ESSAY

Victorian Studies and the American State

EMILY STEINLIGHT

What has the nineteenth century done for us lately? Recent scholarship has dynamized the relationship between that era and ours, reanimating from new angles Hayden White's claim that the nineteenth century "does not yet—for us—belong to 'the past'" (120).[1] If for White in 1987, "Marx, Freud, and Durkheim" could serve as shorthand for the period's persistence even in scholars' methods of studying it (127), Zachary Samalin links the durability of its theories to the enduring structures that formed them, from the nation-state to the infrastructures of empire and global capitalism ("Map" 426–30). We dwell in its footprint, wide as a world reshaped by imperial extraction, Atlantic slavery, and fossil-fueled industry, long as the present when, "in both metaphorical and brutely chemical senses," Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer stress, we breathe "the carbon-saturated atmosphere" of the Victorian age (3). Such claims advance the V21 Collective's call, in 2015, to look beyond cultural-particularist interests in Victorian Britain and find the field's stakes in the presence of the nineteenth century. Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Alicia Christoff, and Amy Wong extend this aim in 2020 while mounting a contrasting critique of Victorianists' implicitly white universalism and inattention to race. Reckoning with the aftermath of racialization, slavery, and anti-Blackness in a call for "undisciplining" inspired by Christina Sharpe, they insist that "we need, as Sharpe says, to sit with 'the past that is not past'" (Chatterjee et al., Introduction 370, 371). Such work reconsiders the nineteenth century from the perspective of the twenty-first, whether as its source, obverse, secret double, or unfinished business.

Engagements with afterlives traverse disciplines; challenges to pseudo universalism and efforts to decolonize knowledge have long been elemental to ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, and Black

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studies, and experiments in anachronism have emerged from multiple fields including medieval studies and queer theory. Yet the nineteenth century claims peculiar primacy in analyses of the present, whether in its planetary aftermath—per Andreas Malm's ecohistorical account of petrocapitalism, "*the causal power of the [British industrial] past inexorably rises*" as climate change accelerates (9)—or its felt epistemic hangover in broad debates on interpretation. Routine alignment of Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud with depth hermeneutics makes it possible, as Samalin suggests, to read the method wars as a tacit referendum on the nineteenth century ("Plumbing" 389). Bruno Latour's claim that critique has "run out of steam," as Anna Kornbluh notes, cements this in figuratively tying theory to fossil fuel ("Extinct Critique" 767) and thus to the wished obsolescence of a steam-powered era. As its material pressures on the present attest, one cannot think away the nineteenth century even in contending with its legacies. Neither can attention to a prior era's distinctness bracket its own contemporary conditions. These are both constraints and possibilities.

Presentism names a range of interpretive errors: generalizing current norms backward; conversely, ahistorically exceptionalizing present conditions; or treating one's own time as inevitable outcome. Strategic presentism, by contrast, means "awareness that our interest in the period [we study] is motivated by certain features of our own moment" (V21 Collective) rather than disinterested curiosity about a past culture viewed as if from outside history. Though sometimes positioned as antihistoricist, it is arguably most effective as a prompt to historicize the present and to recognize the historical contingencies of interpretation. New conditions sharpen or occlude continuities and ruptures; ongoing struggles change the uses of the past. Such is clear, for instance, in the impact of the George Floyd uprisings on many disciplines. Efforts to "undiscipline" Victorian studies vitally revise its stakes, sources, and timelines. And the turn to the present has energized the subfield in stressing, as the V21 manifesto asserted, that "in finance, resource mining, globalization, imperialism, liberalism, and many other vectors, we *are* Victorian, inhabiting, advancing, and resisting the world they made" (V21 Collective). But who—and where—are "we"?

Without question, Victorian studies is shaped by scholars across continents, for much the same reasons that the Victorian era's afterlives have been (unevenly) globally lived. Critical insight into the British Empire's wide legacies enables Priya Joshi, analyzing the postcolonial "half-life" of Victorian institutions such as Connemara Library and the post-1991 recurrence of Victorian preoccupations with economic mobility in local negotiations with Chennai's "global" identity, to redefine Victorian not as a period but "as a *longue durée* phenomenon with a centre of gravity now located in India" (23); it enables Simon Gikandi to analyze a postcolonial Black Victorianism stretching from Alexander Crummell to C. L. R. James; it animates Sukanya Banerjee, Ryan Fong, and Helena Michie's experiments in "widening" without homogenizing the nineteenth century (Banerjee et al.); and it prompts Nasser Mufti to read anticolonial thinkers including James, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Eric Williams—survivors and "insiders" of a Victorian world—as its first theorists, for whom Victorian culture composed a "field of intelligibility" for decolonization (395). If the era's legacy of Western bourgeois "overrepresentation" as the human, in Sylvia Wynter's terms (328), persists in Victorian studies' own "fantasy of an unmarked universality" (Chatterjee et al., "Undisciplining"), so too does the dialectical potential of universalism to be turned toward anticolonial uses, as Gikandi and Dustin Friedman suggest.[2] But when scholars debate the methods and stakes of Victorian studies today, a striking fact recedes into the background: those interventions, like much of the institutional infrastructure of the field as it formed in the postwar era, emerge from a predominantly US context. Perhaps this geography is more consequential than such debates have yet acknowledged.

