The Cultural Turn in U.S. History

Past, Present, and Future

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Twelve Propositions for a History of U.S. Cultural History

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This volume was born of our belief that the time is ripe for a broad assessment of U.S. cultural history. Since the mid-1970s, at least, cultural historians working on a wide range of topics have stretched, deepened, and dramatically transformed our sense of the nation's past. And if one includes the important body of historical scholarship produced under the banner of American studies, the U.S. field would feature a lineage that actually precedes the "new cultural history" by more than three or four decades. Yet these same signs of innovation, breadth, and longevity have often pushed against neat and easy categorization. With a few notable exceptions, U.S. cultural historians have tended to prioritize new research over methodological reflection, leaving the important work of field assessment to their Europeanist colleagues (who in turn have often defined their own trajectories as "cultural history" writ large).[1]

By calling for a dedicated history of the U.S. field, we do not mean to suggest that it can be easily disentangled from parallel projects in other national contexts (a comparative question to which we return later). Nor has the U.S. field lacked tough and useful debates about its own working methods. Yet these more explicit conversations about historiography have tended to cluster around particular topics—from consumerism, popular culture, and the concept of cultural hegemony to working-class life, moral problems, and the cultures of the cold war—rather than the larger enterprise of cultural history itself.[2] Even today, as some commentators have begun to speculate on a methodological future "beyond the cultural turn," we still lack a clear sense of what, exactly, the U.S. field *was* for much of the past century.[3]

In this introductory chapter, we look backward and forward, and also meditate on the current state of U.S. cultural history. In looking backward,

we attempt to sort through the multiple strands of questioning that first coalesced into a recognizable disciplinary project, now often described as the "cultural turn." This story is one that currently exists only in bits and pieces, and is largely unknown even by many of the field's practitioners. We begin with the conviction that any speculations on the future need to be grounded in a much longer, broader, and more comparative view of the field's complex development.

At the same time, we want to look forward by tracing some of the field's current and future contours. Now that cultural history has come to occupy a central disciplinary position, how should we think about its once controversial efforts to make language, identity, perception, and meaning-making primary objects of historical analysis? Are these efforts best understood as the momentary correctives of older blind spots? Or have they fostered more lasting and productive projects?

As an object of analysis, U.S. cultural history presents a number of built-in challenges. One is the field's remarkable diversity, a pattern well illustrated by the roster of contributors to this volume. Some of us began our careers in social, intellectual, labor, gender, and African American history and only slowly gravitated toward cultural history as a self-description. Others of us went to graduate school specifically to train in American studies or U.S. cultural history and have spent much of our careers working within well-established national networks. Much the same can be said about our current institutional locations. Some of us were hired in American studies programs and now teach (at least part of the time) in history departments, whereas others have spent much of their history careers pushing toward more interdisciplinary modes of teaching, research, and writing. Over half of us currently hold joint appointments.

These complex conjunctures point to one of the field's defining features. Although we see ourselves as engaged in common analytical problems and source types, none of us would insist upon a fixed or finished method for "doing" cultural history. Nor would we insist on any one definition of "culture," a notoriously slippery concept whose multiple meanings have long thwarted strict categorical precision.[4] Of course, this very flexibility runs the risk of producing a kind of Rashomon effect, with each cultural historian telling a different story about the field's origins and foundational practices. We begin, then, with twelve propositions for assembling a more coherent history of U.S. cultural history. We offer these propositions not as a comprehensive chronicle—something that would require much more than a single introductory essay—but as multiple angles of approach on a large and shifting target.

Proposition One: The new cultural history was, in fact, a relatively late development

This initial proposition will no doubt strike some readers as counterintuitive. After all, the phrase "new cultural history" did not achieve common currency until at least the late 1980s.[5] And since that time, most leading commentators, especially on the European side, have described it as a specific response to major intellectual shock waves from the previous decade. Some have pointed to the growing disenchantment with quantitative analysis that led many "new social historians" to push for alternative ways of accessing the subjective experiences and perceptions of non-elites. Others have emphasized the budding historical interest in symbolic systems and rituals of meaning-making, projects commonly associated with the anthropological writings of Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, and above all, Clifford Geertz. Still others have highlighted Michel Foucault's efforts to explicate the microworkings of power through shifting patterns of discourse.[6]

We too see these developments as crucial and in this chapter attempt to trace some of their distinctive American resonances. But first we want to challenge the more basic notion of the "new cultural history" as a methodological starting point. On the European side, such a periodization would elide dozens of pioneering efforts by French Annalistes such as Lucien Febvre, British neo-Marxists such as Eric Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson, and American Europeanists such as Natalie Davis, Carl Schorske, and Robert Darnton. On the U.S. side, by contrast, it would neglect a vast body of postwar scholarship (largely but not exclusively within American studies) that sought to historicize dominant patterns of language, imagery, and collective perception three or four decades before the arrival of Geertz and Foucault.[7]

The problems of periodization become more pronounced when we examine some of the very first investments in culture.[8] Often forgotten now is the fact that something called cultural history was periodically prominent in the U.S. field before World War II, practiced by some of the country's most important historians. As Harry Elmer Barnes noted in 1922, summing up the goals of the "New American history," our nation's past "can by no means be restricted to a record of political and military development. The most notable American achievements have been non-

political in character." In particular, Barnes singled out "psychological and cultural elements" as the key alternatives to political and military history.[9]

These early developments were shaped by a number of broader innovations in the social sciences. Among the most crucial was the pioneering anthropological work of Franz Boas from the late 1910s through the 1930s. "After Boas," explained the eminent sociologist Robert Lynd, culture came to be understood not so much as a racialized set of evolutionary traits but as "the ways that people inhabiting a common geographic area . . . do things . . . the ways they think and feel about things."[10] It was also during this period that some of the best-known literary and humanistic definitions from the nineteenth century began to give way. Matthew Arnold's rarified notion of culture as "the best which has been thought and said," for example, was now increasingly supplanted by the long-standing German emphasis on "the totality of ideas in a society, popular as well as scholarly—in other words, low as well as high culture."[11] .

In the U.S. field, the major historiographical innovator during the 1930s was Caroline Ware, who launched a series of new research projects on previously "neglected" topics such as documentary photography, folklore, and popular music. To promote her "bottom-up" vision of U.S. history, Ware organized dozens of panels at the American Historical Association meeting in 1939. And in 1940 she edited a major AHA-sponsored volume based on those sessions, *The Cultural Approach to History*.[12] This volume received widespread critical attention from many leading scholars, including Melville J. Herskovits, Charles Beard, and Crane Brinton.[13] One contemporary reviewer, using language that many of us assume only arose in the late 1960s, noted that "many of the writers" begin from the proposition that "history should concern itself with the inarticulate masses, their lives, languages, loves, etc."[14] Whereas previous historians had focused primarily on society's "intellectual and political leaders," the goal now was to understand "processes of change" that affected "the multitude."[15]

For Ware, in particular, these goals were part of an explicitly "integral" approach to the study of history, as well as a more socially conscious orientation in an age of "mass unemployment" and "the degradation of totalitarian war." "The historian of today," she concluded, "no longer secure within the framework of nineteenth-century Western European assumptions, needs new intellectual tools with which to view his society."[16]

Looking back on these efforts four decades later, one contributor to Ware's volume, the eminent business historian Thomas Cochran, wondered why such a promising body of research had not become "synonymous with history" (which is what Cochran and many of his colleagues had hoped and predicted during early 1940s).[17] The prominent anthropologist Ruth Benedict shared Cochran's view, writing to Ware in April 1941: "I have been reading 'The Cultural Approach to History' and I am delighted with your introduction. . . . I believe it will stimulate much valuable historical work; perhaps, even, in ten years, it will be possible to get out a really definitive collection of historical studies of the kind you call for."[18]

From our own vantage point, it is easier to see that Ware's innovative projects of the late 1930s were alternatively ignored, recast, or unselfconsciously absorbed by the dominant groups of political, intellectual, and social historians that soon followed, a pattern that led many self-described culturalists of the 1970s and 1980s to assume they were entering into wholly uncharted territory.[19] As Donald Kelley observed in a 1996 review essay, the "most recent phase of cultural history has not paid much attention to its antecedents."[20]

As a first step, then, it seems important to recast the "new cultural history" of the late 1980s in more precise terms: not as a wholly distinctive historiographical phenomenon, or as the field itself, but as one major development within a much longer twentieth-century trajectory.

Proposition Two: The broad historical interest in culture that first took root during the 1930s did not simply disappear in the years following World War II

Once again, our genealogical instincts may seem to fly in the face of conventional wisdom. Previous discussions of Ware's career, for example, have generally characterized her postwar influence as less significant, not least because Ware herself pursued a series of very different professional projects, including government service, consumer activism, and teaching social work classes at Howard University.[21] Likewise, most general surveys have described the postwar years as dominated by the "presidential synthesis" and "consensus history"—two projects that seem to have little in common with the bottom-up perspectives, popular sources, and pluralistic models running through Ware's 1940 volume.

To some extent, these characterizations are accurate. Few today would

argue that something called U.S. cultural history constituted a dominant, or even particularly coherent, *field* during the late 1940s and 1950s. Fewer still would insist on tracing direct lines of influence between Ware's cultural approach and the more pervasive cultural turn that began to take shape three or four decades later. One could argue, in fact, that it was directly in opposition to the presidential synthesis and consensus historiography—with their conventional emphases on elite white men, high-level diplomacy, electoral politics, and ideological continuity—that many of the subsequent innovators in U.S. cultural history positioned themselves.[22]

Still, this familiar trajectory can be qualified and sharpened in a number of ways. One has to do with consensus history itself. As Robert Berkhofer first noted, it was precisely by applying prewar social science's more expansive concept of culture to American politics that so-called consensus scholars such as Richard Hofstadter, Daniel Boorstin, and David Potter sought to explain the relative absence of socioeconomic conflict in U.S. history.[23] The specific models varied from author to author and text to text. In the *American Political Tradition* (1948), for example, Hofstadter referred to "common climates of opinion" and "bounded horizons" of political debate, whereas Potter's *Peoples of Plenty* (1954) emphasized the "traits," "values," and "behavioral patterns" central to the formation of "national character."[24] For our purposes, however, the most notable feature of this scholarship was less its internal variations than its broader tendency to treat political questions in cultural terms. Potter, in particular, was quite explicit about his conceptual debts, applauding Ware's *Cultural Approach* for "breaking new ground" in the "broader relationship between history and the behavioral sciences."[25] By the mid-1950s, moreover, Hofstadter began to focus more squarely on the problems of "status politics" and "symbolic analysis"—two lines of questioning that, as Daniel Signal has argued, shared a number of affinities with Geertz's later reconceptualization of ideology as a "cultural system."[26]

Another important qualification involves the postwar rise of American studies. By the mid-1950s, this increasingly national "movement" (which generated its own journal, professional association, conferences, and degree programs) had become the second major location for analyzing culture in historical terms. But whereas consensus historians understood culture as the ideological wellspring of American politics, American studies scholars such as Henry Nash Smith, R. W. B. Lewis, John William Ward, and Leo Marx focused their attention on shifting patterns of representation, a move specifically designed to bridge the gap

separating formalist analyses of "individual works of art" and broader historical treatments of their "social setting."[27]

The hybrid work that followed was a major challenge to U.S. historians, not just as competing claims to particular source types but also at the more fundamental levels of concepts and epistemologies. For Smith and his colleagues, much of the point of American studies was to complicate U.S. historiography's conventional tendency to treat aesthetic forms as straightforward "reflections" of social, political, or economic developments. And in this sense, at least, one could argue that the American studies boom of the 1950s was not so much an extension of Ware's "cultural approach" but a vehicle for its displacement, offering postwar scholars interested in shifting patterns of representation an alternative register in which to engage some of the era's most widely discussed historical issues (e.g., the significance of the West in the popular imagination).

In our view, however, these methodological contrasts should not overshadow the era's most notable long-term development, namely, the crosscutting dialogues around culture that began to take shape in multiple disciplinary quadrants. By the early 1960s, that is to say, U.S. historians regularly cited leading works in American studies and vice versa. English professors such as Perry Miller, Howard Mumford Jones, and John Cawelti published historical studies of Puritanism, Jeffersonianism, and the self-made man, while history professors such as Merle Curti and William R. Taylor wrote about patterns of representation in nineteenth-century fiction.[28] Henry Nash Smith was alternatively described as both the founder of the American studies movement and one of the nation's leading cultural historians. And virtually everyone in these circles had something to say about the new critiques of mass culture launched (both within and outside of academia) by H. L. Menken, Robert Merton, Theodore Adorno, Dwight MacDonald, and David Riesman.

Not surprisingly, these postwar conversations often generated sharp debates. Social scientists liked to complain about American studies scholars' somewhat fuzzy conceptualization of the relation between "mythic constructions" and "empirical facts," an issue that left unresolved the fundamental question of causality.[29] American studies scholars, in turn, defended their "unscientific method" by pointing to some of the analytical blind spots in quantitative studies of literature, music, and film—many of which categorized (and counted) complex works of art according to their core "messages."[30] As Smith argued in one of his best-known essays, the aesthetic "content" in such studies was far "too rudimentary"

in conceptualization; "it is . . . a factor [understood as] common to large numbers of works, which means a factor that is very far from exhausting the particularity of even a simple work of art. We need a method that can give us access to meanings beyond the range of such a systematic simplification—meanings that are not, so to speak, homogenized."[31]

Should these postwar debates be understood as part of the larger genealogy of U.S. cultural history? In our view, the answer is yes, not least because prominent postwar historians began to describe them as such. A good example is David Brion Davis's 1968 *American Historical Review* essay, "Recent Directions in American Cultural History." For Davis, postwar historical studies by Arthur O. Lovejoy, Walter Houghton, and John Higham formed key branches of the family tree, but so too did leading American studies titles such as Smith's *Virgin Land*, Lewis's *The American Adam*, and Charles Sanford's *The Quest for Paradise*. Also revealing was Davis's strategic juxtaposition of a recent work in American studies (Leo Marx's *Machine in the Garden*, 1964) with another in history (William R. Taylor's *Cavalier and Yankee*, 1961) to build his central arguments: first, that the best cultural history work necessarily incorporates *all* of these analytical registers; and second, that the field as a whole was now becoming increasingly sensitive to the "inner contradictions" and "conflicting values" that have often divided American culture.[32]

In this last respect, especially, Davis's essay looked ahead to the more "contested" models of culture that began to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s (a topic to which we will return). Ultimately, though, the most important lesson of the postwar period probably has less to do with fixing the precise moment—or problematic—in which the field began to achieve some degree of methodological coherence than acknowledging the intensely polyglot character of the larger project. As Davis's essay made clear, U.S. cultural history was something of a mess during the 1950s and 1960s, practiced in bits and pieces across a wide variety of scholarly locations. But perhaps that's the key lesson. What we now describe as the field's conventional eclecticism was at least a decade or two old when Davis began to sort it out.

