

DISCIPLINARY DIVIDES

New Work on Race in Latin America

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- Legacies of Race: Identities, Attitudes, and Politics in Brazil.** By Stanley R. Bailey. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pp. 293. \$70.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.
- Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, *Redes*.** By Arturo Escobar. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. Pp. xvi + 435. \$89.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.
- Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast.** By Jan Hoffman French. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Pp. xxii + 245. \$59.95 cloth, \$22.50 paper.
- Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States.** By David Luis-Brown. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. Pp. ix + 339. \$89.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper.
- The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatán.** By Matthew Restall. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pp. 456. \$65.00 cloth.

"Anthropology," writes Arturo Escobar, "wants to remain a discipline" (xi). Escobar sets this drive against the profound inter- or "undisciplinarity" of his own *Territories of Difference*, thereby gesturing to a tension between, among, and across disciplines that inspires and distorts work on race in Latin America today. Students of sociology, anthropology, history, literature, and the various "studies" (Africana, American, Latin American, ethnic) all struggle to reconcile disciplinary training and norms with ubiquitous calls for interdisciplinarity in the U.S. academy. Whether one chooses to heed, refuse, or ignore these calls, it is striking how notions of race remain resolutely grounded in specific disciplines. Stanley Bailey's *Legacies of Race* introduced me to the useful schema of bright versus blurred, hard versus soft, and thick versus thin boundaries. As we shall see, researchers in the humanities and in the social sciences often speak to one another across the hard-bright boundary between qualitative and quantitative paradigms and between definitional and disciplinary camps.

These differences arise despite the good number of concerns shared by recent books that, centrally or tangentially, address race. Of the five books reviewed in this essay, two engage racial boundaries directly and as their main interest, with illustratively different methodologies. Jan French's deft and engaging *Legalizing Identities* focuses an anthropological gaze on descendants of Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans in Brazil's northeastern state of Sergipe. Bailey's *Legacies of Race* uses polling data about everyday attitudes to make policy suggestions for fighting racial discrimination in Brazil. Both are interested in the relationship between law and identity, exploring the role of the state in the formation of racial categories, as Escobar also does in *Territories of Difference*. Escobar comes to the question of identity as part of a larger project: to decenter conventional forms of knowledge in deference to those promoted by indigenous activists. The literary scholar David Luis-Brown shares this "decolonizing" project. His *Waves of Decolonization* undertakes a literary analysis of anticolonial novels, essays, and ethnographies from the early twentieth century. In a work that provides background for all the aforementioned studies, Matthew Restall's *The Black Middle* reveals the rich African heritage of a region—the Yucatán—not usually assigned a place of prominence in the African slave trade.

Restall's book is a useful starting point because of the light that it sheds on the emergence of Afro-inflected racial identifications, the phenomenon treated by French, Escobar, and Bailey. Restall documents the tracks of Afro-American culture and presence laid by the slave trade, yet erased in collective memory by cultural absorption and racial mixture. Although the number of Africans brought involuntarily to Yucatán was less than that brought to other New World colonies, they were still a significant presence. Through exhaustive archival gleanings in Mérida, Campeche, small Yucatecan towns, Mexico City, London, Madrid, and Seville, Restall unearths the importance that these migrants and the tens of thousands of their descendants had for racial and cultural mixture in the region. He argues that "not only are Hispanic Yucatecans also Afro-Yucatecans" today but also "the Mayas of Yucatán must now be viewed as Afro-Mayas" (285).

To this bold conclusion, Restall adds nuanced consideration of Afro-Yucatecans' roles in colonial society. He explains that Afro-Yucatecans occupied a middle ground between Maya and Spaniards. Yucatán was not the mass slave society of Bahia or the Carolinas, and many Afro-Yucatecans were free or freed, particularly as the colonial period progressed. They were skilled laborers working singly or in small numbers, whereas the Maya were forced to toil as an unskilled mass. Afro-Yucatecans also performed a managerial role overseeing Maya labor. Nevertheless, Afro-Yucatecans often worked for wages as low as those of the Maya and in conditions as miserable as theirs. This pattern extended even to rural areas by 1700, a late midpoint of this study that ranges from

the 1530s to the 1830s. So, although the slave trade was certainly responsible for the presence of Africans in this “society with slaves” (rather than slave society), slavery did not determine their experience. Restall underlines the distinctiveness of Afro-Yucatecans in this regard by supplementing his tables, figures, and lovely hand-sketched maps with anecdotes and stories about the provenance, work, status, and magic of individual people.

