

Introduction

By Robert F. Barsky, Editor

The idea of undertaking a special issue on radicalism in Quebec and the Americas grows out of my belief that we have an underdeveloped sense of how important so-called ‘radical’ actions have been in advancing the cause of social justice, and that in this era of social conformity and atrocious consequences for disobedience we need to be reminded of what has been done in the past to confront illegitimate power. As such, one of the first people I contacted for this issue was Howard Zinn, and he generously suggested that I publish any article or interview from the past, from which I chose an interview about what role the historian, and history, can play in advancing our understanding of social action. I was disappointed that we couldn’t have an original work by him, but at the same time felt that much of his work includes a timeless approach to doing the task of history; little did I know that as we went to press with this issue, we would be adding a note of condolence to his family for the passing of Howard Zinn. I, we, will miss him.

Of course one aspect of this issue that might seem surprising is the focus on Quebec, unless of course one considers, as I do, that radicalism from Quebec has its own specificities that require our attention. The Quebec context, including its struggles for independence, its particular approach to social issues, its debates about identity – linguistic and otherwise – make it a model of what is possible within a small area of the Americas when history, religion and language create group identity. Such a context can also be built on, or come up against, versions of resentment, and on my urging, Marc Angenot has revisited what I take to be a classic article that deals this issue, published first in article and then book form in French, for the *AmeriQuests* readers. This is a seminal reading that has been understood to be in part a critique of certain québécois tendencies, but in fact is a much broader approach to the issue from the perspective of the kind of history of ideas that has characterized his approach for decades. I am very excited to have it here in English, accompanied afterwards by a previously-published and wonderfully informative interview about his work. This is the second in-depth discussion with Marc with which I’ve been involved, the first being an interview I did with him in 2004, published as part of a special issue called “Marc Angenot and the Scandal of History” for the *Yale Journal of Criticism*.

Radicalism and utopian ideas are further developed in an important piece called “De l’Utopie radicale à la bonne gouvernance: le cas du Québec”, in which Denyse Côté and Étienne Simard undertake a sociological study of social movements, offering important insights into the evolution of communitarian ideals and the emergence of new “utopias” in the political landscape against the backdrop of a framework for political action that is the legacy of a more radical generation of the 60s and 70s. Arguing that these structures are limiting, the authors inquire into possibilities for future militancies and struggles, while at the same time tracing a history of the province that will serve those who are less emerged in current debates. These first three articles are themselves a snapshot of Quebec work, published against the backdrop of support for *AmeriQuests* that has been provided by the Quebec government, part of a new Quebec initiative at Vanderbilt University, designed to foster growing awareness of work done in the Northern climes of the Americas.

In “The Quest for Caribbean Identities: Postcolonial Conflicts and Cross-Cultural Fertilization in Derek Walcott’s Poetry”, Catherine Douillet investigates how the political merges with the literary in Derek Walcott’s poetry, using the poems “A Latin Primer” and “The Light of the World” as primary examples. This essay seeks to specify the structuring place of sociopolitical realities, including the split world of the European colony and the

peripherized world of the postcolonial Caribbean, in an oeuvre often charged with aestheticizing politics into a set piece of Caribbean-European artistic synthesis and syncretism. The essay foregrounds specific poetic gestures, such as the representation of colonial wounds and the remaking of European cultural traditions and objects to New World realities, and argues for their showcasing of Walcott's poetics of hope (as opposed to recrimination and despair) and his culturally Creole sensibility. Appearing in the very wreckage of Haiti's capital city, this work offers some insight into the specificity of Creole Caribbean worlds, and further indication of interconnectedness of the Americas that is too often foregrounded only in moments of crisis.

In "Captive America: Smart, Rowlandson and the Colonial Sentiment," Shannon Luders-Manuel reviews the seventeenth-century early colonial American captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, arguing that its discourse of colonial 'othering' returns in narratives of the 2002 abduction of Elizabeth Smart by a polygamist. Focusing on the gendered and religious axes of meaning in both texts, and the implicit or explicit racialization at work in their rhetoric, the essay aims to uncover a formal and ideological connection between the texts. From this demonstration, whose details comprise the bulk of the essay, emerges the beginnings of a claim for the centrality of othering to these two moments in U.S. culture. With its temporal range from 17th century to early 21st century texts, this essay contributes interesting ideas about comparative models within the new US studies of empire, and insists upon a range of questions about race and gender, as well as religion and community, as crucial objects for such studies.

The reader will then note a growing fictional bent to *AmeriQuests*, present in the work of three young poets, and a satirical polemicist who updates Yeats's poem "The Phases of the Moon" to include zombies. If there is radical work out there, it's often literary or satirical, and the power of these refreshing and powerful works, by Benjamin Lesousky, Edward Carvalho, Benjamin Crane and Shane Svenpladsen, is truly invigorating. It has been my experience, as a teacher, that students when freed from what is often the arbitrary authority of academic form, discover radical work that is quite literally within their own minds (pace Chomsky!), and they find in the process of creating these works so much pleasure that they invest in whole new ways in their work. From one perspective the process of growing up and moving through the institutions of (say) higher learning is one that develops obedience against a backdrop of fear, – of failure, unemployment, non-recognition – that is stultifying, and these young writers have dared to speak out within that context in creative ways. I'm excited to have them fill the proverbial pages and screens of *AmeriQuests*, and, in the spirit of Howard Zinn, and against a backdrop of Marc Angenot's wisdom and audacity, I look to a future issue of *AmeriQuests* that will include peer-reviewed contributions from students and scholars on "The Beat Generations' French Connections." We are all "beat," but, as we can see from the contributions to this issue, not beat.