Proposition Three: More recent varieties of U.S. cultural history have regularly encompassed a wide range of "culture concepts"

In one sense, of course, this proposition only adds to the problems of categorization.[33] Just as no two cultural historians would describe the field's chronological parameters in precisely the same way, neither would

they map its core concepts according to a perfectly consistent set of definitions. What follows here, then, should be understood not as a rigid or comprehensive taxonomy of the field at large but as a starting point for more careful and complex readings of individual works.

CULTURE DEFINED AS ARTISTIC EXPRESSION In this formulation, culture has generally signified a movement (e.g., Impressionism), an idiom (e.g., blues), a mode of display (e.g., P. T. Barnum's three-ring spectacles), or a set of critical categories (e.g., Clement Greenberg's antipodes of "avant-garde" and "kitsch").[34] Somewhat ironically, the best recent genealogies of European cultural history have ignored artistic expression almost entirely, a pattern that may reflect older materialist prejudices against any notion of culture as set apart from "ordinary" experience.[35] On the U.S. side, however, such social and epistemological separations have held far less sway. In fact, one of the distinctive features of pioneering U.S. studies such as David Brion Davis's *Homicide in American Fiction* (1957), Alan Trachtenberg's *Brooklyn Bridge* (1965), David Grimsted's *Melodrama Unveiled* (1968), Nathan Huggins's *Harlem Renaissance* (1971), Neil Harris's *Humbug* (1972), and Ann Douglass's *Feminization of American Culture* (1978) was the desire to track their subjects across the conventional boundaries separating intellectual, cultural, and social history; representation and politics; art and ideas; high and low.[36]

CULTURE DEFINED AS THE LARGER MATRIX OF COMMERCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND STRUCTURES IN WHICH ARTISTIC FORMS ARE PRODUCED AND CONSUMED In this formulation (a reworking of the previous concept), new styles and genres have been understood as inseparable from questions of commodification, standardization, promotion, distribution, and regulation. Some of the earliest work in this mode (e.g., Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno's midcentury writings on the "culture industry") presented the impacts of capitalism somewhat monolithically: as part of a longer declension story in which modern American consumers found themselves increasingly manipulated or alienated from the growing numbers of cultural products all around them.[37] By the mid-1980s, however, leading scholars (both in the United States and Europe) had begun to reconceptualize the relation between producers and consumers in more nuanced and dialectical terms. Where previous critics had spoken of "unending sameness" and "captains of consciousness," the trend now was toward more localized studies of "cultural appropriation" and "strategic positions to be won or lost."[38]

CULTURE DEFINED AS ANY SOCIAL OR INSTITUTIONAL SPHERE IN WHICH COLLECTIVE FORMS OF MEANING ARE MADE, ENFORCED, AND CONTESTED This much broader formulation includes explicitly cultural sites of production such as theaters, museums, publishing houses, amusement parks, and film studios, but also artisan workshops, abolitionist conventions, middle-class parlors, boxing rings, and secondary schools—in short, any institution that generates its own norms, values, rituals, and representations. Not surprisingly, older boundaries separating different forms of social life and ideological expression have been especially permeable here. Indeed, much of the point of this formulation was to explicate "culture" and "context" as mutually constitutive—as two sides of the same historical process.[39]

CULTURE DEFINED AS A COMMON SET OF BELIEFS, CUSTOMS, VALUES, AND RITUALS—A.K.A. THE "ANTHROPOLOGICAL" CONCEPT OF CULTURE As we have seen, one early version of this formulation achieved currency just before World War II. And in the years that followed, it continued to resonate (somewhat abstractly) in many local and community studies—as a "whole way of life" or as "tradition" itself. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, however, new waves of social and labor historians began to recast the community-based culture concept in the more specific register of "agency." Driving this shift was the desire to explore the subjective and experiential dimensions of culture, as well as a political imperative to take seriously the vernacular expressions and consumption habits of subjugated peoples (peasants, slaves, industrial workers, and the like) who left behind few written records. In the new formulations, culture generally functioned as a "resource," as a font of oppositional "consciousness," as a "unifying force," or as a mode of "infrapolitics."[40]

CULTURE DEFINED AS A SEMIOTIC OR DISCURSIVE SYSTEM In this formulation, "culture" has generally referred to signifying practices that could be "read like a text" or excavated via dominant patterns of "discourse."[41] Often, too, these modes of questioning have been described as "postmodern" in orientation and European in origin.[42] Yet many of the same critical impulses lay at the heart of the postwar American studies movement, especially in its efforts to explicate "those mediating forms which organize, define, and subdue the details of experience."[43]

By acknowledging these domestic precedents, we do not mean to ignore or downplay the innovations that followed. Henry Nash Smith's introductory remarks from *Virgin Land* provide a useful touchstone. In

1950, Smith defined the core American studies concepts of "myths" and "symbols" in two basic ways: as "intellectual constructions" that "fuse concept and emotion" and as "collective representations." But he also argued (in the very next sentence) that such "products of the imagination" should be set apart from "empirical facts." Myths and symbols, in this view, existed on a "different plane" from external "reality."[44]

For late twentieth-century scholars following in the wake of Geertz and Foucault, by contrast, sharp analytical distinctions between representation and reality became increasingly difficult to sustain. Where Smith had gestured somewhat vaguely toward the impact of representations on "practical affairs," growing numbers of Americanists now began to emphasize the constitutive power of words and symbols in shaping the very parameters of what could be thought, said, imagined, and experienced. In many cases, moreover, these explicitly "productive" dimensions of language and imagery became the crucial springboards for exploring new kinds of collective identities: from the "white" self-identifications of antebellum artisans and the "civilizing" discourses articulated by late nineteenth-century reformers, to the interwoven cultural tropes of "good wives, nasty wenches, and anxious patriarchs" that shaped social life and law in colonial Virginia.[45]

CULTURE DEFINED AS TRANSNATIONAL OR GLOBAL CIRCULATION This last formulation has emerged from a number of overlapping projects. One of the most fundamental was the desire to challenge the notion of a singular American "mind," "character," or "culture"—three master tropes from the postwar period that were sometimes used to celebrate American exceptionalism and to privilege white middle-class viewpoints. That these critiques often surfaced in the contexts of immigration history and ethnic studies was hardly coincidental.[46] For those working on questions of national belonging, the historical movement of peoples and cultures was not a shiny new idea fostered by world systems theory or the information age. It was the central problematic for much of the field.

Over time, however, this body of work has expanded and overlapped with two related projects: one on the transnational circulation of art, ideas, and politics; and another on U.S. empire and global capitalism. In the first instance, the goal was to account for cultural practices and intellectual debates never wholly contained by nation states—from the multiple forms of black artistic expression that have moved across the Atlantic diaspora to the transnational intellectual and political exchanges fundamental to so many of the twentieth century's saving ideas (such as

Social Democracy and Pan-Africanism).[47] In the second cluster of work, by contrast, the emphasis has been on the expanding systems of commerce, colonialism, and communications through which much of the cultural traffic actually *moved*. Perhaps inevitably, this last formulation has involved a more systems-oriented vocabulary than some of its predecessors. Whereas immigration historians had emphasized the circulation of specific individuals, groups, and traditions, much of the new work has sought to explicate the conduits themselves: from the "chains" of commodities to the "webs" of communication to the "networks" of colonial rule.[48]

*Proposition Four: In actual practice, most cultural
historians have sought to work across these concepts,
often combining them in new and productive ways*

Consider, for example, Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1977), one of the seminal works in the U.S. field. At first glance, Levine's epic study seems to fit neatly within an anthropological conception of culture. Through much of the book, orally transmitted customs, values, and rituals serve as the primary entry points into a collective "black consciousness," while classic ethnographic works by Herskovits, Malinowski, and Lévi-Strauss appear regularly in the footnotes. Yet for anyone familiar with Levine's meticulous readings of antebellum folk tales—or his extended discussion of "the rise of secular song"—it would be hard to describe this book as something other than a study of black aesthetics. Indeed, part of what made *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* so fresh and exciting during the late 1970s was precisely its insistence that the history of African American vernacular expression required both the functionalist tools of cultural anthropology and the formalist scrutiny previously reserved for canonical works of art.[49]

Similar arguments could be made about many of the best-known works in the U.S. field over the past thirty years. Was Karen Halttunen's *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (1982) an innovative study of middle-class cultural rituals in parlors, ballrooms, and cemeteries or a more discursive analysis of antebellum notions of sincerity and theatricality? Should Susan G. Davis's *Parades and Power* (1986) be viewed as a community history of artisan culture in nineteenth-century Philadelphia or as a semiotic analysis of their public protests? Was Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) an institutional history of a major publishing industry or a more localized reception study of women's reading habits?

In actual practice, of course, the methodological strands running through these distinctions cannot be neatly or easily separated. And over time, the strands have only become more entangled. Our view, in fact, is many (if not most) of the field's landmark works achieved their broad resonance precisely by *combining* culture concepts in powerful new ways.

*Proposition Five: Previous confusion surrounding the parameters
of cultural history has stemmed in part from a long-running
tendency to elide the field in more general U.S. surveys*

The pattern here is surprisingly extensive. In 1981, the editors of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* devoted two entire volumes to the topic "The New History: The 1980s and Beyond." Painting a broad canvas of the cutting edge of the profession, the editors solicited articles on myriad topics, including political, economic, family, population, and intellectual history, as well as the history of science, biography, and quantification. At this early juncture, however, cultural history was not included.[50] The following year, "The Promise of American History," a special issue of the influential journal *Reviews in American History*, similarly omitted cultural history in its analysis of the state of the U.S. field.

In 1990, Eric Foner's important edited collection, *The New American History* (a volume specifically designed to register the U.S. field's multicultural expansion), offered no extended discussion of culture in thirteen different review essays. The second (1997) edition, significantly, contained a wide-ranging essay by Thomas Bender titled "Intellectual and Cultural History." But even here, the move was somewhat circumscribed. As the title suggests, cultural history was now grouped with, and partially subsumed by, a related field; and in terms of longer genealogies, the category of "cultural" analysis emerged here only as one of four seedbeds for intellectual history. Louis Masur's 1998 volume, *The Challenge of American History*, similarly examined cultural methods only as subtopics of dedicated essays on colonial history, narrative history, urban history, ethno-racial history, and visual studies.[51]

Over time, this pattern has produced an increasingly untenable disjuncture: even as many leading Americanists now point to "the cultural turn" as the major historiographical development of the late twentieth century, new waves of U.S. surveys continue to offer little acknowledgment that cultural history actually *happened*.[52] In our view, however, the real problem is not so much the contents of journals or the contours of essay collections as their concomitant silences on questions of transmis-

sions and influence. What we still lack, in other words, is a clear sense of how the growing interest in culture over the past three decades grew out of and ultimately transformed many of the core fields in U.S. history. It is to these more comparative questions of historiographical impact and change that we now turn.

Proposition Six: Many of the seedbeds of U.S. cultural history can be found in the work of those who first identified themselves as specialists in other fields

Consider, for example, the generational cohort of Herbert Gutman, Warren Susman, Nathan Huggins, Lawrence Levine, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, five scholars we would group together as cultural historians *avant la lettre*. During the late 1950s and 1960s, these scholars often described themselves (or were described by others) in relation to some other methodological rubric, be it labor history (Gutman), intellectual history (Susman), social history (Huggins), political history (Levine), or women's history (Smith-Rosenberg).[53] Yet their forward positions within each of these fields suggest a number of structural similarities.

On a very basic level, all five scholars moved toward culture as part of a larger departure from the main currents of postwar U.S. historiography. None of them, for example, evinced much interest in the tools of quantitative social science. Nor did they favor the rubrics of big events history (such as elections, treaties, and wars). Rather, all five began to argue that the nation's most compelling dramas required an analytical register more sensitive to the contingencies of individual perception, language, imagery, and day-to-day experience.[54] They also shared the conviction that a more capacious—and contested—understanding of American culture was central to the larger process of expansion. By redefining the boundaries of the nation's cultural life to include workers, non-elite consumers, racial/ethnic minorities, and women, they simultaneously refuted long-running assumptions about *whose* histories were worthy of serious consideration.

Their shared commitments to culture as a historical motor, furthermore, sometimes put them in marginal or ambiguous positions vis-à-vis their original areas of training. In Levine's case, this led to feelings of "loneliness" and "isolation" as he embarked upon an eleven-year study of black popular culture, while for Gutman it meant serving as "the spokesman" for a new mode of working-class history "that as yet had no

name."[55] It also required them to articulate more precisely the limits of historiographical practice in neighboring fields. In 1976, for example, Gutman described the conventional tendency to align his work with "the new social history" as both "pleasing" and "disturbing," noting that "much in the new social history soundly examines greatly neglected but important aspects of past working-class experience. But too much of it is narrowly classificatory, too narrowly statistical and behavioral." Culturally specific beliefs, habits, customs, and experiences, he now argued, were the essential missing pieces for "explaining" (rather than merely "describing") the "regularities" of American working-class life.[56]

Similarly, Smith-Rosenberg's autobiographical introduction to *Disorderly Conduct* ("Hearing Women's Words") described her approach as an evolving effort to transcend the constraints of her graduate training. Starting from a "traditional social historian's" emphasis on public life and institutional structures during the late 1960s, she increasingly turned to the private thoughts and writings of nineteenth-century women to add a more "experiential component." These discussions of "the every day," in turn, opened up new historiographical registers: first, by endowing "census data with the warmth of emotional reality"; and second, by allowing her to "test the accuracy" of Victorian era "prescriptive material" against "what people actually did." She also began to argue that both the "language" of emotional intimacy and the "categories" of social relations required a new set of analytical tools. Whereas earlier historians might have understood "friendship," "love," "domesticity," and "licentiousness" as straightforward behavioral descriptors, Smith-Rosenberg now turned her focus to the "shared systems of signs or symbolic languages rooted in, and expressive of, social relationships and social experiences."[57]

There are, of course, limits to how far one should take this sort of generational synthesis. For Susman, Huggins, and Smith-Rosenberg, "neglected" or "non-elite" forms of culture generally meant commercial products, published sources, and middle-class correspondence, whereas Gutman and Levine used the very same terms to describe the orally transmitted habits, customs, values, and artistic expressions of workers and slaves. One can also point to obvious differences in the theoretical tools used to access and explain these things. Whereas Gutman and Levine developed their understandings of culture via anthropology and folklore, Smith-Rosenberg, in her somewhat later interventions, included the more explicitly linguistic and semiotic approaches of Bakhtin, Barthes, and Foucault. Susman, by contrast, was particularly attuned to the

social scientific literatures on U.S. consumerism, while Huggins sought to bridge previously separate scholarly discourses on the intellectual history and civil rights politics of the 1920s and 1930s.