As a historian happily immersed in his discipline, Restall’s take on race is a no-nonsense view of change over time. He lends surprising credence to genetics and biology, but briefly, and ultimately supports a constructionist view, cautioning that the racial prejudices of Yucatecan colonial society—profound as they were—should not be equated with modern racism and did not rely on the social category of race in the form it takes today. Yucatán was instead an example of “racism without race” (James Sweet, cited in Restall, 78). Restall carefully considers the importance that *casta* and *calidad* had, in tandem with *raza*, as categories of status or rank that were less systematic than metaphorical, and he shows with detailed evidence that these terms were applied with fluidity and ambiguity. Although racism and discrimination certainly existed, a coherent, lasting racist ideology did not, and the small size of most towns and villages meant that personal considerations of occupation, kinship, reputation, and so on, were as important as race in fixing one’s social location. As a result, Africans and their descendants were integrated into Yucatecan society, obscuring the region’s black past. Other aspects of national and regional history added further layers of concealment. This distinctiveness vis-à-vis the more common narrative of slave society does not compromise the relevance of Restall’s study; indeed, the importance of African culture and slavery rests just below the visible surface elsewhere in Latin America as well.

Legalizing Identities presents one such example, in which the residents of Mocambo, in northeastern Brazil, fought to be designated as descendants of a *quilombo* (a community of escaped slaves), to capitalize on a legal status won by the Afro-Brazilian racial justice movement in the 1990s. The state awarded Mocambo this status in 1997, giving its residents land rights and protections like those of people on the neighboring island of São Pedro, who had, twenty years earlier, won recognition as members of the Xocó Indian tribe. The marvelous contradictions of these neighboring and interrelated villages that chose divergent identifications is abundantly “good for thinking” about race and law.

French carefully situates the two ethnic identifications in Brazil’s changing political context. The Xocó designation was part of a wave of Indian identification supported by a progressive Catholic Church in the face of an oppressive military state, whereas the status granted to Mocambo emerged from the government’s democratic opening and the black social movement at a time when the church, now more conservative, strove to dis-

tance itself from its previous positions. French sets these national changes against the global currents of the Cold War, Vatican II, and movements against colonialism and for racial justice in Africa and the Americas, so that Mocambo does not appear as a piece of “the Brazilian puzzle”—the exoticist figuring of Brazilian exceptionalism—but as a site marked by “a series of phenomena that have transformed Brazil and the hemisphere,” that is, by “movements for ethnoracial recognition and redistributive justice” that began in the 1970s and are also hemispheric (xv–xvi).

This broad context does not prevent French from telling a satisfyingly specific story. We see islanders and villagers work to differentiate themselves from one another while family feuds, personal conflicts, and petty grievances unfold in relation to ethnic and legislative shifts. French presents anthropologists who participated in both movements, and priests; nuns; activists; local and national politicians; local landowners; and many, many *sertanejos* alive and legendary. To read this book is to understand exactly how contradiction occurs—how two neighboring, related groups come to identify as ethnic others. *Legalizing Identities* resoundingly confirms the value of methodical ethnography and storytelling.

There is more to this book than ethnography, though I am not sure that it is important to call it interdisciplinary. French’s attention to the history of northeastern Brazil exceeds the usual nod to colonization, slavery, racial mixture, sparse settlement, drought, and famine to the social construction of ideas about the region, including the idea of region itself, questioning the common attribution of regional history to Gilberto Freyre. French describes the critical place of the Northeast in a broader Brazilian imaginary, which projects onto the *sertão* the expectations of Messianism, banditry, paternalism, religiosity, nostalgia, poor planning, and dreadful poverty. As French notes, this projection (which blames the poor for their poverty) neglects the laws that disenfranchised Indians and peasants in the nineteenth century, creating a landowning oligarchy that is still dominant today.

