

U.S. and Pakistani Perspectives on American Studies: Status and Future Directions

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Vernon Louis Parrington is frequently considered the founder of American Studies. His 1927 three-volume books, entitled, “Main Currents in American Thought,” established the groundwork for the launch of this discipline. These books integrated the methodologies of historical research and literary criticism when describing and analyzing what was thought to be traditionally American. Soon after the publication of Parrington’s books, the discipline of American Studies began to emerge in the 1930s with some additional roots in classes offered in American Civilization at Yale University and Harvard University in the United States (U.S.). The focus of this field has become increasingly interdisciplinary embracing the entire spectrum of the humanities along with the arts and to some extent the social sciences. Moreover, the field’s emphasis now includes, for instance, studying race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Additionally, the discipline’s emphasis on the importance of understanding culture and context when examining what is America and American has evolved over time. The field also has taken a keen interest in how America and so called “American values and actions” are and have influenced individuals, cultures, and structures outside of America.

Not surprisingly, the discipline of American Studies has emerged in institutions of higher education worldwide. This development has enriched the scholarship and pedagogy linked

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to this field by offering a broader and multinational, diverse lens to investigating critical lines of relevant research and contributions to exploring and building salient assumptions and theory.

Consistent with this so called, “internationalization” of American Studies, in 2012, Ball State University (BSU) located in Muncie, Indiana-USA was awarded funds by the U.S. Department of State to implement a three-year project designed to raise the capacity of the Area Study Centre for Africa, North and South America at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) in Islamabad, Pakistan to provide a high-quality postgraduate program in studies of the U.S. One objective of this partnership between BSU and the QAU Area Study Centre for Africa, North and South America was to collaborate on the publication of a special issue of the *Pakistan Journal of American Studies*. This journal issue represents the fulfillment of this objective. Each of the seven articles in this current issue entitled, “U.S. and Pakistani Perspectives on American Studies: Status and Future Directions,” was written collaboratively by authors representing Pakistan and the U.S. As scholarship in American Studies draws from many disciplines (e.g., Anthropology, Literature, History, Political Science, International Relations, Art, Music, Film, Theatre), historic and current societal events and trends, research methodologies, and creative outlets (e.g., social media, graphic novels, pop culture), this special issue includes articles that reflect this rich diversity.

In the first article, “Security studies as an introduction to American Studies in Pakistan,” Sadia Sulaiman and Kenneth M. Holland explore the question of whether security studies is a particularly attractive portal for young people in Pakistan to enter into a serious investigation of the U.S., including its politics, history, economy, literature and arts. The second article in this issue, “China as a threat to the U.S.: Myth or reality?” written by Steven R. Hall and Hafiza Sarwat Fatima also focuses on security, though from a very different vantage point. That is, how theories of international relations can be used to explain whether China’s rise to power constitutes a

threat to the U.S. or to the stability of the global order. The next article authored by David J. Roof and Sadaf Ali, “Imaginative geographies and homeland insecurities: An American T.V. drama’s portrayal of Pakistan and the discourse of U.S. security mechanisms in the post 9/11 era,” also addresses security in an even different way. Relying on an interpretative phenomenological analysis, this paper examined the fourth season of the T.V. series *Homeland*, a show that dramatizes the U.S. CIA’s anti-terrorism operations.

The fourth article in this issue, “The influence of U.S. jurisprudence on the Supreme Court of Pakistan,” written by Umar Rashid and Amna Rashid provides a comprehensive examination of how some laws in the U.S. have been used by the judges of the Pakistani Supreme Court when making their decisions. The fifth article, “Influences and approaches shaping the architectural roots of Pakistan,” authored by Quratulain Asghar, Fatima Javeed, and Zille Ali examines an extremely different way the U.S. has affected Pakistan. In specific, this paper discusses the important buildings designed by U.S. architects, the inspirations and influences that led to these designs, and the factors that affected and, at the same time, helped the evolution of contemporary Pakistani architecture.

Elizabeth N. Agnew and Mansoor Abbasi wrote the next article, “The academic study of religion in the U.S. and Pakistan: A comparative perspective” in this special issue. This paper focuses more narrowly on the constitutional roots, and sometimes contested status of the academic study of religion in the U.S. It does so with a Pakistani audience in mind, and with a concluding inquiry into the possibilities and limits of the study of religion in the political and educational context of Pakistan. The seventh and final article in this issue, “American culture and Afghan identity in Khalid Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*,” was authored by Sameena Nauman and James J. Connolly. It examines this book’s treatment of America and the main character’s Americanization to demonstrate the novel’s refusal to situate this individual entirely within one society and to refute claims that it offers little more than Western condescension.

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It is our hope that the articles in this special issue provide a unique multinational perspective in how American Studies can be conceptualized and investigated when relying on a historic, international relations, literary, and/or culture frame of reference. It also is our hope that this issue will stimulate further collaboration among scholars from Pakistan and the U.S. as well as scholars from other nations interested in American Studies. The pursuit of such endeavours will not only expand the diversity of inquiry and contribute to new discoveries in American Studies, it will offer opportunities to increase cross-cultural understanding of what America means, what it means to be American, and how America may influence persons, cultures, and structures outside of its borders.

We invite your responses to the articles that appeared in this special issue and we welcome future articles related to American Studies co-authored by scholars from Pakistan and other countries.