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The Most Famous Thing Robert E. Lee Never Said:
Duty, Forgery, and Cultural Amnesia

SEAN HEUSTON

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- Pamela C. Corley, Amy Steigerwalt, and Artemus Ward, *The Puzzle of Unanimity: Consensus on the United States Supreme Court*
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- Caren Irr, *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U. S. Fiction in the Twenty-First Century* (Literature Now)

Editor's Note

In spring 2011, I joined Celeste-Marie Bernier and Bevan Sewell in a Mission Statement:

We believe that “America” is a concept for negotiation and mobilization – in the literary and cultural texts that construct our meanings; in the interpretations and uses of history; in the approaches to politics, law, and civil society – alongside others in the academic and civic communities.

We believe that “America” may be at the centre of one’s consideration but it is equally important in American studies to recognize where “America” is at the margins of experience, activity, and discussion. We believe that we can examine an American exceptionalism but we do not have to position ourselves either in embrace or in rejection of it.

It has been a privilege these past four years, and the four years before that as Associate Editor, to pursue that mission and to do so with the best colleagues for whom one can wish. It has been a honor to edit articles, roundtables, and discussions which have never settled for a set definition of an America but which have tested its possibilities and complications, even as the author is challenging his/her vision of the issues and constructions in American studies. In these years, there have been exaltations of US power, followed by jeremiads of the decline of that power amid conflicts, concerns, and aspirations which do not turn upon an American panacea.

I believe that both approaches are mistaken, for power is not the endpoint of our studies. Power lies instead in our negotiation of America among our other interests and concerns, be it attention to gender, race, or class; whether it is a re-examination of the past or a projection of the future; from an America as conceived and critiqued by those within the US or by those outside it.

The richness of American studies is in never reaching a destination but always pursuing the paths of possibility. I am confident that these will be pursued by the incoming editors, Celeste-Marie Bernier and Bevan Sewell, and by those whose contributions to the journal set new standards for research, analysis, and interrogation.

This issue features articles which uphold those standards, considering different areas of American studies but intersecting in their ideas and conclusions. Graham Culbertson, Sheyda Jahanbani, Lauren Turek, and Amy Jordan consider projections, imaginations, and rewritings of “America” – from race to poverty to the religious rhetoric of George W. Bush to the work of John Berryman. Andrew Menard and Sarah Wasserman use the art of Robert Smithson and a novel of Don DeLillo to interrogate the “urban.” In a special,

online-only article, questions of duty and honor are the focus for Sean Heuston as he sheds new light upon the life and legacy of Robert E. Lee by working with diverse bodies of evidence to trace the relationship between language and memory in Civil War history.

On the review side, we have two feature publications: a roundtable on Frederic Jameson's *Antinomies of Realism*, and a review essay on a series of recent books published on environmentalism and American history. In the former, Bridget Bennett, Rachel Bowlby, Andrew Lawson, Graham Thompson, and Mark Storey wrestle with Jameson's new work on literary realism and its implications for the way that scholars understand and categorize American literature. In his response, in fact, Jameson questions the entire idea of American literature, arguing "that we have no national literature, even though we keep trying to have one and the (false) question of 'what it means to be an American' recurs historically again and again, at least since Emerson, like an allergy or a predisposition to this or that physical weakness." In the latter, Kurk Dorsey reviews several sweeping studies that seek to offer different perspectives on the importance of environmentalism in seeking to understand America's past, and critically considers the way in which scholars are suggesting that environmentalism – both as an idea and as a cause – affected the course of US history.

SCOTT LUCAS