



The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture (Convergences: Inventories of the Present)

By Amy Kaplan

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The United States has always imagined that its identity as a nation is insulated from violent interventions abroad, as if a line between domestic and foreign affairs could be neatly drawn. Yet this book argues that such a distinction, so obviously impracticable in our own global era, has been illusory at least since the war with Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century and the later wars against Spain, Cuba, and the Philippines. In this book, Amy Kaplan shows how U.S. imperialism--from "Manifest Destiny" to the "American Century"--has profoundly shaped key elements of American culture at home, and how the struggle for power over foreign peoples and places has disrupted the quest for domestic order.

The neatly ordered kitchen in Catherine Beecher's household manual may seem remote from the battlefields of Mexico in 1846, just as Mark Twain's Mississippi may seem distant from Honolulu in 1866, or W. E. B. Du Bois's reports of the East St. Louis Race Riot from the colonization of Africa in 1917. But, as this book reveals, such apparently disparate locations are cast into jarring proximity by imperial expansion. In literature, journalism, film, political speeches, and legal documents, Kaplan traces the undeniable connections between American efforts to quell anarchy abroad and the eruption of such anarchy at the heart of the empire.

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Editorial Review

Review

Kaplan does a beautiful job of reintegrating the "domestic" with the "foreign" in American history, and of demonstrating the persistent, ubiquitous imperialist logic which has informed, inflected, or sometimes fully shaped "domestic" social relations, cultural productions, and utterances of all sorts. In moving from Beecher to Twain to Theodore Roosevelt to Griffith to Du Bois, Kaplan not only offers up original and provocative readings of some very familiar texts (across a number of genres), but she highlights an important thread which runs through the entire period from Manifest Destiny to the WWI years. Texts like *Huckleberry Finn* and *Citizen Kane* will never look quite the same. (Matthew Frye Jacobson, Professor of American Studies at Yale University)

Over the past decade, Amy Kaplan has led the way in integrating the field of empire into our understanding of American literature and culture. The contributions of this superb book are many. It compels us to reexamine dominant paradigms and topics in American Studies--from sentimental domesticity, to Twain's stature as a national icon, to the "splendid little war" of 1898, to the rise of modern film--all in the light of empire. Each and every chapter has an eye-opening prospect, but the cumulative view is breathtaking. (Christopher P. Wilson, Professor of English at Boston College)

In six carefully crafted case studies--ranging from American notions of Manifest Destiny in the 1840s through Mark Twain's international travels to late-19th-century popular romances like Charles Major's "When Knighthood Was in Flower" and Mark Johnson's "To Have and To Hold"; journalistic accounts of the Spanish-American War; and a concluding account of Du Bois's incisive remapping of the imperial world in his 1920 book "Darkwater"--Kaplan travels freely over a wide swath of American cultural history. Along the way she casts a theoretically sophisticated eye on disparate texts--some familiar to American readers, many not...The result is a challenging, provocative work that makes a persuasive case for the inextricable--and complicated--connections between American notions of national identity and US foreign policy. (James A. Miller *Boston Globe* 2003-02-02)

[Kaplan] has a big important idea: the outside world mattered intensely and intimately to Americans from the nineteenth century onward. Through writings such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's writing for housewives, Mark Twain's dispatches from Hawaii, and W. E. B. Du Bois's fiction, Kaplan traces how America's foreign relations shaped popular consciousness at a time when conventional wisdom has Americans slumbering in isolation and ignorance of the wider world. Kaplan is rightly fascinated with the contradictory impulses in American culture: we want the whole world to be like us, but being different and unique is part of who we are. We cannot have it both ways, but we endlessly try, and Kaplan provides real insight into the ways this conflicted agenda continues to shape American identity. (Walter Russell Mead *Foreign Affairs*)

Through insightful readings of texts from film to fiction, travelogue to memoir, Kaplan writes empire into the cultural history of the U.S., and America into the transnational history of empire. With a keen eye for contradiction, Kaplan shows how the endeavour to maintain boundaries--between U.S. and world, domestic and foreign--works constantly against its own undoing. (Susan Carruthers *Times Higher Education Supplement* 2004-05-21)

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About the Author

Amy Kaplan is Edward W. Cane Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *The Social Construction of American Realism*.

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