A first career as a lawyer and familiarity with Brazilian and U.S. legal codes aids French in refining the hypothesis that law and lived experience are mutually constitutive. She coins the phrase “legalizing identity” for the insight that laws not only transform people but also are themselves transformed by the use that people make of them. When people take on ethno-racial identities that leverage legal advantage, they also alter their lived experience, though neither abruptly nor entirely. French shows that residents of Mocambo and São Pedro chose from among traditions they already practiced and that could buttress claims to Xocó or quilombo status. Those of São Pedro danced the *toré*, and those of Mocambo the *samba de coco*, and they did not stop dancing the one or the other (or playing soccer, for that matter) as a result of changing identity claims. However, as *toré* became a mark of Indian authenticity and *samba de coco* a proof of

quilombo survival, the dances assumed a new place—as ritual or play—in people’s lives. Continuity, and not invention, informed cultural practices, French explains. Yet the process of selection rerouted individual senses of self, changing them deeply. Authenticity is thus not an analytical concept for French and many others in her field. Even in legal proceedings, anthropologists in her study rejected authenticity as “a definitional requisite of identity” (xv). The discourse of race as a social construction “enhanced rather than undermined Xocó and Mocambo claims of difference” (xv). Essentialism was not necessary even as strategy.

As a thoroughly poststructural anthropologist, French places culture—what humans do—at the foundation of identity and law. Just as identity is a mutable series of experiences, law does not exist until it is used. (One could easily flip the concepts: just as law. . . .) It would be difficult to imagine a more convincing exposition of the mutability of race and the mistakes entailed in its naturalization or reification. Ethnic boundaries change as a matter of course: “what it means to be a quilombola is in a state of flux” (150) because culture “moves in unexpected ways” (153). At the basic level, this tour de force concludes, a seeming violation of common sense is merely the sense that culture makes.

Escobar considers another group of people who have recently come to identify as black: the residents of Colombia’s Pacific Coast. Their resistance to development by state, foreign, and multinational corporations exemplifies, for Escobar, “one of the defining features of the decade . . . the emergence of unprecedented forms of black identity” (200). Identity is one of a series of factors that Escobar judges critical to social movements in the region, along with place, capital, nature, development, and networks. Social movements, Escobar maintains, generate knowledge that must have pride of place in any epistemology that aspires to participate in fostering justice. If academics can take the rhetoric and strategies of activists seriously, they will see alternatives to modernity, subversions of coloniality, and spaces outside and against neoliberal globalization. As this proposal suggests, this is a hopeful book. Escobar’s *Encountering Development* (1995) despaired at the hegemony of the discourse of development, which he found to be highly toxic to the disenfranchised, even when advanced by well-meaning nongovernmental organizations and philanthropic foundations. *Territories of Difference* holds out the promise that people can carve out places where real diversity resides and survives.

Territories of Difference is an ambitious exercise in building a social science framework to nourish collaboration between academics and activists. It links political economy to political ecology (the study of conflicts relating to ecological distribution) insisting that the resulting combination consider the power of culture, since conflict often arises from the unequal weight “accorded to various knowledge and cultural practices” (13–14). Ultimately, “economic crises are ecological crises are cultural crises”; the

three domains “interpenetrate” and must be studied together (14). Escobar calls this approach a “political ecology of difference” (6).

Insofar as Escobar seeks to present a set of priorities and principles to organize thought and action, his method is multifaceted. It “interweaves both ethnographic research and theory,” he explains, and hesitates to reduce it to the field of political ecology “or any other, for that matter” (xi). It shares much with intellectual history in that its genealogy of knowledge is based on a small group of thinkers. Escobar does not attempt to take into consideration all the peoples of Colombia’s Pacific Coast but instead presents a self-selected subset of activists, whose voices and stories emerge less from participant observation than from interviews and meeting notes.

This practice may give some readers pause. In drawing conclusions about the effects of personal memories and experiences of blackness, for example, Escobar relies heavily on notes from a single daylong meeting with fourteen activists in Cali, and the results of a questionnaire sent by e-mail to roughly the same number of people. From these sources, Escobar concludes that activists have “pleasant remembrances of life by the river or by the sea, under attentive parental or grandparents’ care, enveloped in local culture (food, the drumbeat of music and dance, the carelessness of childhood lived in river and forest, and so forth)” (229). Their first sense of their blackness (as a form of difference) came from experiences of racism in Andean cities or Pacific towns, in dealing with neighbors or indigent groups. The simplicity and romance of the memories attributed to Escobar’s informants—the predictable tropes, their utilitarian value—is stunning, and Escobar does not remark on it. He asserts that “memories of life on the river can be important in shaping activism” (232), but he does not plumb how activism also shapes memories of life on the river. Surely part of becoming an activist is learning to tell a life story in ways that promote both activism and black identity as a conclusion. Anthropologists and oral historians have long recognized that identity narration is a collective, carefully guided process, which in this case (as in that of Mocambo) specifically and consciously engages the utility that identity narratives can have for land claims.

