sup> In this trope, the racializing and the feminizing of nature/land – the identification of colored female body with land – as a way to naturalize the conquest is “a *poetics* of ambivalence and a *politics* of violence” (McClintock 28, italics original). On the other side of the story of this feminine noble savage whose subjugation facilitates conquest, is the male ignoble savage representing primitivism that must give way to civilization.

While cultural narratives derived from this colonial trope were fraught before the end of the eighteenth century (see Hulme), the continual regeneration of cultural narratives based on this trope since the nineteenth century has been evocative; its significance and transformation in U.S. history are implicated within the changing political, economic, and cultural milieu. I analyze the politics of cultural representations utilizing this age-old trope, with the understanding that culture is a crucial site for

“debates of American identity” (Huhndorf 22). It is the site for the negotiation of political and moral values and for the development of an often uneven and contested public understanding of history and its significance (McAlister 2002, par. 4). In other words, I examine the process not of a conspiracy nor a set of functionalist representations in the service of power, but one of convergence, as historical events and diverse vested interests come together in a powerful, if historically contingent aggregate that evokes overlapping and transforming cultural representations rooted in this trope. Such a process is productive of a new ‘common sense,’ and provides a common ground for understanding (McAlister 2002, par. 6). In this project, I examine how this ‘common sense’ is founded upon past colonial tropes and is developed to articulate certain aspects of the status quo within accelerated processes of globalization.

In Chapter One, I start by articulating the colonial trope and the role of the Smith-Pocahontas legend in American cultural history. This legend, I argue, has been constantly evoked at different historical moments for its cultural usefulness, resonating with particular questions about American history, race, and the progress of civilization. I focus on Henry Adams and Everett Emerson’s scholarly works on ‘Captain John Smith’ during the periods following the Civil War and leading up to the Vietnam War. Through a close comparative study of these two texts, I explore how, in their contrasting evaluations of Smith’s writing and manhood, they each helped justify the progress of American history and civilization. At the cost of manipulating and subjugating the intersecting categories of race, gender, and nature in Smith’s Pocahontas narrative, Adams denounced the agricultural South and upheld the future of industrialization after the Civil War, whereas

Emerson promoted the advance of America's international frontier during the Cold War era. As such, through their narratives both have employed the old colonial trope in their contribution to progress of the United States within the globalization processes.

Within the context of this linear narrative of American progress, in Chapter Two I trace how this trope evolves in the idea of 'nature's nation,' in Perry Miller's terms, as shaped by Thomas Cole's art. By examining Cole's works *The Oxbow* and *The Hunter's Return*, I look at the ways in which discourses of nation, nature, race, and gender come into play in his art. Cole's romanticized landscape paintings of American nature and the frontier set up the framework for his nineteenth-century followers, a framework that is deeply saturated in ideology and often considered today as nationalistic yet appealing. I therefore examine the resonance of his vision of nature, race, and gender on the American frontier in our contemporary lives through a juxtaposition of his work and the 2002 PBS program *Frontier House*. In both cases, the interpretation of these discourses convey a sense of ambivalence towards progress in nineteenth-century industrialization and twenty-first-century globalization. Similarly, romanticized subjugation in terms of nature, race, and gender is generally represented as a necessary step towards the improvement of lives within the status quo in both of these cases.

In Chapters Three and Four I examine the articulation of this trope within the American context in terms of America's international frontier in Asia. Accordingly, I investigate the cultural representations of noble and ignoble savages manifest respectively in the musical *Miss Saigon* as well as in media representations of Wen Ho Lee. Both chapters thus illustrate the very reliance of narratives of American race,

gender, nature, culture, and nation upon transnational phenomena. In Chapter Three, I approach the Americanized version of *Miss Saigon* as another Pocahontas-type narrative, which revises the history of the U.S. in Vietnam. I argue that its box-office success in the U.S. during the 1990s proves its cultural function to help its American audience out of the shadow of the Vietnam War. At the same time, news reports of the development of capitalism in Vietnam further confirm the ultimate American victory over Vietcong through transnational business. In the new millennium, *Miss Saigon* becomes a globalized cultural product exported from America's Broadway to Southeast Asia. The mass popularity and cultural debate the show has generated in those former colonies then points to the U.S. structural, national and transnational forces at work in the reciprocal processes of cultural and economic globalization.

While Vietnam poses a relatively small threat in the late twentieth century to the American international frontier and thus warrants a comparatively benign representation in *Miss Saigon*, American media representations of the Wen Ho Lee case within the context of U.S.-China relations are a different story. In Chapter Four I analyze the Wen Ho Lee case as a result of his being caught within the contradictions between nation and state in the U.S. national, international, and transnational forces. America's continual conquest of natural resources, in this case, is extended to the control of intellectual power through the 'brain drain' from Asia and thereby the control of technology, including nuclear forms. Representations of Wen Ho Lee and China during his trial thus served as a justification of the global order monitored by America, whereas his final release marked another exceptionalist moment in validating an American justice system that was

believed to be beyond racism by many Americans witnessing the case.

I chose to analyze these narratives are analyzed here because they were/are “popular” or well-known, and were/are thus influential in their own ways. They are varied as to their place in the wide political and cultural spectrum, deeply rooted in the past and still resonate loudly today. They are united by their participation in constructing an American identity at the intersections of nature, race, and gender, paving a common ground for understanding the progress of American history, industrialization, and globalization. In often complex and highly contested situations, these narratives appear as inheriting, continuing, and at the same time transforming the old colonial trope, as they continue to help people grasp cultural representations, solve social conflicts, and negotiate with political realities. As such, they are an integral aspect of both history and politics.

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#### Notes

<sup>i</sup> One exceptionalist narrative of an American experience starts with a prototypical American self (R.W.B. Lewis’s *American Adam*), in a civilizing mission (Perry Miller’s *Errand into the Wilderness*) to cultivate our native, feminized land into the Garden of the World (Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land*).

<sup>ii</sup> This representation between colonial men and the colonizable land manifest in the form of a colored woman starts with Jan van der Straet’s famous engraving of Amerigo Vespucci and America herself (ca.1575), and the long list of such representation also includes Cortes and Malintzin, Inkel and Yarico, among others.

Chapter One  
A Legend of America:  
Reinventing John Smith and Pocahontas in Post-bellum and Postwar Eras

<i>

In a series of articles, the June 2003 issue of *Time* magazine reintroduced Benjamin Franklin, a larger-than-life figure in American culture. These articles are excerpts from a new book, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, also published in 2003. In the wake of 9/11 and the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, *Time* promoted this figure from early America for his “particular resonance in 21<sup>st</sup> century America” (Isaacson, par. 6). Franklin, according to this updated portrait, is “the founding father who winks at us,” for his “pioneering principles shaped the way Americans see the world today” (Isaacson, pars. 1-3). The excerpts in *Time* cover Franklin’s virtues as a citizen, his legendary kite story and his relationships with women, establishing a model American in an unstable world. In post-9/11 America, Franklin was thus established as an “exemplar” of “the American character,” embodying virtues, traits, and world views that are “imprint[ed] onto our national fabric” (Issacson, pars.7-11). *Time*’s choice is just one example of how early America serves as an important source for defining Americanness at times when various events and wars challenge America to rearticulate its identity. In this chapter, I approach “the most vivid personality of American literature before Benjamin Franklin” – John Smith – to explore the presence of early America in our contemporary lives (Emerson 1971, 121).

The 1996 Disney film release of *Pocahontas* once again reiterated and reasserted one of America’s favorite national origin myths – the story of John Smith and

Pocahontas.<sup>i</sup> Since Smith narrated his rescue by Pocahontas in 1624, this episode has been the source of art and literature – both fictional and historical – for almost four centuries. His account has inspired a vast body of material that, Peter Hulme suggests, constitutes what can only be called “the myth of Pocahontas” (141).<sup>ii</sup> Across generations, this famous story has been recognized as the “American Genesis” (Hulme 138), a “national myth” (Scheckel 41), or the “original American myth” (Mossiker 322). In fact, it is recognized by recent scholarship as one of the two ‘rival myths of American origin;’ the only other national origin story that can compete with it is the Massachusetts myth of the Pilgrims (see Abrams). Long living “in American folklore” alongside such tales as George Washington and the cherry tree, or Benjamin Franklin and his kite, the Smith-Pocahontas story has been preserved “in imperishable amber” and ingrained in the American public consciousness (Wector 25). This story attained its legendary status when the myth it spawned was conflated with history.

To this day, the popular accounts of American history are impossible to imagine without John Smith and Pocahontas. For example, *The Cambridge History of American Literature* asserts that Smith has become widely known as a folk hero “not for war but for romance” (70). The Disney version of *Pocahontas*, despite the protests against its filmic representation of American Indians, was praised by numerous reviews for its demonstration of the “power of ‘Pocahontas’” and its ability to transform “history into great entertainment” (Baltake, par. 3). As the centuries-long scholarly debate over the authenticity of the Pocahontas episode has continued to this day,<sup>iii</sup> public familiarity with Smith and Pocahontas also persists. Despite the debate over Smith’s credibility and

literary merits, he successfully created two prominent and related iconic personae in American cultural imagination: himself and the Indian maiden. The questions remain: how has Smith become such a vivid figure in American culture, even though he only spent two years in Jamestown? Why has Smith's scant and controversial account given birth to a "favorite American tale" such that it continues to stand as a founding chapter in the cultural imagination of American history (Tilton 2)?

Central to the lasting power of the myth of Pocahontas is, in Robert Tilton's words, its "cultural usefulness" (2). It all began with this brief narrative, which has kindled generations of Americans' imaginations:

Two great stones were brought before *Powhatan*: ...being ready with their clubs to beate out his brains, *Pocahontas* the Kings dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevaile, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon his to saue him from death: whereat the Emperour was contented he should live to make him hatchets, and her bells, beads, and copper; for they thought him aswell of all occupations as themselves....*Powhatan*, more like a devill then a man, with some two hundred more as blacke as himself. (II 151)

As several contemporary scholars have shown, this narrative embodies a colonial trope fundamental to the conquest of America.<sup>iv</sup> In the Smith-Pocahontas legend, cultural harmony in the New World is achieved through interracial romance. By casting the early Euroamerican encounter in the form of heterosexual fascination, this legend "naturalizes the Conquest" by claiming European man's virile and cultural power over feminized America, personified by Pocahontas (Fuller 110). Smith's image as "the founding father," the original American Adam, of the British Virginia colony is thus established through the European patriarchal ideology behind the myth (Sayre 49). Moreover, the Anglo representation of American Indians in this brief narrative also stands as prototype for

later portrayals. The distinction between ‘ignoble savage’ and “noble savage,” for instance, is construed here as a gendered one between Indian men – ‘devill’-like, ‘blacke,’ primitive, and murderous, who need Smith’s skills – and Pocahontas, who supported the white colonist to the extreme of being willing to sacrifice herself. In her symbolic gesture of shielding Smith with her own body, her feminine body overlapped with the feminine land of America. This trope became an important theme for later nationalistic dramas in the nineteenth century (Scheckel, chapter 3). Given that this mythic narrative has been retold in various forms and versions, it appears that the story helps Americans respond to cultural challenges at different historical moments.

Thus I want to account for the resonance of the legend of Pocahontas in American culture in this chapter. What cultural work – what symbolic shaping of the way people think in the U.S. – does this narrative keep doing for us in its variations (see Hogle xi)? The tremendous number of references to Pocahontas in the past and present centuries makes an exhaustive study impossible. Robert Tilton offers a thorough critical analysis of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century transformations and reinterpretations of the early texts surrounding the myth of Pocahontas in *Pocahontas: The Evolution of a Narrative*. I go beyond his work to examine how representations of John Smith resonate with our contemporary views of American history and civilization. His cultural status as a historical figure transforms in different variations of the narrative, but he is often depicted against the backdrop of American Indians and best known for the Pocahontas episode.<sup>v</sup> His shifting images have been closely bound to historical and regional interests. Numerous Smith scholars and artists have represented him when addressing various

national, racial, and gender issues in response to the social, political and ideological exigencies of the nation-state. Such representations became cumulative in their impact on the public understanding of an American Genesis, of the birth of Anglo-American history – the Jamestown colony, of the civilization that followed, and accordingly, of America as an idea, a place, a people, and a culture. Here I focus on the two literary works that have contributed to two of the most significant shifts of Smith’s cultural status. First is Henry Adams’s “Captain John Smith,” a momentous piece that appeared after the Civil War, which has generally been considered as delivering “a death blow” to Smith’s reputation by convicting him of lying (Abrams 247). Then there is Everett Emerson’s *Captain John Smith*, which revives Smith during the Cold War as “the father of Anglo-American history” (1971, 63). Based on their extensive study of the same primary sources, Smith’s writing, they came to remarkably opposite conclusions.

In this chapter, I first summarize their major theses on Captain John Smith. I then situate their works within the context of their cultural, political, and historical backgrounds. Specifically, I want to put their divergent approaches to Smith’s Pocahontas episode in dialogue. In doing so, I examine how Adams and Emerson’s readings of John Smith and his Pocahontas episode resonated with the critical questions about American history, race, and the progress of civilization during the periods following the Civil War and leading up to the Vietnam War. The answers to these questions will eventually lead to a better understanding of the current globalization process. In later chapters, I will explore how colonial tropes in the Pocahontas narrative have been developed across a wide cultural and political spectrum in our contemporary

cultural lives. I do not intend to suggest here that Adams's and Emerson's accounts in any way directly 'reflect' their historical or ideological realities, but rather to explain the coincidence that brings their cultural texts into conversation, which is really a conversation between their specific social-political discourses.

<ii>

In Henry Adams's essay "Captain John Smith," published in the prestigious *North American Review* in 1867,<sup>vi</sup> he accuses Smith of fabricating the Pocahontas episode in a syllogistic argument. This ambitious argument "aims at nothing less than the entire erasure of one of the most attractive portions of American history" (1867, 2). Adams first juxtaposes the two "essentially" different original accounts of Smith's captivity among the Indians in *A True Relation* and *The Generall Historie* (1867, 6). In *A True Relation*, Adams eloquently attests, Smith represents Pocahontas as "merely" a "pretty and clever child of ten years old", as opposed to her romantic image in the public imagination inspired by *The Generall Historie* (1867, 23). Presenting the obvious discrepancy, Adams attributes it to Smith's "remarkable...[and] curious air of exaggeration" in *The Generall Historie*, thereby claiming the superior credibility of *A True Relation* that excludes the Pocahontas episode (1867, 10). In addition, his research shows none of Smith's contemporaries in the British Virginia colony ever recorded or even mentioned Pocahontas's rescue. This event was thus either known only to Smith, who never revealed it until sixteen years later, or it never happened.

Adams proceeds to further analyze "Smith's style" within the historical context. Smith's version of colonial history, Adams contends, is "filled with excuses and praise"

of himself as well as “vigorous attacks and abuse of everyone else, from the authorities in England down to the laborers at Jamestown” (1867, 18). Smith’s life after leaving America was marked by a series of failed attempts to return and by his unemployment in England. The gradual addition of the Pocahontas episode, and indeed Smith’s whole writing career, Adams maintains, are Smith’s self-fashioning to save him own image from complete career failure. Adams’s case against Smith carries so much weight that later Smith critics who wished to reverse his conclusion have had to address its brilliance.<sup>vii</sup>

Everett Emerson published *Captain John Smith* in 1971 because he “admire[d]” Smith very much (7) and, as “even more an enthusiast,” revised it in 1993 with a growing “appreciation” of Smith (x).<sup>viii</sup> This book serves as a thorough analysis of Smith’s life and writing, a career with “tremendous impact on England and, indeed, the world” (1971, 31). Emerson first situates Smith within the historical and literary context, ranking him among “the great Elizabethan voyagers” (1993, 1) and comparing his writings with those of William Bradford. Through a close reading of Smith’s writing and twentieth-century Smith scholarship, Emerson then dedicates the rest of book to defining Smith’s vivid and successful personae as “the reporter,” “the historian,” “the autobiographer” (1971, chapters 3 and 4), and “pamphleteer and poet” (1993, chapter 7). Even though Smith’s deficiencies as a writer are brought into view upon close reading, in Emerson’s view, Smith’s contributions outshine his limitations (1993, 101).

In *Captain John Smith*, Emerson pictures Smith’s complex image as “[a]bove all, an American,” “a new man,” “the prototype of the American hero” (1993, 116), “the

greatest single founder of the English colonies in America” (qtd. in 1993, 117), and “the first American writer” (1993, 35). Smith’s many writings on the Virginia colony are summarized by Emerson in one theme<sup>ix</sup>: “Smith was the only real expert on Virginia and he alone knew what should have been done and what should be done now” (1993, 61). He was the globalized man who ventured to travel abroad to make his own fortune. At the same time, Smith, as a reporter and compiler, in Emerson’s view, wrote “the first American book” – *A True Relation* (1993, 35), and addressed “an important part of the deeper cultural consciousness” in his *Generall Historie* (1993, 55) Significantly, in addition to being the founding father of the Virginia colony, Smith is also credited with “the signal individual achievement in the founding of Massachusetts,” for it was his *Description of New England* that guided Pilgrims and Puritans there (1993, 98).

<iii>

The Pocahontas narrative was a crucial part of cultural battle during the Civil War for both Northerners and Southerners; this battle was a defining one regarding the then heated issues of race, the future of America, and the development of American history and civilization. Henry Adams joined this battle as he started his writing career with the ambitious piece “Captain John Smith” in order to “make a position for himself” (1946, 222). Adams was the fourth generation of the Massachusetts Adams clan, “the greatest American family” of his time, which provided two presidents and a minister before his generation reached maturity (Brogan, Intro. to Adams 1961, viii).<sup>x</sup> Early in the 1790s, his great-grandfather, John Adams, founded and led the Federalists with Alexander Hamilton of New England, against the Republicans led by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia of the

South. Together, they witnessed the birth of the American party system. In the cultural terrain, their competition has taken the form of competing “invented traditions” about Massachusetts and Virginia, what Ann Uhry Abrams has called the myths of the pilgrims and Pocahontas (5). Both the myths of pilgrims and Pocahontas filled the “cultural and historical void created by the separation from the English motherland,” inspiring a new nation searching for historical anchors (Abrams 5). Where the nation-state was unable to accommodate all those challenges, it had fallen to the terrain of culture to be imagined differently. Through cultural narratives, people grasp the challenging realities to reach a new ‘common sense’ of Americanness. The sentiments of New Englanders and Virginians in their contending quests for national origins could be found in such famous works as the Capitol Rotunda paintings, Robert W. Weir’s *Embarkation of the Pilgrims* and John Gadsby Chapman’s *Baptism of Pocahontas*. In this way, the two invented traditions of origin myths evolved with politics, culture, history, economy and industry. Further aggravated by increasing regional ideologies and economic developments, the conflict between the North and South culminated in the Civil War (1861-1865).

Adams’s attack on Smith can thus be seen as a continuation of the century-long conflict between New England and Virginia colonies, his grandfather and Jefferson, the Federalists and the Republicans, and the North and the South. In the agrarian South, the legendary statuses of Pocahontas and Smith were established and solidified particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was also a time when many Southerners started to claim themselves descendents of Pocahontas. In popular culture such as dramas, “Pocahontas emerg[ed] as a popular hero” and a national mother (Scheckel 45).

Whereas miscegenation between white and black was much frowned upon, interracial marriages between white males and American Indian females were common. The native female body, as frequently represented in popular culture, was repeatedly identified with the “feminized landscape of Virginia....receptive to masculine self-assertion” (Scheckel 47). The Southerners’ claim of direct descent from Pocahontas and interracial marriages therefore legitimized their claim to the land, the base of the agrarian economy in the South. Before the Civil War, Virginians had highly elevated ‘the heroic deeds of Pocahontas and Smith,’ whose images were symbols of the agrarian South. Smith was heralded as “the father of the Colony” and “the Columbus of the Virginian civilization” by respected antebellum Virginian historians (qtd. in Abrams 15). His figure as a courtly knight and courageous leader “[b]y the mid-nineteenth century...was as well known to Americans as any figure from American history, save, possibly, George Washington” (Lemay 1991, 2).

During the Civil War, at the suggestion of John Gorham Palfrey,<sup>xi</sup> Adams began his research on Smith – the core of the Virginian origin myth – while serving as a private secretary to his father Charles Frances Adams, then American minister to the Court of St. James. At this time, Virginians promoted the images of Pocahontas and Smith even more vigorously. The origin myth was magnified so powerfully that it served as a “motivating credo...during the war years” (Abrams 240). As the conflict between the North and the South grew, Palfrey believed that an essay on John Smith and Pocahontas would “attract much attention, and probably break as much glass, as any other stone that could be

thrown by a beginner” (Adams 1946, 222). Adams’s initial research seemed to confirm Smith’s Pocahontas stories, but further readings changed his mind.