Ultimately, though, it was this cohort's collective efforts to put culture at the center of analysis that mattered most. For those of us who followed, this was the pivotal generation of scholars who assembled the new sets of questions, sources, and narrative practices around which a larger field of U.S. cultural history began to constitute itself.

Proposition Seven: Some of the most important debates from this period involved historians loosely or explicitly identified with the New Left

Central to these debates was the pathbreaking work of the British literary scholar Raymond Williams, the American anthropologist Sidney Mintz, and the British and American labor historians E. P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman, all leading influences on the slightly younger New Left generation, which came of age during the 1960s and 1970s. Williams was especially important for challenging the vulgar Marxist base/superstructure model in which culture generally functioned as an epiphenomenon (or mere reflection) of deeper economic realities.[58] Also crucial was Thompson's emphasis on culture as the key to understanding the "experience" of class in history. "Class consciousness," he argued in a crucial passage from The Making of the English Working Class (1963), "is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms."[59] Americanist practitioners of the new social and labor histories quickly followed suit, shifting their understanding of culture (in Michael Denning's wry formulation) from "sweetness and light to customs and morals."[60]

For Gutman, following Mintz, culture was above all a "resource" in working-class struggles. He generally located these struggles in particular communities, which were (again following Mintz) the "arena" in which the experiences of class played themselves out. In this way, the "community study" became the conventional monographic framework of the new social and labor histories, thanks in good measure to Gutman's place-centered approach to labor history as well as the broad influence of pioneering social histories, such as Stephen Thernstrom's influential work on mobility in a New England town.[61]

Community, in these works, signified two things. It was a distinct locale (such as the shoe-making town of Lynn, Massachusetts, about which four important books were written), and it stood for the solidarity

of working people within those towns and cities.[62] Communities were seen as embodying culture in Gutman's sense: as a resource and bulwark in the larger class struggle. Scholars emphasized the unique cultures of working-class communities across a wide variety of locales, describing them as social as opposed to individualistic, mutually supportive rather than competitive, and characterized by "rough" amusements rather than middle-class rituals of respectability.[63] By the late 1980s, Leon Fink noted that the "culturalist thrust," with its emphasis on the defense of both the labor process and the working-class community, had become the "central paradigm" of the new labor history.[64]

These patterns, in our view, can be understood as part of a broader New Left celebration of community-based values and politics. By shifting their focus to more localized and quotidian forms of agency, new labor historians paralleled the simultaneous New Left turn toward community-based, rather than electoral, politics.[65] As the Port Huron Statement, the founding document of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), noted, "politics has the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community." Several years earlier, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. claimed that the country was witnessing the "creation of the beloved community" during the Montgomery bus boycott.[66]

As New Leftists worked to create truer and more vital forms of collectivity in their own time through localized organizing projects and the development of a new style of community-based politics, they simultaneously sought to recover much earlier working-class struggles of the sort that Gutman was so effective at unearthing.[67] The renegade sociologist C. Wright Mills's famous "Letter to the New Left" (1960) is often remembered today for its call to young progressives to reject the "labor metaphysic." But Mills also claimed that the working class must be studied "freshly" and with an emphasis on the "agency" of workers.[68] Many New Left historians found that freshness in the oppositional cultures of working-class communities. Here, after all, was a homegrown alternative to the inexorable advance of late capitalism, an alternative that put forth the values of mutualism and the public good that New Leftists so valued.[69]

By the 1980s, however, some within these circles believed that their colleagues had gone too far. Despite more than a decade's worth of efforts to politicize culture, critics increasingly condemned what they now called "culturalism," largely on the grounds that however one tried to interpret it, culture was not power. The critics also charged that the new emphasis on culture had become a distraction from the questions that mattered

most in working-class history. They spoke of the "tyranny of culturalism" and a "creeping culturalism." The "cultural approach," some declared, "had floundered."[70]

For self-identified cultural historians, however, the fundamental problem with the "culturalism" of the new social and labor histories lay in its limits rather than its excesses. Even the so-called culturalist wings among the new labor and social historians, those who expanded the meaning of the political to include the cultural, tended to treat it in somewhat circumscribed and instrumentalist terms.[71] Many suggested, for example, that their investment in culture was delimited by their broader political vision. As Ira Berlin has written of Gutman's lack of interest in culture per se, "Outside the terrain of class struggle, such cultural baggage appeared merely as a collection of antiquarian curiosities; within that context, it was a powerful instrument of class warfare."[72] Similarly, another key mentor to the culturalist wing of new social and labor historians (albeit one with a very different approach), the pioneering British cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall, famously said that his interest in popular culture was primarily as a "place where socialism might be constituted. This is why 'popular culture' matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it."[73]

In this way, new social and labor historians were momentarily at the forefront of the cultural turn but soon became critical targets during the late 1980s.[74] Good examples of this transition can be found in a pair of seminal essays first published in *International Labor and Working-Class History*: Joan Scott's "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History" (1987) and Michael Denning's "The End of Mass Culture" (1990). Both of these essays pushed labor historians to bring the insights of cultural history and cultural studies more directly to bear on their scholarship. Scott suggested to labor historians that linguistic analysis provided a way to more fully and accurately incorporate gender as a central category of analysis, whereas Denning urged them to see mass culture not as alien to working-class life but as the very landscape in which modern politics and culture were necessarily bound.[75]

Key words within social and labor history similarly became theoretical points of departure for some of the most innovative work in cultural history: from Jackson Lears's 1985 meditation on "cultural hegemony" and Joan Scott's 1991 challenge to the "evidence of experience" to Daniel Rodgers's 1992 conceptual analysis of "republicanism" and Walter Johnson's 2003 reevaluation of "agency" as the master trope of slavery studies. Each of these essays took a generally discursive and critical approach,

decrying the limitations and begged questions of previous methodological formulations.[76] A central target of Scott's critique, for example, was the new labor history's somewhat narrow conceptualizations of "difference," a category, she argued, that could benefit from more careful investigations of language, identity, and perception.[77] After some labor historians responded to these provocations by arguing that the real world of "experience" trumped theory, Scott began to question the category of experience itself, arguing that "it is not individuals who have experience but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition . . . becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain."[78]

In retrospect, it is notable that so many of the seminal articles in late twentieth-century cultural history were published in journals of social and labor history. These were two of the primary fields that revived cultural analysis during the 1970s. But in the view of many scholars who subsequently migrated to cultural history, they were also fields that ultimately served to constrain it.

Proposition Eight: The unifying trope of a "cultural turn" needs to be understood not as the evolution of a single method but as a weaving together of innovations from a variety of disciplinary locations

We have already pointed to some of the innovations brought forth from various disciplinary locations, such as the "myth and symbol" school of American studies, or the "culturalist" wing of the new labor history. Here, we argue more broadly that most if not *all* of the traditional fields in U.S. history experienced their own particular "turns" to culture. And in virtually every case, the disciplinary locations mattered deeply for how the surrounding debates unfolded.

In U.S. intellectual history, for example, much of the discussion of the late 1970s involved a growing crisis of confidence around the question of how broadly to conceptualize the province of ideas.[79] As John Higham explained in the opening pages of *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (1979), "the quest for national definition" that had driven many of the leading intellectual histories of the postwar period proved "devastatingly" brief: "In a few years of the early and midsixties what was called 'consensus history' suddenly lost credibility. . . . Simultaneously, in sociology, anthropology, and history, two working assumptions that were closely related to the idea of national character came under wither-

ing attack: first, the assumption that societies tend to be integrated, and second, that a shared culture maintains that integration."[80]

The result, Higham concluded, was a growing bifurcation between the "levels of consciousness" studied by intellectual historians. Some continued to focus on the "clearly articulated beliefs" of philosophers and scientists, a body of thought "amenable to formal exegesis," whereas others now began to emphasize "the less refined level of consciousness the French have taught us to call collective mentalites." By 1979, these levels of consciousness were already associated with a more circumscribed sphere of intellectual activity (what David Hollinger referred to as "communities of discourse") as well as a new set of methodological tools. Anthropology's insights on the "meanings expressed in symbol, ritual, and language," Higham noted, were quickly outpacing "the heuristic insights of literary critics" and "psychologists in the Freudian tradition." Clifford Geertz, he quipped, was the volume's "patron saint."[81]

For other leading Americanists, however, this splitting of consciousness into distinctive social and epistemological domains proved less than fully satisfying. Richard Fox and Jackson Lears's widely influential 1983 collection on U.S. consumerism is a good case in point.[82] Whereas previous intellectual historians might have offered a synoptic lineage of theories of capitalist development (or divided this complex subject into formal policymaking and popular attitudes), Fox and Lears framed their anthology around the more capacious notion of a "culture of consumption." This conceptual shift from "intellect" to "culture" did not amount to a wholesale jettisoning of elite ideas. As Fox and Lears argued in the volume's introduction, "to discover how consumption became a cultural ideal, a hegemonic 'way of seeing,' requires looking at powerful individuals and institutions who conceived, formulated, and preached that ideal or way of seeing."[83] Still, their larger project tracked a surprisingly broad range of "individuals and institutions" involved in the hegemonizing. Henry James and John D. Rockefeller Jr. were part of the process. But so too were dozens of lesser-known advertising executives, bank presidents, Protestant ministers, newspaper reporters, poll makers, and policy wonks.

In women's history, by contrast, much of the debate during this period focused on the central categories of analysis. By the mid-1970s, many leading figures in the field had begun to shift their attention from "women" (previously understood as a demographic and historical group) to "gender," a more expansive category that now signified social and cultural rather than biological constructions of sexual difference. This shift also signaled a growing interest in "masculinity" on much the same

terms: as a historically specific set of cultural norms and social relations as opposed to natural traits and immutable forms of "patriarchy."[84]

As in the other fields we've surveyed, these innovations were neither universally applauded nor wholly accepted. Some feminist scholars viewed the shift from women to gender as a problematic retreat from the more concrete work of explicating and fighting male oppression.[85] Others, especially feminists of color, argued that the broader category of gender continued to mask long-running normative assumptions of "women" as white, middle class, and often detached from the world of work.[86] Still others began to argue that the rapidly proliferating body of work on gender-as-cultural-construct could not be neatly separated from related categories such as race, class, and sexuality.[87] By the mid-1990s, in fact, the core insight that such categories were "mutually constituted" (in both ideology and social relations) had become an article of faith for most U.S. cultural historians.

On one level, then, it is helpful to think of the "cultural turn" in latitudinal terms: as a series of interrelated debates in adjoining fields, each with its own particular vectors and points of emphasis. But one can also track this process across the career trajectories of individual scholars. Consider, for example, Paul E. Johnson, a leading practitioner of the new social history whose work has become increasingly "cultural" over time. In *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (1978), Johnson approached his topic through a series of sophisticated quantitative analyses and a strong emphasis on class relations. The book's opening chapter, titled "Economy," had an organizational framework designed to suggest the determinative impact of material conditions in shaping the era's great battles over religious beliefs and moral values.[88]

To the extent that he drew explicitly on theory, Johnson utilized the statistical methods common to his cohort as well as a mostly sociological model of "social control" descended from Durkheim. And despite the fact that Johnson later described his project as a study of "Rochester's culture wars of the 1820s and 1830s," he did not actually *use* the word "culture" in *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*.[89] Topics that we might now define as squarely within the bailiwick of cultural history (such as drinking, the circus, and other forms of popular amusement) Johnson grouped together under the chapter heading "Society."

By contrast, Johnson's most recent book, *Sam Patch, the Famous Jumper* (2003), focuses on a single Rhode Island mill worker-cum-waterfall daredevil. At first glance, this book shares a number of obvious similarities

with his earlier study. Beyond the common geographic locations (both books are set in small northeastern cities of the early nineteenth century), Johnson employs many of the same sources to examine the effects of industrialization on one of the nation's first proletarianized families. But *Sam Patch* is less the product of the author "listening" to the historically "inarticulate" (Patch, after all, did not leave much information about his life, and the only statement attributed to him is drawn from a newspaperman's paraphrase) than a rigorous series of "readings" of the meanings of Patch's public gestures in relation to contemporary debates about popular amusements, aesthetics, and celebrity. In stark contrast to the community-based approach of *Shopkeeper's Millennium*, in *Sam Patch* Johnson places his protagonist's individual daredevilry at the center, treating each death-defying leap as a kind of oppositional performance art through which we can glimpse the struggles of thousands of anonymous mill workers who left behind no written records.

This new emphasis on subaltern agency and consciousness was not unrelated to Johnson's earlier questions about "social control." Indeed, it is only in defiance of the "rational amusements" and "languages of progress" championed by bourgeois reformers that Patch's public gestures accrue their deeper social and ideological significance. More accurately, then, we might say that *Sam Patch* employs many of the conventional tools of late twentieth-century cultural history—thick description, discourse analysis, close readings of visual imagery, a more performative model of selfhood, the narrative structure of microhistory, and so forth—to expand what can be known about the day-to-day struggles of those caught in the vortex of nineteenth-century industrialization.[90] And in *this* sense, especially, the trajectory to *Sam Patch* was typical of its period. Like many of his colleagues trained in social, labor, African American, women's, intellectual, and religious history during the 1960s and 1970s, Johnson came to culture not out of disinterest with the questions in his earlier work but as an alternative way of framing and answering them.