This lack of source criticism may stem from a desire to buttress the authority of subjects whom Escobar admires and whose cause he supports. Such deflection is unnecessary, however; for to acknowledge his subjects’ construction of identity narratives is not to accuse them of deceit but to see more clearly the intellectual brilliance of their activism. Escobar’s apparent naïveté may also reflect a disinterest in telling individual stories. His fieldwork notes and interview results are reorganized into large blocks of text, in which only ellipses mark the shift from one voice to another. Statements are disembodied, summarized in a collective, passive voice. Escobar gives few names or details of individual variation and does not reflect on how the occupation, gender, age, kinship, and so on, of his diverse

subjects may affect the knowledge that each produces. He terms this framework *hypertextual* (xi), and even his prose follows suit, darting via caveats, reminders, and constant parenthetical directions to other parts of his book or to other works in his oeuvre, including collectively authored volumes and works by collaborators and students.

This refusal of individuality reflects Escobar's critique of modernity, his observation that identity (and surely individuality) is an inescapably modern Western concept. Escobar states that he is "very much aware of the inadequacy of this methodology for dealing with such a complex issue as the personal narratives of activists" (361n22), and he directs readers to a doctoral dissertation to fill in the gaps. His goal, he explains, is to make other, general points. Some readers may wish for more detailed ethnography from Escobar's dozen years along seacoast and river shore. They might wonder what sorts of relations his subjects held to state, church, near and midrange neighbors, indigenous people who may have been kin, and how all those relations might have changed over time. Such readers are looking for another book; French's, for instance. Escobar is aiming elsewhere: to develop a theoretical armature to pull together elements that academy and state prefer to atomize into separate, digestible slices.

Despite great differences, *Territories of Difference* and *Legalizing Identities* both help historicize race by exploring an emergent blackness, alert to the range of subtle factors that shape their particular cases. This commonality is all the more evident when set against the quantitative, poll-driven approach of Bailey's *Legacies of Race*, which rejects ethnography and the insights of activists as insufficiently representative.

Bailey draws on surveys by the DataFolha Instituto de Pesquisa, the Pesquisa Nacional Brasileira, and the Ford Foundation—Bailey helped design the latter, an impressively tailored and subtle instrument—and on his deep familiarity with secondary literature produced in Brazil, to challenge long-held assumptions about Brazilian racial democracy, arguing that this conceit or myth (as it is often called) does not create ideological conformity nor false consciousness. Because survey respondents did not deny the existence of racial discrimination, Bailey reasons that racial democracy today functions as an ideal toward which to strive, a legitimate utopian creed rather than a legitimizing hoax. Bailey's finding that Brazilians across the board do not deny (or no longer deny) discrimination makes his work a valuable contribution.

As a good sociologist, Bailey's research is oriented toward the creation of policy, hoping to assist in producing new law. His concern is that antiracist lawmakers might try to foster racial identity to oppose the myth of racial democracy. Particularly worrisome to Bailey in this are the consequences of classifying anyone of African descent as *negro*, the umbrella category the black movement has proposed. If this classification were to confer governmental benefits such as quotas in university admission,

would it effect how people identify, Bailey wonders? Could this proposal backfire? That is, if people of African descent were forced to choose between classification as *negro* or *branco* (white), might more of them instead choose the latter? Also, might whites withdraw their support for reparations if these applied more widely? These are Bailey's fears.

Advising scholars to craft "studies continually demonstrating the common relative disadvantage of browns and *pretos* in Brazil" (209), Bailey arrives at the opposite of Escobar's conclusion that marginalized people produce good knowledge for reparative policies. Yet he also embraces precisely the activist point that the experience of racism has pushed Brazilians to resist identification as Afro-descended. This tension in Bailey's work has to do, I think, with certain disciplinary wrinkles in his definition of race, and with the national comparison that underlies his study.