Adams took on the Smith project fully aware of the pertinent and crucial issues it arose regarding race, the development of American national history, and the progress of civilization in the second half of the nineteenth century. As his editor George Hochfield makes clear, Adams believed history to be “the attempt to understand politics in terms of broad, underlying themes...[including] the development...of national character” (1961, vii). Therefore, a lot was at stake in Adams’s denunciation of Smith. When Adams decided that he had a “clear case” against Smith, he admitted privately that it was going to be a piece of political propaganda, “some sort of flank, or rather a rear attack, on the Virginia aristocracy, who will be utterly graveled by it if it is successful” (*Letter I*, 287-8). As the multi-layered conflicts between the two sides were not entirely resolved by the end of the Civil War with victory on the federal government’s side, Adams’s piece was his aid to the Union effort to “discredit the South” (Sayre 59).

Pocahontas, the personification of many Southern values, is then the focus in Adams’s eloquent case against Smith, whose reputation, Adams believes, rests largely upon his romantic association to her. At the end of his argument, Adams explains why the key issue of Smith’s deceit was “left unquestioned” until Adams’s research (1867, 30). The Pocahontas episode, he points out, had been celebrated by influential historians of their time such as George Bancroft as “the most romantic episode in the whole history of [this] country” (1867, 11-2). The illusion thus created by its popularity was powerful enough to blind numerous historians and readers (Adams 1867, 12). On the grounds of

extensive research, Adams breaks this illusion by arguing that the writing of the Pocahontas episode is Smith's attempt to associate himself with Pocahontas, "the object of extraordinary attention" and "most distinguished person in [London] society" of 1616 and 1617 (1867, 24), and to promote himself against what he considered as "undeserved neglect" – "career failure" in Adams's words (1867, 29). In construing the Pocahontas narrative as an illusion, Adams discredits not only Smith, but also Southerners. He charges Smith's *Generall Historie* with "falsehoods of an effrontery seldom equalled in modern times" and transforms Smith's image into that of a liar and failure. Furthermore, Adams also deconstructs the Pocahontas narrative and thereby dislodges the Southerners' legitimated claim to land through their connection to Pocahontas. Accordingly, Adams also displaces the base of Southern economy – agriculture, paving the way for industrialization throughout the country.

In the post-bellum period, Adams's work on Smith had significant impact in the cultural terrain. Adams's even stronger attack on Smith in the later revision of "Captain John Smith" in 1871 testifies to the necessity he and his camp felt to further discredit the symbol of the Old South. In general, Adams succeeded in "delivering a death blow to the Virginian myth by falsifying its very core" (Abrams 247).<sup>xiii</sup> Alongside the Union's victory in the Civil War, the onset of Thanksgiving as a national celebration, and other northern historians' attacks on Smith, Adams's famous piece played a part in the emerging dominance of the New England founding myth in the American cultural scene during the last third of the nineteenth century (Abrams 240). This cultural triumph was concomitant with the victory of Northern economy that promoted industrialization,

capitalism, and expansionism. The origin myth of the Pilgrims, Puritans, and the first Thanksgiving dinner had thus gained more momentum than before, upholding the New England genealogy from the *Mayflower*. As a contemporary history professor indicates, when asked about “the original settlement antedated the founding of the United States,” his college students’ “consensus answer was ‘1620’” (Loewen 67). All those before the Pilgrims – the pre-Columbian, non-Anglo, and other Anglo settlers such as Jamestown – are obliterated from most of the history textbooks, which have been “filled with America’s origin myth, the story of the first Thanksgiving” (Loewen 67). In addition, Smith’s reputation in American academe suffered tremendously. It was not “recuperated” until the second half of the twentieth century by Smith’s later editors, biographers, and commentators (Sayre 60). Among them, Everett Emerson contributes much to summarizing his predecessors’ arguments, which he invests with even richer cultural meanings for the late-twentieth-century America.

Emerson’s life and academic career were closely connected to the development of the U.S. during and after World War II. During the War, he served in the Marine Corps, stationed on the Mariana Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Before 1944, college education was a realistic option only for an elite minority in the States. At the end of the War, the GI Bill brought about profound and permanent changes in American society. Higher education became a sound economic investment that, it was hoped, would serve egalitarian ideals of opportunity for all veterans, African Americans, and women.<sup>xiii</sup> It was under these circumstances that Emerson went back to school. During his postwar school years, the United States emerged as one of the most powerful and richest nations

in the world. Having avoided the devastation that World War II had caused in Europe, Japan, and other parts of the world, the nation entered an era of unprecedented prosperity, standing as the land of hope for immigrants from other shores. It was in this euphoric atmosphere that Emerson finished his education and began teaching.

After school, Emerson had a successful career as a defining figure in the field of Early American Literature since its reconception during the Cold War era. At this time, the nation was committed to exporting American-style capitalism and democracy. Filled with self-confidence from his education, his teaching and scholarship both displayed Emerson as “a person at home with America” (“A Tribute” 229). His books are “known to all in our field” and his two edited works, *Major Writers of Early American Literature* (1972) and *American Literature 1764-1789* (1977), “have become standards in the field” (“A Tribute” 229). He was an active member in the creation of the MLA Division on American Literature to 1800 and of the journal that helped define the field, *Early American Literature*, which he edited for twenty years from 1968 to 1988. It was in the late 1960s, when the nation was deeply divided over and involved in a war very different from WWII – the Vietnam War (1959-1975) – that Emerson, as an established scholar in early American studies, took up the John Smith project.

With his previous academic work exclusively on English and American Puritanism, Emerson’s sudden interest in John Smith of the colonial South in the midst of the Vietnam War was significant. Emerson also admits that his *Captain John Smith* would not have been possible if not for the “heroic scholarly labors” of “modern” Smith scholars (1993, ix-x). Emerson’s choice leads us to question why, after almost a century

of neglect in academia, John Smith attracted much favorable attention of scholars after WWII. In particular, it was curious that Emerson, previously an established Puritanism scholar, found John Smith so important as to be worthy of a book-length study during the Vietnam War. The answer to the first question may manifest itself if we explore the second inquiry, a clue to which may be found in a dialogue between Adams's and Emerson's opposing interpretations of Smith and the Pocahontas episode.

In *Captain John Smith*, Emerson establishes a dialogue with Adams's influential piece "Captain John Smith," which Emerson calls "the most famous attack on Smith" (1993, 77). At two different historical moments with distinct agendas in mind, Adams and Emerson differ drastically in their views of Smith as a person and a writer. Adams's central thesis is to discredit Smith's veracity, whereas Emerson celebrates it: "The most admirable quality of Smith's style is its concreteness. Smith's *concern for fact*...gave him great assistance when he turned to writing" (1971, 124, emphasis mine). For Adams, Smith is a liar and braggart; for Emerson, Smith's work reflects "in the most direct possible manner [Smith's] own activities" (1971, 34). Where Adams critiques Smith's penchant for praising himself and abusing others, Emerson does notice some revisions – especially the denigrations of Captain Newport – that make Smith "seem very peevish" (1971, 85). However, Emerson recontextualizes such incident by highlighting Newport's efforts to profit improperly from colonization, and his attempts to replace Smith as the president of a colony, all set alongside Smith's otherwise "kind words" about many other colleagues (1971, 85).

To respond to Adams, Emerson also addresses the gradual additions in Smith's texts. Emerson clearly avoids any singular answer to Smith's inconsistency. Instead, assuming Smith's honesty, Emerson subtly defends Smith by quoting contemporary Smith biographers and editors Bradford Smith (1971, 81) and Philip Barbour (1993, 73), whom Emerson endorses as "responsible scholars," and who provide conjectures to justify the accuracy of Smith's accounts (1993, 73). They believe that Smith was either adopted by Powhatan's tribe through a rescue ceremony, or that he was writing in memory of Pocahontas "whose bravery and devotion to the English Smith [was] emphasized" after her death (1993, 73). In this fashion, Emerson suggests that Smith's every addition serves meaningful purposes (1993, 70). Smith's many significant changes, Emerson reckons, are all "effectively integrated into the narrative" as the result of "responsible editing," even though some of the "small" ones are indeed motivated by "egotism" (1971, 85).

Smith's writing thus receives exactly opposite evaluations by Adams and Emerson. As mentioned above, Adams believes Smith's writing to be the consequence of his career failure. In Emerson's account, Smith, undeniably going through the distress of neglect after leaving America, as Adams indicates, was the great dreamer with "paramount" ideal for the American colony, with which Smith "alone knew what should be done" (1993, 61). As such, Smith wrote because he wanted to provide a "firsthand" and thus "accurate" account of, along with his practical plans for, the American colonies (1971, 119-21). Unsuccessful though Smith's attempts were, he "lives on" as a vivid persona as "the first American" (1971, 119-25). This American persona that Emerson

promoted during the Vietnam War was a colonial hero, whose heart was always in the right place, and knew what was best to be done.

The largest gap between Adams's and Emerson's works lies in their reading of the Pocahontas episode. In Adams's case against Smith, the Pocahontas episode is its central focus, the pedestal which Adams believed had raised Smith's heroic status through the mid-nineteenth century. By arguing that episode a fabrication, Adams devalued Smith's character, writing, and cultural status. Emerson, on the contrary, presents a unique view of this episode, completely different from those of Adams or any other critic, in his discussion of *Generall Historie*. Emerson treats this episode as just another reasonable addition to serve Smith's perpetual purpose of writing: "to advocate his Indian policy" (1971, 79). In approaching the Pocahontas episode, Emerson directs his readers' attention from Pocahontas to Smith's emphasis on "the savagery and the grotesqueness of the Indians" (1971, 80). This most well-known and popular episode is, in fact, Emerson observes, an "anticlimax" because most readers are diverted from the real center of the story (1971, 81). Emerson therefore urges "every American...[to] read Smith's classic account of his rescue by Pocahontas" in order to understand its real center, which he asserts to be Smith, "not really Pocahontas" (1971, 80-1). Emerson wants all readers to understand the real purpose of this episode as endorsing Smith's handling of American Indians. They serve as the background against which "Smith saved himself by both bravery and quick-wittedness," as well as personal charm and stamina (1971, 81). Pocahontas is thus only mentioned by Smith for her "bravery and devotion to the English" (1993, 73). As Emerson reads it, in this episode, what happens to Smith

beyond Pocahontas is what matters – in particular, Smith’s achievement in his Indian policy. Emerson’s distinctive comments here, I believe, are key to rooting his John Smith project in the particular historical moment that saw its production.

One critical reason for Emerson’s choice of pursuing the Smith project was that it resonated with questions about race, American history, and the progress of civilization that obsessed many Americans during the 1960s. These preoccupations stemmed mainly from two events that became deeply intertwined in the public consciousness: the civil rights movements and the Vietnam War (Huhndorf 133). The movements challenged but were unable to correct the structural inequality underlying the American society (Takaki 409). While minority activism raised questions about racial hierarchy at present, the Vietnam War made Americans reconsider the civilization that was founded upon a collective colonial past:

From the beginning, the [Vietnam] War had been linked in the popular imagination with the nineteenth-century conquest of Native America. Early on, commentators dubbed Vietnam “Indian Country”... It seemed to demonstrate that “‘progress’ can and must be defended by ‘savage war.’” (Huhndorf 133)

But, in time, when Americans first witnessed the horrors of war on television, public sentiment was marked by doubts about the justice of war and, by implication, about the earlier conquests of Native America (Huhndorf 133). It was at this time that Emerson published his *Captain John Smith*.

If Vietnam can be identified as “Indian Country,” Emerson’s vision of America in the Vietnam War may be analogous to John Smith’s view of the Jamestown colony surrounded by American Indians. Smith, as Emerson emphasizes, “was an American, it

should be insisted, because his vision of America was...[to] be considered the characteristic one” (1971, 6). At the center of this characteristic vision is the “Indians [as] a constant threat” (1971, 79). The ‘Indian question’ is thus the connecting thread throughout Emerson’s book. Emerson frequently underscores Smith’s “conviction that he alone knew how to deal with the Virginia Indians in order to protect the English colonists” (1993, 71). According to Emerson, Smith’s observation of Indians, “working of course from the assumptions of his time but showing real interest in and rarely condescension toward the Indians,” “was surprisingly objective” (1993, 51). From this objective view, as Emerson shows, Smith “conceived Indians as inferior peoples obliged to recognize the superior status of the English” (1971, 82), thereby rightly advocating “his own tough Indian policy” (1993, 64, 71, 77) to “frighten the Indians into submissions” (1971, 79-81) and to “treat the Indians with severity” (1971, 82?). In fact, Emerson summarizes the message of Smith’s *Generall Historie* in one sentence: “send Smith with troops to subdue the Indians” (1993, 75). In many ways, Emerson’s interpretation and celebration of Smith’s ‘Indian policy’ in the colony resonated with the American government’s desire to deal harshly with the Vietnamese communists during the Cold War era. America’s others, American Indians during the colonial period and Vietcong during the Vietnam War, are to be racialized in cultural presentation and colonized for the progress of civilization. During both times, Americans’ general attitude towards the colonized other is to conquer for the realization of an order, an American dream, at the center of which is Smith’s image as the first American in Emerson’s vision.

In order to sustain Smith's image as a model American, Emerson devotes much of his book to defending Smith from numerous criticisms. Responding to the critical disapprovals of Smith's attitude towards the Indians, Emerson comments that, even though Smith did write that the Indians were "all savage" (qtd. in 1993, 50), he was "more impressed with their abilities" (1993, 50). Addressing criticisms on Smith's severity in his Indian policy, Emerson justifies it as a consequence of the violent massacre of 1622. Moreover, Emerson emphasizes, Smith "distinguished between low-born and high-born Indians" (1993, 50), validating the violence against the violent low-born. Most significantly, to discredit Henry Adams's influential attack on Smith, Emerson quotes Adams's 1861 letter to Palfrey in which Adams mentioned Smith's account as "truth" (1993, 77). Emerson thus believes that he has overthrown Adams's "very strong case" against Smith: "Unfortunately, Adams chose to publish the attack without including even a hint of the position he set forth in the letter" (1993, 77). In fact, Adams's 1861 letter was written before his further research and readings; it was not until later, after his extensive research "at the British Museum," that Adams believed that he "got enough...to make...a clear case" on Smith's deception, as he recorded in an 1862 letter (*Letter I*, 287). This quoting out of context is uncharacteristic of Emerson's overall mode of scholarship.

Through a detailed study, Emerson's representation of John Smith elevated the image of an American hero in the midst of the Vietnam War, who happened to be the founding father of "Anglo-America" and whose colonial vision of American dream was worthy of being celebrated in the Cold War era (1971, 63). Smith as "the quintessential

American hero,” “an American...a new man,” tackled in his writing “the hallmarks of American literature: the Native Americans, America as wilderness, the importance of hard work, the recognition of individual merit over family status” (Emerson 1971, 119-21). In Emerson’s portrait of Smith, rival American origin myths are connected into one. Smith is central both to the building of the Jamestown colony and to the guiding of the Pilgrims and Puritans to the New England. Smith’s vision of America is one of the American dream, as Emerson has it, a world with “limitless possibilities” (1993, 64), and “a world where abilities, not social standing, determined one’s future” (1993, 121). The vision of this egalitarian and democratic American dream is visible in John Smith’s and Emerson’s writings. However, this vision, this American dream, was presented by and for the white colonists. As Paul Lauter elaborates, American studies as “an *academic* discipline...came into being in the post-World War II era as, in part, an expression of American nationalist objectives” (23). While there are many implications in and supplementations to this statement, it nevertheless presents an appropriate context for Emerson’s John Smith project. It may also explain in part the emergence of favorable academic opinions of Smith right at the end of WWII.

<iv>

The Pocahontas narrative has continuously played a crucial role in American culture and history. The thorny issues of race, gender, nature and nation it evokes resonate with ongoing questions about race, American history, and the progress of civilization that have obsessed many Americans at different historical moments. During the Civil War and the Vietnam War, Henry Adams and Everett Emerson both chose to

pursue a Smith project, situating the figures of Smith and Pocahontas at the center of the debates that dominated the cultural scenes during their time. In the discussion above, they appear to diverge distinctly in their assessments of John Smith as a colonizer, a writer, and an American cultural icon. Ultimately, however, Adams and Emerson's paths converge as their works each played a part in defining the progress of American history and civilization that has informed today's America. Adams's work resonates with the Northeastern values of speeding industrialization, expanding capitalism, and thus expansionism that characterize the development in the course of the nineteenth century. As a result of the continuous development in this general direction, the Vietnam War occurred on America's expanding international frontier during the Cold War era. Emerson then utilized the old colonial tropes from the Pocahontas narrative, developing the John Smith persona to promote the advance of America's international frontier, at the cost of nature, and racialized and gendered others.

Within the current globalized world, the Pocahontas narrative is still alive in various forms across a wide cultural spectrum, as the United States' current global and domestic relations between races, genders, and ethnicities are to an extent still shaped by the early colonial conquest of American Indians, the West, and nature. The transformations of age-old colonial tropes are the product of changing contradictions and problems in cultural and political realities. Such processes are fascinating, because they illustrate the continuities between past and present, while bespeaking the adaptability of cultures that are productive of a new 'common sense' in the face of new challenges. With the acceleration of globalization and corporatization, these cultural narratives are often

regenerated in such commercialized products as Disney's *Pocahontas*. These new manifestations celebrate treasured American qualities including egalitarianism, democracy and individualism. Such cultural narratives, contingent upon historical events and diverse interest, further justify and define America's role on the world stage, where the old colonial tropes of race, gender, nature and progress remain, as I will explore in the coming chapters.

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Notes

<sup>i</sup> Disney has chosen and adapted several popular European and African folk tales for its series of motion pictures such as *The Little Mermaid* and *The Lion King*. In the series, *Pocahontas* is the first local tale originated in America, which introduces John Smith as the first folk hero in American history for Disney's audience.

<sup>ii</sup> For definition of myth in the usage here, see the Afterword in Frances Mossiker, *Pocahontas: The Life and the Legend* (NY, 1976).

<sup>iii</sup> When Smith first narrated his colonial encounter in his *True Relations* of 1608, the Pocahontas episode was not included. In 1624, seventeen years after the Pocahontas story was reported to have happened, this episode appeared for the first time when Smith published the *Generall Historie*. This particular addition has led to considerable skepticism as well as a dispute among scholars about Smith's reliability in his later account. On the issue of and debate over John Smith's veracity, see Adams, Barbour, Fuller, Hulme, Lemay, Mossiker, and Bradford Smith.

<sup>iv</sup> See Abrams, Barbour, Fuller, Lemay, Sayre, and Bradford Smith.

<sup>v</sup> See note iii.

<sup>vi</sup> It was later revised with even more vehement attack on Smith and published in *Chapters of Erie*, 1871, and further revised and reprinted in *Historical Essays*, 1891.

<sup>vii</sup> See Barbour, Emerson, Fuller, Hulme, Lemay, Mossiker, and Bradford Smith.

<sup>viii</sup> This 1993 version is not so much a revised as it is an updated edition of Emerson's

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1971 study. The approach, structure, and assessment are essentially unchanged, which are the main ideas I want to address here and which appear in both versions. The 1993 version is different in its incorporation of the substantial Smith scholarship between 1971 and 1993, many of which are also referenced in this chapter.

<sup>ix</sup> See Emerson 1993, chapters 3-5. By quoting various sources of and repeating this statement in various forms, Emerson implicitly consents to it.

<sup>x</sup> “There were no legitimate descendants in the male line of Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, the only founders of the Republic to be compared with John Adams” – who was Henry Adams’ great-grandfather (Brogan, Intro. to Adams 1961 viii).

<sup>xi</sup> John Gorham Palfrey, author of a five-volume *History of New England* (1858-92), in which Smith is portrayed as a career failure (Adams 1867, 26).

<sup>xii</sup> This ‘death blow’ is to be understood in relation to the myth of the Pilgrims in academia and larger national scenes. The Pocahontas legend was still much alive in regional popular culture.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Lipsitz on how inegalitarian the distribution of GI Bill benefits was. Emerson as a white male would have seen the egalitarian side of this Bill though.

Chapter Two  
 Frontier Exceptionalism:  
 Nature, Nation and Others in Nineteenth Century Art and Twenty-First Century Media

*The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history.*

– Raymond Williams

*Every view of nature carried with itself a powerful American self-image.*

– Barbara Novak

Thomas Cole's 1836 work, *The Oxbow*, hangs prominently as a significant centerpiece in the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Every day thousands of visitors to the museum view this American painting. In its middle foreground is the figure of Cole himself, working on the *Oxbow*. Cole's image is lastingly fixed as "an American producing American art, in communion with American scenery" ("Description"). His vision of art, nature, and nation was crucial to the formation of the nineteenth century American artistic taste and Americans' attitudes towards their native land and natural world. Under Cole's influence, landscape painting replaced portraiture and history painting as the dominant genre throughout most of the century. This significant turn in American art history has been closely associated with many pressing nineteenth-century concerns including evolving ideas about nature and culture, the Old World and the New World, the progress of civilization and history, and the frontier. These issues were central to Cole's time, an age of tremendous political, religious, economic and cultural transformation, and are central in Cole's art as well. An analysis of Cole's work reveals not only how these issues figure into his work but how Cole's

paintings resonate with a defining moment in American history that in many ways still informs America today.

