

## Editor's Introduction

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This special issue of *The Southern Quarterly*, “The South in a Global Context,” seeks to explore the ways the South has always been and continues to be at the crossroads of a national and transnational world. The essays in this issue open up new ways of thinking about the region, exploring the multicultural influences that have shaped the area historically, in relation to African, Asian, Latino, and European economic and social contacts, and currently, in relation to immigration and the changing economies of the area. Indeed, the South, where competing Spanish, French, and English colonization dramatically shaped its history, arose from the nexus of transatlantic trade – a nodal point in the movement of peoples, slaves, and natural resources – connecting Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and the United States. Its port cities, then as now, continue to be the gateways for hemispheric and international goods. And, decade over decade, new immigrants make the South their home enriching the area with new customs, foodways, and traditions. The essays found here reveal the trajectory of global contacts that are often overlooked because of national, sectarian conceptions of the area’s history and demographics.

Emerging from this global context, the contributors to this issue explore the ways that Southern, Hemispheric, Transatlantic, and African American studies provide new perspectives for reading and understanding the historical, cultural, and literary influences of the South. Gary Helm Darden’s essay, which opens this issue, challenges us to rethink the terms by which the history of the Jim Crow South has been argued. By repositioning that history in the broader context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century imperialism and decolonization, Darden’s transnational reading resituates the political and cultural development of the South within a “global project ... central to the structure of the European World Order.” Amanda M. Page also applies a transnational approach in her essay on James Weldon Johnson’s autobiographical novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912). By tracing the influences of Latino culture, the writings of Cuban poet and revolutionary José Martí, and Johnson’s own upbringing in the Cuban-American communities of Jacksonville, Florida, Page argues for a hemispheric reading of not only Johnson’s writings but also the development of his political consciousness.

Turning more explicitly to literary analysis, the essays by Crystal Parikh, John W. Lowe, Catherine Seltzer, and Frank Cha all explore the intersections of the literary imagination and the South as both place and cultural signifier. Crystal Parikh, through a postcolonial and psychoanalytic lens, reveals the ways Susan Choi's novel, *The Foreign Student* (1998), provides an alternative yet complicit narrative of civil rights viewed from the perspective of a Korean student grappling with the legacies of "two Souths" – post-war South Korea and the southern United States. Examining Richard Wright's travel writings, particularly *Pagan Spain* (1957), John Lowe uncovers the ways "Wright sought a new posture in the world as a kind of public intellectual, and [how] he increasingly saw connections among oppressed peoples of the world because of his own background and consequent mode of social perception," both arising from his racial experience in the South. Catherine Seltzer, also exploring the South's cultural influence on writers even when they are writing elsewhere, reads Elizabeth Spencer's novella, *The Light in the Piazza* (1960), as an interrogation of the South's literary tradition and the southern writer's complex relation and response to that tradition. As interesting counterpoint, Frank Cha's essay presents three works of "Southern Literature" written by and about Asian Americans. Novels by Cynthia Kadohata, Monique Thuy-Dung Troung, and Mary Gardner reveal the frequently overlooked experience of Asian American children as they cope with and seek to assimilate within the already racially contested South.

Closing the issue is Anthony J. Stanonis's "global" account of New Orleans's culinary history. Stanonis, a New Orleans native now teaching in Belfast, Ireland, traces the Crescent City's emergence as a gastronomic capital whose reputation began with its multinational settlement and spread by its unique position and reputation as a transnational city. More connected to the Caribbean and Africa than the United States, New Orleans's foodways, along with Jazz, have become its most important and persistent export. As Stanonis shows, "N'Awlins" cuisine can now be found in cities circling the globe, from Toronto to Tokyo.

That the South can be, and should be, explored and understood in a global context is provocative yet to be expected. The South's international and transnational history began with the discovery of the New World. The contested point of European colonization, the transfer point of hemispheric trade and military expansion, and the meeting point of global markets and exchange, the South's complicated social, cultural, racial, and literary legacies and traditions have always been and remain vibrant and productive sources of both national consciousness and schol-

arly investigation. As the following lines from Joel Barlow's epic poem *The Columbiad* (1807) imagines, then as now the Mississippi becomes the New World Nile, streaming outward toward the world.<sup>1</sup> The poet sings:

... lawless Mississippi, now who slimes  
And drowns and desolates his waste of climes,  
Ribb'd with your dikes, his torrent shall restrain,  
And ask your leave to travel to the main;  
Won from his wave while rising cantons smile,  
Rear their glad nations and reward their toil.

Thus Nile's proud flood to human hands of yore  
Raised and resign'd his tide-created shore,  
Call'd from his Ethiop hills their hardy swains,  
And waved their harvests o'er his newborn plains;  
Earth's richest realm from his tamed current sprung;  
There nascent science toned her infant tongue,  
Taught the young arts their tender force to try,  
To state the seasons and unfold the sky;  
Till o'er the world extended and refined,  
They rule the destinies of humankind.

(Book VIII. 415-430).

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Joel Barlow, *The Columbiad: A Poem* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Milligan, 1825), p.282.