Proposition Nine: As growing numbers of younger scholars embraced cultural history from the outset, the specific terms of debate began to shift once again

During the late 1980s and 1990s, that is to say, a new generation of historians came to culture not through some other rubric, such as social, labor, intellectual, or woman's history (many of whose innovations from the 1970s they now took for granted), but as a more explicit start-

ing point. They also began to notice broader historiographical patterns largely unobserved by the earlier celebrants and critics of culture, including a certain sameness of conceptual emphasis. To some extent, these new critiques echoed earlier concerns about the proliferation of "community studies." But whereas previous commentators such as Eric Foner had feared an incoherent "patchwork" of "diverse values and identities among working people," with no "coherent overview of labor's historical development," many cultural historians of the late 1980s and 1990s perceived the problem as one of structural redundancy.[91] Again and again, the localized exploration of non-elite customs, habits, and traditions seemed to produce much the same forms of "community-building," "consciousness," and "agency."

New waves of cultural historians also began to question some of the core stylistic values of the earlier scholarship, especially its conventional hostility to narrative. For earlier generations of social and labor historians, in particular, narrative history had represented (in Eric Monkkonen's words) a denial of "complexity," a demand "for a return to simpler times and simpler tales, for a world no longer mired in . . . opacity."[92] By the mid-1980s, however, growing numbers of Americanists in a variety of fields were beginning to challenge the notion that effective storytelling and incisive analysis were mutually exclusive.[93] One of the earliest examples was Nick Salvatore's 1982 prize-winning biography of Eugene V. Debs, a work published by the University of Illinois Press in its influential Working-Class in American History series.[94] But the trend quickly expanded to include a wider range of historiographical experiments.

In some cases, these experiments involved the presentation of an odd or improbable episode—an eighteenth-century printer's joke about a riotous massacre of cats, for example; or the surprising tendency of antebellum blackface troupes to quote Shakespeare before working-class audiences—which, in turn, became the very problem that the cultural historian sought to unpack, contextualize, and explicate.[95] In other cases, however, it was precisely the plurality and variability of *competing* stories that generated the analytical sparks. Narrative, that is to say, now began to serve not merely as a delivery system for arguments and evidence but also (and more specifically) as a dedicated field of analysis for those increasingly sensitive to the complexities of language, rhetoric, perception, and memory.[96]

Over time, these manifold efforts to rethink the fundamental forms of historical writing enabled a much wider range of scholars—from ethnoculturalists to quantifiers, feminist historians of gender to Marxist his-

torians of workers—to embrace the cultural turn as a forward position. In many cases, too, these migrations to culture were accompanied by new conceptualizations of power, especially among somewhat younger scholars, such as Robin Kelley, Tera Hunter, and Kimberly Phillips, all of whom published new studies during the 1990s that productively transcended the conventional boundaries separating African American, social, labor, and gender history. All three scholars, that is to say, remapped the conventional parameters of black "struggle" by following their subjects across a wide variety of social and institutional domains: from domestic work, tenant farming, religion, and public health to Harlem dance halls, interracial vice districts, and the more autonomous spaces of rural "jook joints."[97]

Building upon the theoretical insights of James C. Scott, moreover, these studies made it easier to appreciate the "hidden transcripts" and "infrapolitical" moments within black working-class life, moments that might not have passed muster as orthodox expressions of Thompsonian "class consciousness" a decade or two earlier, but that nevertheless shed crucial new light on the cultural expressions, thoughts, and aspirations of non-elite African Americans. As Kelley noted in a key passage from his 1994 study Race Rebels, the larger goal was to excavate a "dissident political culture" carried out both "off stage" (in the autonomous cultural spaces constructed by and for working-class blacks) as well as "on stage" (through countless "unorganized, clandestine, and evasive" acts that only suggested the "appearance of consent"). That the political valence and intent of such acts should remain partially "invisible" was, of course, entirely "by design."[98]

Broadly speaking, then, we might describe the 1990s as a period of ongoing experimentation and innovation. But this was also a period during which some of the older shared identifications became more tenuous and complex. An important case in point is the December 1992 forum on "popular culture and its audiences" that appeared in the pages of the American Historical Review. The location here was significant: not since Caroline Ware's pioneering work of the prewar period had a collective project in U.S. cultural history received such high-level support from the discipline's national organization. By the time of publication, moreover, all four of the AHR forum's participants—Lawrence Levine, Robin Kelley, Natalie Davis, and Jackson Lears—had become (or were quickly becoming) major figures in the field.[99]

What transpired in print, however, can hardly be described as a simple exercise in collective self-congratulation. In the forum's lead essay, Levine

emphasized his ongoing struggles to convince skeptical colleagues that twentieth-century entertainment products (such as radio programs and Hollywood films) might be read as something more than evidence of the profit-making schemes and marketing formulas of corporate producers. In stark contrast to the earlier praise bestowed upon Black Culture and Black Consciousness, he noted, "I have learned unmistakably . . . that this time around there will be no easy acceptance, that popular culture is seen as the antithesis of folk culture: not as emanating from within the community but created—often artificially by people with pecuniary or ideological motives—for the community, or rather for the masses who no longer had an organic community capable of producing culture." In response, Levine emphasized the creativity and efficacy of consumer choices. "Modernity," he acknowledged, "dealt a blow to artisanship in culture. . . . But to say this is not to say that, as a result, people have been rendered passive, hopeless consumers. What people can do and do do is to refashion the objects created for them to fit their own values, needs, and expectations."[100]

This concept of refashioning was itself a subtle variation on the older theme of "culture-as-resource," now updated to include the localized consumption practices and meaning-making strategies of those who had little hand in the production of mass entertainments. Throughout the essay, Levine was explicit about the methodological connections to his earlier work on slave vernaculars, noting that "my intention is to explore the degree to which popular culture functions in ways similar to folk culture and acts as a form of folklore for people living in urban industrial societies."[101]

For the two younger scholars on the forum, however, this leap across the threshold of mass production was riddled with potential problems. Kelley, for instance, questioned the wisdom of projecting "folk" concepts into new commercial contexts, arguing that this move often equates degrees of "marginalization" and "distance from commercial influence" with some putative notion of "authenticity."[102] Kelley also questioned Levine's broader assumption that the work of "refashioning" typically leads in progressive directions:

Although I agree with his point that people actively make meaning out of popular culture (which also means revising and jettisoning narratives or representations that are unacceptable), his discussion sometimes seems too celebratory. By focusing on the audience versus producer dichotomy rather than race, gender, and class hierarchies within popular culture audi-

ences, and by placing too much emphasis on the autonomy of "the folk," Levine misses an opportunity to illustrate how popular culture can simultaneously subvert and reproduce hegemony.[103]

Lears, by contrast, took issue with Levine's larger approach to the issue of "consumer choice." The fundamental problem, in Lears's view, was not that twentieth-century audiences were simply duped or manipulated by corporate producers, but that the rhetoric of choice-as-agency was itself a recapitulation of one of the fundamental tenets of neoclassical economics: the notion that "sovereign consumers" maximize "their gratification through freedom of choice" and meet "their needs rationally in the cultural marketplace."[104] The choices at stake, Lears argued further, were far from equal and could only be assessed critically by including more structural questions about who controls the flow of goods to the point of purchase: "What difference did it make, for example, that some groups or classes had the capital to mass produce and mass market cultural forms, while other groups had to make the best of what they bought—reinterpreting, rejecting, reinventing texts creatively and even subversively sometimes, but still basically stuck with what they were sold?"[105]

For those of us who read and learned from these exchanges, a number of larger conclusions began to take shape. One was that the initial work of field building had now given way to difficult but nonetheless crucial differences of opinion—differences that were in many ways inevitable given our multiple modes of training and diverse trajectories into the field. Like many leading culturalists of his generational cohort, Levine came to the question of vernacular expression via cultural anthropology, which meant that he also tended to ground localized acts of meaning-making squarely within the fabric of experience.[106] Popular artifacts, in this view, were "good to think with."[107] And for Levine, writing good history meant never assuming that one's subjects were incapable of recognizing the same "hegemonizing" forces subsequently identified by professional intellectuals.[108]

By 1992, however, this ground-level mode of historicizing was merely one of many powerful ways of conceptualizing popular/mass culture. For Lears, who had spent much of his career explicating capitalism's manifold impacts on rhetoric and ideology, the functionalist theories of postwar social scientists were themselves deeply suspect because they tended to reproduce the "therapeutic" rationales so essential to modern consumerism—each rational "choice" leading to satisfied needs and meaningful outcomes. To question the assumptions at work in this model, he

insisted, was not to ignore the creativity of ordinary consumers. Rather, it was the crucial first step toward imagining a better and more capacious set of choices, as well as a model of analysis in which the self-justifications and "agenda-setting powers" of corporate capital were more plainly visible.

Kelley, too, was deeply interested in such questions, but from the somewhat different angle of cultural studies. One consequence of this distinction was Kelley's more explicit focus on key words, categories, and questions of identity. "A cultural studies approach," he explained, "would insist that terms like 'folk,' 'authentic,' and 'traditional' are socially constructed categories that have something to do with the reproduction of race, class, and gender hierarchies and the policing of the boundaries of modernism."[109] Kelley also called for more careful attention to the expanding distribution fostered by the rise of mass media, a process that enabled modern consumers to "experience a common heritage with people they have never seen" and "acquire memories of a past to which they have no geographic or biological connection."[110]

Looking back on these debates, it is easier to see them as one of the major watersheds in the cultural turn: a pivotal moment in which leading practitioners began to argue with each other over competing visions of the field, as opposed to defending themselves from skeptical colleagues in other specialties. But of course that's what happens to fields as they diversify and prosper. Latent tensions in the foundational concepts become more pronounced. And the concepts themselves quickly proliferate. Which is why cultural history remained such an exciting place to be during the 1990s, even as the field began to look more and more like the disciplinary center.

Proposition Ten: Over the past three decades, many U.S. cultural historians have developed new understandings of politics as central components of their methodological projects

Starting in the 1980s, cultural historians often reacted against what they saw as the narrow approach of traditional political history in terms of sources, topics and methodology. A good number of them also criticized what they viewed as the too-easy linkage between politics and history made by some of the new social and labor historians, in which history from the bottom up was frequently understood as the moral equivalent of New Left politics. These politics, as Roy Rosenzweig explained in a recent interview about the motivations of his graduate school cohort,

"shaped their work in history. They were looking for connections between politics and history and looking for ways to 'use' the past. They saw direct connections between doing 'history from the bottom up' or 'social history' and the politics of the 1960s." Rosenzweig agreed with his interlocutor, however, that his later works (on the history of Central Park, on historical memory, and in public history, among other topics) "resist easy classification."[111]

The same was true for many cultural historians who came of age during the mid-1980s and beyond, for whom the relation between politics and historical practice was perhaps less direct or obvious than it was for many of their predecessors. Brought up in an age of political cynicism, when the traditional Left vision of social democracy no longer seemed entirely viable, and schooled in the works of Michel Foucault, some of these scholars increasingly problematized the very meanings and functions of intellectual engagements with politics. In good postmodern fashion, they also learned to display "incredulity to metanarratives," questioning the straightforwardly deterministic assumptions crafted by older generations of social, political, and labor historians.[112] The widely cited work of the "new historicist" literary scholar Walter Benn Michaels, for example, warned against pigeonholing complex works of fiction as "for" or "against" capitalism and aimed instead to show the ways in which transformations in the economy affected the narratives styles of seemingly radical authors, such as Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris. Leo Marx, a founding figure of American studies, praised Michaels' "subtle" approach and highlighted its "unschematic conception of the convergence of literature and power."[113]

A similar shift was evident in *The New American Studies*, an influential collection of essays reprinted from one of the leading journals of the cultural turn, *Representations*. Phillip Fisher, the editor of the collection, pointed to the authors' shared interest in "rhetorics" as opposed to "myth" (the earlier focal point of American studies), as well as their tendency to cast this concept in the plural (as opposed to the more singular and monolithic understandings of "American culture" from the postwar decades). Studying rhetorics, according to Fisher, involved the close analysis of "words, formulas, images, and ideological units of meaning within politics." He also highlighted a new focus on contestation and paradox, which in turn "reveals interests and exclusions." Fisher labeled this approach the "politics of culture."[114]

Although they sought to complicate the relationship between history and politics, those who took the cultural turn during the late 1980s

and 1990s did not deny that there was a crucial connection between the two. Indeed, most new cultural historians also drew from the view, promulgated by new social and labor historians, that culture was, to use a favored metaphor, "contested terrain," but now reconfigured in terms of what James Scott has called "infrapolitics," a domain of quotidian struggle practiced largely outside of the realm of elections and elite policymakers. One index of the ongoing importance of these questions is the growing popularity of "cultural politics," a phrase rarely used before the late 1980s but which has since appeared in dozens of book titles.[115] A book series of that name was initiated by the University of Minnesota Press in 1990, and *Cultural Politics: An International Journal* was begun in 2005. Cultural politics was also one of the central concepts (often paired with "aesthetic ideologies") at the heart of Michael Denning's influential 1998 book, *The Cultural Front*, which sought to expand our conception of art's relation to politics in the twentieth century. Demonstrating that working-class cultural production (disseminated by diverse ethnic and racial groups) was central to New Deal politics, Denning viewed politics and culture as overlapping categories, since the positions taken by cultural workers on social issues and the aesthetic forms they developed had important political meanings.[116]

Somewhat paradoxically, many of those who use cultural politics as a standard catchphrase treat politics implicitly. For example, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (a reference work published in 2007) contains no dedicated discussion of politics as a category of analysis, although politics is implicit in almost all of the sixty-four entries, such as those on citizenship, corporations, and capitalism.[117] By contrast, the second edition of *The Cultural Studies Reader*, published in 1999, added a section on politics, which was not part of first edition, published in 1993. This section included two articles on the relationship between culture and public policy, a topic discussed in several of the essays in this book as well. In his introduction to the 1999 edition, Simon During noted a growing "acceptance of the state hitherto unknown in cultural studies."[118]

Significantly, many of the cultural historians who have fueled these developments have combined two approaches previously seen as antagonistic. On the one hand, they have adopted the concern with paradox, ambiguity, and irony that characterized the worldview of mid-twentieth-century "consensus historians." These scholars, as we have seen, countered the conflict-ridden worldview of the early twentieth-century "progressive historians," emphasizing unity through social science categories such as "national character," or *the* American mind. In this sense, they used cul-

ture to explain politics; indeed, one could say that Richard Hofstadter, Bernard Bailyn, John William Ward, and Daniel Boorstin invented the idea of "political culture."[119]

On the other hand, more recent practitioners of the cultural turn have espoused an increasingly conflictual and multifaceted conception of politics, emphasizing power differentials operating along the axes of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. For most of these scholars, political history is comprised not merely of grassroots practices and phenomena—as it was for many of the new social and labor historians. Nor do they understand political consciousness as singular or unitary—as it was for many of the earlier consensus historians.[120] Rather, in current practice, identity itself has become a central object of political struggle.