In this chapter, I will examine how Cole's work was unlike many of his fellow landscapists, with its ambivalent attitudes towards progress, and how his romantic approach to issues of nature, nation, race, and gender still resonate in our globalized world today. Cole's work has been the main focus of several Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibitions held in 1987, 1994, and 2002. Focusing on two Cole paintings, *The Oxbow (View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm)* and *The Hunter's Return*, I want to look at how discourses of nation, nature, race and gender come into play in his representation of nature and the frontier. I approach such representations of the frontier as a constitutive process, a site on which multiple discourses converge to give meaning and purpose to these representations at specific historical moments. To explore the implications of the currency of his art and the contemporary gap between the academic and public understanding of the frontier, I also juxtapose the discourses of nation, nature, race, and gender in Cole's works and the 2002 PBS program *Frontier House*.

<i>

During his lifetime, Thomas Cole (1801-1848) witnessed an unprecedented turning point in American history. His family had immigrated from England when he was seventeen. Between 1803 and 1845, he saw the United States triple its size and become a continental nation.<sup>1</sup> The accelerated process of industrialization resulted in rapid urbanization and the commercialization of agriculture. These developments helped fuel

the westward expansion to come and forever changed the American landscape as the nation gradually shifted from an agriculture-based society to an industry-based capitalist economy, beginning in the Northeast.

Cole's debut in 1825, as well as his rise to fame, coincided with two historical events: the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine and the opening of the Erie Canal (Flexner 145). The Doctrine warned European nations away from the hemisphere, furthering the American policy of regional control. The Erie Canal made direct trade between the Eastern seaboard and the expanding West possible. The interior of the American continent was thus connected to the Atlantic Ocean with New York City as its gateway, assuring the economic leadership of the city. For the first time in American history, travelers had a close view of "a splendid microcosm of the young nation," enjoying nature alongside industrial progress (Burner et al. 523). In 1829, Cole himself joined the throngs of travelers going up the canal, and in his journal praised the wonders of commerce and industry springing up all along the artificial waterway. At the same time, a new class of merchants rose to wealth as they operated within their own continent. These capitalists were also expansionists who were to become major patrons of the landscape artists such as Cole and those others who celebrated American nature and frontier (Truettner 31; Boime).

Intellectually, the discovery of American nature and landscape was an artistic as well as a literary movement in the early nineteenth century. In fact, the early nineteenth-century interest in nature and landscape was not unique to the United States.<sup>ii</sup> Although there was a new respect for "the unspoiled nature" on both sides of the Atlantic, the U.S.

was the only nation to fuse this interest with a nationalistic pride. As industrialization swept through the Old World, nature in its early state uncontaminated by human touch became harder to find. The New World of America, with its abundant natural beauty and resources, unexploited by the white race, was found to be an ideal place to realize Rousseau's concept of primeval paradise than any European country.

It was also a time when intellectuals started calling for a distinctively American culture; the sentiment of this cultural turn is best characterized in Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1837 speech "The American Scholar." During the first half of the century, in his Leatherstocking series, James Fenimore Cooper expressed an awed feeling for the grandeur of America's virgin forests. In his sketches and stories, Washington Irving lent a pictorial charm to the Catskill mountain region and the Midwest. In his poetry, William Cullen Bryant praised America's natural wonders (Tymn xiv). These American writers thereby shared and appreciated many of Cole's artistic intentions and mode (Merritt 12-3).

The development of the first native landscape school paralleled the American Romantic literary movement. In his youth, Cole and his family fled the smoky sky of industrialized England and spent years on the Ohio frontier, which exposed and attached him to the more pristine nature in America, intensifying his appreciation for it. When he arrived in New York in 1825, he quickly discovered the picturesque beauty of the mountains near the Hudson (Tymn xix). In his "Essay on American Scenery" (1836), Cole distinguishes America from Europe by calling attention to "the most distinctive...characteristic of American scenery" – "its wilderness" (8). His art offered an

initial framework for development of landscape paintings. Two of Cole's paintings *The Oxbow* (1836) and *The Hunter's Return* (1845), which were completed during the midpoint and last stage of his life and career and considered among his most popular works, are characteristic of the basic structure of many later American landscape paintings of the frontier.

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Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow* provided a popular artistic narrative in a framework that corresponded to prevalent discourses of land, nature and the nation's future among the early nineteenth-century Northeastern elites. "Constructions of nature," Donna Haraway implies, are oftentimes "riddled by the dominations of race, colonialism, class, [and] gender" (2). In *The Oxbow*, Cole depicted an actual scene just south of Northampton, Massachusetts, that contained "the oxbow," a dramatic bend on the Connecticut River. *The Oxbow* presents a panoramic and expansive view of the scene from above, a way of viewing shared by all artists across generations and schools with few exceptions in the nineteenth century (Boime 35). Art historian Albert Boime calls this design "the magisterial gaze," a commanding gaze that defines the relationship between the viewer and American nature:

the domination of the land and landscape through the magisterial gaze of Cole and Bryant conjures up the ineffable sense of domain through the metaphorical idea of being the master of all they survey. This occurs only in a purely American context that no longer has to depend on European imports for its economic and cultural life. (89)

The visual and physical control of land serves as a foundation for constituting American nationhood. Moreover, under the magisterial gaze, the land in *The Oxbow* endlessly

recedes into the background in peaceful sunlight, signifying infinite hope for Americans lying beyond the horizon. This commanding view thus embodies a cultured American elite's exaltation on beholding the expanding territory.

Within this framework, landscape paintings such as *The Oxbow* resonate with many mythic narratives that inform American perceptions of nature. Cultural historians such as Perry Miller and Henry Nash Smith have argued that many Americans conceived of their exceptional national character as a domestication of the vast 'virgin land' to realize "the Garden" in the New World. Having left behind the crowded civilization of Europe for America, settlers recreated themselves as denizens of a new nation on the supposedly vacant land.

Significantly, this conception of nature's nation is also gendered. The idea of nature, already being gendered as female, embodies the nationhood, whereas the primary agents that take and work the land are almost always depicted as male. Since the time of early exploration and settlement, European and American male colonists have imagined themselves nurtured and gratified by entering a maternal and erotic landscape. In the artistic tradition that starts with early images such as Theodore Galle's *America* (1580), American nature is always personified in a female, an object of interest and possession in the eyes of the male explorer. Annette Kolodny describes this symbolic feminization of nature as creating a psychological bond between male settlers and their new land. The tradition of feminizing landscape has been inherent in the national history. In Thomas Cole's writing, even though nature is considered a sacred place where people seek God's

order, nature is always referred as “she” which is always seen or observed by an American subject referred as “he” (9).

At the core of these mythic traditions, then, are the contradictory conceptions of nature. The idea of nature is central to defining American uniqueness even as everything associated with nature is subsidiary (Stein 6). Leo Marx detects the inner conflict of this conceptualization of ‘nature’s nation,’ in Miller’s term, between the desire for the pastoral life and the drive for the civilized, industrial progress that endangers the very existence of garden – nature itself. Nature is contradictorily construed as the very ground of nation and yet also the converse of civilization to be settled, as Roderick Nash suggests in *Wilderness and American Mind*. In addition, the imagery of the feminized future almost always induces violence, as male settlers inevitably “violate” the new continent represented as the mother/lover whose overtures initiate conquest. Clearly, such contradictory views of nature come from the need to subject nature to the nation’s needs, control, and exploitation.

In the midpoint of his career, as national progress was unfolding, Cole urged people to cultivate a taste for American scenery of rural nature (17). Wild or undisturbed nature, observe Nash (1982) and Marx (2000) in their works, can only be valued in hindsight, once the sprawl of civilization has threatened it with extinction. Cole’s attitude towards such development was ambiguous. Cole differed from his followers such as A. B. Durand and Frederick Church, among others, all of whom were American born. Raised in the pre-Civil War Northeast that claimed peace and prosperity as the base for progress, they saw American nature as a physical manifestation of a benevolent God

(Flexner 146). They developed the framework set by Cole in their optimistic paintings, which were regarded by the broad American public as revealing the glory of the divine creation.

Cole, on the other hand, brought up in England witnessing the consequences of industrialization, remained haunted by what the linear progress might bring. Seeing the dilemma between sustaining a nature's nation and a progress-driven society, Cole composed his grand production between 1834-1837: *The Course of Empire*. This five-piece series presented a cycle of an empire born out of nature, reaching the height of civilization, and eventually fading into desolate wilderness. The role of human civilization in the tragic historical cycle, like that in the cycles of nature, seems beyond human control. According to Cole's description of the fourth canvas, *Destruction*, "Ages may have passed since the scene of glory, though the decline of nations is generally more rapid than their rise" (qtd. in Wallach, Truettner and Wallach: 93). The series could have been a lesson for its American audience, but it achieved public success without the lesson delivered. Even though the devastated city in this series is ostensibly anonymous, for instance, Cole's contemporary American critics read it as Jerusalem on the eve of its fall to Rome. Delighted reviewers and public audiences in the Northeast avoided any possible parallels between America and empire in the series, enjoying it as "stories of other lands" (qtd. in Miller 1993, 33).

In the spring of 1836, as a relief and change of pace from months of laboring on *The Course of Empire*, Cole painted *The Oxbow*, in which he conceded more to public

opinion. In a letter dated 2 March, 1836, Cole wrote to his patron of *The Course of Empire*, Luman Reed:

I shall take advantage of your kind advice (and Mr. Durand's) and paint a picture expressly for the exhibition and for sale. The only thing I doubt is that I may be able to sell the picture....Fancy pictures seldom sell and they generally take more time than views, so I have determined to paint one of the latter. (qtd. in Novak 1978; 76-7, and Merritt 30-1)

The result was a work of “art” supposedly transcending the “mere view” (Novak 1978, 77).

In *The Oxbow*, then, Cole presents American nature, free of contradictions, by collapsing temporal and spatial boundaries and juxtaposing the past, present, and future of the national nature on the same canvas, a design to be found in many later landscapes. The canvas is largely divided in two: on the viewer's left, dark clouds overshadow the wilderness; on the right, soft light brightens the greens and yellows and the gentle rolling landscape of farms. Here, the contrasting views of nature from colonial times are reconciled in a bright prospect. The garden in the New World is cultivated successfully on the right lowlands and small hills, stretching back for miles and miles as indicated by shrinking details in clear sunlight. Nearby neat farms can be seen prospering with growing crops. Human habitations are visible by the smoke from their homes scattered in farmlands. A couple, a well-dressed gentleman and his wife, can be seen walking along the farms, enjoying the peaceful American garden. This pleasing cultivated landscape pictures the American pastoral dream so well that it was chosen to appear on the Metropolitan magazine cover which featured the exhibition of Hudson River School paintings entitled “American Paradise” in 1994.

In dramatic contrast to this view of cultivated nature is the wilderness at the left, what Cole believes to be “the most distinctive” feature of America (8), in which we see “the sublime melting into the beautiful, the savage tempered by the magnificent” (9). The dark storm clouds over the wilderness and the blasted trees and gnarled tree trunks in the foreground, among which the only remaining tree bends seemingly under the storm, testify to the uncontrollable power as well as the sublimity of nature. Behind the foreground is dark green unbroken foliage, signifying the primeval forest that is receding at the edge of the cultivated landscape. Cole sees the prospect of American wilderness in such scenes:

in looking over the yet uncultivated scene, the mind’s eye may see far into the futurity. Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise temple and tower – mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; and poets unborn shall sanctify the soil. (16-7)

The pastoral civilization seems gradually and peacefully to replace the wilderness, being as beautiful in its order as nature is in the sublimity of wilderness. “As the undeveloped land is subjugated to development and speculation, landscape assumes a pregnant role in masking the commercialized objectives of those who promote it” (Boime 89). *The Oxbow* can be interpreted to assume this role in naturalizing the conquest. The wild forces of nature as shown on the blasted trees and scattered tree trunks seem to justify human actions to subdue the wilderness in exchange for the ordered garden. In addition, the contrast between the darkness shadowing the wilderness and the light brightening the civilized world here also became an often-used metaphor in the later nineteenth-century landscapes. As Boime points out, it was Cole’s ability to encode in his landscape “the idea of futurity and progress” that made his work so saleable (8). In *The Oxbow*, the

storm seems to be receding – indeed, the complete title indicates it is a view after a thunderstorm – the light of civilization is rising to enlighten the now forested wilderness. As this landscape could be perceived as a peaceful transition into the future and progress, the painting, despite Cole's pessimism about selling it, was bought for \$500 after its exhibition by Charles Talbot of New York. Many contemporary scholars have criticized Cole for showing no remorse for the recession of the wilderness in the painting (see Boime and Truettner).

As a romantic artist, Cole lamented the passing of wilderness by capturing its beauty and sublimity and calling for its appreciation, while also debating the future of civilization. In *The Oxbow*, as William Cronon has suggested, “in the lazy turn of the great oxbow – echoed by the circling birds at the edge of the storm – we can make out the shape of a question mark: where is all this headed?” The question mark resonated with many of Cole's contemporary concerns and the debate about the future. The questions lying between civilization and wilderness bespoke the artist's and people's anxiety and uncertainty about the disappearance of wilderness from American scenery and the march of utilitarianism. Cole expresses his unease about the concerns of his time: “a meager utilitarianism seems ready to absorb every feeling and sentiment, and...improvement in its march makes us fear that the bright and tender flowers of the imagination shall all be crushed beneath its iron tramp” (6).

In an age of great transformation, Cole, along with other intellectuals such as Cooper, started a national romantic tradition of artistic attitudes towards progress; they

represented idyllic images of the passing wilderness and condemned the evils of civilization, while accepting its march as inevitable. Cole states:

I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes is quickly passing away – the ravages are daily increasing – the most noble scenes are made destitute....another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called improvement; which, as yet, generally destroys Nature's beauty...This is a regret rather than a complaint; such is the road society has to travel; it may lead to refinement in the end, but the traveler [sic]...dislikes the road. (17)

Where the road led people remained a question mark for the artist, whose admiration for American nature was genuine. However, the central paradox within his philosophy lies in the dualistic conception of wilderness, separating human from nature. When he argues for the appreciation of American nature, everything associated with nature is understood on the grounds of human needs. This was why, even with his ambiguity towards the progress, certain rhetoric in his art was read and developed to become an “imperialist nostalgia,” in anthropologist Renato Rosaldo’s term, that romanticized what was lost in the march of modern progress.

One of the pressing public issues during Cole’s time, for instance, was what to do with the American Indians. When in office, President Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) developed new Indian policies that culminated in the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830. During the same year, the rise of the United States was linked to the history of Indian decline in the Capitol guidebook, which was to become common rhetoric (Scheckel 129). At this time, American Indians seemed to be a passing race. In popular culture during the 1830s, as mentioned in the last chapter, John Smith’s rescue by Pocahontas was recurrently evoked in various cultural forms as a “myth of national

origins,” that would legitimate the act of conquest by celebrating Pocahontas’s subjugation to the white culture (Scheckel, 41). Dana Nelson maintains that American Indians in nineteenth-century art continually functioned as a “multiuse repository” (101) for justifying conquest and “validating whiteness *qua* civilization” (66).

In Cole’s art, the primary agent of this national drama of progress is always a white male, to whom nature and everything associated with nature such as American Indians is subjugated.

In Cole’s *The Oxbow*, the only active agent represented is Cole himself, working on the creation of American art in the middle ground between civilization and wilderness, where he is the creative link. His agency is most evident in that he looks back at the audience, as if winking at us, acknowledging his awareness of the audience’s gaze. The presence of American Indians, on the other hand, like that in his other American landscapes, is hard to detect. The background forest of *The Oxbow*, where a circle of birds flew out of the top of trees at the edge of the storm, seemingly being disturbed by something in the forest, reveals a tiny head of a typical American Indian under Cole’s brush, suggesting that there might be a few more of them hidden by the foliage.

As American Indians failed to establish dominion over the natural world, Rachel Stein convincingly elaborates, Euro-Americans viewed them as subhuman beasts who blended into the landscape rather than lording over it; this view is manifest in Cole’s art. Cole reflects: “the American continent, now the United States, rested [before colonization] in the shadow of primaeval forests, whose gloom was peopled by savage beasts, and scarcely less savage men” (7). In *The Oxbow*, as in his other works, the

presence of American Indians is always passive. Although human figures in general are comparatively small in Cole's work, white presence is afforded agency whereas that of American Indians is oftentimes much more minute and their posture makes them blend easily into the natural world. Moreover, regardless of differences from tribe to tribe, the American Indians are always adorned with a red-feather headdress and, in other paintings, similar-colored body and clothes, that corresponded to the tips of the blasted trees or autumn leaves. They are subsumed by nature of Cole's landscape where they, like autumn leaves and other animals in the wilderness, 'naturally' disappear into the background. When Cole recalls the historical associations on American landscape, he speaks of "the great struggle for freedom...worthy of poet's pen or the painter's pencil" – the American Revolution (16). He further suggests that "American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and the future" (16). This total erasure of American Indians from American history is the rhetoric behind Cole's composition of 'natural' landscapes. Engraved on each landscape, as Joni Adamson argues, are "patterns of social injustice that encompasses people and environment" (20). In Cole's artistic vision, such injustice is naturalized and romanticized.

Toward the mid nineteenth century, with industrial progress in full swing, landscape paintings such as Cole's *The Hunter's Return* (1845), considered "one of Cole's finest American views" (qtd. in Merritt 39), started to evoke nostalgia. Cole believed that "we are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly" (17). In *The Hunter's Return* and his other piece *Home in the Woods* (1847), Cole's audience found Eden on the frontier. *The Hunter's Return* centers on an

opening in the forest, beside a transparent lake, an idealistic frontier dwelling. On the viewer's right stands a settler family's log cabin, around which women are attending to household chores and children are playing. Tree stumps, indicating husbandman's work, and blasted trees, symbolizing the sublime power of nature, stand together on the foreground. Here human cultivation and natural power appear in peace and harmony. From the forest thicket on the left two bluff hunters approach with a deer slung on a pole and borne on their shoulders. One waves his cap to the wife standing by the cabin door and holding up their infant to greet his return. The eldest son hurries on ahead. Around the peaceful scene tower the evergreen firs, maples, oaks, and beeches, the foliage of which "kindled with all the splendid dyes of an American autumn.... [For Cole's patron, it] is altogether a beautiful and most authentic illustration of American life and nature" (qtd. in Merritt 39). For Cole's general nineteenth-century audience, it was the "most pleasing" landscape, in which "everything wears nature's brightest apparel," that enabled people to "breathe again" (Parry III 339). Such romanticism, as I suggest in the next section, is still at work today in the popular television series *Frontier House*.

For people in the Northeast amid speeding urbanization and industrialization, such frontier scenes were the most popular among Cole's works; the popularity of this vision of nature and the American Eden, however, was steeped in ideology. When the westward expansion became the trend in the mid nineteenth century, the images of the American garden were developed. Frontier, in between civilization and wilderness, was regarded as where "the best of human condition" was possible (Marx 100). Paradoxically, the frontier was the ideal space to realize the American dream to civilize the New World

– the “errand into the wilderness,” in Perry Miller’s term – and simultaneously a place to pursue a freer, ‘more natural’ life away from the crowded, civilized world. In the pleasing landscape of *The Hunter’s Return*, the social hierarchy of civilization is replicated on the frontier. The American Indians, in contrast to earlier paintings, are completely extinct from this “free land” promised for white Americans.

Furthermore, *The Hunter’s Return* illustrates the gender divisions of the time, which the frontier life might have reinforced. Nature’s virgin interior becomes the frontiersmen’s stage for exploring their masculinity, who felt overwhelmed in the industrialized urban society in the nineteenth-century Northeast. They hunt game to provide for their family, gradually domesticating the environment for their use. Women and girls, by contrast, are strictly confined to the domestic sphere men built for them – in and around the solitary log cabin. They are the present and future bearers of the tradition of civilization, being bound to the only symbol of civilization – the log cabin – and being the reproducers of the civilized generations to come. The eldest son here is the only one who occupies the middle link of the two separate worlds of wilderness and civilized space. He is representative of the next generation of new Americans who have cultivated the frontier and will be the master of the land/nation. Such frontier scenes were a most popular cultural invention of an artificial American nature, in which men are both at ease with and in control of nature, a prospect most reassuring and gratifying for nineteenth-century Northeastern audience. The romanticizations in the representation of gender issues are still at work today, as I will discuss in the next section on *Frontier House*. Lying at the heart of every western culture’s favorite story about itself, as Adamson

points out, are the roots of injustice and environmental degradation (29). Regardless of the consequences, the appeal of this story of the frontier is still alive in our contemporary lives.

