

Introduction:

Feminisms in American Studies in/and Crisis

WiN Editorial Board

Understanding feminist scholarship as a form of critical practice necessitates the continuous critical self-scrutiny of one's field, one's archive, one's canon, and one's own positionality. The question of who speaks, and for whom, in feminist scholarship requires thorough inquiry because un/marked universalisms have always been written into Western discourses of identity, agency, and, not least of all, woman*hood.

We, the Steering Committee of the EAAS Women's Network, have taken the third issue of our journal *WiN* as an opportunity to take stock of feminist scholarship in (European) American studies, to reflect on, interrogate, and rethink cultural production, philosophy, and lived experiences with respect to conceptions of feminism from intersectional perspectives as a critical practice of scholarship.

Although feminism has been conceived most broadly as an heiress to the women's liberation and suffrage movements, its liberatory practices have, time and again, unveiled that other forms of oppression and inequality cannot be remedied by or subsumed within the feminist project. For instance, in regard to the ongoing climate crisis and the latest health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the particular inequalities and vulnerabilities of women* and trans* and non-binary people have been brought to the fore. The formation of nationalist, (alt)right, racist, and xeno-phobic 'feminisms' have been gaining popular and populist support in Europe and the United States, deploying racist and racializing tropes firmly rooted in anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism and exalting a White supremacist vision of a "traditional" family; and the backlash against gender studies is often based on simplistic (mis)understandings of and hostility towards deconstructivist and queer approaches.

In response to these challenges and crises, the articles included in this issue of *WiN* are interested in (revisionist) readings of U.S.-American feminist history, interrogations of past

and current feminist theories and practices, grievances of and towards (particular) feminist positions, national and global challenges to feminist activism, and utopian visions.

In her article, Marie Dücker dissects the alternating focalization in Kiley Reid's debut novel *Such a Fun Age* (2019) to unveil how the white and Black protagonists' struggles are shaped by racial inequality and 'white fragility'—the latter is used in reference to Robin DiAngelo's concept. Dücker convincingly argues that this narratological practice perpetuates white supremacy as well as racial inequality by exposing how 'color-blind racism' (Eduardo Bonilla-Silva) is established to justify the idea of 'white property' (Cheryl Harris) of the Black protagonist.

Rita Filanti suggests a novel reading of Voltairine de Cleyre's anarchist feminism in her article titled "'The question of souls is old—we demand our bodies, now' (1890): Voltairine de Cleyre's Anarchist-Feminism," which thematizes how de Cleyre drew from pre-Civil War feminism, but also put forth novel ideas of second-wave feminism. Filanti traces both de Cleyre's ideology and uncommon use of language and offers a critical perspective highlighting why de Cleyre's thought ought to be considered visionary and ahead of her time.

In "Feeding the Other, Feeding the Self: Pat Mora and Ana Castillo's Feminist Narratives of Food," Méliné Kasparian-Le Fèvre brings feminist discourse and practice to the table as she unpacks the essentializing nature of foodwork and pushes readers to consider cooking and feeding not only as taking care of others, but as community building as well as nurturing and curative for women as individuals and as a group.

Julia Nitz's article titled "Racist Feminism(s): White Southern Women's Post-Civil War Commemoration and Emancipation Culture" offers a reading of three post-Civil War white Southern diarists – Eliza Frances "Fanny" Andrews, Sarah Ida Fowler Morgan, and Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas – who participated in commemoration culture by virtue of their life writing or journalistic activities. As Nitz argues, two of the diarists—Andrews's and Thomas's—active membership in the memorial society of The United Daughters of the Confederacy marked them as members of Southern elite and constituted a platform for their

efforts at social reform and suffrage. Nitz further shows how notions of Southern femininity were challenged during the war, as they could no longer be defined against the male and/or racial other, and hence needed to be reconfigured in the post-bellum South. Ultimately, however, the rhetoric of white supremacy was left intact, the ante-bellum notions of white benevolence being replaced after the war with claims of whites' "race knowledge." Thus, white women contributed to the creation of a myth of the New South, in which racial relations still remained unchanged.

In her article "From (Sexual) Difference to Diversity: On Categories of Critique" Johanna Pitetti-Heil identifies and then eloquently tracks the elusive and uneasy feeling many of us including herself have (had) with the term 'diversity.' To unpack how diversity has become a catch-all term for a "trendy cosmopolitanism that is blind to structures of disparity and inequality" (Pitetti-Heil 2), she presents several unsettling examples of appropriation of the concept from the entertainment media. By revisiting critical scholarship on diversity and reading it along the ongoing debate within feminist theory on the concept of difference, Pitetti-Heil sends a powerful message of caution of what would get were we to entirely replace the concept of difference with diversity.

In her article titled "'Strategic White Tears Womanhood': A Critical Examination of White Womanhood and Emotional Entitlement," Sandra Tausel examines a viral exchange between Jully Black and Jeanne Beker on a *Canada Reads* episode as a starting point for her reflections on white women's deployment of emotions and tears to reinforce their privileged position vis-à-vis Black women. Using the term "Strategic White Tears Womanhood," Tausel argues that both historically and contemporarily white women instrumentalize(d) their emotional responses, including the shedding of tears, to uphold the existing racial hierarchy, while Black women continue to be invariably cast within the paradigm of an "angry Black woman." Further, Tausel discusses recent examples of white women calling law enforcement on Black persons to show how white emotional entitlement and resorting to the damsel in distress trope engages law enforcement and may possibly endanger Black lives.

Katharina Wiedlack's article was inspired by her own experience of teaching feminist and LGBTIQ+ theory and history to international students. A wide majority of them viewed twentieth-century feminism as an almost exclusively white, middle-class movement. Conversely, Wiedlack highlights the early influences of Soviet Russia and Soviet central Asia on US feminism, with a special focus on Black feminism; hence, as the author demonstrates, US feminism may be regarded as an "internationalist project."

The issue concludes with a transcription of the keynote conversation feminist scholars Jennifer Nash and Samantha Pinto engaged in with Ingrid Gessner, Johanna Pitetti-Heil and the online audience at the Fourth Biennial EAAS Women's Network Symposium on April 28 and 29, 2021. Taking its cue from the book series Nash and Pinto launched with Duke University Press in 2021, they titled their talk "Black Feminism on the Edge" to engage with Black feminism as raising a set of tremendously pressing and important questions but not offering quick-fix solutions. Reflecting on the conference's theme of feminism in crisis and the question "where do we go from here," Nash and Pinto commend the self-scrutiny of the field that is fully aware of its continuing struggle but equipped to adapt to a constantly changing horizon.

Critical to the articles collected in this issue are the diversity of voices and case studies they offer. As editors we believe that all of the contributions are living and breathing examples of the continuous struggle of feminist history, theory, and activism. Please join us to explore future vision.

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