Recent scholars have also stressed conflict at the epistemological level by highlighting the construction of normative categories as a fundamentally political process. Saul Cornell, for example, has emphasized that denaturalization, dehierarchalization, and demystification are among the central tasks of today's politically conscious historian.[121] In this sense, many of those practicing cultural history today have been far more circumspect about making broad and confident claims about the political efficacy of their work. Yet the larger shift has not been without its rewards and insights. On the most basic level, recent cultural historians have dramatically expanded the definition of what counts as "political." In the process, they have also created new forms of cross-talk and symbiosis between cultural and political history. For many of us, the older certainties of the new social, political, and labor histories have given way to a pair of open questions: "what is *cultural* about politics and what is *political* about culture."[122]

Proposition Eleven: As long as there has been a cultural turn, the adjacent fields of European and U.S. cultural history have alternatively merged and diverged in significant ways

The first half of this proposition becomes easier to grasp as soon as we acknowledge some of the shared concerns running through many of the fields' landmark texts. One can point, for example, to the roughly contemporaneous interests in subaltern thought, ritual, and agency that informed both Natalie Zemon Davis's *Society and Culture in Modern France* (1975) and Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1977). Or the parallel efforts to unpack dominant categories of collective identity in Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* (1989) and

David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* (1991). Or the shared sensitivity to shifting modes of urban perception that guided Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992) and John Kasson's *Rudeness and Civility* (1990). Or the new emphasis on transnational circulation that began to crystallize in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and George Lipsitz's *Dangerous Crossroads* (1994). Or the cross-cutting debates around historical memory running through John Gillis's *Commemorations* (1995) and Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt's *History Wars* (1996).

In many cases, moreover, the theoretical discussions driving these projects have dovetailed in recognizable ways. A prominent example is Clifford Geertz's work in symbolic anthropology, which appeared in the footnotes of dozens of important cultural histories during the 1980s: from William Sewell's *Work and Revolution in France* (1980), Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984), and Lynn Hunt's *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (1984) to Rhys Isaac's *The Transformation of Virginia* (1982), Roy Rosenzweig's *Eight Hours for What We Will* (1983), and Susan Davis's *Parades and Power* (1986).[123] But Geertz was hardly exceptional in this regard. In fact, one could easily construct similar genealogies vis-à-vis Antonio Gramsci on hegemony, Theodor Adorno on the culture industry, Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival, Michel Foucault on discourse, Walter Benjamin on the flaneur, Edward Said on Orientalism, and Pierre Nora on sites of memory—all key concepts that have regularly migrated back and forth across fields.[124]

This migration does not mean, however, that the fields have simply mirrored one another. On the European side, for example, one can point to an earlier set of engagements with the psychological and cultural dimensions of colonialism, a pattern deriving (at least in part) from the pathbreaking work of postcolonial scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, C. L. R. James, and Stuart Hall.[125] On the U.S. side, by contrast, one can trace a wider spectrum of research around the problem of consumerism, an issue that goes back at least as far as the early 1980s (to the work of Warren Susman, Jackson Lears, Roland Marchand, and Daniel Horowitz), and which more recently has generated rich new studies on topics ranging from the "free produce" campaigns of antebellum abolitionists to the New Deal politics of the "citizen consumer."[126]

When we turn from clusters of work to institutional histories (or more precisely, to their interrelation), the contrasts become sharper and more complex. Consider, for example, the central cases of American studies and British cultural studies. By the early 1950s, American studies had become a full-blown "movement," with its own national journal (*Ameri-

can Quarterly), professional organization (the American Studies Association), and degree programs across a number of leading universities and colleges (such as Harvard, Yale, Penn, Minnesota, and Amherst). British cultural studies, by contrast, first emerged in a poorly funded postgraduate research center (the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, founded in 1964 at the University of Birmingham) and a "house journal" (*Working Papers in Cultural Studies*) that was quite explicit about the "incomplete" and "tentative" character of the larger enterprise.[127]

These institutional contrasts likewise corresponded to basic differences in political outlooks and modes of questioning. Especially early on, American studies gathered momentum in an ideological climate of American exceptionalism, while British cultural studies emerged from a series of debates among prominent New Left intellectuals over the future of Marxist cultural theory. And whereas American studies defined itself as an effort to work across the disciplinary boundaries separating literature and history, British cultural studies sought a "materialist" mode of cultural analysis that might better account for "the dialectic between agency and conditions."[128] Not surprisingly, this last goal pushed in a very different direction than the earlier American studies problematics. Indeed, if American studies conceived its foundational project as the excavation of distinctively national forms of mind, character, and culture, early British cultural studies emphasized "cultures, not Culture," and more precisely, the "necessary struggle, tension and conflict between cultures . . . the struggles betweens 'ways of life' rather than the evolution of *a* way of life.'"[129]

Once again, however, it seems important not to overstate the analytical divide separating these two projects. Frequently forgotten today is the fact that the exceptionalist impulses running through much of postwar American studies often coexisted with a more critical emphasis on the *power* of representations to shape collective perception—myth, in short, as something closer to a dominant ideology than a straightforward celebration of cultural taproots.[130] And in this respect, at least, works in American studies such as Smith's *Virgin Land* or Marx's *Machine in the Garden* can still seem surprisingly prescient, pointing ahead to much later British cultural studies interrogations of the popular cultural "ground" upon which collective "common sense" is forged. On the British side, to be sure, this "radically new" way of theorizing the popular grew out of a particular intellectual conjuncture: namely, Gramsci's writings on the concept of hegemony, which exerted a powerful influence on early works in British cultural studies such as *Resistance through Rituals* (1976),

Policing the Crisis (1978), and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1982).[131] Even here, though, it would be a mistake the draw the contrast too sharply. By the mid-1980s, few continental theorists were more widely invoked by U.S. cultural historians than Gramsci. And in many cases, those pushing the debates forward were either trained or teaching in American studies departments.[132]

Our final area of comparison involves a recent trio of historiographical studies on the European side: Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (1999); William Sewell, *Logics of History* (2005); and Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line* (2005). In each case, these works proceed autobiographically: from the exciting intellectual and political possibilities of the "new social history"; to a growing sense that social history's emphasis on quantitative categories and material conditions had become inadequate for explaining the deeper subtleties of human perception and localized meaning-making; and finally, to the rise of a "new cultural history" designed to address some of the blinds spots. Not surprisingly, each book offers a slightly different mix of antecedents and historiographical motors. Sewell, for example, emphasizes cultural anthropology and the French Annalistes as the key influences driving his own transition from social to cultural history, whereas Eley emphasizes Foucault's work on discourse, the impact of British cultural studies, and the deconstructed identity categories developed by Joan Scott.

What really stands out in these narratives, however, are the multiple points of convergence. All three studies pivot their narratives on a crisis of confidence among New Left historians and hail the cultural turn as a useful corrective to the rigid "determinisms" and "totalizing logics" of 1970s social science. All three studies, furthermore, cite Hunt's 1989 edited volume, *The New Cultural History*, as the critical juncture at which an eclectic jumble of interpretive modes began to crystallize into a more clearly recognizable historical field. Finally, all three studies register a growing ambivalence vis-à-vis the cultural turn—at least in its narrower, deconstructive forms of the late 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, much of the point of these studies is to insist that the now conventional tools of cultural history—thick description, linguistic analysis, the interrogation of identity categories, and so forth—need to be reconnected to socioeconomic structures and the lived realities of class.

In our view, these recent efforts to move beyond the antinomies of social and cultural history represent a welcome intervention. Yet we would also insist that there are crucial differences between the European and U.S. trajectories—differences that matter deeply for how

one conceptualizes the broader turn to culture. Consider, for example, the respective positions of class and race within each field. Sewell and Eley, in particular, present class as the central category of analysis. Both single out the British neo-Marxist historiography of Eric Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson, and Christopher Hill as foundational. Both draw intellectual lineages from the political revolts of 1968 to the renewed interest in "history from below" during the 1970s. And both trace the origins of a "new cultural history" to the pivotal moment when many social historians began to doubt the deterministic power of social structures and material conditions.

On the U.S. side, by contrast, it is simply impossible to tell this story apart from race. Here again, Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* is instructive. Initiated during the mid-1960s, while Levine himself was actively involved in the civil rights movement, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* wrestles with many of the same problematics highlighted by Sewell and Eley. It is a "history from below" that explicitly sought out new ways of conceptualizing subaltern thought, experience, and agency. But it did so from a very different set of personal and intellectual vantage points. As Walter Johnson has recently argued, the strong rhetorical emphasis on self-determination in Levine's work had obvious affinities with the era's civil rights politics.[133] And the "determinisms" against which Levine framed his argument generally came in the form of psychoanalytic theories of victimization (e.g., Stanley Elkins's somewhat earlier claim that the antebellum plantation had constituted a "total institution").[134]

Much the same kind of argument can be made about the work on identity categories that began to emerge during the mid-1980s. On the European side, one of the earliest interventions was Gareth Stedman Jones's *Languages of Class* (1983), an important but controversial book that Eley describes as an "early stalking horse for . . . the linguistic turn."[135] Although Jones's work was widely discussed and cited by Americanists, it would be difficult to argue for an obviously parallel case—in part, because the debates around class never quite achieved the same depth and centrality in U.S. historiography.[136] If we shift the focus to race, however, the patterns look very different. Only three years after the publication of *Languages of Class*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986) performed a similar kind of maneuver by describing race (a category that had long been understood as self-evidently tied to skin color and other forms of physiology) as an ideological construct traceable across shifting patterns of discourse. And over the

next decade, this new way of thinking about race quickly became a sign of the times, extending from Alexander Saxton's *Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (1990), Thomas Almaguer's *Racial Fault Lines* (1994), and Kathleen Brown's *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs* (1996) to Neil Foley's *The White Scourge* (1997), Philip Deloria's *Playing Indian* (1997), and Robert Lee's *Orientals* (1999).

At this point, we suspect, some readers may want to insist on a pair of qualifications: first, that much of the work has argued for race and class (as well as gender and sexuality) as interwoven categories of analysis; and second, that this pattern was partially anticipated and informed by a number of seminal works in British cultural studies, such as Stuart Hall's "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance" (1980) and Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987). We readily agree on both counts. But we also suggest that these wrinkles are entirely consistent with our central argument: namely, that the U.S. and European trajectories have regularly merged and diverged. Which also means that any history of cultural history that limits itself to a single geographic field runs the risk of missing a lot.

Proposition Twelve: As cultural history has moved to the center of the discipline, the question of what is and what is not cultural history has become increasingly complex

Consider, for example, Walter Johnson's history of the antebellum slave market, *Soul by Soul* (1999). In terms of the book's narrative arc (the transposition of human beings into chattel) and collection of sources (such as probate inventories, tax records, and notarized acts of sale), there is little that can be described as strictly or obviously cultural. The slaves in Johnson's story do not spin tales, tell jokes, or sing more than a few short verses. The only institution that receives much focused attention is the slave market itself.

Yet in many other respects *Soul by Soul* exemplifies one of the major developments in recent historiography: the proliferation of cultural interpretations of topics previously understood as squarely within the province of other historical fields. Johnson's sophisticated treatment of the buying and selling of slaves is a good case in point. For much of the late twentieth century, historians of the antebellum South might have analyzed such practices exclusively through quantitative or statistical measures, or by some criterion of economic necessity. Historiographical debate might have turned on the bottom-line question of slavery's profitability, which,

in turn, might have been used to construct a much larger argument for or against the inevitability of the Civil War.

In Johnson's hands, by contrast, these market-driven questions about the profitability of slaves ultimately reveal more subtle cultural motives, rationales, and payoffs. In recording their financial transactions in human property, slaveholders simultaneously "make themselves" and their "social worlds." In writing to relatives about "making a start" in the slave market, they "translate" the "productive and reproductive labor" of their slaves into "images of their own upward progress." And in computing the "necessity" of individual purchases, they do more than simply respond to structural and economic pressures. More accurately, Johnson argues, slaveholders "objectified their desires into necessities," thereby "giving cultural meaning to the economy in people upon which their lives (or at least their livelihoods) depended."[137]

Over the past few years, this impulse for mixing subjects, sources, and modes of questioning has made it increasingly difficult to draw sharp boundaries around cultural history. One thinks, for example, of Mary Renda's recent study of the U.S. military occupation in Haiti, or John Stauffer's chronicle of interracial abolitionism, or Scott Sandage's work on failed nineteenth-century businessmen, or Sarah Igo's treatment of modern survey research—all innovative histories that have applied the tools of cultural analysis to an increasingly broad swath of the American past.[138] Paradoxically, this pattern of expansion has led some commentators to suggest the field's impending obsolescence. If "we are all culturalists now" (as one recent formulation has it), why bother with a dedicated field called cultural history? If the field's "heuristic work" is now largely complete, perhaps the "family of inquiries" known as cultural history will simply ripple across the disciplinary pond and fade away.[139]

In our view, there are a number of problems with this line of speculation. One is that the recent migrations of cultural methods have never signaled universal acceptance. Even today, more than a few of our colleagues continue to view culture as the proper concern of some *other* discipline—be it literature, anthropology, American studies, art history, gender studies, or cultural studies. Another basic problem is the implicit assumption of a finite collection of cultural approaches, when in fact the larger process of cross-pollination always cuts in multiple directions. Much of the best recent work, that is to say, has provoked new modes of questioning in other fields even as it has forced a reconsideration of what, exactly, counts *as* cultural history among self-identified practitioners.