Cole provided his nineteenth-century audience and patrons, most of whom were elites in the Northeast, with a popular vision of “the possibilities of the national landscape” (“Description”). During the colonial period, two contrasting views of nature and land in America illustrated people’s projected fears and desires: the Puritan literature and art of New England presented the unknown nature as wilderness, the antithesis of civilization; in other early colonies such as Pennsylvania and Virginia, nature was imagined as the Garden, which God offered to men for a second chance (Herzogenrath 85). From the beginning of the American government, its sovereignty was grounded in physical control of land (Bright and Geyer, Bender: 74). What began with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison as an argument for liberty through equality of condition became in the Jacksonian era a doctrine of expansionism (Bright and Geyer, Bender: 74). Cole and his followers during this era incorporated divergent views of nature to represent American landscape. In the course of the nineteenth century, territorial expansion became the “manifest destiny” of America. Simultaneously, the story of the frontier as national fulfillment and personal self-renewal was to be canonized by Frederick Jackson Turner at the century’s end: “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development” (27). Turner argued that the close of this western frontier was the end of the American source of rejuvenation.

Cole's most well received works during the nineteenth century were those on American native scenes: American nature and frontier (Novak 1978, 71-2). These scenes afforded the audience living in a tumultuous age a certain defining sense of distinctive Americanness that bespoke the promising prospect of future. Actually Cole critiques this general attitude in American public's preference for "things not thoughts" (qtd. in Novak 1978, 78). In this country, the study of the national frontier has dominated historiography as it never has elsewhere (Duara, Bender 32). This frontier historiography, through such ideas as manifest destiny, often tended to moralize national expansionism throughout the twentieth century, what many believe to be "the American century." Although the domestic frontier closed, the international frontier opened to continue the expansion. As I maintain in my last chapter and will elaborate further in the coming chapters, American dealings with this international frontier are oftentimes justified based on colonial typologies found in early America. The frontier since the nineteenth century has become a popular metaphor that is still at work today.

In the twentieth century, Cole's art has inspired diverse responses. The last decades of the century witnessed a vigorous criticism of the frontier narrative in various cultural texts. Since the 1960s, art historians have traced the ways in which Cole and his fellow artists "enlisted their talents serving progress" (Truettner vii) and have analyzed their landscape paintings in terms of "a nationalistic project" (Novak 1980, 16), one that reflects ideas of nineteenth-century expansionism and manifest destiny. Indeed, in certain scholarly views, Cole's art is only studied by "a small number of academics" and only

“for its historical value” today due to its being more comforting, less complex and challenging than, say, the writings of Henry David Thoreau (Smithson 110-1).

I would argue, however, that we study Cole, among other reasons, for the national tradition he started that still echoes today. Cole’s complex, ambivalent attitude towards progress was and is a quality often lost to the general audience of the nineteenth century and later. Cole’s works are certainly comforting to a degree, but it might be just the reason why they still feature in the major blockbuster art exhibitions today. His art resonates in our globalized world beyond all scholarly comment. In reality, the profound gap between the public imagination and scholarly trends has emerged dramatically in examples of popular culture, such as the well-liked site of Frontierland in Disneyland (Limerick, Grossman: 72) or in the controversy over “The West as America,” a 1991 exhibition at the National Museum of American Art (Grossman). Labels accompanying the popular western images explicitly referred to these paintings as “ideological narratives,” castigating them for their ideas about race, class, gender, and war (Grossman 4). This exhibition generated responses ranging from accolades to vehement dismissals. As Patricia Limerick demonstrates with powerful examples, despite the shared roots in nineteenth-century historical tradition, the popular understanding and the scholarly effort to reckon with the complex history of the frontier “share almost no common ground” (Grossman: 79).

In light of this gap between the public and academe, I want to articulate the resonance and appeal of Cole’s romantic vision of and approach to American nature and frontier in the popular TV series *Frontier House*. In my last chapter, I discussed an

example of how an academic scholar in the 1970s evokes colonial tropes from early American colonial enterprise to view post-World War II American international enterprise. Similar connections are seen in the lessons of *Frontier House*. Such resonance, including narratives and approach that informed American perceptions of nature and frontier in Cole's art, is to be found in the public and participants' response to the PBS project, *Frontier House*. An analysis of this resonance can thus help us connect the present and past. I can then explore the cultural and political palpability of certain discursive constructions of American nature and frontier, race and gender, that has contributed to Cole's currency in our time, and to the popularity of *Frontier House*, simultaneously binding the two narratives together.

<iii>

Every episode of the widely popular 2002 PBS program, *Frontier House*, is introduced with the following statement: "Fictionalized, mythologized, often romanticized, now see the real experience of life on the frontier" (Brown and Chermayeff).<sup>iii</sup> This program has sent three modern families to experience what life as homesteaders may have been like on the American frontier in 1883. As the narrator claims in the program: "Even today the quest for the American dream echoes loudly" (Brown and Chermayeff). This claim is substantiated by the fact that more than 5,000 families across the country applied to participate in the project. As the series associate producer Mark Saben notes, the overwhelming number of applications and their outstanding qualities testify to the degree to which "this project has such a broad appeal and has seemed to strike a chord with the American people." Certainly, to this day, many

Americans still consider the “so-called pioneer spirit of the ‘Old West’ as the one that ‘forged’ the nation” (Truettner 28). Gordon Clune, one of the participants, for example, identifies with this collective history of the American West even as an immigrant from Canada. He explains his interest in the project as a desire to “understand what our ancestors have done,” because they were “great people” and “America [as] a great country is from” (Brown and Chermayeff). Moreover, different participants in the project admit their previous image of the frontier as “charming” and “romantic,” a “Garden of Eden” (Brown and Chermayeff). In light of this prevailing perception of the frontier, the program producer explains the goal of *Frontier House*: “Life in the American West has been greatly romanticized and mythologized. We wanted to peel away some of that veneer” (qtd. in Wrobel 147).

From late May to early October 2001 in backcountry Montana, what the three families struggle through demonstrates “a good deal about the rigors of frontier life” (Wrobel 149). That, in terms of achieving the producers’ goal, makes *Frontier House* “a resounding success” for many (Wrobel 150).<sup>iv</sup> It has been one of the most watched mini-series on PBS and been re-broadcast several times since it first aired. The show is acknowledged to have de-romanticized frontier life and nurtured “the public’s historical consciousness” (Wrobel 150). More than twenty history consultants worked to provide period supplies and practical guidance for the three families in their attempts to survive and thrive as homesteaders. Without modern conveniences such as running water, electricity or toilet paper, the families were challenged on many different levels of survival: to provide themselves with shelter and food, to stay healthy, to keep their farms

running, to prepare for the winter, and to live with each other, among other things. In this process, those modern pioneers have had to live with much difficulty and drudgery, such as routinely hand washing clothes and scrubbing dishes. These struggles have been emphasized in the program to show how “life was much harder in the early days of white settlement” (Wrobel 150).

Smoothly woven into these frontier narratives is the well-researched historical information which presents the similarities and disparities between the past and present about race and gender in particular. For one thing, the program strives to present racial diversity on the frontier, an effort praised by critics. The choice of an interracial couple, Nate (of African descent on his father’s side) and Kristen Brooks from Boston, in the project serves as a natural entry into discussion of racial segregation in 1880s. Three months into the project, the families decide to build a period frontier school for their children. In their preparation, the other two families – the well-off Clunes from Southern California, and the middle class Glens from Tennessee – unanimously abandon the idea of a public school on government aid which would prevent the Brooks’ children from attending it. Moreover, when families are starving during the first five weeks, Dale Old Horn, a Crow Indian, “in a gesture that turns history on its head,” brings a mule deer a Crow Indian team has hunted to feed the homesteaders (Brown and Chermayeff). This incident also gives Dale Old Horn a chance to state his perspective on the Homestead Act, which starved out many Crows in 1880s. In addition, the local general store designed for the project is run by Hop Sing Yim, indicating the presence of Chinese

population on the frontier at the time. Altogether critics believe that this “emphasis” on racial diversity is a “welcome corrective” to the racism of 1880s (Wrobel 149).

The reenactment of nineteenth-century gender roles and the tension it created is another focus in *Frontier House*. From the beginning, domestic skills consultant Susan Cain laid out the ground rules clearly: “The way this project is going to work is: men will be doing the roles outdoors, and we women will be working within the home” (Brown and Chermayeff). The lifestyle and domestic order thus unfold throughout the program are vividly reminiscent of the ideal frontier scene depicted by Cole and favored by his nineteenth-century (mainly male) audience. The voice-overs also address the sexist laws of the period that deprived women of their legal rights upon marriage. At the end of the project, the three men of the families all could say they enjoyed it, and could really live there. “In five years,” Gordon Clune says, “I could have this place really wired” (qtd. in Stewart 47). Nate Brooks and Mark Glenn found it hard to leave the result of their hard work: the cabin, the chicken coop, the garden, the root cellar, the fences, chopped woods, among others, almost all of which were made with their own hands.

On the other hand, during the course of the project, the three women felt trapped in that lifestyle for many reasons. Their work was repetitive and routine; their daily schedule went: “sewing, cooking, making bread, sanitary...” (Brown and Chermayeff). Furthermore, while men could show the result of their hard work in the things they built, most of the women’s daily labor vanished with eaten food and washed dishes, and they had to start almost everyday with the same routine. Karen Glenn’s marriage cracked under what seemed to be the tension of incongruent gender roles, and she suffered

physical pains from the daily work. For her, the “Garden of Eden” at the beginning “turned into hell” (Brown and Chermayeff). Adrienne Clune felt like she had “been sentenced to five-month hard labor,” with a household of six to attend to, and suffered bouts of depression which never happened to her before. Kristen Brooks sums it up: “This place is men’s playground. We [women] are just the [backstage] supporting staff” (Brown and Chermayeff).

*Frontier House* thus ends with some good and intelligent history and life lessons, at least for many critics who have commented on it. In the last segment of *Frontier House*, the participants are back in their modern lives, six months after leaving Montana, and are concluding their frontier experiences with lessons they have learnt. As they enjoy modern convenience and freedom, they also feel the excess of possessions. Adrienne says she shops and drives less, while Karen and Kristen give up things like dishwashers and cable TV. Upon leaving the project, Adrienne believes she would never complain about her workload in contemporary life because nothing could be as hard as frontier life for her. In her new house in Malibu, California, however, she talks nostalgically about the much tighter family relationship on the frontier.

In the end, *Frontier House* is about the twenty-first century (Poniequzik 69). Its most salient lesson is our alienation from family, people, work and nature (Poniequzik 69; Brown and Chermayeff). At the same time, nonetheless, all of them but Mark Glenn believe that this is the century in which to live. Both Adrienne and Kristen praise technology such as washing machines, which Kristen calls “God’s gift to the world” that liberates our lives (qtd. in Stewart 48). The general message of the program is then

“people should better remember and appreciate the hardships of their forbears as they enjoy contemporary comforts” (Wrobel 149).

Still, the discourses of race, gender, and nature in *Frontier House* are rather unsettling. To a certain extent, the manner in which those discourses are posited in *Frontier House* are similar to Cole’s approach to them in his art. Even though times have changed and, in many ways, ‘improved’ since the nineteenth century, the ways in which these discourses contribute to shaping how Americans view and represent themselves still stand and continue to connect us with the collective past with which people are encouraged to identify.

While *Frontier House* intends to emphasize racial issues by representing racial diversity on the frontier, at times their efforts at such appearance of pluralism underplay “the real experience of life on the frontier” that the program claims to present. The problems of racial hierarchy in the 1880s and in our contemporary life, for instance, are completely glossed over by what appears in *Frontier House*. The two white families, the Clunes and the Glenns, demonstrate the up-to-date spirit of political correctness and pluralism when they decide to forego government aid so that the Brooks’ future interracial children can also attend their school against the racist law in 1880s. In fact, to emphasize this spirit, Mark Glenn goes into an emotionally-charged tirade: “Do we decide if Nate’s kids can go to school with ours? Yea. .... Why the hell’d we come out here if we are going to have someone tell us what to do....against what we feel?” (Brown and Chermayeff) As Mark and the others all express their desire to have their children educated alongside the Brooks’ children, they take pride in overcoming or ignoring the

prevailing racist assumptions of the 1880s which viewed anyone of African descent as subhuman. However, they also fail to see their own susceptibility to the hierarchical construction of race. This hierarchy grants them the right to decide the rights of children of African descent, a right they accept and wield generously with, in Mark's case, a sense of entitlement.

On the other hand, while the two white families are happy to inform the Brooks of the 1880s racist law and their modern non-racist decision, Nate views it differently. Regardless of the sense of modern improvement that the two white families share, he expresses his doubts based on his personal experience of racial discrimination in modern-day life. The fact that people today laugh at the racist history of 1883 Montana, he indicates, often leads them to ignore the common racism and racist stereotypes that are "still very much alive today" (Brown and Chermayeff). This comment curiously resonates with how American Indians and Asian Americans are represented in *Frontier House*.

In the six-hour show, the reference to American Indians takes up less than five minutes. In an event that replicates certain racist stereotypes, Dale Old Horn makes his appearance only when the families are adjusting to the harsh reality on the frontier and in need of help. In the beginning of the project, Gordon Clune protests vehemently when the families are informed of the current law against hunting game out of season. With prepared vintage guns for himself and his sons, he cannot accept that "in America you have something like that, I feel very very disappointed by how little this part of the West is emphasized" (Brown and Chermayeff). For Gordon, hunting and the frontier are

inseparable; hunting represents the most significant part of the Old West he seeks to relive, a crucial element of frontier life that could nurture masculinities in him and his sons. While they enjoy the venison as a gift from Dale Old Horn, they listen to his account of history, in which the Homestead Act prohibited the Crow Indians from hunting and so two out of three Crows starved and died during the late nineteenth century. Yet, the homesteaders – Gordon included – nod silently. The incident, unlike many others in the show which solicit the participants' reflections, is cut directly back to show how the families resolve to work harder so they would not have to depend on such gifts. The narrator comments in passing: "The free land comes at a price, only it was paid by the American Indians" (Brown and Chermayeff). So ends the brief appearance of American Indians. This staging for the Indians to feed the pioneers when they first arrive and struggle with the elements, moreover, is reminiscent of a favorite national origin story of the first Thanksgiving dinner, reinforcing the image of peaceful colonization. All the racial contradictions, as Dale Old Horn's story, are dislodged in the historical past, seemingly distant from the viewers' contemporary world.

The presence of Asian Americans on the frontier is also acknowledged briefly in *Frontier House*, and it also includes the sense of current-day racial profiling. To represent racial diversity on the frontier, the producers choose to replicate a period store run by Chinese American Hop Sing Yim to provide for the families. His importance is emphasized by the families, who consider him the only available mailman, supplier, and trader for all kinds of services, food, and money exchange. He always appears in a neat uniform, whether in his store or at delivery, with a white starched shirt, a black apron,

and oiled hair. His much-valued service seems to put him on equal footing with the homesteaders, and his brief appearance, like Dale Old Horn's, happens only when families are in need. However, other than his function, Hop Sing Yim has no agency in this program; he is not even given a chance to tell his story. These modern families transplanted to 1883 Montana accept his service pleasantly, conveniently oblivious to the fact that the 1882 Exclusion Act deprived the Chinese population, including the store keeper, of their right to citizenship. In other words, no Chinese person was entitled to anything that the homesteaders took for granted: land or other civil rights. Unlike the other vivid cast members from the three families in the project, Hop Sing Yim in his uniform evokes the passive image of pre-World War II Chinese Americans being confined to service-sector jobs in American society.

The racial diversity praised by the critics in *Frontier House*, like Cole's artistic representation of the racial relations, is a romanticized vision which masks a tremendous amount of history that might be "too much" for the general audience. In both cases, the overall framework of the narrative is white-oriented. Cole's *The Oxbow* establishes active white dominion over the land in his romantic landscape, where the American Indians as part of nature are giving way to the march of white civilization. In *Frontier House*, which claims to offer "the real experience of life on the frontier," the reconstruction of the American frontier is made easy for its focus on the homesteaders; the life of other ethnic groups, which made homesteading possible, are not taken into consideration beyond their mere presence. Under the appearance of diversity, the historical setting is thus white centered, recalling how the non-white populations in reality were not perceived as fully

human nor equally eligible under the Homestead Act. Within this setting, although racial violence is not totally masked in a romanticized view such as Cole's, the past contradictions between races remain in the past, worthy only of a passing comment. In the place of colonization is the modern appearance of racial diversity and mutual civility between races in the program, bespeaking the improvement in the modern attitude towards racial and ethnic differences. The program producers and participants through their liberal stance thereby dislodge all racism and subsequent conflicts in the past, representing a liberal world of the present. For Cole's nineteenth-century and PBS's contemporary audience, the present moment represented in each case was and is a romanticized vision.

Similar mechanisms seem to be at work in the representation of gender issues in *Frontier House*. In the interviews toward the end of the program, all the adult participants are asked to reflect on how twenty-first-century women fit into nineteenth-century life, but not how modern men fit into frontier life. What this question implies is that nineteenth-century and twenty-first-century women live completely opposite lives. The program has proved a clear point: by assigning women a strict schedule of chores to follow, which is much more specific and repetitive than men's, they have shown the difficulties and frustrations of these modern women in that situation. The three women, along with the viewers, find it much easier to live in the modern world, in which the gender roles are much less restricted. They agree on the improvement of modern-day life.

The only one who ever criticizes the modern-day gendered wage system is Karen Glenn, whose marriage falls apart in the course of the program for apparently gender-

related reasons. In the many clips that record her and Mark's fights, she appears to challenge the typical gender roles in the family, insisting on herself being the pivotal person and refusing to answer to Mark. Yet the focus of the editors' cuts make her seem more aggressive and unlikable. Therefore, her passing comment – "women and men are still getting paid differently for the same work [as 1883], we really haven't evolved as much as we like to think we have" – is easily denigrated by the avoidance for its bitterness and lack of balance. It does not change the lesson for Adrienne and Kristen, and for those who identify with them, that our time is the century in which to live.

The image of nature on the frontier in *Frontier House* is evocative of the bifurcated view in Cole's landscape: it is divided between "nature's fury" in the wilderness and "nature's beauty" on the cultivated homestead. This perception of nature is again based on the human ownership and control of nature. When the families first arrive on the "virgin territory" in Montana, as the narrator calls it, the first thing Gordon Clune does is to take his sons to survey the land, stressing to them "all the land you can see, all the way to that mountain...is our land" (Brown and Chermayeff). The families' first response is to praise nature's beauty of the "promised land" over which they claim ownership and will soon change and cultivate. Later, as they struggle to survive as homesteaders, Gordon, for instance, explains their task as a competition between "family versus nature, family versus the elements" (Brown and Chermayeff). Central to this perception of nature is still the dichotomous division between humanity and nature.

The sponsors of *Frontier House* and their advertisements at the beginning of every episode also implicitly suggest certain lessons about understanding the role of

nature and our world. Bob's Red Mill Natural Foods promotes their products as "all-grain, all-natural...to your good health," evoking nostalgia for pre-industrial, unpolluted and organic sources of food, and for an unpolluted natural environment signified by the frontier. The other two sponsors, on the other hand, focus on the lessons from the hardships of the frontier. Alfred P. Sloan Foundation funds the project to "enhance public understanding of the role of technology in society." This public understanding that the Sloan Foundation is trying to enhance is elaborated in the next sponsor's pronouncement: "Life on the frontier would have been different with GP brands like...bath tissue, Brawny towels, and Dixie cups and plates... We make the things that make you feel at home." Against these words describing modern products are the scenes from *Frontier House*, in which the inconvenience of the frontier privy, the lack of toilet paper, and the unsanitary rag used to wash dirty dishes are dramatically shown. Technology is thus closely associated with modernity in our world, symbolizing comfort, progress, convenience that characterize our lives in this view. The price of environmental degradation in this process, however, is underplayed in the celebration of technology.

<iv>

Like Cole's *The Oxbow*, *Frontier House* tells a two-fold story. Through the dichotomy between the wilderness and garden, Cole laments the passing wilderness while he simultaneously appreciates the order and beauty of the cultivated garden. *Frontier House* evokes nostalgia for a pre-industrialized world and uncontaminated natural environment, while the hardships of the frontier endorse the material comfort and social improvement of our modern world. In Cole's artistic world, there is no contradiction in

the peaceful transition to the human control of land. *Frontier House* enacts contradictions in terms of race, gender, and nature. However, the major part of the show is taken up by the primary focus on fights and arguments, often found in Reality TV, between the Clune and Glenn families and among the Glens. As one critic points out, “it’s hard for the civics lessons to compete with a civil war” (Peysner 77). The Brooks, the neighborly and mellow interracial couple, thus get relatively little screen time (Ponieqozik 69). In this way, the issues of race, gender, nature, and American history give way to – and are obscured by – the drama between the modern pioneers; while the contradictions involved in those issues are mainly attributed to the past in several passing comments, these issues seem to be settled and resolved in our modern world. At the same time, the price of industrial progress and technology that have been paid by the racialized, gendered others and natural environment is glossed over in the appearance of improvement and progress.