Bailey explicitly takes the constructivist position that racial boundaries are contingent and "fluctuate over time" (176), while also arguing that Brazil is now experiencing "a time of racial category instability" (191). A thorough constructivist would see such instability as a constant. As does French, Bailey cites Fredrik Barth in maintaining that ethnic boundaries are defined by contrasts and in relation rather than determined by cultural traits. Such a process is difficult if not impossible to discern through polls, and the survey that Bailey helped design can only ask questions about music, sports, and religion that record preferences for a range of racialized forms. Finally, Bailey is interested only in the variable of race. The surveys do not explore the process of racial construction in relation to the other social categories involved in negotiating ethnic boundaries, and maybe no survey could. It would be prohibitively complex to include variables of gender, neighborhood, kinship, region, religion, and so on, in a poll. These contradictions reflect tension between a humanities definition of race and a social science application.

The terms that French and Bailey hold stable or put into play highlight a disciplinary split in U.S. academia today. Humanities scholars often take for granted what social scientists feel it is their obligation to determine. For the former (especially followers of poststructuralism), race and ethnicity are categories of power that—because they are constructed through everyday practices in multiple relation to other peoples, groups, states, and ideas—leave ample room for innovation, dissent, and reformulation. Such scholars would not, as Bailey does, set sociocultural theories of racism (which contend that people are socialized to be racist) against the frame of group conflict (the idea that divergent interests drive people to become racist); they would instead ignore the distinction to contend that elements of each paradigm are present in different contexts. Bailey struggles with the idea that "everyday Brazilians" might think for themselves rather than passively accept elite notions. This is a good fight, long ago won in the humanities, which also take for granted that states assist in making race, so

that the task of research is instead to document and examine the state's role in any given instance. The possibility that racial identification might in turn influence the state falls entirely outside of Bailey's framework.

Nevertheless, Bailey reveals a deeply interesting fork in the road in thinking about race in Brazil. A handful of historians (George Reid Andrews, Kim Butler, Tiago Gomes, this reviewer) have argued that the notion of racial democracy began as a social principle, which activists proposed during the First Republic in the hope that it would foster genuine social change. Now, in another moment of highly visible activism, it seems to have regained some of that earlier valence. Bailey, however, maintains that the attitudes expressed in his polls are not new but instead date back at least to 1986. Bailey will hopefully forgive historians for thinking that he has, nonetheless, charted an emergent mentality; for a historian, 1986 is basically the present. Disciplines order a sense of time, among so many other things.

Some readers might well find problematic Bailey's juxtaposition of recent developments in Brazil to black activism and the civil rights movement in the United States. Although *Legacies of Race* astutely notes the inadequacy of applying models developed in the United States to other contexts, it also contends that Brazil today is like the United States in 1963, when there was widespread recognition of racial discrimination and support for reparative justice. This support had waned by 1968, and Bailey cautions that this might occur in Brazil as well if affirmative action should threaten the interests of whites. This analogy rests on a narrative about the U.S. civil rights movement that not only decries the turn to more radical black activism but also has been criticized by historians (Charles Payne, Adam Greene, Nikhil Singh, James Smethurst, Komozi Woodard) for fracturing into phases developments that were actually continuous in personnel and philosophy and, more important, for ascribing blame to activists rather than to intense state repression. The idea that Afro-Brazilian activists might be held accountable for white backlash is painful, for only if white privilege is genuinely upset will the racial justice movement have accomplished anything of note. What should racial activists recommend, and antiracist states implement, if not resource redistribution?

Legacies of Race may suggest the disinterest of quantitative sociology in postcolonial and poststructuralist analysis, and also the difficulty of dialogue with scholars in other fields in which these modes of analysis are widespread. *Waves of Decolonization* shows that literary studies is at least in part such a field; Luis-Brown barely speaks Bailey's language. His focus is U.S.–Latin American dialogue, which he sees as the rule rather than the exception in U.S. literature, and as feeding an anti-imperialist and anti-racist discourse of decolonization in what might seem to be domestically focused or otherwise limited texts.

Luis-Brown contends that, when read in transnational relation, the latter contain critiques of nationalism and offer models for genuinely

