Editors' Note

Writing in his 2013 book *The Unwinding*, George Packer described North Carolina's Fifth District and its elected Republican Congresswoman, Virginia Foxx, around the time of the 2008 US elections. Her constituency, Packer noted, ran from the "Blue Ridge Mountains on the Tennessee border to just west of Greensboro, with no town larger than twenty-five thousand people, and 90 percent of the residents white." While Foxx won reelection easily, this seemed, to Packer, like an anomaly in an age when Barack Obama swept to the White House so triumphantly: "she seemed like a relic of the past, and so did her constituents, and maybe even her party."

Three years later, Packer's judgment has been upended. Donald Trump's election win in November, fired in the main by voters in those rural areas deemed anachronistic by Packer, has provided a profound shock to the American political system and, moreover, to those of us across the world who seek to better understand the nation, its people, and its institutions. It seemed simply unbelievable that a candidate endorsing such belligerent, hateful, and divisive positions could secure enough votes to win. And yet, for millions of Americans, Trump offered something they could believe in. Some simply saw in Trump's bigotry, racism, misogyny, and sexual boasting a figure that seemed to see the nation and the world as they saw it. The man promising a crackdown on immigration, who vowed to build a wall between the US and Mexico, and who advocated a total ban on Muslim immigration struck a chord with many whites in rural areas who felt that the US was no longer their nation. Remarkably, the man who stalked Hillary Clinton round the stage during the second presidential debate, who was caught on camera demeaning women and boasting of his ability to grab and kiss whomever he chose, and who openly bragged about his virility in response to insinuations about his manhood, still won the support of many white women. This, truly, was the politics of division and hate. For many others, however, Trump simply seemed to offer an alternative – to be someone who might break the cycle of unrelenting poverty and wealth inequality that has become the new norm, who was not a long-term political insider certain to back the usual established interests in Washington and on Wall Street, and who had vowed to bring jobs back to areas of the country that were depressed and largely forgotten.

The upshot, whatever the reasons people voted for Trump, was the stark reality that America is a divided nation. Paul Krugman, seeking to make

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875817000330 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sense of the election in a post for the *New York Times*, noted that it was all too evident that the beliefs of many city-dwelling Americans were not shared across the nation. "There turn out to be a huge number of people – white people, living mainly in rural areas – who don't share at all our idea of what America is about … I don't know how we go forward from here."

For us, as for so many others, Trump's victory was dispiriting, depressing, and extremely worrying. The tone, the mood, the insults, the divisive language of the campaign, all seemed to herald a politics that is entirely at odds with the sort of scholarship that we seek to encourage and to publish in the pages of *JAS*. It was truly humbling in the days after the election to receive messages from colleagues in the US telling us that they had had groups of students in class that week who were in tears because, suddenly, they didn't seem to know their country, and the values that they held had been so thoroughly rejected. Events since November – Trump's Cabinet picks, his continued confrontational style on Twitter and toward the media while embracing the leading figure behind Breitbart News, his willingness to deliberately antagonize other nations – have done nothing to dim those sentiments.

Amid the feelings of concern, however, there is an attendant sense that now, more than ever, there is a need for us to better understand and engage with the complexities of the United States. While suggestions that Obama's presidency ushered in the post-racial age in the US were always erroneous, it is possible that his two terms in the White House, whether you believe he has been a successful President or not, led us toward positions of complacency about the nation's difficult and complex history. That isn't to say that Obama's presidency has been free from trouble or that he should be considered a flawless President; the massively expanded use of drone attacks against the nation's enemies and the worsening state of race relations in the US are compelling counter-arguments to any such claim. Rather, it is to suggest that the election of the nation's first black President gave the impression that things were still improving in the US and that the world was gradually becoming more progressive and enlightened. Trump's victory resoundingly demonstrates that any such notion is hollow. Rarely, if ever, has a candidate been elected to such high office while being so manifestly unqualified in terms of temperament and personal experience. Understanding the United States' culture and history more deeply in light of this is therefore now vital.

Accordingly, it seems entirely appropriate that this issue of *JAS* features scholarship that embraces and interrogates the complex diversity of the US and its history. As *JAS*'s inspirational plenary lecturer at the annual British Association for American Studies conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 2017, we begin this issue with Deborah Willis's trailblazing essay "The Black Civil War Soldier: Conflict and Citizenship." Here she provides a seminal inter-, cross-, and multidisciplinary examination not only of "the

numerous acts of courage, and their rewards," but also of "the low points for black soldiers in the war, from inequities in pay to discriminatory practices in the field, and inadequate health services, to the shared experiences of all soldiers." As she incisively declares, "I hope to build on the story the portraits tell, to shine a light on the hopefulness of black soldiers, the sense of what could be won out of loss." A wonderfully thought-provoking and stimulating essay, Willis's pioneering research has resulted in a cutting-edge scholarly forum consisting of no less illuminating contributions from Rachel Farebrother, Nicole King, and Rachel Williams. Across their responses, they rely on groundbreaking theoretical frameworks to address the lives and deaths of black soldiers as examined in social, political, cultural, historical, and ideological perspective.