Both Cole’s art and PBS’s *Frontier House* were and are interpreted in ways that reinforce the status quo of their time by glossing over the critical issues of race, gender, and nature. Confronted with the rapidly transforming, industrializing world, Cole openly lamented, regretted, but did not complain about the passing of ‘pristine nature’ and ‘noble savages’ associated with it. In our globalized world, by looking into the past and showing the modern families struggles in the frontier setting, the producers of *Frontier House* also fictionalize the frontier experiences by celebrating the settler heroes and heroines who had made sacrifices to make modern American possible. The project gives us the impression of how much things have improved today on various levels, while our alienation from family, people, and nature is construed as a necessary price to pay, as

concluded by the participants. This price – what and how much has been lost in the process of industrial progress – is an issue addressed in the program only through a few sporadic comments by participants. Cole’s romantic landscape and the drama in *Frontier House* thus lull their audience into a sense of pleasure that upholds our status quo while supporting the infrastructure that has made the conquest of the frontier and later progress possible: racial and gender inequality, alienation from and control over nature, and selective interpretation of history.

Furthermore, the forms in which these ideologically saturated messages are conveyed are in general considered a *neutral* channel of expression. During Cole’s time, it was commonly believed that “In every kind of art, truth to nature is an imperative law.... Truth-telling about nature, external nature and internal, the creation, in short, is the great end and aim of art” (qtd. in Novak 1978, 71). As an exalted form of expression of truth that should “sublime and purify thought, by grasping the past, the present and the future,” art was afforded a certain sheen of objectivity even though it was mainly supported by the elites and capitalists of the time (Cole 3). In our time, public television enjoys a similar status that assumes a morally higher position and neutrality than other channels of mass media. PBS is generally considered to be *the* television channel for thinking intellectuals, a network which inspires originality, tolerance, and connectedness, oftentimes ignoring the fact that it receives funding from transnational corporations that have vested interests in certain representations of race, gender, nature, and technology. As such, the ambivalence and inequalities in the cultural ideas that Cole and PBS projects attempt to decipher are both obscured and revealed in the process.

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Notes

<sup>i</sup> In 1803, Thomas Jefferson signed the Louisiana Purchase; in 1819 Florida was purchased; in 1845 Texas became a state.

<sup>ii</sup> This emphasis on nature and landscape could be found abroad in Jean Jacques Rousseau's concepts of natural primitivism, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, and William Wordsworth's "God in nature," as well as in Emerson's "Nature" (Novak 1978, 61).

<sup>iii</sup> *Frontier House* is one of the four PBS "living history projects" to date. The ones preceding it include *1900 House* set in Victorian England, and *The 1940s House* in World War II Britain. *Frontier House* is the first one set in an American context. The next one will be *Colonial House* set in a 1628 American colony, to be aired in Spring, 2004.

<sup>iv</sup> Several commentators compare *Frontier House* and other living history projects to the currently overflowing reality shows and in the general opinion the PBS projects are the only few intelligent among them (Martin 23).

Chapter Three  
 Performing the Orient in the Globalized World:  
 The Redemption of White Manhood, the American Nation and Empire by *Miss Saigon*

*In other words, it is only insofar as  
 'Woman/Women' and 'the East' are  
 defined as Others, or as peripheral,  
 that (Western) Man/Humanism can  
 represent him/itself as the center.*

– Chandra Talpada

Mohanty

As the new millennium unfolds, the Vietnam War becomes the “past” both Americans and Vietnamese are trying to “put aside” (Armstrong, par. 12) and Vietnam is well on its way to adopting capitalism. Several years after the end of the Cold War, President Bill Clinton began the change with his 1995 order to lift a postwar U.S. trade embargo of Vietnam. Under advice from Americans, the country has since developed its market economy, vigorously learning the “American way of business” and aggressively courting business with America in terms of corporate investment and tourism (Armstrong, par. 26). In 2002, 265,000 Americans visited Vietnam, making the U.S. the second largest and growing source of Vietnam tourism. Many of those tourists were Vietnam veterans. Meanwhile, Vietnam, a hybrid of socialism and capitalism in its present system (Armstrong, par. 9), is working to integrate into the world economy, and embracing the “standardized ways” of American businesses and international rules (par. 30). Today, as businessmen report, young people in Vietnam “are very interested in business... They have no memory of war” (Armstrong, par. 32). It would appear then, that three decades after the war ended with the defeat of the U.S., America has won the war over communism through capitalism and globalization.

Interestingly, at the same moment in history when Vietnam seems to start accepting capitalism as a national goal, *Miss Saigon*, a musical which first appeared in 1991 and which has been known as one of the “Big Four” of the twentieth century, achieved “one of the greatest stage successes ever” (“*Miss Saigon* Becomes,” par. 2) in the West and in Southeast Asia. When it first opened its curtains in New York in 1991, it was immediately regarded as “already a legend” (Kroll, par. 2; “*Miss Saigon* Becomes,” par. 6). It broke the record as one of the longest-running and most popular musicals on Broadway, in addition to being “Broadway’s most expensive and controversial musical” (Bañez, par. 6). To this day, it has entertained more than 28 million people in 12 countries and 71 cities worldwide, and in eight different languages for over ten years. In this chapter, then, I want to examine the reasons for *Miss Saigon*’s popularity in the U.S. and elsewhere and why it is no accident that its popularity developed concurrently with the development of capitalism in Vietnam and the warming of U.S.-Vietnam relations.

The story of *Miss Saigon* is a simple one, many have said, but it has the power to deeply move people. It is set during the final days of the Vietnam War, just before the American evacuation of Saigon in April 1975. Kim, a young Vietnamese woman works at the Dreamland, a local bar in Saigon run by Engineer, a Eurasian who aspires to the American dream. Kim falls in love with Chris, a marine guard at the U.S. Embassy. Kim refuses her betrothed, a high-ranking Viet Cong cousin, and marries Chris instead. But when Saigon falls under the red banners and yellow stars of the Viet Cong, the American GI is forced to retreat, not realizing Kim is pregnant. Kim flees to Thailand to work as a bar girl owned by the Engineer to raise Chris’s son and waits patiently for him to return.

Three years later, Chris returns to Kim, but with his American wife. In an ultimate sacrifice, Kim kills herself so that Chris will take their son to the U.S.

Based on Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* (1901), *Miss Saigon* is one of the contemporary manifestations of what Maria Degabriele terms 'the Madame Butterfly myth' of popular orientalism (105). According to Degabriele, the story of *Madama Butterfly* functions as a myth, endlessly repeated and elaborated in the last one hundred years. *Madama Butterfly* has become a key oriental intertext which continues to inspire subsequent texts. She traces this mythic text from its origin in Pierre Loti's 1887 novel *Madame Chrysantheme* through Puccini's opera and several films to *Miss Saigon*, its most recent version. However, it is not the scant one hundred years old it apparently seems to be – the basic structure of this narrative is a colonial trope that has appeared as early as when Western Europe started to imagine an other, and continues to be present in our culture.<sup>1</sup>

Storylines similar to this narrative, for example, can be found in the popular tale of John Smith and Pocahontas, dating back to 1624, as shown in the first chapter, as well as in 2001 TV specials including *The Lost Empire* and *The Princess and the Marine* on NBC, and *Rodgers & Hammerstein's South Pacific*. Disney's 1996 motion picture *Pocahontas*, for instance, tells the story of her romantic encounter with and rescue of John Smith. Pocahontas in this version rejects Kocoum, the man her father has chosen for her, and moves against all allegiance to family, friends, tribe, and culture for Smith. In *The Lost Empire*, a famous Chinese goddess seduces and falls in love with an American businessman who alone is led back to the ancient past to save the whole of Chinese

history. She even sacrifices her divine status for him. Similarly, *The Princess and the Marine* celebrates a romantic account of the real story of a young woman who leaves her Bahraini royal family for a young white American soldier, running the risk of being killed by her family. In *South Pacific*, a Pacific Islander woman is desperate to escape her arranged marriage to a fellow islander. The one whom she depends upon and places her hope in is an American soldier who takes her as a lover but refuses to marry her. While the narrative transforms according to time and place, it contains recurrent patterns that are easily identifiable.

At the core of the age-old trope underlying those narratives is its framing of contacts between the so-called East and West in the form of interracial romance. Peter Hulme finds that the colonial anxieties in many narratives of colonial encounters appear to be solved in the formulation of “cultural harmony through romance” (141). Within this formula, John Smith’s Anglo colonial enterprise in the American continent is vindicated by Pocahontas’s symbolic tribute of her own body, closely associated with the land. In 2001, national television channels present stories of a white American man, soldier or an average middle-class person, who possesses irresistible sexual and cultural power, which an attractive and exoticized brown woman (an East Asian, Middle-Eastern, Indian, American Indian, or Pacific islander) recognizes, yields to, and falls for regardless of the pursuit of other elite brown men. After a short love affair which the woman sacrifices everything for, the white man leaves and, in most cases, the woman kills herself.

The persistence of this narrative in contemporary American popular culture raises the question of how the constitution of an American subject hinges upon the old colonial

trope in the global order today. Deconstruction and psychoanalytic theorists have exposed this western subject as “a historical construction – European, male, and bourgeois” as well as “sovereign” and “universal” (Yeğenoğlu 5). As Meyda Yeğenoğlu indicates by revising Edward Said’s theorization of Orientalism, colonial/imperial discourses are structured in the language of phallogentrism and thereby point to the inextricable link between representations of cultural and sexual difference (11). The western subject is therefore both colonial and masculine. In this colonial trope, the conquest of land in reality is concomitant with the conquest of the female body in cultural imagination, where both land and women are potentially or realistically colonizable. The bifurcation between West and East, man and woman, white and non-white has become the bedrock that colonialism depends upon for its justification, naturalization and thus coherence, as contemporary scholars in postcolonial studies have shown.

This age-old colonial trope, however, has been extensively critiqued by writers and critics in late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century America. In the last two decades there have been texts that directly question and undermine this tropological narrative; David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* (1992) and David Cronenberg’s film adoption of the same name (1993) are among the most significant attempts.<sup>ii</sup> Many of these texts subvert stereotypes of white men and brown women while reinscribing others such as the virile white men and emasculated brown men. Therefore these adaptations simultaneously contest and perpetuate the myth.<sup>iii</sup> In academia, almost every element of this myth has been subject to scrutiny. For instance, the representation of either the East or the West as homogenous entities have long since been fractured by the multiracial

reality of the U.S. (McAlister 2000, 11). The dichotomous structures that these narratives depend upon have also been theoretically complicated and deconstructed. Moreover, it has been established that mythic representations of East and West cannot be sustained and thus examined outside of the context of its discursive material effect (Yeğenoğlu 18-22).

Given the many destabilizing forces working against this trope that inspires so many narratives, it is curious to see its continued currency in present-day society in the form of the record-breaking box-office success of *Miss Saigon*. To account for the coincidence that brings together the production and popularity of *Miss Saigon*, and the development of U.S.-Vietnam relations and Vietnamese capitalism, and globalization, we must account for the ways in which *Miss Saigon* evokes and, to a certain degree, revises the cultural history of the Vietnam War that has left unresolved tensions in American culture.

<i>

In the new millennium, the international success of *Miss Saigon*, especially in such non-western cities as Manila, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore and Hong Kong, comes from its function as a globalized cultural product that bespeaks different cultural meanings that warrant our attention within the current globalized world. *Miss Saigon* was created with its makers' aspiration to update *Madama Butterfly*, a project realized after the composer's random encounter with a photograph. Claude-Michel Schönberg, the famous composer of *Les Misérables*, came across a magazine photograph of a Vietnamese mother parting from her child who was leaving for America to live with her

ex-GI father (Behr and Steyn 26). Immediately, Schonberg interpreted the theme of this photograph as the “ultimate sacrifice” (Behr and Steyn 26). Studying the image, he quickly drew an outline of a story behind it: this woman in tears made the “ultimate sacrifice human beings can do” – by giving her child away for a better life in America (Wright). This outline became the foundation of *Miss Saigon*.

Just as Sigmund Freud’s infamous question “What does woman want?” causes the woman (along with all the possibilities of her subjectivity and self-expression) to disappear and brings about her construction by man, Schonberg’s projected theme entails a double erasure of this Vietnamese woman: first in terms of the colonial other and then in terms of sexual difference. This woman, frozen in this image for a Western audience, is then characterized by her absolute silence. Schonberg’s cultural upbringing and familiarity with the *Madame Butterfly* narrative served as the intertext that informed his reading of the Vietnamese woman’s image. As Edward Said elaborates, “the Oriental woman...never speak[s] of herself, she never represents[s] her emotions, presence, or history. He [the white man] speak[s] for and represent[s] her” (1971, 6). By speaking for her and telling a story about her, Schonberg participates in “the persistent constitution of Other as the [Western] Self’s shadow” (Spivak 75). In this process, then, the constitution of her “otherness” is conceived of as a condition of the subject (Yeğenoğlu 9).

As such, the foremost task in making *Miss Saigon* was casting the central character: Kim. The introductory programs to this musical, the British television program “The Heat is On” and the subsequent video *The Making of Miss Saigon*, are thus primarily the story of the painstaking worldwide search for someone to play Kim. From

the beginning, the musical's creative team considered this search "an especially difficult task" (Wright). The team "unanimously felt that [they] had to tell this very real story authentically...we needed Asian voices that could sing Western music" (qtd. in Pao 32). The initial criteria of a perfect Kim was a girl with "lungs of steel" that enabled her to sing Kim's eight numbers in the musical (Wright). But most importantly, Schonberg stressed, they were looking for a girl with a special quality that "will make the audience fall in love with her when they see her on stage" (Wright). A search team was thus formed. Made up exclusively of white men, the team conducted a search first in European and America cities: New York, Los Angeles, Honolulu, among others, where they encouraged girls of Asian or mixed ancestry to apply. In other words, no differentiation was made among Asians or mixed descents as the qualifications were defined by their 'common' difference/otherness from the Western subject – their gender and skin color. When none in the West seemed fit for the role, the team moved auditions to the Third World – Manila.

Manila, the only Asian city in the team's "worldwide search," was chosen for its history as an American colony (Wright). The Manila audition scene is introduced in *The Making of Miss Saigon* after a shot showing city people on the sidewalk covering their noses with handkerchiefs against the dirty air, announcing the program's shift from the First to the Third World. According to the search team, girls in Manila with their colonial heritage were expected to understand and appreciate Western musicals. It was in Manila where they found their perfect Kim in Lea Salonga, who in her tryout sang a number from *Les Misérables*, which she later performed on Broadway. By carefully choosing the

location of their auditions, the search team added another qualification of otherness. The chosen performer must have the “right” racial characteristics and skin color, as well as have been educated in Western culture so that she would be able to speak the English language and embrace the sentiments of the cultural hegemony that made this musical possible.

Remarkably, the video recording of *The Making of Miss Saigon* is predominantly about the making of Miss Saigon herself. The search process for Kim involved, for the most part, educating the candidates to identify with Kim. In numerous auditions, the white men on the search team were seen spending long hours guiding these girls to think as Kim with patient and detailed explanations of Kim’s sentiments, generally consisting of complete subjugation and a willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice. In particular, these sentiments are conveyed in Kim’s representative numbers; in “Sun and Moon,” she expresses her unconditional love of Chris, and in “I’d Give My Life for You,” she makes the prophetic promise to sacrifice everything for her child. These two numbers vividly epitomize the romanticized tragedy of *Miss Saigon*. The final candidates for the role of Kim were therefore evaluated by their performances of these two numbers, thereby being judged by how well they played out the white man’s dream of an Oriental other. The two girls, Lea Salonga and Monique Wilson, were finally chosen precisely because their convincing performances as the sacrificial Kim brought the search team “close to tears” (Wright). They moved and fascinated the white men on the search team, who were utterly enthralled by the perfect other of their own design. Their long search for Miss Saigon ended successfully in Manila.

At the same time, their casting task did not stop there; in Manila and New York City, the casting of *Miss Saigon* made the headline news for fundamentally similar reasons – non-white candidates fought for those roles. For the initial search team, it never occurred to them in their so-called ‘worldwide’ search for Kim to simultaneously locate or train actors of Asian descent for the lead male roles. In Manila, the team held auditions only for the minor Asian male roles that play “a horde of robotically marching Viet Cong” (Kroll 60). These roles, which are characterless and function as the show’s homogenous background, were nonetheless heatedly competed for by Filipino men. For those men as well as Salonga and Wilson, accepting and presenting their assigned roles well opened a door to the First World, the political economy of which I will discuss further in section iv. By performing Asian males’ “comparatively low and usually unflattering visibility in Western culture,” these men earned their visas and tickets to America (Pao 32). The relative insignificance of these roles, corresponding to the general representation of Asian men in the West, was the reason they were filled by Asian men.

In the U.S., the casting induced substantial controversy when the show moved from London’s West End to Broadway with its two lead actors, Lea Salonga as Kim and Jonathan Pryce as the Engineer; the controversy started with Asian American actors’ protest against the casting of Pryce in the hope to take the Eurasian and Asian role in *Miss Saigon*. While the initial search team considered the ethnicity of Kim essential to her authenticity as the other, this was not the case for the roles of the Eurasian “Engineer” and Kim’s Viet Cong cousin and fiancé Thuy. In London, both parts were played by white actors with “yellow-face makeup” and “eye prosthetics” (Harbison 105). Asian

American actors found it offensive for non-Asian foreign actors to take away the few jobs on Broadway available to them. They pleaded to the American Equity Association (AEA) to address the situation.<sup>iv</sup> The AEA thus barred both lead actors from performing on the Broadway stage in August 1990. Pryce was denied the right to reprise his role as Engineer because a group of Asian American actors protested against his casting in an Eurasian role. Salonga was also barred as she was not American or British.

At this time, Mackintosh's determination to cast white actors for the male lead Eurasian and Asian roles was as strong as the initial creative team's obsession with casting the 'authentic' Kim in *Miss Saigon*. Despite its largest advance ticket sale in history, Mackintosh defiantly cancelled the Broadway production in 1990, refusing to replace Pryce or Salonga and asserting that no other satisfactory candidate for Kim could be found even in the extensive auditions he conducted in several American and Canadian cities for the Broadway production. In the end, Mackintosh fought hard for both Pryce and Salonga against AEA and protesting Asian American actors.

Mackintosh was able to win his fight due to his influence in the capitalist economy. In the interim between the initial denial of Pryce and Salonga's rights to reprise their roles on Broadway and AEA's final decision, the controversy made the front page of the *New York Times*. Theater is central to New York both spiritually and economically, especially to the *Times* and media in whose essential pages the theater industry spends a great deal of its advertising dollars. Under such circumstances, the AEA decision "was roundly condemned" (Resnikova 52). While the New York City mayor David Dinkins announced his attempts to reach out to AEA, he was attacked by media as practicing

“minority terrorism” (Iyer 86) and polarizing racism (Resnikova 52). Eventually the AEA reversed its decision under the pressure of Broadway in dire need of a hit. In April 1991, *Miss Saigon* opened on the Broadway with both of its original lead actors, the only two performers to win Tony Awards for the show. Amidst all the controversy, including Asian Americans’ protests against its “sexism and racism,” *Miss Saigon* produced the biggest advance ticket sales ever on Broadway and still retains the distinction in the *Guinness Book of World Records* (Bañez, par. 7). Significantly, despite the producer’s initial insistence on casting white actors for lead male roles in *Miss Saigon*, amidst the political and cultural changes and the prospect Asian market for the show during the 1990s, those roles were later almost all filled by actors of Asian descent.

<ii>

The success of *Miss Saigon* in America is deeply embedded within the context of the cultural exigency and historical contingency that makes this reproduction of an age-old tropological narrative possible. In many ways, the making of *Miss Saigon* points to the significance of reimagining the Vietnam War in American culture. Nevertheless, since the musical’s creation, Mackintosh and his colleagues voiced considerable ambivalence about the significance of the setting. They depoliticized the making of this musical by denying any cultural meanings associated with the Vietnam War. Director Nicholas Hytner emphasized, “This piece has no political sophistication – operas never do” (qtd. in Henry III 73). The French writer of *Miss Saigon* Alain Boublil, as well as the composer Schonberg are both admirers of Puccini and maintain that their original attempt was only to “modernize and rework” *Madama Butterfly* by presenting a “tragic love story

which has the Vietnam War as the background” (Wright). Therefore, they insist, it is “not a musical about the Vietnam War” (Wright). Furthermore, in rehearsals when the cast was instructed through film and lectures about the wartime mood, the creators kept emphasizing to all that *Miss Saigon* was not about politics (Wright). As Schonberg puts it, “I didn’t mind [France’s loss of Vietnam] at all. After all, we French are always losing wars” (Behr and Steyn 65). Apparently, what the two French writers had in mind was reconstructing Puccini’s narrative on the musical stage, thus reproducing Western male autoeroticism in one recent East-West contact – the Vietnam War. When the show came to America, however, it generated different concerns.