This pattern is not entirely new. During the mid-1970s, for example,

when Carroll Smith-Rosenberg turned her attention to the "mythic constructs" and "experiential components" of Victorian gender relations, she also remapped the conventional thresholds separating women's, social, religious, and urban history. Likewise, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Alexander Saxton and David Roediger began to explicate the racialized languages of "wage slavery" favored by antebellum artisans, they simultaneously challenged prevailing certainties about what an innovative history of the market revolution might entail. What U.S. historians have defined as cultural, in other words, has always been in flux to one degree or another. So if there seems to be ongoing confusion today about the field's conventional thresholds, that confusion probably has more to do with the volume of studies than the basic impulse for methodological stretching.

Finally, we question the somewhat counterintuitive calculus that equates broad disciplinary impact with fragmentation and decline. From our own vantage points, the sheer numbers of books, articles, dissertations, and graduate applications in cultural history show few signs of flagging. But they raise a critical issue: what will the next waves look like as the field's normative boundaries and epistemological centers continue to move? It is to these complex—and still open—questions about the future of U.S. cultural history that the remaining sections of this volume are addressed.

NOTES

1. Important exceptions include David Brion Davis, "Some Recent Directions in American Cultural History," *American Historical Review* 73 (February 1968), 696–707; Lawrence W. Levine, "The Historian and the Culture Gap," in *The Historian's Workshop*, ed. L. P. Curtis Jr. (New York: Knopf, 1970); and Levine, "The Unpredictable Past," *American Historical Review* 94 (June 1989); Jackson Lears and Richard Fox, introduction to *The Power of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Michael Denning, "The Socioanalysis of Culture: Rethinking the Cultural Turn," in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, by M. Denning (London: Verso, 2004); Jean-Christophe Agnew, "Lawrence Levine and the Opening of American History," *Journal of American History* 93 (December 2006); and Daniel Wickberg, "What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (June 2007): 661–84. The best assessments of the "cultural turn" by Europeanists include the following work: Roger Chartier, *Cultural History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988),

pt. 4; Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette* (New York: Norton, 1990); Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1997); and Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2004); William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

2. Topic-specific discussions of methodology have generally appeared in review essays, edited collections, and journal forums. Important review essays include Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (June 1985): 567–93; Thomas Bender, "Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History* 73 (June 1986): 120–36; Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 3–26. Prominent edited collections include Daniel Walker Howe, ed., *Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976); Richard W. Fox and Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption* (New York: Pantheon, 1983); Michael Frisch and Daniel Walkowitz, eds., *Working-Class America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Richard Butsch, ed., *For Fun and Profit* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); William R. Taylor, ed., *Inventing Times Square* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); James Gilbert, Amy Gilman, Donald Scott, and Joan Scott, eds., *The Mythmaking Frame of Mind* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993); Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Francis Couvares, ed., *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Karen Halttunen and Lewis Perry, eds., *Moral Problems in American Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, eds., *"Here, There, and Everywhere": The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000); Burton Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston, eds., *The Middling Sorts* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Major journal debates include those in the *Journal of American History* 74 (June 1987), with essays by David Thelen, Nell Irvin Painter, Richard Wightman Fox, Roy Rosenzweig, and Thomas Bender on the problems of synthesis; *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988), with essays by Leon Fink, John Patrick Diggins, Jackson Lears, George Lipsitz, and Mary Jo and Paul Buhle on the issue of hegemony; *International Labor and Working-Class History* 38 (Spring 1990), with essays by Michael Denning, Janice Radway, Luisa Passerini, William R. Taylor, and Adelheid von Saldern on theories of mass culture; *American Historical Review* (December 1992), with essays by Lawrence Levine, Robin Kelley, Natalie Davis, and Jackson Lears on the question of how to use popular culture as historical evidence.

3. Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

4. The classic statement on this issue comes from Raymond Williams, who described "culture as one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language." Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). See also Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Larry Brownstein, "A Reappraisal of the Concept of 'Culture,'" *Social Epistemology* 9,

no. 4 (1995): 311–51; George Steinmetz, *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 4–8; and William H. Sewell Jr., "The Concept(s) of Culture," in Bonnell and Hunt, *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, 35–61. Two of the best and earliest discussions of culture concepts on the U.S. side can be found in Warren Susman, *Culture as History* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); and Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

5. Most scholars associate the origins of this phrase with Lynn Hunt's edited collection of the same name, first published in 1989.

6. See Hunt, *New Cultural History*; Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994); Sewell, *Logics of History*; and Eley, *Crooked Line*. For an early survey of the influence of symbolic anthropology, see Ronald Walters, "Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians," *Social Research* 47 (Autumn 1980): 537–56.

7. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); Charles L. Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961); William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee* (New York: W. H. Allen, 1963); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); and Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). Clifford Geertz develops the concept of "thick description" in *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3–30. Michel Foucault's notion of "discourse" can be traced through a number of major works. See, especially, Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1973); *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979); and *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

8. We refer here to the U.S. field. On the European side, the historical analysis of culture goes back at least as far as Jacob Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1867). For a helpful overview of European developments from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, see Donald Kelley, "The Old Cultural History," *History of the Human Sciences* 9 (1996): 101–26.

9. Harry Elmer Barnes, "The New American History," *New Republic*, July 26, 1922, 259–60.

10. For an excellent overview of the interwar fascination with culture, see John S. Gilkeson Jr., "The Domestication of 'Culture' in Interwar America, 1919–1941," in *The Estate of Social Knowledge*, ed. JoAnne Brown and David K. van Keuren (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 153–74; the quotation from Robert Lynd is at 153. Boas's most prominent students included Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, whose 1934 work, *Patterns of Culture*, provided the most systematic explanation of Boas's holistic, nonracialized model.

11. Robert F. Berkhofer, "Clio and the Culture Concept in Historiography," in *The Idea of Culture in the Social Sciences*, ed. Louis Schneider and Charles M. Bonjean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 82. Warren Susman has similarly argued that this "special sense" of culture was one of the era's distinguishing intellectual features: "In sketching this structure [of the 1930s], no fact is more significant than the general and even popular discovery of the concept of culture.

Obviously, the idea of culture was anything but new in the 1930s, but there is a special sense in which the idea became widespread in the period. What had been discovered was 'the inescapable interrelatedness of... things so that culture could no longer be considered what Matthew Arnold and the intellectuals of previous generations had often meant—the knowledge of the highest achievements of men and art through history" (Susman, *Culture as History*, 153).

12. Our focus here is on early culturalists working specifically within the field of U.S. history. But it's important to note that Ware was not alone during the 1930s. Indeed, one could easily construct a parallel story in the emerging field of American studies featuring Constance Rourke and F. O. Matthiessen, both of whom published foundational works on early American culture around the very same moment as Ware's 1940 essay collection. On Rourke's contributions, see Joan Shelley Rubin, *Constance Rourke and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

13. Caroline F. Ware, ed., *The Cultural Approach to History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940). Ware used the phrase "bottom up" on pp. 73 and 273; another contributor to the volume, Constance McLaughlin Green, also used it on p. 275. For discussion of the volume's reception, see Gilkeson, "Domestication of 'Culture.'"

14. William L. Kolb, review of *The Cultural Approach to History* by Caroline Ware, *American Sociological Review* 7 (February 1942): 122–25, quotation at 123. We do not mean to suggest that the reception of Ware's *Cultural Approach to History* was uniformly positive. For a more hostile response, see the May 1941 issue of the *Historical Bulletin*.

15. Ware, *Cultural Approach to History*, 8.

16. Ibid, 9–10.

17. Thomas Cochran, "Forty Years of the Cultural Approach to History," presidential address to the Business History Association, 1980; http://www.hnet .org/~business/bhcweb/publications/BEHprint/v009/p0001-p0012.pdf (accessed February 11, 2008).

18. Private correspondence, as quoted in Ellen Fitzpatrick, "Caroline F. Ware and the Cultural Approach to History," *American Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (June, 1991): 192.

19. An interesting case here is that of Merle Curti, one of the contributors to Ware's 1940 AHA volume and the author—three years later—of the first modern synthesis of U.S. intellectual history, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1943). In retrospect, Curti's remarkably broad range of topics—which included the penny press, birth control, the YMCA, and the Ku Klux Klan, as well as numerous popular authors, such as George Lippard, Bruce Barton, and Huey Long—suggests some obvious methodological affinities with Ware's cultural approach. One can see continuities, as well, in Curti's opening statements on methodology: "The interrelationships between the growth of thought and the whole social milieu seem to be so close and have been so frequently neglected that this study of American life has tried consistently to relate that growth to the whole complex environment. It is thus not a history of American thought, but a social history of American thought, and to some extent a socio-economic history of American thought" (x).

20. Kelley, "Old Cultural History," 116. In this essay, Kelley argues that Ware's *Cultural Approach to History* has been "unacknowledged." Fitzpatrick makes a similar point when she notes that social and labor historians of the 1960s and 1970s

"reflected little, if any, recognition of the 1930s cultural approach." Fitzpatrick, "Ware and the Cultural Approach to History," 193. See also Ellen Fitzpatrick, *History's Memory: Writing America's Past, 1880–1980*, new ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 186–87; Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

21. Fitzpatrick, "Ware and the Cultural Approach to History," 193–94. One result, as Fitzpatrick notes, was that "no cadre of graduate students existed to carry on Ware's work and reputation" (193).

22. For a sophisticated and early example, see Levine, "Historian and the Culture Gap." We return to this issue in proposition 6.

23. Berkhofer, "Clio and the Culture Concept in Historiography," 75, 88–89.

24. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Knopf, 1948), vii–viii; David Potter, *People of Plenty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), xiii–xxvii.

25. Potter, *People of Plenty*, xxi. Another important exception to the postwar pattern of historiographical forgetting was Herbert Gutman, who twice cited Ware's 1924 labor study, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture*, in his own *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 28n21, 29n22. By the 1970s, however, Gutman's theoretical citations on "culture" focused more specifically on the work of Sidney Mintz, Clifford Geertz, and E. P. Thompson.

26. Daniel Joseph Signal, "Beyond Consensus: Richard Hofstadter and American Historiography," *American Historical Review*, 89, no. 4 (October 1984): esp. 988–1003. See Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), for Geertz's reconceptualization. On Hofstadter's shifting methods, see the following: Christopher Lasch, foreword to *The American Political Tradition*, by Richard Hofstadter (1948; repr., New York: Knopf, 1973); Michael Kazin, "Hofstadter Lives: Political Culture and Temperament in the Work of an American Historian," *Reviews in American History* 27 (June 1999): 334–48; and David S. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

27. See, for example, Henry Nash Smith's two prefaces in *Virgin Land* (1950; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); Joesph J. Kwiat and Mary Turpie, eds., *Studies in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960); Leo Marx, "American Studies: A Defense of an Unscientific Method," *New Literary History* 1, no. 1 (October 1969): 75–90; Barry Shank, "The Continuing Embarrassment of Culture: From the Culture Concept to Cultural Studies," *American Studies* 38, no. 2 (Summer 1997); Lucy Maddox, ed., *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

28. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953); Howard Mumford Jones, *Jeffersonianism and the American Novel* (New York: Teachers College, 1966); John Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Curti, *Growth of American Thought*; Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*. This pattern was mirrored in the cross-disciplinary training and appointments of many of the postwar period's most innovative Americanists. John William Ward is a prime example. As Barry O'Connell explained, Ward "earned his B.A. in American History and Literature from Harvard in 1947 and went on for his doctorate in English at the University of Minnesota. Immediately upon receiving his final degree in 1953 he joined the faculty in English at Prince-

ton University. He taught there until 1964, first in English, then in History and as chair of their special program in American Civilization. He began his long association with Amherst College in 1964 when he accepted a chair in History and American Studies." O'Connell, "In Memoriam: John William Ward," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986): 496. Similarly, Perry Miller became Professor of American Literature at Harvard in 1946 but was often described as the leading U.S. intellectual historian of the mid-twentieth century. Many of his best-known students (e.g., Bernard Bailyn and Edmund Morgan) were historians, as well.

29. Shank, "Continuing Embarrassment of Culture," 99. The most carefully developed argument along these lines came somewhat later. See Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (October 1972).

30. Henry Nash Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" *American Quarterly* 9, no. 2, pt. 2 (Summer 1957); Marx, "American Studies."

31. Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" 204–5.

32. Davis, "Recent Directions," 700, 703. An interesting parallel example is Richard Sykes, "American Studies and the Concept of Culture," *American Quarterly* 15, no. 2, pt. 2 (Summer 1963): S253–S270, which similarly mixes texts from multiple disciplines.

33. The useful phrase "culture concepts" has a long history across much of the social sciences. See, for example, Sykes, "American Studies and the Concept of Culture"; John William Ward, "History and the Concept of Culture," in *Red, White, and Blue*, by W. Ward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Berkhofer, "Clio and the Culture Concept in Historiography"; Sewell, "Concept(s) of Culture."

34. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961). As this list suggests, we use the term "artistic expression" in the broadest possible sense—as a category encompassing both elite and non-elite forms.

35. The most sophisticated discussion of this issue can be found in the work of Raymond Williams. See, for example, Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary," in *Resources of Hope*, ed. Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989).

36. Space constraints dictate that we can only point to some of the earliest and most widely influential examples for each of the culture concepts in the pages that follow. Other important studies in the arts and ideas tradition include John Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* (1965); Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society* (1966); Robert Toll, *Blacking Up* (1974); John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine* (1976); Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace* (1981); David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1981); Michael Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy* (1983); Mary Kelley, *Private Women, Public Stage* (1984); and Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart* (1986).

37. See, for example, Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno's landmark essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," first published as chap. 4 in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947). Other prominent examples of this pattern can be found in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: Free Press, 1957); and Norman Jacobs, ed., *Culture for the Millions? Mass Media in Modern Society* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1961). For an important early exception, see David Riesman, "Listening to Popular Music," *American Quarterly* 2 (1950): 359–71.

38. The first quotations in this sentence are from Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* ("unending sameness"); and Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). The other concepts in quotations ("cultural appropriation" and "strategic

positions to be won or lost") come from one of the foundational texts in British cultural studies: Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" (1979), in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). See also Michael Denning, "The End of Mass Culture," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 37 (Spring 1990): 4–18, which describes Hall's essay as foundational for the new scholarly consensus on mass culture that began to take shape during the mid-1980s. Prominent early examples of this approach include Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (1984); Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents* (1987); Andrew Ross, *No Respect* (1989); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages* (1990); Richard Butsch, ed., *For Fun and Profit* (1990); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon* (1991); Robert Allen, *Horrible Prettiness* (1991); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft* (1993); and Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture* (1996).