This issue continues with Michael Woods's equally groundbreaking analysis of "Interdisciplinary Studies of the Civil War Era" as he fascinatingly comes to grips with "Recent Trends and Future Prospects." He provides researchers with not only a road map but also a blueprint auguring a sea change in scholarly practices by launching an investigation into the "recent scholarship on the history of emotions, medicine, and the environment in the Civil War era." Taking a new direction by shifting specifically to literary matters, in "A New Deal, a New Updike: The Decline of New Deal Liberalism in John Updike's *The Poorhouse Fair*," Yoav Fromer "challenges the prevailing notions that John Updike's fiction was mostly apolitical by offering a fresh and unorthodox reading of his debut novel *The Poorhouse Fair*," which he authored in 1958. A powerfully argued and seminal meditation on the debates surrounding memory and memorialization, Thomas Brown's "Monuments and Ruins: Atlanta and Columbia Remember Sherman" examines the ways in which the "decline of monuments and ruins contributed to the transformation of the Lost Cause into a different cultural configuration during the decade of the Civil War centennial."

Aram Goudsouzian's "From Lew Alcindor to Kareem Abdul Jabbar: Race, Religion, and Representation in Basketball, 1968–1975" maps the life and works of professional basketball superstar Lew Alcindor/Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, as he "traveled a turbulent personal path toward self-discovery." As Goudsouzian argues, "his journey had profound implications for the larger cultural landscape of race, sport, politics, and religion." Dedicated to a no less inspirational figure, Stephen Whitfield's "Daniel Aaron Necrology" traces the trailblazing scholarship of Daniel Aaron. Tracing his world-leading importance as an individual who "belongs on the short list of the academy's most learned and admired custodians of the nation's culture, for which President Obama awarded him the National Humanities Medal in 2011," Whitfield is categorical in his conviction that such "was the arc of his career

and concerns that, as this necrology is intended to suggest, the field of American studies will not see his like again."

A groundbreaking study, Sue Currell's "You Haven't Seen Their Faces: Eugenic National Housekeeping and Documentary Photography in 1930s America" is a hard-hitting, thoughtful, and profoundly interrogative interdisciplinary investigation into "the relationship between welfare, eugenics and documentary photography during the New Deal in order to explain how a set of government photographs taken by Arthur Rothstein in the Shenandoah became entwined in the rhetorical structure of eugenic ideology." Approaching a subject that is equally politically charged, David Kieran's "'Never Too Late to Do the Right Thing': Barack Obama, Vietnam's Legacy, and the Cultural Politics of Military Awards during the Afghanistan War" examines "the cultural politics of military awards during the Obama administration" by investigating "the administration's posthumous recognition of three Vietnam veterans, arguing that the President has embraced a remembrance of the war that encourages Americans to celebrate veterans without regard for the illegal, controversial, or morally questionable activities in which they participated." Stefan Schöberlein's "Speaking in Tongues, Speaking without Tongues: Transplanted Voices in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*" breaks new ground by revealing "an underexplored aspect of Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* – namely its German–Indian context," which he interprets "through the story's main plot device: ventriloquism."

Tim Jelfs's "Matter Unmoored: Trash, Archaeological Consciousness and American Culture and Fiction in the 1980s" effortlessly traces "the cultural significance of the garbage panics of the 1980s" in order to demonstrate that trash "is important to our understanding of both the 1980s and the present because it demanded – and still demands – that Americans see and understand it as a class of matter unmoored from temporal as well as spatial boundaries." For Kenneth Millard writing in "'The Dark Unaccompanied Moment': Louise Erdrich's 'The Antelope Wide' and the Problem of the Origin," "a critical examination of Louise Erdrich's novel *The Antelope Wife*" which "has a particular focus in conceptualizations of origins" lies at the heart of his investigation. Finally, in Stephanie Lewthwaite's "'Seeing in the Dark': The Aesthetics of Disappearance and Remembrance in the Work of Alberto Rey," she provides a powerful examination of the ways in which "contemporary Cuban American artists have experimented with visual languages of trauma to construct an intergenerational memory about the losses of exile and migration."

On the reviews side, the print section opens with a roundtable discussion of Andrew Hartman's *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. Andrew Wroe, Emma Long and Timothy Stanley discuss an important

new contribution to the history of social and cultural politics since the 1960s, and the roundtable includes a response from the author. The print section then includes fifteen reviews, led by a series discussing eight recent titles that deal with the Irish in the United States. Several of these books consider how Irish immigrants' experiences, whether real or imagined, intersected with those of other minority groups in the United States. The online section showcases a roundtable devoted to the intellectual and logistical challenges of conceptualizing a second research project after the completion of the PhD. Featuring contributions from four early-career researchers, and responses from three established Americanist scholars, the roundtable was originally organized as part of the joint conferences of the British and Irish Associations for American Studies at Queen's University Belfast in April 2016.

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