Richard Maltby Jr., the English lyricist, was added to the creative team of *Miss Saigon* in order to reframe the musical for an American audience due to the significance of its setting in the Vietnam War. At first, Maltby joined the team with doubts. He was startled to find that none of his colleagues “really understood how devastating the Vietnam War was to the American psyche” (Behr and Steyn 65). Revealingly, he pointed out the problem he had with the project: “Europeans, you’ve lost so many colonies, what’s the big deal? That was just not an American pattern” (Behr and Steyn 65). When he addressed the cast at rehearsals, he stressed the significance of Vietnam War for Americans so well that it is worth quoting him at length:

America never lost a war. We still thought that John Wayne was gonna come over the hill and save the day. There was something dying for America much bigger than just the end of the event or the war they had officially pulled out of after two years. It was the end of a vision of America, of a dream of America, of its invincibility and of the perfect morality that we clothe ourselves in all the time. It came to end brutally on that day. So this moment in time, as part of the background of this love story, has a reverberation in American history that just needs to be pointed out from time to time. (Wright)

With this understanding, Maltby rebuilt the image of the American protagonist Chris as “an all-American idealist” (Behr and Steyn 65). In so doing, he retrieved a vision, a dream and invincibility of America in the cultural imagination, at the same time giving the whole musical a more honorable tone than Puccini’s opera.

It was also during a particular moment in time when *Miss Saigon* achieved its “biggest ticket sale in the Broadway” (Bañez, par. 7). The show arrived in America right after the end of the Persian Gulf War, a war that President George Bush proclaimed as having exorcised the ghost of Vietnam (Kroll 60). Although this sentiment may not be shared by all theater-goers, the general buzz of the time was that “at last the Vietnam War is ancient history” (Disch 642). *Miss Saigon* was then viewed as presenting “a Vietnam rinsed of all controversy, a place where lovers meet and...are parted tragically” (Disch 642). This was the exact setting as the original French makers would have it, “thanks to the Gulf War” (Disch 642). Against this background, Maltby’s Americanized version presented a revised story of the U.S. in Vietnam.

<iii>

*Miss Saigon* serves as an ideologically saturated site onto which imbrications of Western colonialism, phallogentrism, American exceptionalism and imperialism are inscribed, constituting an other in relation to the West/American/masculine subject. Through these lenses, the Oriental is feminized and the land is sexualized (Yeğenoğlu). This is aptly exemplified in *Miss Saigon* when the curtains open with an erotic strip dance by the Vietnamese bar girls in their bikinis in the first scene. Boubil’s long-term

attempts to “have a beauty contest in a show” is realized here in the Engineer’s “sleazy perverted version of what the Miss America pageant is” (Behr and Steyn 35). For white male spectators, both beauty pageants and the strip dance in *Miss Saigon* are designed to cater to their scopophilia – as Laura Mulvey defines it, “pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight” (589). It renders colonial discourse dynamic, as the curtains open on stage to present the unveiling of the ‘East’ and woman,’ which are mutually constitutive (Yeğenoğlu).

*Miss Saigon* displays these half-naked Vietnamese girls as erotic objects to satisfy the audience’s expectation and desire to see the Orient, whose only allowed speech is her aspiration for the American dream. The spectacle of the Orient, in part, consists of an imaginary power over the other. From the outset, the relationship between the audience and *Miss Saigon* is one between West and East, “civilization and anarchy, male and female, mind and body” (Ty 16). The objectified bar girls’ only expression is through Gigi who, in the middle of a slowdrag with a drunken soldier, upholds her American dream in “The Movie in My Mind.” In this number, she expresses all the bar girls’ tender wishes for security, abundance, and loving environment in the West, picturing an idealistic American dream amidst the miseries of their lives. Those bar girls and later Kim and the Engineer, represent the Third World in *Miss Saigon*, who are “vivid” as “they reveal almost nothing of themselves except their fantasies of these distant others,” a theatrical performance praised by Western critics (Henry III and Simpson 73). In this fashion, America’s part in the Vietnam War as a cause of their miseries is obliterated by their recognition of and aspiration to the American dream.

On stage, Kim is closely associated with Vietnam, the nation and the land – the object of Western/colonial desire and fantasies, whose agency is also rendered only in her longing for the American, Chris. Her body is virginal, and her spirit is noble. In the opening strip dance scene, among the seductive Vietnamese bar girls, Kim alone wears a long, pure white gown, symbolizing her purity and virtues amidst corruption and war. She is afforded agency only when she lives for Chris, starting with her coy statement “I like you, Chris.” The competition for her between Chris, the idealistic American, and her cousin and fiancé Thuy, a high-ranking official Viet Cong, epitomizes the Vietnam War. Regardless of the Vietnamese tradition which betrothed Kim to Thuy, Thuy never gets close to Kim. Chris alone gains access to Kim’s inner chamber, a re-inscription of prescribed knowledge – the knowledge and thus the power of the Western sovereign subject on her body. This contact between the constructed West and East is romanticized here, manifest in the musical number “Sun and Moon.” In Kim’s chamber, she sings in soft melody to Chris, “You are sunlight and I moon/ joined by the gods of fortune...we meet in the sky... We have been blessed, you and I” (Schonberg et al. 29-32). In this metaphor, Chris’s brightening presence in Vietnam becomes a welcomed blessing.

Metaphorically, *Miss Saigon* revises the history of the Vietnam War on stage, turning America’s lost war into symbolic triumph for the American protagonist. After Chris leaves along with all other retreating American troops, Saigon falls into the hands of the communists and is renamed Ho Chi Minh City. In this scene, the Northern Vietnamese soldiers, when celebrating their victory, are portrayed as “a horde of robotically marching Viet Cong” (Kroll 60). In their primitive dance, everyone wears a

hideous-looking mask. At the center of the stage is a towering black statue of Ho Chi Minh against the red background, symbolizing dictatorship and communism. Through theatrical design, America's communist opponents are demonized, leaving the audience with the impression of Vietnam as uncivilized and barbaric after the departure of U.S. forces. During this time, Kim raises her child alone, protecting him in her enclosed chamber. However, Thuy, now an important figure in the new communist government, still tries to win Kim over and, after all his attempts fail, even forces entrance to Kim's inner chamber. In a stunning moment, Kim guards herself and her child by shooting Thuy with the gun Chris left her. Her inner chamber, opened only to Chris, is forever closed to Viet Cong. Even though Chris is gone, she still keeps the space only for him and their child. Chris's sovereign knowledge of her body and her nation, and thus his superiority to the Viet Cong, is secured even after he leaves Vietnam. The American wish to remove the Viet Cong is thus symbolically carried out on stage by Kim. America, wins the victory after all, if not in war, at least in virility and cultural superiority.

To enhance this sense of Western superiority in an entertaining way, the producers here insert the Engineer's dazzling number "The American Dream," parodying the Third World's hopes and desires for the entry into the First World. The Engineer defines his whole existence on the hope of realizing his American dream one day. Unlike the bar girls' idealistic expression, his American dream is purely materialistic. The drama of his dream reaches its climax with the appearance of a big white Cadillac bearing the Statue of Liberty on stage, where he worships Uncle Sam for money. To realize his dream, the Engineer is depicted as making money by exploiting bar girls' sexuality, and

responsible for their hardships. Moreover, Kim is forced to flee to Thailand and work in his bar after she kills the Viet Cong, who has been pictured as the villain who causes all her difficulties and miseries. In this version, it is natives like the Engineer and the Communists, more than the foreign soldiers, who have caused the poor people of Vietnam their sufferings during the war. Meanwhile, the commoners in Vietnam like the Engineer and Kim define their existence through their American dreams.

However, at the end, Kim's existence troubles the narrative. In *Miss Saigon*, her tragedy – being abandoned, being forced to work in bars and to raise her child alone – is a continuing reminder of white male's complicity in her situation. Furthermore, Kim's presence threatens the wholeness of Chris's American identity. Three years after Chris leaves Vietnam, he completes his bourgeois life by starting a family in America after he marries Ellen, a white woman. In post-WWII America, the universal subject of the nation-state has been dependent upon the core structure of the heterosexual couple and the family (McAlister 2000, 12). The centrality of this idea to an American identity is testified to by the fact that the character of Ellen in *Miss Saigon* was greatly developed and strengthened when the show moved to America. Ellen is modeled as a white middle-class woman and thus, supposedly, the typical American wife. On the Broadway stage, she is portrayed as “blond and Anglo-Saxon looking,” “more assertive, not the passive Ellen in the original” (Santos 33), as well as “the suburban and conventional wife” (Pheifer, par. 9). Chris's American identity is complete with Ellen, and Kim thereby becomes an outside threat to that identity.

All of these factors build up to and necessitate Kim's tragic ending – her theatrical 'ultimate sacrifice.' The musical's creators subtly pave the way for this conclusion in the middle of the second act, through Kim's moving words to her child in her representative number "I'd Give My Life for You." This number foreshadows her chosen destiny: "You who I cradled in my arms.../little snip of a little man/ I know I'd give my life for you... You should know it's love that brought you here.../ I'll give you a million things I'll never own/ I'll give you a world to conquer when you're grown/ You will be who you want to be/ You can choose whatever heaven grants.../ I swear I'll give my life for you" (Schonberg et al. 61-4). In this fashion, Chris, an American subject in *Miss Saigon*, "a metaphor for the U.S.'s blundering good intentions at playing global policeman" (Henry III 91), is entirely free of responsibilities, regardless of his sexual exploitation and abandonment of Kim. Moreover, Chris realizes the autoerotic dream of the western white male – both his Asian lover Kim and American wife Ellen love him unconditionally – in the musical number "I Still Believe." Sung by Kim and Ellen, this number expresses their devotion and subjugation to Chris, ending with both singing to Chris "I'm yours until we die" (Schonberg et al. 50). Chris, an idealistic American whose heart is always in the right place, is even out of the predicament of facing Kim with his American wife. Kim kills herself to secure her Amerasian son's future in America – the 'ultimate sacrifice' that *Miss Saigon's* white male creators invite their audience to celebrate together. As the curtain falls, Kim's complete exploitation is followed by her convenient disappearance. Chris goes back to America, still an idealist and now "comes

off as the tragic hero” (Mattimoe 25). America stands to the world as the land of hope, of milk and honey, where everyone in the Third World aspires to be.

In general, the musical achieved significant success in the West among a mainstream white audience. However, some minority groups including “Asian Lesbians of the East Coast” challenged the show’s representation of Asian Americans. These protests can be explained by the fact that *Miss Saigon*’s target audience from the outset was white America, or more specifically, white male America. At the same time, because the show leaves American identity and the West’s cultural superiority intact and elevates heterosexual marriage, it reaches the white female audiences too.

<iv>

The Americanized version of *Miss Saigon* thus achieved phenomenal success in the United States in the 1990s among its target audiences. However, in the new millennium, this Americanized musical has traveled to many cities, including Manila, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore and Hong Kong, where it has enjoyed grand box-office success in those former colonies as well. This curious phenomenon can be explained only in terms of how *Miss Saigon* functions as a globalized cultural product in the new millennium within the context of cultural globalization.

Many people in Southeast Asia, especially in big cities like Manila, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taipei, embrace all things American as the fashion, and are eager to see themselves on the Western film screen. For example, Michelle Yeon’s role in the 2000 award-winning Ang Lee film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* made her an international celebrity. In Malaysia, her home country, her ethnicity and gender are not respected, but

with the success of the film, she was granted the title of Datuk, an honorable rank for citizens who contribute to the nation. With his success in this film, Ang Lee, originally from Taiwan, was also considered a national asset, and his parents were also honored for their son's achievement as an award-winning director in Hollywood. Similarly, the 2003 Jackie Chan film *Shanghai Knights* cast a Singaporean actress Fann Wong. Even though her role as the lead actress was insignificant in the film (neither her name nor image appear on the official poster), with the worldwide premiere of the film, Wong was widely praised and respected as a national heroine in Singapore for becoming part of the Hollywood film industry.

Within this context, when the Americanized version of *Miss Saigon* arrived in Southeast Asian cities including Manila, Singapore, and Hong Kong, it achieved phenomenal box-office success everywhere. In each city, in addition to local audiences, the musical attracted viewers and even groups of tourists flying from other Asian cities like Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, and Taipei, because they did not want to miss the chance to see one of the "Big Four" from Broadway. The Hong Kong season of *Miss Saigon* was extended due to demand precisely for this reason. As a globalized cultural product, *Miss Saigon* was thus generally considered an American theater classic that presupposed popularity in Southeast Asia. As Rob Kroes, an Americanist based in Western Europe, remarks,

there are the further questions of mediation and reception, questions to do with the manifold ways in which people at the receiving end recontextualize American culture as it reaches them. There is a freedom involved in cultural reception that may make us aware of the agency implied in the process of reception.... The exceptionalist moment...lies in the structural imbalance

between America's position as a semiotic center relegating *all* other nation-states to the position of receivers. (Bender: 296-7, italics original)

In his piece "American Empire and Cultural Imperialism," Kroes presents an insightful analysis of the post-WWII Europe cultures affected as the receiving end of American mass culture, by reading advertising as a peculiar blend of economic and cultural imperialism. I examine the reception of *Miss Saigon* in Manila to illustrate how an Americanized cultural product functions on a moving American frontier in the process of cultural globalization and how a former colony at the receiving end of an American cultural product responds to it.

In the Philippines, the arrival of *Miss Saigon* was a national event as "a world-class musical...coming to a Third World Country" (Guzman, par. 5). It was made possible by the presidential son Joseph Victor Ejercito, founder of the Ang Bayang Makulay Foundation that was authorized to produce the musical in Manila. Initially reported to be on a budget of P400 million, the show was "the most ambitious extravaganza in the history of Philippine theater" with contributions from corporate and private donors, making other local theater groups "green with envy" ("*Miss Saigon: A Gamble*," pars. 1-4). Moreover, in addition to the presidential family's sponsorship, the staging of *Miss Saigon* also received endorsements and security assistance from leaders of the country's different political parties. In general, the show generated "Saigon mania" in Manila that certain critics declared "it's worth [watching] even if you have to pay a leg and an arm" (Tolentino, par. 7). Its phenomenal ticket sale made it "the musical event of the decade" in the nation ("*Pride*," par. 1).

The success of *Miss Saigon* in the Philippines was foregrounded by its previous local reputation of making the appearance of Filipino talents on the international stage possible. When the show traveled to the Philippines, it was localized by featuring 35 Filipinos out of the 48-member cast. At the same time, anticipating the show's Manila season, Filipino journalists called for the public's recognition of "the international significance of such an event" and encouraged people to "take pride" in Filipino performers (Salterio-Gatdula 2000a, par. 1). Lea Salonga, in particular, at the time had already become a national star in the Philippines as the role model among many Filipinos for her achievement as a world celebrity who "conquer[ed] the West End, Broadway, and the world" ("*Miss Saigon* is Home," par. 17). Indeed, one news report of *Miss Saigon* starring Salonga went with the headline "*Miss Saigon* is Home." Many Filipinos identified with *Miss Saigon*'s 'worldwide' success as a source of national pride, because through the show "Filipinos conquered the world and earned for themselves pride and recognition amid racial differences and backgrounds" (Telentino, par. 1). It was widely quoted among Filipino journalists that the show's producer Cameron Mackintosh and composer Claude Michel Schonberg affirmed in different occasions that "without the Filipinos, there would be no *Miss Saigon*" (Salterio-Gatdula 2000b, par. 6, Bunoan, par. 4). There were also many new reports or readers' responses under similar titles to "*Miss Saigon* makes me proud of being Filipino." Overall, much of the coverage on the show in Manila was focused on the national and international significance of the "world-class" Filipino artists' part in it (Lumbera, par. 22).

*Miss Saigon* was also welcomed as a globalized cultural product promoted as enlightening and educating local people and theaters in Manila. When the news of the show coming to Manila first broke, many people thought it was “a publicity gimmick” due to their suspicions of the standards of local theater production (“*Miss Saigon: A Gamble*,” par. 1). As the show arrived, some journalists found its stage effects “truly awe-inspiring by Philippine standards” (Lumbera, par. 6). Many echoed the presidential son Ejercito’s pronouncement that the staging of the show in Manila benefited the Philippines with the knowledge of the latest in theater production and technical work. This “infusion of foreign technology” made possible by *Miss Saigon* was commonly considered as a rare gift for the whole country (Salterio-Gatdula 2000b, par. 6).

Being marketed to the Filipinos as the “show of the millennium” (Po, par. 6), *Miss Saigon* with its tremendous capital – (\$10 million) and western technology came to symbolize progress and the positive trend of globalization. Therefore, even when facing controversies, the show was still believed by many to have “usher[ed] in a livelier cultural life in the new millennium” (“*Miss Saigon: A Gamble*,” par. 9). As its supporters defended the show, “This is the new millennium... it’s time to start discarding our parochial view of things. It’s time we think global or we’ll be left out” (Salterio-Gatdula 2000b, par. 3). In other words, the ability to appreciate *Miss Saigon* served as a standard of ‘thinking global.’ Furthermore, many felt proud that their nation had functioned as “the best venue” for the show in its transition from the West to Asia: “After all, the Philippines is the Asian country most open to Western cultural ideas. And it is the biggest English-speaking country in the region” (“*Miss Saigon: A Gamble*,” pars. 12-3). In this

fashion, the nation's colonial legacy became a source of facilitating globalization and establishing national pride in the globalized world. 'Thinking global' became the equivalent of embracing American cultural standards, which served as the measure for defining 'world-class.'

Amidst the widespread celebratory atmosphere and phenomenal ticket sale that greeted the show in the Philippines, protests and criticisms against it seemed outnumbered. Some of the show's advocates acknowledged the censure of the show's lack of originality in story and the "colonial mentality" it implied (Bunoan, par. 4), as well as its "import[ing]...of the cultural imperialism of the West" ("*Miss Saigon: A Gamble*," par. 9). While reprimanding or ignoring such criticisms, the majority of reporters agreed to welcome the show as the globalizing trend swept through the world. As such, from the beginning, the main storyline of the show and 'colonial mentality' behind it were mentioned rarely or in passing comments. The tolerance of the cultural subjugation in the storyline was generally agreed to be the necessary and worthwhile price to pay for the Filipino exposure to its 'world-class' Filipino performers, 'world-class' technology, and tremendous capital.

An additional reason behind the show's box-office success in Manila, as some journalists have made clear, was the show's presentation of the American dream to both its actors and audience. For one thing, nation-wide pride in Lea Salonga was mainly due to her realization of the American dream shared by many. Another Filipino actress, Criste, for instance, participated in the Broadway production of *Miss Saigon*, considered Salonga her role model and the show "a blessing" for Filipinos (Plesa, par. 7). Although

it called for Asian American actors for roles like pimps and whores, it was one of the few chances for them to gain exposure and to credit themselves as professionals in a business where they have been a minority (Plesa, par. 7). Due to such exposure in the West, actors like Criste were treasured as ‘world-class’ performers when they went back to the Philippines with the show.

Among the general Filipino audience, the American dream as portrayed in *Miss Saigon* struck a chord. Schonberg’s first response to the photo that inspired this remake of *Madama Butterfly* actually found certain resonance in Southeast Asia. Kim’s ‘ultimate sacrifice’ – her suicide – in her attempt to realize the American dream for her son, as well as Gigi’s and the Engineer’s American dream, “reminded [Filipino theater-goers] of their own colonial dreams of finding paradise across the Pacific Ocean in such cities as San Francisco, Chicago, and New York” (Lumbera, par. 17). The show thus “re-ignite[d] in the impoverished Filipinas the American dream” (“We!” par. 4). In fact, Singaporean commentators also admitted to a similar sentiment, “What works for *Miss Saigon*...is that its world of Vietnamese folk grovelling [sic] to go to America is closer to our hearts” (Oon, par. 9). Within the globalized world, many people in developing countries hold close the American dream, for which they found echoes in *Miss Saigon*.