39. See, for example, Daniel Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America* (1974); Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism* (1976); Ronald Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal* (1976); Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order* (1978); Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out* (1981); Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream* (1982); Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (1984); Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (1984); Elliott Gorn, *The Manly Art* (1986); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (1986); and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound* (1988).

40. These quotations come from Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society*; Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), respectively. On the American side, the theoretical lineage goes back at least to Sydney Mintz's pathbreaking work of the early 1970s. See, for example, Mintz's foreword to *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Norman Whitten and John Szwed (New York: Free Press, 1970), 1–16; and Mintz, "Toward an Afro-American History," *Journal of World History* 13 (1971): 317–33. One can see the conceptual apparatus coming together (and migrating to other U.S. fields) in Gutman's long footnote on culture as "resource" in *Work, Culture, and Society*, 17n14. Beyond Mintz, those to whom Gutman owed conceptual debts included Eric Wolf, Zygmunt Bauman, Clifford Geertz, and E. P. Thompson (who was thanked as the central influence on the work as a whole). Other major examples in this mode include Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (1980); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will* (1983); Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside* (1983); Francis Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh* (1984); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman* (1985); Christine Stansell, *City of Women* (1986); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture* (1987); Richard Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis* (1990); and George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American* (1993).

41. The two terms in quotations here come from Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture* ("read like a text"), and Foucault, *Order of Things* ("discourse"). See n. 7 for additional key citations.

42. See, for example, Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*.

43. On this issue, see especially Alan Trachtenberg, "Myth and Symbol," *Massachusetts Review* 25 (Winter 1984): 667.

44. Smith, *Virgin Land* (1950), xi. The subsequent critiques and revisions of Smith's 1950 methodological statements were often launched by those from within the early American studies movement. See, for example, Smith, "Can American Stud-

ies Develop a Method?"; and Smith, 1969 preface to *Virgin Land* (1970), vii–x; Marx, "American Studies"; and Trachtenberg, "Myth and Symbol."

45. For early semiotic analyses in American studies, see Smith, *Virgin Land* (1950); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964); Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge* (1965); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence* (1974); and Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian* (1978). Pathbreaking cultural histories that treated signs and language as central topics include Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia* (1982); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct* (1985); Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power* (1986); Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (1989); David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness* (1991); Gail Bederman; *Manliness and Civilization* (1995); and Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs* (1996).

46. See, for example, John Higham, "The Cult of the 'American Consensus': Homogenizing our History," *Commentary* 27 (February 1959): 93–100; Levine, "Historian and the Culture Gap"; John P. Diggins, "Consciousness and Ideology in American History: The Burden of Daniel J. Boorstin," *American Historical Review* 76 (February 1971): 99–118; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Distant Shore* (Boston: Little Brown, 1989); Kaplan and Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism*; David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); K. Scott Wong, "The Transformation of Culture: Three Chinese Views of America," *American Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (June 1996); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Jose David Saldivar, *Border Matters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and John Carlos Rowe, ed., *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

47. On black cultural circulation, see, for example, Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1983); Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads* (London: Verso, 1994); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Hazel Carby, *Cultures in Babylon* (London, Verso, 1999); Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). On the intellectual exchanges that informed the concepts of Social Democracy and Pan-Africanism, see especially James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (New York: Beacon Press, 2002); and Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006).

48. See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Edward Herman and Robert McChesney, *The Global Media* (London: Cassell, 1997); Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); David Held, Anthony G. McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (London: Polity Press, 1999); Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (London: Verso, 2005); and Donald Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

49. In Levine's hands, spirituals, folk tales, work songs, and jokes emerged as both

powerful social tools (for living) and complex representational forms (whose stylistic conventions required their own modes of questioning).

50. The closest approximation to a cultural history essay was a piece on "anthropology and history."

51. Louis P. Masur, ed., *The Challenge of American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). This, too, grew out of a special issue of *Reviews in American History* published in March 1998. The essays we have in mind here were written by Kathleen Brown, James Goodman, Timothy Gilfoyle, David Hollinger, and George H. Roeder Jr., respectively.

52. See, for example, Howard Sitkoff, ed., *Perspectives on Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Melvyn Stokes, ed., *The State of U.S. History* (New York: Berg, 2002). For recent commentary on the movement of cultural history to the center of the U.S. field, see "The Practice of History," *Journal of American History* 90 (September 2003): 577–91. The commentators in this roundtable included Drew Gilpin Faust, Hendrik Hartog, David Hollinger, Akira Iriye, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Nell Irvin Painter, David Roediger, Mary Ryan, and Alan Taylor.

53. The rubrics in this list refer to the field of training and dissertation topic of each scholar. We base our claim of a generational cohort on the years in which they received their Ph.D.'s: Susman, 1958; Gutman, 1959; Huggins, 1962; Levine, 1962; and Smith-Rosenberg, 1968.

54. Levine's 1971 essay "The Historian and the Culture Gap" is a prime example of this shift. But one can also see the larger pattern at work in the introductions to Gutman's *Work, Culture, and Society*; Susman's *Culture as History*; Huggins's *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*; and Smith-Rosenberg's *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

55. The Levine quotation is from his introduction to *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6. The description of Gutman's working methods comes from Ira Berlin, "Introduction: Herbert Gutman and the American Working Class," in *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class* by Herbert Gutman (New York: Pantheon, 1987), 17. It is noteworthy that both assessments were written during the late 1980s, at a point when the field divisions were somewhat clearer and easier to describe.

56. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society*, xii.

57. Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 22, 29, 43. Much the same self-consciousness about combining and transcending older historiographical approaches runs through all of these scholars' work from the late 1960s and 1970s. See, for example, the acknowledgments to *Harlem Renaissance* in which Huggins thanks Henry May for teaching him about "the 1920s and American intellectual history," Kenneth Stampp for his inspiration in "Afro-American history," and Oscar Handlin for "opening his mind to social and cultural history" (ix). Or Susman's introductory remarks to *Culture as History* about the specific type of "cultural conflict" he hoped to explicate: "Historians, to be sure, have readily seen and studied other basic cultural conflicts in American history: between classes, between regions and sections, between urban and rural worlds, between native and immigrant populations, between races and ethnic groups, and more recently between genders considered as cultural groups. These essays propose another kind of cultural

conflict that offers additional perspectives on such work, and that, I believe, can help explain much of the dynamic conflict over values in our century"(xx).

58. Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review* (November–December 1973). This essay was reprinted in a number of places. See, for example, Raymond Williams, *Postmodernism, Materialism and Culture* (New York: Verso, 1980).

59. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Golancz, 1963), 10.

60. Denning, "Socioanalysis of Culture," 77. Williams's and Thompson's powerful influence on U.S. historians is a complex story that we can only begin to point to here. For more detailed genealogies of New Left historiography on the U.S. side, see the following (in addition to Denning): David Brody, "The Old Labor History and the New: In Search of an American Working Class," *Labor History* 20 (1979): 111–26; Mike Davis, "Why the U.S. Working Class Is Different," *New Left Review* 123 (1980): 3–46; David Montgomery, "To Study the People: The American Working Class," *Labor History* 21 (1980): 485–512; and Frisch and Walkowitz, *Working-Class America*. Major U.S. histories of the working class that explicitly acknowledge Williams's and Thompson's influence include Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will* (1983); Francis Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh* (1984); and Christine Stansell, *City of Women* (1986). Interesting transitional cases here are George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America* (1981), and Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (1986), both of which pushed the new labor history toward a more explicit focus on leisure and consumption. For helpful genealogies of New Left historiography on the European side, see Sewell, *Logics of History*, and Eley, *Crooked Line*.

61. In 1988, Christopher Johnson noted that the "detailed local study to illuminate the world of ordinary people" was the characteristic form of labor history. Johnson, "Back to Politics: Some Recent Work in North American Labor History, a Review Article," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30 (October 1988): 804–19, quotation at 806. Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). For a good example of Gutman's conceptual impact even among quantitative social and labor historians, see Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 418n2.

62. Studies of Lynn include Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); John T. Cumbler, *Working-Class Community in Industrial America: Work, Leisure, and Struggle in Two Industrial Cities, 1880–1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981). See also Alan Dawley and Paul Faler, "Working Class Culture and Politics the Industrial Revolution: Sources of Loyalism and Revolution," *Journal of Social History* 9 (1976): 466–80.

63. See, for example, Bruce Laurie, "Nothing on Compulsion: Life Styles of Philadelphia Artisans, 1820–1850," *Labor History* 15 (Summer 1974).

64. Leon Fink, "Looking Backward: Reflections on Workers' Culture and the Conceptual Dilemmas of the New Labor History," in *Perspectives in American Labor*

History, ed. Alice Kessler-Harris and J. Carroll Moody (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 13. Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle likewise noted in 1988 that the cultural turn in labor history was built on a long history: "Behind what we now call a 'cultural approach' to United States labor history stands a long and complex scholarly evolution." Buhle and Buhle, "The New Labor History at the Cultural Crossroads," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 151–57, quotation at 151.

65. For a survey that is a good measure more sympathetic to the "old labor history" than are most of the new labor historians, see Brody, "Old Labor History and the New."

66. The Port Huron Statement is quoted in James Miller, *Democracy in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 333. King is quoted in Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 206.

67. See, for example, Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962–1968* (New York: Praeger, 1982), which includes a chapter titled "Politics as Community"; and Jennifer Frost, *"An Interracial Movement of the Poor": Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

68. C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," *New Left Review,* no. 5 (September–October 1960).

69. See, for example, Sean Wilentz and responses, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 26 (1984): 1–36.

70. The quotations in this sentence are from, respectively, Howard Kimeldorf, "Bringing the Unions Back in (or Why We Need a New Old Labor History)," *Labor History* 32 (1991): 91–103; Johnson, "Back to Politics," 805; Alice Kessler-Harris, "A New Agenda for American Labor History: A Gendered Analysis and the Question of Class," in Kessler-Harris and Moody, *Perspectives in American Labor History,* 220. See also, for more general critiques of the "culturalist" bent of social history, Tony Judt, "A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians," *History Workshop Journal* 7 (1979): 66–94; Elizabeth Fox Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, "The Political Crisis of Social History: A Marxist Perspective," *Journal of Social History* (1976): 205–21; and Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?" *Social History* 5 (1980): 249–72.

71. We take this to be Alice Kessler-Harris's point when she writes, "in the end, we never struggled with the meaning of culture" ("New Agenda for American Labor History," 222).

72. Berlin, introduction to *Power and Culture,* 37.

73. This passage from Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" (1979), was widely quoted. See, for example, Andrew Ross, "Giving Culture Hell: A Response to Catherine Gallagher," *Social Text* 30 (1992): 98.

74. "Ironically, labor historians played major roles in both the emergence and opposition to the cultural turn in the United States," notes Daniel J. Walkowitz in "The Cultural Turn and a New Social History: Folk Dance and the Renovation of Class in Social History," *Journal of Social History* 39 (2006): 51.

75. Joan Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 31 (Spring 1987): 1–13; Denning, "End of Mass Culture."

76. Lears, "Concept of Cultural Hegemony"; Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1991): 781; Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992) 11–38; Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History*, 37(2003): 113–24.

77. Scott, "Language, Gender, and Working-Class History." For critical responses to Scott that emphasized the physical reality of class, see Bryan Palmer, "Response to Joan Scott," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 31 (Spring 1987): 14–23; and Dick Geary, "Labour History, the 'Linguistic Turn,' and Postmodernism," *Contemporary European History* 3 (2000): 445–62. Scott, "Evidence of Experience,", 781.

78. Scott, "Evidence of Experience," 779–80.

79. A key intervention in this regard was John Higham and Paul Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). Significantly, two of the volume's best-known essays—Neil Harris's "Iconography and Intellectual History: The Half-Tone Effect," and Warren Susman's "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture"—are now considered foundational works in U.S. cultural history. For an intriguing representation of the "crisis" within late 1970s intellectual history, see Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s essay in which he notes a general "flight" from synthesizing concepts such as "national character" and "the liberal tradition," as well as a growing consensus that anthropological conceptions of culture might serve as intellectual history's "salvation." Schlesinger, "Review Essay/Intellectual History: A Time for Despair?" *Journal of American History* 66 (March 1980): 888–93. For an additional view that cuts across U.S. and European historiography, see Robert Darnton, "Intellectual and Cultural History," in *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).

80. John Higham, introduction to Higham and Conkin, *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, xii. "Intellectual historians," Higham was quick to add, "had by no means ranged themselves solidly" behind these assumptions. "Some had been among the leading critics of the consensus approach; most were sensitive to its limitations" (xii).

81. Ibid., xv–xvi. Our point here is simply to chronicle one of the most important subdisciplinary debates that pushed in the direction of cultural history as an independent field of analysis. For helpful assessments of cultural and intellectual histories' symbiotic relationships, see Thomas Berber, "Intellectual and Cultural History," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); and Casey Nelson Blake, "Culturalist Approaches to Intellectual History," in *A Companion to American Cultural History*, ed. Karen Halttunen (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

82. Fox and Lears, *Culture of Consumption*.

83. Ibid., x.

84. The literature on these issues is too vast to summarize here. For explicit theoretical discussions and historiographical surveys, see especially Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75; Mary Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 51–65; the issue of *Gender and History* 1, no. 1 (1989): 1–6, 7–30; Louise Newman, "Critical Theory and the History of Women: What's at Stake in Deconstructing Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 2, no. 3 (1991); and

Newman, "Gender History/Women's History: Is Feminist Scholarship Losing Its Critical Edge," *Journal of Women's History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 89–128.