emancipatory “hemispheric citizenship.” He sees W. E. B. DuBois’s notion of a “global color line” that “traces and traverses national boundaries” (4) as a means to link domestic movements for social justice to movements against U.S. imperialism elsewhere. Specifically, he seeks to tie Mexican *indigenismo*, Cuban *negrismo*, and the U.S. New Negro movement together and to the pan-Americanism of the 1880–1890s and 1920s, when those movements occurred. The interethnic and transnational alliances that actors in those movements imagined or realized enabled them to see the “denial of rights to imperial subjects” invisible to others who only struggle within the nation-state (243). Focusing on three modes of expression used in these movements—sentimentalism, primitivism, and ethnography—Luis-Brown argues that they have wrongly been called conservative in their constructions of class and race. On the contrary, as practiced by DuBois, José Martí, the novel *Ramona*, the anti-Díaz journalist Teresa Urrea, Harlem Renaissance figures such as Langston Hughes, and the anthropology of Manuel Gamio and Zora Neale Hurston, among others, these modes are “protean” (36) or “plural” (198), able to promote liberation by the oppressed. The inclusion of ethnography in this triad of modes usefully insists that this mode, commonly associated with academic writing, need not be immune to scrutiny by literary analysis.

Luis-Brown discusses his subjects’ transnational imaginaries and travels, and their hopes for coalition with people in other nations. He does not study the effects of their travels on them, or how they may have influenced one another. Therefore, in key ways, *Waves of Decolonization* is not transnational in its approach but is instead a fairly traditional work of comparative literature. It takes texts from three countries and compares them, using theories and secondary sources primarily by U.S. scholars. It does not step outside the U.S. academy to engage the concerns of Latin American scholars. The analysis of Gamio is a case in point. Although Luis-Brown notes that Gamio was a student of Franz Boas and lived in several U.S. cities, he does not explore whether his experience in Chicago shaped his or his hosts’ opinions. The social context of social science matters, Vernon Williams and Kevin Yelvington argue, and Gamio indeed influenced social scientists in the United States as Mauricio Tenorio and Claudio Lomnitz, among others, have shown. Luis-Brown suffers from the “reciprocal blindness” that Lomnitz finds in Mexican and Anglo-American attitudes toward their long interdependence, in part because Luis-Brown overrelies on George Stocking’s diffusionist model, which posits that scholarly influence moves along national lines.¹ The broader, Americas-wide circle

1. Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), esp. “Bordering on Anthropology,” 228–262; Quetzil E. Castañeda, “Stocking’s Historiography of Influence,” *Critique of Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2003): 235–263 (reference to Lomnitz, “reciprocal blindness,” at 236).

of academics around or tangential to Boas and Gamio is likewise absent, although the ways that this circle taught and transformed its members might have enhanced the argument that a hemispheric framework can shed light on individual texts. The United States remains the center and source of Luis-Brown's story, compromising his hope to displace it.

Luis-Brown situates his work in an isolation that may reflect the silo of an insular subdiscipline. He promises to reveal "previously unacknowledged institutional and intellectual spheres" linking the social movements he discusses (202), but there is a sizable body of work on Mexican indigenismo and the Harlem Renaissance (Mauricio Tenorio, Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins, James Oles, Daniel Widener); on the transnational aesthetic and life experiences of U.S. writers such as Langston Hughes (Brent Edwards, Monika Kaup, William Scott, Robert Chrisman), on connections between African Americans and Cuba, and, in particular, on Martí's hemispheric frameworks (Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes, Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández). Luis-Brown's contention that the idea of the color line "presents new opportunities because it suggests the need for linking domestic civil rights movements to struggles against imperialism" (4) would surprise generations of activists who did just that, as well as the scholars who have studied them. There is no need to wonder, as Luis-Brown does, what American studies would look like "if scholars were to use the global color line in order to transform their fields into comparative, transnational endeavors" (1). It would look like Michelle Stephens's astute discussions of black transnationalism or Brent Edwards's gorgeous analyses of the meetings of Afro-diasporic writers across the North Atlantic. It would share a great deal with the entire field of border studies and with the insights available in work on black internationalism, particularly that focused on the Americas. It is simply not necessary at this point to call on American studies to critique imperialism; the field is full of marvelous critiques.

Waves of Decolonization could more simply be framed as a revision of literary genre and as a contribution to a burgeoning field rather than as a bold outlier. Is it that unpopular to present a book as solidly disciplinary these days? If so, it is too bad, because disciplines still have plenty to offer and share fundamental concerns. The anthropological, sociological, historical, literary, and interdisciplinary works reviewed here each examine an existing body of thought, popular, legal, activist, or artistic, finding within its archive, directions for scholarship and politics to combat racism and foster justice. To advance this shared project, we need not change our disciplinary definitions of race or methods of study but must attend honestly to the specificities of discipline. As Escobar reminds us of anthropology, disciplines desire. We would do well to heed their conscious and unconscious drives.