As in New York, *Miss Saigon* opened its curtains in Manila amidst protests and criticisms that had no apparent impact on its box-office success. Progressive cultural organizations and militant groups protested outside the theater against what they deemed “a Broadway surplus that glorified and justified prostitution and U.S. aggression” (“We!” par. 1). In the media, significantly, as in American academe, in-depth cultural critiques of

the show in the Philippines were articulated only by non-white women (Gavina, Llagas, and Po). Maricel J. Gavina and Gi-An Llagas found Kim's American dream "a horrible nightmare" for Third World women. Julie L. Po presented a sound review of *Miss Saigon* as a globalized cultural product that exported Western media and culture "at an overprice in the pursuit of big bucks and colonial propaganda" (par. 5). She indicated the consequences of the exclusive access granted to *Miss Saigon* at the Cultural Center of the Philippines for eight months, which relegated to lower status and thus repressed local theater productions (pars. 6-7). Moreover, while the show's Filipino cast was the source of many people's pride, Po made it clear that the cast, except to lend an Asian face and voice, exercised no real control over the production of the show (par. 11). She therefore called on Filipino people to "resist cultural subjugation and enslavement by the proponents of globalization" (par. 14). Those eloquent arguments, however, were seemingly inundated by public rebuttals and completely outnumbered by the massive support of the show in this cultural debate.

All issues taken together, the ironies surrounding the Filipino reception of *Miss Saigon* are rooted in the unbalanced ways that First World and Third World countries are positioned in the globalized world. As one of the rebuttals to Po's critique goes, the Filipino cast for *Miss Saigon* "shows the world that Filipinos can be competitive, and even excel...[as well as] arouses in Filipinos a sense of self-respect, dignity and pride, something we need badly at this point in time" ("Pride," par. 3-4). This opportunity for Filipinos to 'excel' and to feel dignified and proud, however, is based on their acknowledgment of their own inferiority to the Western standards in terms of theater

technology, performer training, and capital accumulation, among others. Furthermore, their admitted identification with the American dream in *Miss Saigon*, like Kim's, is founded precisely upon a negation of their own national pride and self-esteem. In addition, many Filipinos believe that *Miss Saigon* has made the world "think of Filipinos [more than] as just servants, domestic helpers and maids" ("Fame," par. 7). Their roles in the musical as prostitutes and militants nonetheless reproduce other stereotypes as well as make their images interchangeable with those of Vietnamese or other Asians or Asian Americans.

Another irony in the Filipino perception of *Miss Saigon* lies in the reciprocal relationship between American cultural and economic hegemony that makes the circulation of cultural products like *Miss Saigon* possible in the globalized world. As Kroes points out, the U.S. exceptionalist moment occurs when Americanized cultural products in the transnational flow render other countries at the receiving end (Bender: 297). In the case of the Americanized version of *Miss Saigon* in Manila, its success was made possible by complex interconnecting factors behind its production. Within the global economic order, the U.S. represents to many Third World countries a nation of material wealth and abundance, what has come to define the goal of living in the expanding capitalist economy. The American dream in *Miss Saigon* and the Filipino response to it therefore bespeak the materialistic nature of this dream held so dear by many in the Third World. Indeed it is this economic advantage of the U.S. that has made Americanized cultural products 'world-class,' and termed Third World residents' aspirations to better material life as 'American dream.' In the case of *Miss Saigon* in

Manila, ironically, this Third World aspiration to ‘world-class’ cultural products and the American dream, reinforced by cultural representation in *Miss Saigon*, had functioned to promote the material gains of globalized cultural products. Such aspirations enabled Western transnational corporations (in this case, the Mackintosh Ltd.) to make money off the supposedly poor Third World country, thereby furthering the economic imbalance between the First and Third Worlds that caused these aspirations. In this fashion, cultural and economic globalization processes go hand in hand.

(At this point of my research I have not found very much materials on the show’s reception in Vietnam. When these materials are available, I will incorporate them here.)

<v>

As a transnational, globalized product from the West, the phenomenal box-office success of *Miss Saigon* worldwide has been predicated upon the unbalanced relationship within the global economic order. *Miss Saigon* testifies to the currency of the age-old colonial trope based on the intertwining discourses of race, gender, nature, and nation. In the U.S. during the 1990s, the popularity of the representation of Vietnam in the feminine Kim and her subjugation to American cultural superiority in *Miss Saigon* coincided with and may have contributed to the warming-up of U.S.-Vietnam diplomatic and trade relationships as well as the Vietnamese turn to capitalism. In the new millennium, this Americanized cultural product has achieved still more success in Southeast Asian countries. Within this process, I believe, the apparatuses of global capitalist economic development have created new expanding globalized regimes that perpetuate, under new guise, the structures and relationships under colonialism. The colonial trope at the core of

*Miss Saigon* then is revived to articulate a U.S. exceptionalist moment of overcoming Communism in Vietnam after the official war ended decades ago.

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Notes

<sup>i</sup> For usage of the general category of ‘colonial discourse’ as a complex unity instead of a simple harmonious totality, see the discussion in Yeğenoğlu, Chapter 1.

<sup>ii</sup> For an in-depth feminist and postcolonial reading of *M. Butterfly*, see Chang, Hsiao-hung, “Cultura/Sexual/ Theatrical Ambivalence in *M. Butterfly*.” *Tamkang Review*, 23.1-4 (II): 735-55.

<sup>iii</sup> David Henry Hwang, for instance, also wrote the NBC special screenplay of *The Lost Empire* mentioned above. While he challenges certain aspects of the Madame Butterfly narrative in his *M. Butterfly*, the structure of many of his plays remains parallel to the mythic narratives.

<sup>iv</sup> The American Equity Association (AEA), an association of theatre actors, exists to defend the interests and livelihood of its members, and all foreigners have to be approved by equity before they can work in American theatre.

Chapter Four  
 “My Country Versus Me”:  
 From Wen Ho Lee to American National Identity within the Globalized World

*The American experience...was from the beginning founded upon the idea of an ‘imperium’ – a dominion, state or sovereignty that would expand in population and territory, and increase in strength and power.*  
 – Edward Said



The case of Wen Ho Lee – a Chinese American scientist accused of espionage in 1999 – has now become a legend. The case is now an incident in which no one can declare to know the whole or ‘real’ story. The incident itself has been and continues to be referenced, retold, and re-interpreted by and for diverse groups with various purposes. Across a wide cultural and political spectrum, various responses to this case have invoked such thorny issues as the transnational flow of immigration, national security, nuclear technology, and the role of the United States within the globalized world, among others. On the understanding that culture is a site for negotiating political and moral values and for developing contested perceptions of history, I will approach various cultural narratives evolving and revolving around his case that together have provided a common ground for grasping this case and the issues surrounding it.

On March 6, 1999, *The New York Times* reported that Government investigators believed China had accelerated its nuclear weapons program with the aid of stolen American secrets. Two days later, scientist Wen Ho Lee, a Taiwan-born naturalized U.S. citizen who worked for decades as a physicist in the top secret weapons design division

of the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratories in New Mexico, was fired just nine months short of his retirement. On December 10, 1999, he was arrested and jailed for posing “a grave threat to the nuclear balance.” The government brought a fifty-nine-count indictment against him for his purported mishandling of material containing restricted data, with the intent to injure the United States through securing an advantage to a foreign nation. Throughout investigation, he was under highly unusual guard. He was put in solitary confinement in a cell 23 hours a day for nine months without bail, constantly heavily shackled, chained and, when out of his cell, accompanied by two U.S. Marshalls with machine guns. He ultimately pled guilty on September 13, 2000 to one felony count of mishandling sensitive information. He was sentenced to 278 days, the time he had already been imprisoned. Thus the case ended, yet its repercussions continue with proliferating cultural narratives.

Wen Ho Lee’s highly unusual treatment in this case cannot be separated from the historical, cultural, economic and political context of Asian immigrations to the U.S., the changing U.S.-China relationships, industrialization and globalization. I situate this case, then, at the intersection of a complex web of representation. Within this web the figure of Wen Ho Lee has been caught by and interwoven into the contradictions between the past and present affairs, the national and international relationships, and the political and economic imperatives. In the following section, I contextualize Lee’s situation within the historical conditions and changing scenes of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. I will then examine the cultural narratives surrounding the Wen Ho Lee case generated by the government, major political parties, the mass media and their audiences in post-Cold War

America as a cultural process. Through the juxtaposition of these narratives I seek to uncover a process not of conspiracy nor a set of functionalist representations at the service of power, but one of convergence as historical events, overlapping and conflicting representations, and diverse vested interests come together in a powerful, if historically contingent, way that may explain Lee's unusual encounter.

<ii>

The contradictions between the U.S. nation-state's political and economic imperatives in which Wen Ho Lee was caught have informed Chinese American immigration experiences since the nineteenth century. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, during the course of the nineteenth century, the speeding industrialization became the main path of the nation-state, that gradually led to its increasing need for expansion in frontier, capital, labor, and market. The States thus recruited and regulated both labor and capital from Asia (Lowe 7). Chinese immigrants came across the sea from war and famine-ravaged Southern China to participate in economic activities undesirable to white population, taking jobs as railroad and servile workers. The meaning of their presence was then largely caught between conflicts over the nation's economic need for inexpensive labor and the political urgency to maintain a homogeneous, Anglo-centric state (Lowe 17).

Before the World War II, the rapidly industrializing U.S. nation-state solved such economic and political contradictions through Asian exclusion laws, as Asia and Asian immigrants provided labor, capital, market as well as safety valve for domestic tensions in American society (Lowe 12; Eng 11). On America's international frontier, the U.S.

joined other imperial powers to force China and other Asian countries to open their doors to foreign imperialism and expanding capitalism. Within the domestic sphere, the 1882 Exclusion Act prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the country and becoming citizens. Through bars to citizenship and naturalization, the state simultaneously “racialized” nonwhite groups as it established representative citizens of diverse European descent as “white” through those legal acts (Lowe 159), thereby creating the illegal Asian.<sup>1</sup> During this era of the Asian Alien and Yellow Peril (Eng 11), Chinese immigrants faced waves of terror, violence and discrimination as they were blamed for social problems such as shortage of job opportunities (Young et al). These official years of Asian exclusion as a result of the U.S. nation-state’s conflicting political and economic forces were not ended until the WWII (Eng 11).

The situation of Asian Americans has been contingent upon the nation-state’s economic and political needs as well as its imperial enterprise abroad, a condition whose complexity would later play out in the Wen Ho Lee case. One manifestation of the contradictions in this condition during the postwar era was the paradoxical cultural representation of Asian Americans. Regardless of their diverse backgrounds, profiles and experiences, they were oftentimes categorized as either ‘model minority’ or ‘foreigner-within,’ an extension of the old colonial trope that differentiates between noble and ignoble savage/racialized other. Such conflicting images are to be found in the representations of Wen Ho Lee within different circumstances that inform his situation.

The Asian American model minority myth, observes David Eng, arose during the Cold War, when the division between the Soviet Union and the United States necessitated

the production of good (anti-Communist) Asian subjects (12-3). Since William Peterson first coined the term 'model minority' in his article, "Success Story: Japanese American Style," in the *New York Times* in 1966, many East Asians have carried the stereotype of a hard working, education-hungry, family bound and social-ladder-climbing group. The U.S. aspiration to lead a global order in competition with the Soviet Union at this time also called for immigration labor which was no longer exclusively manual but also intellectual. Through the reformation of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act and subsequent policy changes, then, the U.S. not only recruited Asian American citizens as ideological opponents of Communism, but initiated a professional "brain drain" from Asia. As Charles M. Vest, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, contends, "American industry relies greatly on engineers and computer scientists born in other countries. Most of them came here as graduate students" (par. 5). In fact, in science and engineering fields, between 35 to 50 percent of doctoral degrees go to foreigners, many of whom stay in the U.S. (Mukerjee 26). During the Cold War era, Wen Ho Lee came to the U.S. in the early trend of professional brain drain from Taiwan, the sworn foe against Communist China, and served as a scientist, fitting the model minority role perfectly.

Lee's later plight in the late 1990s then was inseparable from the many coincidences that brought together his job in the nuclear weapon lab, national security issues, China's rise on the world stage, his ethnicity and the conception of Asian Americans as 'foreigners-within.' As Edward Said indicates, "the epic scale of United States global power and the corresponding power of the national domestic consensus

[today]...have no precedents” (1993, 391-2). The relationship between the two forms of power is in no way coincidental. Throughout the twentieth century, the U.S. went through several wars with Asian countries. The series of U.S. wars in Asia included those with the Philippines (1898-1910), Japan (1941-1945), Korea (1950-1953), and Vietnam (1959-1975). These wars, Lisa Lowe suggests, were “liberal hybrid[s] that combined economic internationalism and anti-communism” (18). Many of them, particularly the Vietnam War,<sup>ii</sup> shook the stability and coherence of cultural identity of the nation-state. This history of wars in Asia remains within the living memory of post-Cold War America, “haunt[ing] the conception of the Asian American,” whose images have been associated with America’s enemies at different wars (Lowe 5). This mechanism of racialization across domestic and international orders would prove central in the Wen Ho Lee case.

U.S. wars in Asia during the twentieth century have thus contributed significantly to the view of Asian Americans as foreign enemies incapable of being assimilated into a U.S. national identity (Lipsitz 70), a view that would later haunt Wen Ho Lee during his trial. “[I]mperialism as a political or economic process abroad,” Amy Kaplan points out, “is inseparable from the social relations and cultural discourses of race, gender, ethnicity, and class at home” (16). Racialized as “foreigner-within” (Lowe 12), the images of Chinese Americans and those of other East Asian Americans and East Asians are at times mixed in the public perception through the lens of stereotypes characterized by yellow skin and slanted eyes. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant observe:

*race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called ‘phenotypes’), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification*

is always and necessarily a social and historical process. (55, emphasis original)

The conflated representation of East Asians and East Asian Americans through stereotypes therefore serves as an ideologically saturated site “on which the nation projects a series of condensed, complicated anxieties regarding external and internal threats...to the national body” (Lowe 18). American global and domestic colonization are thus mutually defining as well as reciprocally constructive.

As such, within the post-Cold War global order where China has risen as a major competitor, higher-end Chinese American immigrants like Lee who have participated in the advancement of U.S. science and technology are caught again by the nation-state’s political and economic contradictions. These Chinese Americans serve as indispensable laborers in science and engineering fields, some of which being closely tied to national security. In the case of Wen Ho Lee, his image turned from a ‘model minority’ to a ‘foreigner-within’ when he was caught at the intersection of the multiple-layered conflicts between the nation and state, the economic and the political, the national and international, and the past and present. In the next section, I examine the media representations of and political responses to Lee’s case within the context of representation of the U.S. and China within the post-Cold War order.

<iii>

The media campaign against Wen Ho Lee started with a *New York Times* front-page story on March 6, 1999, with the striking headline: “China stole Nuclear Secrets from Los Alamos.” The second line discreetly adds: “U.S. Officials Say” (Risen and

Gerth). Before any espionage or technology theft was proven, the *New York Times* presented this headline as fact. After reading the headline, readers are left with a strong impression of the connection between technology theft and the threat of Chinese spying and China. Therefore, the appearance of the second line, “U.S. Officials Say,” does not change this impression or admit this statement to be a partial truth or a preliminary suspicion. This report begins the coverage by claiming: “Working with nuclear secrets stolen from a U.S. government laboratory, China has made a leap in the development of nuclear weapons...according to administration officials” (Risen and Gerth, par. 1). No reference to solid evidence is indicated in this report. For most readers who browse through headlines, the message is complete: China has surely stolen our national secrets, and a threat is forming against us.

Amidst this pending sense of threat, Wen Ho Lee was immediately fired and later arrested as his image was now changed from one of a ‘model minority’ to a ‘foreigner-within’ when connected with a potential foreign competitor of the U.S. Lee, a short, old man with colon cancer, was seen as a major threat to national security before he was convicted. He was perceived as being so dangerous that he was placed in solitary confinement for nine months before any conviction, a highly unusual arrangement. He was heavily chained, shackled, and watched closely by armed guards even during his family’s brief visits. During his time in prison, this first-generation Asian American scientist was described by his lawyer as receiving worse treatment than his “murder clients, drug clients, clients accused of taking millions of dollars from the federal government” (Scheer 2). Such uncommon situation that Lee was subjected to cannot be

fully grasped outside the context of how such sensitive issues as national security and China associated with Lee were generally perceived in the late 1990s preceding Lee's case. Before further looking into Lee's case, then, I want to contextualize it by surveying some cases of the representations of China from the late 1990s to 2000.

Within the post-Cold War global order, the rhetoric of Chinese threat could be found in the mass media, as the U.S. was in the process of assessing its relationships with China. For instance, in 1996, on a cover of *Newsweek*, the headline reads: "CHINA: FRIEND OR FOE?" Significantly, this seemingly innocent and harmless question has "CHINA" printed in red, capital letters, reminding the readers that "Red China" is a Communist government – in other words, the ideological opponent of America. Most conspicuous is the imposing image of an Asian soldier, positioned in jungle-like surroundings with a military cap on, who gazes at the readers with binoculars in his hand. In this case, the *Newsweek* cover pictures America's other through invoking a historical figure from the past. This figure is reminiscent of the representation of America's military foes during the Vietnam War like stealthy, lurking Vietcong/'gooks' or other wars in Asia. This other on the cover is partly defined through various physical characteristics including skin color. In this fashion, all East Asians (be they Vietnamese or Chinese) and East Asian Americans look alike, forming a homogenous foe. This perception of a Chinese threat was reactivated in the 1990s and manifested itself as a warning, reminding Americans of a possible danger.

This possibility became increasingly real in the late 1990s with reports of China's development of nuclear weapons. On the cover of *Time* magazine of June 7, 1999, an

Asian eye is peeking through the hole of a red star, with the caption: "THE NEXT COLD WAR?" and in small letters: "It's not that simple. And the CHINESE SPY SCANDAL shows why." According to Roland Barthes, the effect of magazine cover consists both of its design (text and typography) and the social and cultural context of the design. The enormous capitalized headline, from which the readers usually expect to see news of primary importance, draws immediate attention. In this case, the frightening words "War" and "Spy" are positioned next to the threatening "yellow" gaze. The most prominent words on the cover read: "Chinese spy scandal" and the "Next Cold War." Even for the most careless reader, it is difficult not to see the cover picture without connecting the exaggerated yellowish skin and the slanted eye to the prominent text "Chinese spy" and "Cold War." For American shoppers who catch a casual glimpse of this magazine cover in grocery stores and bookstores, as well as those who read the story carefully after seeing the cover, this design produces a similarly powerful effect by presenting this image alongside the capitalized title.

These over pictures and headlines of prestigious magazines and newspapers in the United States serve as entry points into discourses of Americanness. The design of covers and the choice of headlines, as Leo R. Chavez indicates, are encapsulations of an issue or issues that hopefully will interest potential and existing consumers (5). In this fashion, symbols, both visual and textual, are selected to represent the nation, its people, its history, and its other. Media is therefore not apolitical in the endeavor to represent; there are constant struggles over representation. In the cases examined above, a shared sense of threat and danger in the face of the Chinese is developed. The nation-state and its other

are thus discursively constituted through such representations. This rhetoric of threat and danger then served as an increasingly influential ground for common understanding as more groups evoked it for their purposes.

By employing similar rhetorical strategies, both the Republicans and Reform Party presidential candidate Pat Buchanan played out the fear of the Chinese threat before the 2000 presidential campaign. Significantly, Pat Buchanan differentiated himself from the other candidates by his attitude toward the Chinese threat. In his speech announcing his plan to seek the Reform Party presidential nomination, he claimed shortly after he started: “Both [Democratic and Republican Parties] voted for MFN trade privileges for a communist China that is right now pointing missiles at our country, the United States of America.... The appeasement of Beijing is a bipartisan disgrace, and we will not be a party to it” (par. 1). Furthermore, one of his campaign ads depicts the United States government as an item being sold by other candidates at an auction. Along with other buyers, such as certain influential American corporations, is a Chinese man dressed up in a soldier’s uniform with a red star on his uniform cap signifying the Communist government. Unlike other American corporations, which are interested in controlling the U.S. government for their profits, the Chinese other is portrayed as using any means, military or financial, to take hold of the United States.

The political Right, in their vehement attack on the Clinton administration’s close relationship with Beijing, did not miss the opportunity to maneuver this fear of the Chinese threat for their own purposes. In four battleground states, some Republican supporters ran an ad produced by a Texas-based organization, Aretino Industries, which

claims on its Web site to produce “the finest accountability ads in the industry” (Novak, par. 4). This 2000 presidential campaign ad is a remake of the notorious 1964 ad called “Daisy,” which featured a little girl picking off flower petals as a voice counts down to a missile launch, followed by a nuclear bomb explosion in the background. The 2000 campaign ad declares that, “Under Republican leadership and vision, the Cold War was ended, securing our children from the threat of a nuclear confrontation. Now, under eight years of Clinton-Gore, our security has been sold to Communist Red China in exchange for campaign contributions. Don't take a chance,” the ad concludes with this warning: “Vote Republican.” As the little white girl in this ad innocently clasps the white daisy against a background of the sky tainted by red nuclear clouds, American national identity is personified. This ad portrays America as the innocent white girl, extremely vulnerable in the face of the phallic nuclear threat posed by a red China. In this fashion, this ad encourages American audiences to identify with this white girl, thereby assuming American innocence in any future interactions with the threatening Chinese – a potential child rapist.