85. For prominent discussions of these debates, see Ann Sitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (Boston: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Judith Bennett, "Feminism and History," *Gender and History* 1, no. 3 (1989): 252–72; and Elizabeth Fox Genovese, *Feminism without Illusions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

86. Here again, the paper trail is enormous. For pathbreaking historical studies, see the following: Paula Giddings, *Where and When I Enter* (New York: Bantam, 1984); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman* (New York: Norton, 1985); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Evelyn Nawanko Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See also Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women's History," *Gender and History* 1, no. 1 (1989): 50–67. For multicultural critiques from within feminism, see Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1981); Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back* (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press 1983); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (London: Routledge, 1990); and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

87. On this question, see especially Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke," *Signs* 14 (Spring 1989): 610–33; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): 251–74; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

88. It is in precisely this sense that many 1970s historians spoke of tracing the "social origins" of seemingly non-economic topics (such as religious revivals). In the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of the book, Johnson, referring to both the tone and the methods he employed, noted that "much of this way of doing history is over with now." Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (1978; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), xv.

89. Paul E. Johnson, *Sam Patch, the Famous Jumper* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 228n13.

90. Not surprisingly, *Sam Patch* also draws upon a much wider range of theoretical insights, moving through scholarly literatures on celebrity, the sublime, parades, and visual culture as well as the work of many foundational thinkers in European cultural theory such as Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau, and Terry Eagleton.

91. As quoted in Kessler-Harris, "New Agenda for American Labor History," 224. See also Bender, "Wholes and Parts."

92. Eric H. Monkkonen, "Resurgence of Narrative History" (letter), *New York Times Book Review*, September 5, 1982, 21.

93. The case was beautifully made in William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature,

History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1347–76. See also Sarah Maza, "Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History," *American Historical Review* 101 (December 1996): 1493–1515; and John Demos, "History Can Be Literary," *New York Times*, December 30, 1998, A17.

94. Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982). Significantly, this book was published the same year as Monkkonen's critique of narrative history. For additional evidence of how the tide was shifting, see Melvyn Dubofsky's review of *Eugene V. Debs*, which singled out the "warm grace, power, and feeling" of the prose while emphasizing the analytical richness of Salvatore's account. Dubofsky, review, *American Historical Review* 88 (December 1983): 1336–37. A few years later, Salvatore went on to publish one of the earliest and most successful "microhistories" by an Americanist: *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber* (New York: Times Books, 1996).

95. These examples come from Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and Lawrence W. Levine, "William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 1 (February 1984): 34–66.

96. One important wellspring here was the historiographical work of Hayden White: *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). But one can also point to a number of innovative cultural histories that put these ideas into practice. See, for example, Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); and Davis, *Fiction in the Archives* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties* (New York: Knopf, 1991); John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive* (New York: Knopf, 1994); and Richard Wightman Fox, *Trials of Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

97. Kelley, *Race Rebels*; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Kimberley L. Phillips, *Alabama North: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915–45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). For commentary on the innovative breadth of these studies, see, for example, Deborah Gray White's review of *To 'Joy My Freedom*, in which she describes Hunter's work as "a sophisticated blend of labor, social and cultural history." White, review, *Journal of American History* 85 (June 1998): 290–91.

98. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 7–8. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). The goal here, as Kelley argues, was an expansion (as opposed to a supercession) of earlier historical understandings of "the political": "Like Scott, I use the concept of infrapolitics to describe the daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts that often inform political movements. I am not suggesting that the realm of infrapolitics is any more or less important or effective than what we traditionally understand to be politics. Instead, I want to suggest that the political history of oppressed people cannot be understood without reference to infrapolitics, for these daily acts have a cumulative effect on power relations" (8).

99. At this point, Levine held the Margaret Byrne Chair of U.S. History at the University of California–Berkeley, had been a MacArthur Foundation fellow, and was the newly elected president of the Organization of American Historians. Similarly, Davis held an endowed chair at Princeton University and was a former president of the American Historical Association (1988–89). Lears and Kelley were at somewhat earlier stages in their careers, but each had already developed a considerable national reputation as a leader in his respective specialty. On the back cover of Kelley's 1994 book *Race Rebels*, for example, Cornel West described Kelley "as the preeminent historian of black popular culture writing today."

100. Lawrence Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society," *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1370, 1373. U.S. cultural historians were not the only ones arguing about methodological questions during these years. For tough debates on the European side, see, for example, Roger Chartier, "Texts, Symbols, and Frenchness," *Journal of Modern History* 57, no. 4 (December 1985): 682–95; Robert Darnton, "The Symbolic Element in History," *Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 1 (March 1986): 218–34; James Fernandez, "Historians Tell Tales: Of Cartesian Cats and Gallic Cockfights," *Journal of Modern History* 60, no. 1 (March 1988): 113–27; Dominick LaCapra, "Chartier, Darnton, and the Great Symbol Massacre," *Journal of Modern History* 60, no. 1 (March 1988): 95–112; and Harold Mah, "Suppressing the Text: The Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre," *History Workshop Journal* 31 (1991): 1–20.

101. Levine, "Folklore of Industrial Society," 1372.

102. Robin D. G. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing the Folk," *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1402–3.

103. Ibid., 1404–5 (our emphasis).

104. T. J. Jackson Lears, "Making Fun of Popular Culture," *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1419.

105. Ibid., 1422–23. In the next sentence, Lears put the point more strongly: "Levine remains oblivious to the fundamental fact of cultural power: not its capacity to manipulate consciousness but its existence as a set of givens that form the boundaries of what the less powerful can do or can even (sometimes) imagine doing." (1423). Kelley made a similar point: "The question of power and access to the tools of production (as opposed to the receptacles and spaces for consumption) is surprisingly absent from Levine's discussion. . . . Although Levine cites test screenings and audience surveys as examples of consumers shaping popular film, this is not the same as having a direct voice in cultural production from inception to completion. Subordinate groups, especially in the period Levine is writing about, generally did not have access to the production of radio, television, and film in the same way they had access to churches, local clubhouses, and street corners" ("Notes on Deconstructing the Folk," 1404).

106. See, for example, Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1744–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983). Along these lines, it is noteworthy that Davis was by far the least critical respondent to Levine's essay in the December 1992 *AHR*.

107. The phrase "good to think with" comes from the cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. For an extended discussion of the phrase's resonances in Euro-

pean cultural history of the 1970s and early 1980s, see Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*, 3–7.

108. This historiographical rule of thumb applied equally to pre-industrial slave communities and twentieth-century consumers of commercial entertainment. Indeed, it was in just this spirit of taking seriously the localized reception practices of mass audiences that Levine argued: "We need more empirical research like that done by Herbert Gans in the Italian working-class homes of Boston's West End in the 1950s. Although the television was on constantly, actual viewing was highly selective and was structured to filter out themes inimical to the life of the peer group" ("Folklore of Industrial Society," 1380). In this sense, Levine's approach to the study of popular culture shared certain affinities with the eminent British social historian E. P. Thompson, who described his work as an effort to "rescue" the lost customs, values, and political choices of early modern workers from "the enormous condescension of posterity" (*Making of the English Working Class*, 12). The "condescension" that Thompson had in mind here derived in large part from the "prevailing orthodoxies" of postwar scholars, many of whom, he argued, treat the "great majority of working people" as "passive victims of laissez faire" or as "the data for statistical studies" (11).

109. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing the Folk," 1402. Such an approach, Kelley noted, had been essential to Stuart Hall's pathbreaking analysis in "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" (1979), as well as to Levine's previous book, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988). For additional discussion of this facet of Levine's scholarship, see Nan Enstad's essay in the present volume.

110. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing the Folk," 1403–4. Kelley's quotations here drew heavily on George Lipsitz's important 1990 collection, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*.

111. "History Frontiers: An Interview with Roy Rosenzweig by John H. Summers," *Left History* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2000); http://www.yorku.ca/lefthist/online/interview/rosenzweig.html (accessed November 3, 2006). A similar view was expressed by a labor historian in the mid-1980s: "Many of us ventured into labor history for political reasons . . . it was part of the whole project of changing something in the sixties" (as quoted in Kessler-Harris, "New Agenda for American Labor History," 221).

112. Simon During spoke of the decline of the "social-democratic power bloc." See Simon During, introduction to *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. S. During (London: Routledge, 1999), 16. The quotation is from Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

113. Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). This book was the second volume in the influential series The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics, edited by Stephen Greenblatt. Marx's comments appear on the University of California Press's Web site page for the book.

114. Phillip Fisher, introduction to *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations*, ed. P. Fisher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), quotations at vii, xix. Michaels's piece in the collection is "An American Tragedy: Or the Promise of American Life," 171–98.

115. See Jerold M. Starr, ed., *Cultural Politics: Radical Movements in Modern History* (New

York: Praeger, 1985). See, for example, Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); James L. Watson and Melissa L. Caldwell, eds., *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); Julia V. Emberly, *The Cultural Politics of Fur* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Keith Albert Sandifer, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). One early exception is a 1985 volume on art, but it had a different conception of cultural politics than it subsequently connoted.

116. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1998), see esp. chap. 2. See also Waldo E. Martin Jr., *No Coward Soldiers: Black Cultural Politics and Postwar America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

117. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, ed., *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2007). Another book of cultural keywords also omitted politics as a central category. See Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris, eds., *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Wiley, 2005).

118. The new section of During, *Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., titled "Culture-Political Economy and Policy," included two articles: Tony Bennett, "Putting Policy in Cultural Studies"; and Nicholas Garnham, "Political Economy and Cultural Studies." The quotation is from During's introduction (17).

119. For two deft assessments of Hofstadter's contributions to the concept of political culture, see Signal , "Beyond Consensus"; and Kazin, "Hofstadter Lives."

120. See, for example, "From Culture Concept to Cultural Studies," a special issue of *American Studies* 38 (Summer 1997).

121. Many of the ideas in this paragraph are influenced by two important articles by Robert Berkhofer Jr.: "Clio and the Culture Concept in Historiography"; and "A New Context for American Studies," *American Quarterly* 41 (1989): 558–613. Saul Cornell, "Moving beyond the Great Story: Postmodern Possibilities, Postmodern Problems," *American Quarterly* 50 (1998): 349–57.

122. John Armitage, Ryan Bishop, and Douglas Kellner, "Introducing Cultural Politics," *Cultural Politics: An International Journal* 1 (March 2005): 1.

123. As early as 1980, Ronald Walters noted this trend in "Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians." Four years later, Daniel Signal half-jokingly described Geertz as cited "so often by historians that it has become something of a professional embarrassment" ("Beyond Consensus," 998). This does not mean, however, that cultural historians of the period simply embraced Geertz in precisely the same way. Darnton and Chartier, for example, conducted a fairly heated debate on the question of Geertz's influence in a pair of essays. See Chartier, "Texts, Symbols, and Frenchness"; and Darnton, "Symbolic Element in History."

124. In 1989, for example, Lynn Hunt described the resonance of Foucault's theoretical work as "undeniably tremendous" among recent Europeanists. Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," in *New Cultural History*, 9. Yet the pattern was hardly restricted to Hunt's own field. Indeed, for much of the next decade, Foucault was a regular presence in scores of U.S. cultural histories, including Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch* (1990); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft* (1993); Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Psychiatric Persuasion* (1994); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (1995); George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (1995); Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue* (1996); and Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patri-*

archs (1996). This does not mean, however, that U.S. historians' engagements with Foucault began during the early 1990s. See, for example, David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); and Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1975).

125. For general introductions to this long-running body of work, see Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), esp. 1–56; and Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), esp. 33–55. Also helpful is Bill Schwartz's interview with Stuart Hall, "Breaking Bread with History: C. L. R. James and the Black Jacobins," *History Workshop Journal* (1998). By the early 1990s, a major surge of work on the U.S. side was taking shape, as well. See, for example, Pease and Kaplan, *Cultures of United States Imperialism.*

126. On antebellum "free produce" campaigns, see Lawrence Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," *American Quarterly* 57 (December 2004): 889–912. For the origins of the "citizen consumer," see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003). Other recent U.S. studies in this area include Gary Cross, *Kid's Stuff* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Cross, *An All-Consuming Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Strasser, McGovern, and Judt, *Getting and Spending*; Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Chin, *Purchasing Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Charles McGovern, *Sold American* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Key works on the European side include Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Roy Porter and John Brewer, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The Sex of Things* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

127. On these contrasting histories, see Michael Denning, "The Special American Conditions," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986); and Shank, "Continuing Embarrassment of Culture." Also helpful on the U.S. side are the individual histories of American studies programs at Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Minnesota, and Amherst College (among others) in *American Quarterly* 22, no. 2, pt. 2 (Summer 1970); and Maddox, *Locating American Studies.* On the British side, see Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1971–1979,* ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (London: Unwin Hyman, 1980); Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," in *Culture, Ideology, and Social Process: A Reader,* ed. T. Bennett, G. Martin, C. Mercer, and J. Woollacott (London: Batsford Academic and Educational in association with the Open University Press, 1981); Richard Johnson, "What Is Cultural Stud-

ies Anyway?" *Social Text* 16 (Winter 1986–87): 38–80; and Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies," in *Cultural Studies,* ed. Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992). For quotations, see Hall, "Cultural Studies and the Centre," 15–16.

128. Hall, "Cultural Studies and the Centre," 24.

129. Ibid., 20. Much of Hall's language here came from Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class.*

130. In Denning's genealogy (which builds on Trachtenberg's retrospective essay, "Myth and Symbol"), this less celebratory mode would form part of the "critical" American studies tradition that achieved an early "focus" in the work of F. O. Matthiessen. Denning, "Special American Conditions."

131. Denning, "Special American Conditions," 40.

132. Prominent examples include Lears, "Concept of Cultural Hegemony" (1985); George Lipsitz, "The Struggle for Hegemony," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 144–66; Buhle and Buhle, "New Labor History at the Cultural Crossroads" (1988); and Denning, "End of Mass Culture" (first published in 1990, but written for a 1988 conference).

133. Johnson, "On Agency."

134. Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

135. Eley, *Crooked Line,* 93.

136. For early examples of U.S. historians' reactions to Jones's work, see Frisch and Walkowitz, *Working-Class America.*

137. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 83–86.

138. Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Scott Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Further evidence of this pattern can be found in many of the most interesting and important U.S. histories from the past few years. See, for example, Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Klein, *Cold War Orientalism;* Barry Shank, *A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and American Business Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and David Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). A related but somewhat less serious development can be found in the growing numbers of trade titles on unconventional topics describing themselves as "cultural histories." See, for example, Jim Dawson, *Who Cut the Cheese: A Cultural History of the Fart* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1999); and Andy Lechter, *Shroom: A Cultural History of the Magic Mushroom* (New York: Ecco, 2007).

139. These speculations were ventured by Hollinger, "Practice of History," 588–90.