Such anxieties about China as a potential threat on the world stage and consequently about the presence of ‘foreigner-within’ having access to the national security information culminated in the (in)famous “Wen Ho Lee Fiasco” (Duffy), a term coined by *Time* magazine after his release. Regardless of the truth behind this case, Wen Ho Lee’s story has been shaped by a convergence of cultural narratives composed by the government, political parties, national and international events, and the mass media. After

the *New York Times* report that resulted in the arrest of Lee, curiously, numerous similar stories on the case appeared.

A great deal of major American news coverage followed parallel trajectories when reporting the Wen Ho Lee case as the first *New York Times* report, characterized by the absence of substantial or effective evidence of Chinese theft or espionage. ABC News, for example, broadcast a news report on April 9, 1999 with the enlarged headline “Technology Theft” and a subtitle “China Nukes Might Outpace U.S. Missile Defense” (Ruppe). This story was covered without much concrete evidence. As a result, the language of this report was almost always tentative, full of speculative words such as “might,” “may,” “if,” and “could.” Indeed, its very summary exemplifies its tentativeness: “China *may* have greatly increased its nuclear weapons capabilities through the alleged theft of U.S. nuclear warhead secrets” (Ruppe, par. 1, emphasis mine). Contrary to his strong assertions in the headlines and news summary, the reporter for ABC News admits later in the coverage: “The administration has not yet confirmed the theft” (Ruppe, par. 3). Throughout this report, the only evidence it offers to prove a possible technology theft is this claim: “that China can launch multiple communications satellites suggests it has mastered many of the technologies needed to launch multiple nuclear warheads” (Ruppe, par. 11). While suggesting that such achievement results from Chinese espionage, the story provides no evidence for either the existence of the technology theft or a direct link between Chinese technology progress and Chinese theft. ABC News thus developed the story of the Chinese other as spy and nuclear threat on the basis of surmise.

ABC News was not alone in its style of reporting Wen Ho Lee's case. Many other prestigious media outlets employed a similar rhetorical strategy. *Time* magazine's cover story on June 7, 1999 was titled: "THE NEXT COLD WAR?" Again, supported only by unconfirmed information, this story included an extensive timetable entitled "HOW CHINA GOT THE GOODS" (McGeary 32-6). Providing no direct evidence of Chinese espionage, this coverage stigmatized China and Wen Ho Lee by juxtaposing the highly hypothetical events of Chinese theft and Chinese technological progress. Within this timetable, a theft, such as "1984 to 1988 China steals U.S. W-88 Trident sub missile warhead design," is always followed by Chinese progress: "1988 China tests a neutron bomb. U.S. analysis suggests it is based on American secrets" (McGeary 32). Therefore, before Wen Ho Lee was proved guilty or innocent, his 'crime' was already listed as a true historical event — "1983 to 1995 Wen Ho Lee transfers nuclear warhead design and test codes from a classified computer to an unclassified one" — followed by "1992 to 1996 China tests smaller, lighter warheads" (McGeary 32). Furthermore, alongside this listed crime is an account of possible reasons which explain why a scientist from Taiwan would work for China, based on pure speculations of Chinese characters.

In this fashion, this timetable is presented in *Time* magazine, without supporting evidence for each event, as proving the occurrence of the events listed and the relationship between Chinese theft and Chinese progress. This cover story warns readers that the Chinese have made remarkable progress over the decades, "*thanks to lax security at American national research labs*" (McGeary 34, emphasis originally in red). While acknowledging the threat from China, this reporter still reassures the U.S. that America's

status as world leader remains stable. The implication is that China owes its progress to America. China can only keep up through stealing, which insinuates a false basis for military and technological progress. The subsequent article “Birth of a Superpower” validates this claim: “China wants to be a world power on a par with the U.S., but it has a lot of catching up to do”(Gibney 40). This coverage scrutinizes Chinese military power in terms of air, land, and sea forces, concluding that it “*can’t match* those of the U.S.” and “*would be demolished* in an all-out war” (Gibney 42, emphasis originally in red). Following this conclusion, the supremacy of Americans is established as unquestionable, especially against the backdrop of a sly enemy who always tries to imitate them and steal their technology.

America’s leading role in the global order is thus sustained in these reports, then, by the fraught rhetoric of crisis and threat.<sup>iii</sup> To begin with, the attention given to Wen Ho Lee’s case was closely connected in media reports to China’s leaps in nuclear technologies. Constructing China as the ‘yet-to-be-enlightened’ other, these reports imply that China could not have achieved such technological success without stealing secrets from the United States, the most advanced country in terms of nuclear technology. Curiously, American identities shift within different contexts. The American identity is oftentimes associated with democracy and freedom, as opposed to its militaristic and Communist other such as China in this espionage case, again in the image of a war-like yellow-skinned man in military uniform. In the face of this Chinese other, the U.S. finds itself confronted with ‘crises’ and ‘threat.’ Simultaneously, the U.S. government has also

established and justified itself as the most powerful military country in the world, as exemplified in the Wen Ho Lee case and the current global events.

Similar rhetoric can also be found in articles that appeared after Wen Ho Lee's release, which defend his innocence and deny the accusations of espionage. For example, Robert Scheer indicates that, in reporting Lee's case, the media ignored

the massive amount of evidence in the scientific and intelligence community suggesting that Chinese nuclear weapons gains were very slight and [thus] could easily have been the product of the country's own internal research, and that in any case, China is a full four decades behind the United States and no threat in any way as a nuclear power. (3)

In fact, rhetoric such as this may have contributed to Wen Ho Lee's release. As Scheer points out in his article, it was the testimony of Dr. Harold Agnew, a top advisor on nuclear weapons to five presidents, that cut through the "hysteria" about losing the U.S. nuclear arsenal (9). Such hysteria dominated media and public focus on the loss of American nuclear technology for a time, thereby playing a part in the highly unusual treatment of Lee in jail. With the new testimony and new assessment of China's military power, Judge Parker and the American public now perceived the government's original claim that "Lee had downloaded the 'crown' jewels of America's nuclear program" as an "unbridled exaggeration" (Scheer 9). After the evidence of China's backwardness in nuclear technology was highlighted, Wen Ho Lee was free to go. Judge Parker, respected as "an ultimately courageous judge," apologized to Lee and scolded the government for its mishandling of Lee's case (Scheer 9). At the same time, Americans are "feeling proud that the [American judicial] system had worked once again"(Scheer 2).

However, despite the public support for Wen Ho Lee's release and Judge Parker's apology to Lee, the repercussions attest to the political sensitivity and palpability of this case. On December 8, 2000, three months after Lee's release, the headline story in *The Wall Street Journal*, was "How Federal Agents Bungled the Case against Wen Ho Lee"(Cohen and Cloud). The coverage implies that, because of the FBI's unprofessional performance in handling Lee's case, the 'truth' behind it will be hidden forever. In this article, Lee was not really cleared of the charges against him, and his release was only due to the FBI's bungling. His case is therefore always subject to further accusation or revision. This national event has not ended with a full admission of the government's mistake. The case still resonates.

With the inauguration of the Bush administration, the Wen Ho Lee case was presented in a different light. On August 13, 2001, nearly a year after Lee's release, the Department of Justice revealed a secret document in Lee's case. Two chapters of a classified internal inquiry were made public as a way of criticizing the investigation of the case. This new report faulted the Energy Department for producing a deeply flawed preliminary report and the F.B.I. for investigating the wrong crime for several years. In doing so, the government attempted to reestablish the democratic and righteous image of the American administration by attributing the mistakes in Lee's case to others and by denying any racism. *The Washington Post*, in the media representation of this report, pointed out one of its central themes: "the problem was mishandled...under the Clinton administration" (Eggen, par. 3). The Bush administration has supposedly been rectifying the mistakes made by the former Democratic government, thereby assuming superiority

over it. The present American administration has thus revised Wen Ho Lee's story for its own purposes, while simultaneously subjecting foreigners (Chinese) or 'foreigners-within' (Asian Americans) to further political pressures in domestic partisan politics.

The social drama of Wen Ho Lee's case continues. The most revealing part of the Bush administration's new report lies in its argument against racism. It rejects the central claim from Lee's supporters that his ethnicity was the cause of his plight. The report concludes that the Lee investigation "had many serious problems. Racism was not among them" (Lichtblau, par. 7). However, as Wahneema Lubiano indicates, "the basic character of the United States not only harbored, but depended upon...racism. Central to the existence of racism is the politics of its denial" (vii-viii). In the same year of the Bush administration's report, as a result of the mass media representation of China and Wen Ho Lee, "startlingly" persistent negative perceptions of Chinese were found to prevail according to a study in April 2001. The Committee of 100 (an organization of prominent Chinese Americans) announced the results of this study conducted by Yankelovich Partners in collaboration and consultation with the Marttila Communications Group and the Anti-Defamation League. According to this survey of public attitudes toward Chinese Americans, more than half (sixty-eight percent) of American interviewees hold "very negative" or "somewhat negative attitudes" toward Americans of Chinese ancestry, and one third question Chinese Americans' loyalty to the United States ("American"). In other words, as the American media and public grapple with the Wen Ho Lee case, racial profiling is behind the public understanding of the case, even though racism is denied. While the nation-state's political and economic, national and international interests

continue to collide, the racialized others are at stake. Whereas Vietnam poses a relatively small threat in the late twentieth century to the American international frontier and thus warrants a comparatively benign representation like that in *Miss Saigon*, a major part of media representations of the Wen Ho Lee case within the context of post-Cold War U.S.-China relations contributed to the perception of Lee as a threat, thereby to his plight in jail. Racism in the cases discussed above thus works to provide coherence for an American national identity. The cultural presentations explored here to various degrees serve as a justification of the global order monitored by America – one with a leading role in the global order based upon nuclear (im)balance.

<iv>

As a reading of the Wen Ho Lee case reveals, America's leading role in the globalized order is contingent upon a series of interrelated conditions. Its continual conquest of natural resources on the international frontier has been dependent upon, among other forms, the control of the nuclear power. This power, when developed in other parts of the world, poses a threat and danger but, in the hands of the U.S., it stands for technological progress and scientific advancement. In the case of the U.S., the control of nuclear power has relied upon the transnational flow of labor, which makes the State's recruitment of intellectual labor possible, resulting in the Asian 'brain drain' since the Cold War era. At the same time, those higher-end immigrants, like others from various parts of the world, are regulated by immigration acts and subjected to racialization in the realms of cultural representation, due to the nation-state's need to negotiate between its political and economic, past and present, and national and international affairs. The

extreme vacillation of Wen Ho Lee's images as an other between a noble and an ignoble savage – a 'model minority' and a 'foreigner within' – is therefore the result of his entrapment in the entangled processes of contradictions and negotiation, made sensible through the cultural representations evoked in the conversation among the government, political parties, media, and the diverse American public.

Since September 11, 2001, America's ongoing war against terrorism has necessitated a comparatively more steady relationship with China, as the absolute evil other is targeted elsewhere. Within the domestic sphere, a need for 'good' subjects, similar to one during the Cold War era, is manifest in the re-evoking of the model minority myth. In the cultural realm, the 2003 PBS program *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* illustrates the power of such stereotypes. The PBS program tells an American saga of Chinese immigration history, endeavoring to bring in many sides of the story. For instance, it recognizes the erasure of the wide diversity of circumstances among Chinese Americans by the label of 'model minority.' Those circumstances range from the business and educational elite, populating Silicon Valley and American universities, to the sweatshop laborers in Chinatowns, too busy earning their livings to learn English much less prepare their children for school. However, as Bill Moyer, the program host, explores the personal journeys of Chinese Americans in one-on-one interviews, he chooses five distinguished, extremely successful Chinese Americans who are either Nobel-Prize winners or famous leading figures in their fields. Moyer focuses his interviews on the strong drive to succeed within these Chinese immigrants' families. In fact, he draws on the stereotypes of 'model minority' to conduct these interviews.

Regardless of the diversity among Chinese Americans, he suggests that, “the enormous success on the part of Chinese Americans, and their growing impact on the U.S. culture and economy,” may be explainable by their drive to success “deeply rooted in Chinese family tradition and Confucian belief” (Young et al.). Moyer’s selective representation reinforces the symbolically laden label of ‘model minority’ in articulating the Chinese American experience.

In this fashion, the role of Chinese Americans within the domestic order is again racialized and co-opted for the United States as a multiracial nation. Within the domestic sphere, such racialization, like the mechanism in the PBS program *Frontier House* that recruits stereotypical representations of diverse races and ethnicities that I discuss in Chapter Two, functions to dislodge conflicts into the past and celebrates a contemporary society under the mask of a multiracial nation. Furthermore, as Wen Ho Lee’s story has shown, racialization within the political and cultural realms could function as a powerful tool to inform personal experiences, shape national identities, and impinge upon the global order. The racialized images of Wen Ho Lee, like the shifting yet persistent representations of Pocahontas in American culture, are to be found at the intersections of multiple discourses of nation, nature, race, and gender, serving as ideologically saturated sites for us to grapple with our contemporary experiences in the globalized world.

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#### Notes

<sup>i</sup> Newly arrived white immigrants in the nineteenth century, such as Irish Catholics fleeing the potato famine, also suffered discrimination. However, as “‘white’ immigrants,

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they were eligible for naturalized citizenship” (Takaki 162). The relationship between whiteness and citizenship was further strengthened by the subsequent legal exclusion acts against Asian Indians in 1917, Japanese in 1924, and Filipinos in 1934. The Alien Land Laws of 1913, 1920, and 1923 prohibited Asian immigrants from owning land and other forms of property through the legal construction of nonwhites as “aliens ineligible to citizenship” (qtd. in Lowe 13).

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter Three. The famous Broadway musical *Miss Saigon*, which has been highly popular since its premiere in 1989, can be seen as an American revision of the Vietnam War. Significantly, its immense popularity resonates with America’s desire to modify the national experience in Vietnam.

<sup>iii</sup> This rhetoric has been constantly evoked by the Bush administration in its handling of post-9/11 national and international affairs such as tightened visa rules and its waging of ‘war against terrorism’ – first the Taliban in Afghanistan, then Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq.

Afterword  
American Exceptionalism, Colonialism, and Globalization

*With America, the modern world  
begins.*

– Germán Arciniegas

In the turn-of-the-millennium blockbuster film *The Matrix*, the protagonists, Neo and Trinity, are outstanding computer technicians who have searched all their lives for an answer: what is the matrix? What they discover is disheartening: human beings live in and through the matrix. The matrix, they find, is a closely controlled complex computer program designed by Artificial Intelligence. Through neural-interactive simulation, the matrix beguiles humans, who are grown as crops on the ruined earth by computers. With their consciousness in the ‘dream world’ of the late-twentieth-century earth, humans are turned into slaves whose life energies are, in fact, extracted to sustain the computer system that controls them. While I do not wish to go into details of the film, I do want to point out that the structure of the matrix corresponds with the intricate web of representations that inform our perceptions of our ‘own’ world. It is a world in which people, many of us in Cultural Studies at least, strive to decipher and disentangle, not unlike Neo and Trinity from *The Matrix*.<sup>1</sup>

This project is thus my attempt to detect, in small ways, certain threads that are woven into this extensive web of representations. I start with John Smith’s Pocahontas episode from the seventeenth century, a colonial narrative that justifies the conquest of people and natural resources through a colonial trope. The conquest in this trope is facilitated through the subjugation of feminine body and feminized land (noble savage), and the retreat of primitive/evil/dark ignoble savages in the face of civilization and

industrial progress. This narrative, as I have shown in different chapters, has been re-evoked, re-narrated, and re-interpreted so often that manifests in a series of related American legends, straddling the fence between the historical and mythical. These legends, both early and contemporary, are a viable part of our contemporary lives, embedded as they are within the globalization process. My efforts to make sense of the connections among these narratives had to overcome the temporal, political, social, rhetorical, and disciplinary distance that seemed to separate them. This dissertation represents my attempts to draw together disparate events, contexts, and levels of analysis to think precisely about the overlaps between the discourses of nation, nature, race and gender.

I have been struck by the extraordinary convergences and resonances between discourses of nation, nature, race, and gender that accumulate a collective force, even in their separate moments. As I have shown in Chapter One, Henry Adams and Everett Emerson's opposing representations of John Smith and Pocahontas during the Civil War and Vietnam War eventually lead to the same end: promoting a linear view of American history that upholds progress in terms of industrialization and expansionism at the cost of nature and racialized, gendered others. Thomas Cole and the producers of the PBS program *Frontier House* have questioned this cost and lamented the resulted losses to certain degrees. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, in both cases romanticized subjugation in terms of nature, race and gender is seen as an inevitable and necessary step of progress and civilization. Such progress is recognized as enhancing the quality of life, a status quo people are encouraged to embrace. In contemporary cultural texts including

the Broadway musical *Miss Saigon* and media representations of the Wen Ho Lee case, as demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, this status quo is found to be an American identity that plays a primary role in the global order.

Rooted within these intersecting discourses, this colonial trope persists in our cultural lives. The resilience of this trope rests in its malleability. It is easily adapted to the new and ever-changing guises of colonial structures, operating now through expanding globalized regimes of capitalist economic development. In a sense, the term *globalization* is “only the most recent name for a process that began with a similar world system called colonialism” (Briggs 197). Within the current globalized regimes, American cultural practices have been transmitted through the current flow and circulation of culture. In some major ways, the global proliferation of the North American culture industry helps promote the image of America as the blueprint of what the rest of the world aspires to. According to Frederic Jameson, American life thus projected becomes the goal towards which humanity has been evolving, defining progress and success in the globalized world (63). Although the receivers of American cultural products assume their own forms of agency in this process, the moments of American exceptionalism occur when America occupies the position as the semiotic center of global cultural flows, as well as when people in different parts of the world term their aspiration for a better life or their life goals as “the American dream.”

As I have shown in Chapter Three, within the current global capitalist economy, the American dream represents a life of material wealth and abundance for many Third World residents. However, this wealth and abundance is made possible only by

America's economic power. American capitalist economy and this projected American lifestyle rely upon the continual conquest of natural resources throughout the world. The recent war with Iraq testifies to this ongoing need. For in order to control global natural resources, the United States needs to maintain a global order. This order is achieved through the control of nuclear power. Power over nuclear technology, as I elaborate in Chapter Four, entails the control of intellectual talent and property acquired through the capitalist transnational flow. Fueling the aspirations of many immigrants is the 'American dream,' perpetuated by globalized cultural products such as *Miss Saigon*.

This development, as ecofeminists such as Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva observe, strays from a "Subsistence Perspective" that is healthy for both the earth and its inhabitants. The current Bush administration provides an apt example as it has repeatedly denied the reports of global climate change to placate large energy and oil companies (Townsend and Harris, par. 5). Like the Artificial Intelligence in *The Matrix* that develops and multiplies on its own to the extent of eventually controlling humans for its existence, globalizing capitalist regimes are expanding seemingly beyond human control. Within this process, often coded as progress, culture becomes the site through which people negotiate with the global order. The intricate web of representations that spawn the cultural narratives I examine here is like the matrix, keeping people under control by promoting the possibility of fulfilling the American dream within the status quo. What we are seeing in these narratives is in certain ways similar to what constitutes the brave new world at the end of the matrix trilogy. After the revolution and wars between computer and humans, as all talents and energies on the resistance side are depleted, the control

system creates a new construct, a new matrix in which cyborg children find new hopes. In our contemporary world, the name of this new construct is termed globalization, which many consider a blessing – or at least a mixed blessing. Within the current globalized world of transnational flow and free trade, people are encouraged to believe themselves free of old colonial conflicts in terms of nation, nature, race and gender.

In exploring these cultural narratives, I have only taken a small step towards a more holistic understanding of the intricate web of representations that inform our perceptions of ourselves and our world. Even though this web of representations is like the matrix as a control system to a certain degree, we are afforded the tool of critical thinking. Based on the awareness of how these disparate cultural narratives come together to form a common ground for understanding, I think the next step is to explore alternatives to the structures and relationships under colonialism and globalization. Scholars, like the aforementioned ecofeminists, have worked on formulating alternatives to the linear narrative of progress, and activists have been protesting and resisting the detrimental consequences of globalization (Adamson, Evans and Stein). On various fronts, people are working for positive change in the world. As I take my one small step to join them, I believe that further work needs to be done to bring these diverse people and approaches, on all fronts, together in a collective effort towards a world “less riddled by [culturally authorized] dominations of race, colonialism, class, gender, and sexuality” (Haraway 2).

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Notes

<sup>i</sup> This comparison is only to suggest that a great many of us who choose to be in Cultural Studies are supposedly afforded a strong curiosity in the exploring this web of representations that constitute our 'realities.' My comparison, however, in no ways is intended to imply that we, as academics or as Cultural Studies scholars, are like Neo and Trinity who are able to move almost entirely beyond this web or who are more enlightened or liberated than the general public.

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