A couple basic questions motivate the reflection on past presentisms that follows: What did the idea of Victorian culture offer scholars based in the United States who institutionalized its study in the late 1950s and early 1960s? How did their own political and

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institutional situations shape their narratives of the period? Renewed interest on both sides of the pond in constructing a cohesive Anglo-American culture owed plenty to World War II military alliance and postwar aid (Winston Churchill himself contributed writing to this trend in his 1958 volume *The Great Democracies*), and British training shaped the interests of some postwar humanists. But rather than trace British influences, I want to consider more critically the Americanness of Victorian studies. That context for the field's flowering has much to tell contemporary scholars in and around Victorian studies—particularly those employed in the United States—about the dialectics of universality and particularity still in motion in debates on method, about its interdisciplinary commitments and class alignments, and about their implications for presentism and "undisciplining." If one wants, for instance, to understand why race and empire were deemphasized in Victorianist literary scholarship, I would suggest that this can be partly explained by Victorian culture's function as historical analogy for mid-century US global hegemony, informing the imagination of a particular class invested in statecraft at its Cold War apogee. My claim, in short, is that the study of Victorian literature is contingent on that field's relation to the American state.

In part because of its British focus (as against American studies' initial mission to autonomize American from British culture), and in part, ironically, because of its self-conception as a global endeavor, Victorian studies has been less attuned to its institutional foundations in the postwar United States.[3] Scholars of area studies, American studies, creative writing, and the history of criticism in the United States have fruitfully reckoned with their disciplines' historical ties to the Cold War state.[4] And scholars of postcolonial studies, Black studies, and modernism have analyzed how cultural works and movements they study intersected with American geopolitical interests.[5] Interventions in Victorian studies geared toward broadening its geography sometimes conflate the United States with Britain as a uniform Anglo-American imperial core; while decentering metropolitan cultures yields valuably contrasting accounts of the era, this conflation can occlude the specific impact of US institutions on knowledge of the nineteenth century. As we face what the damaged present inherits from that past, we might pause to situate Victorian studies' launch at a formative moment in between and to locate its dominant site in a postwar world system. If one "cannot wish away [Britain's] political centrality" to the nineteenth century even in taking a multisited approach, as Banerjee, Fong, and Michie stress (Banerjee et al. 3), neither can one wish away America's centrality to the twentieth and to the discipline's self-conception.

Further, reckoning with Victorian studies' legacies of empire and whiteness now may entail confronting not just attachments to British imperial culture but also entanglements with distinctly American intellectual projects in global development. Framed around "modernization," such projects crafted a nineteenth-century history of the postwar present, and they rendered analysis of the Victorian era contingent on the geopolitics of postcolonial transition as seen from the United States. Decolonization was, in a basic sense, Victorian studies' historical condition of possibility and a relay for some striking disavowals and sleight of hand within the field's US institutional core. Mid-century American interests in Victorian culture may clarify how British and US empires differently structure the positions from which scholars study the nineteenth century and its aftermath. Historicizing any field in this way seems crucial to recognizing that contemporary interests, geographies, and institutional and material determinants shape what is readable in past texts and events. It also illuminates the altered relation between higher education and the state as a condition for theories of the present in many disciplines.

If recent interventions seem like a swerve from Victorianists' putative cultural-particularist orientation toward an English past, the turn to the present—with a predominantly American frame of reference—has precedents in the field's early days. Seeking insight into a present of transition, as many understood it, contributors to *Victorian Studies* (*VS*) from its start reference US foreign policy, the civil rights struggle, and the space race as they

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reflect on Victorian culture. These indexes of contemporaneity are indeed key to the enterprise of making the Victorian age into a past worthy of comprehensive study. They validate Matthew Rowlinson's shrewd recognition of the field's reflexivity: "in studying the Victorian era" as a test case for modernity, Rowlinson argues, "the discipline of Victorian studies claimed to study itself" (245). Such political contexts are the stakes of Steven Marcus's 1963 claim that "history can only be a study of the present, the past itself being in fact one mode which the present takes" (7)—a claim that retains its force even as the lessons it derives for "modernity" construct a genealogy from a British past to an implicitly American present.

Nor did the institutional geography of Victorianist scholarship go unremarked after the 1956 founding of its flagship journal (*VS*) at Indiana University. "Why the immense effort and involvement, and accomplishment, of American scholarship in Victorian studies?" asked John Henry Raleigh in a review of the edited collection *1859: Entering an Age of Crisis* (303–04). While Asa Briggs and David Daiches would launch Victorianist curricula at the University of Sussex's School of English and American Studies, and Raymond Williams's 1958 *Culture and Society* (not framed as "Victorian studies") would become a classic, the outsize footprint of US research and publication was conspicuous. Noting in 1960 that the bulk of current scholarship and the preeminent new journal issued from the United States rather than Britain, Raleigh cites both practical reasons (an influx of funding to US universities) and more field-specific intellectual justifications in the form of historical analogy: "there are, whatever the differences, great similarities between Victorian England and twentieth-century America." Shifting silently from analogy to genealogy (and eliding national markers in so doing), he contends that "circa 1800–1950 constitutes a kind of unit" distinct from "all previous ages" (304).

Other assessments of Victorian England's postwar American afterlife give the field's rise in the United States a revealingly triumphalist spin. The *Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*), quoted both by Raleigh and by the editors of *VS*, declared in 1957 that "the Victorian age is now in the high noon of its ascendancy." Announcing the journal's founding, the *TLS* marvels from across the Atlantic at "a singular cultural transaction whereby, in effect, Great Britain has undertaken to lend-lease to the United States nothing less than the Victorian Age in its entirety" ("Lend-Lease"). Their choice of metaphor assigns large political significance to this cultural bequest. The 1941 Lend-Lease Act, passed before direct American engagement in World War II, set new terms for Franklin Roosevelt's cost-free provision of munitions, aircraft, and warships to bolster the war effort. Previously, US warships had been lent under the 1940 Destroyers-for-Bases deal in exchange for ninety-nine-year leases on British bases in the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua, Trinidad, and British Guiana and for US military use of Bermuda and Newfoundland; the Lend-Lease Act made this and further aid repayable in joint action. The *TLS* thus narrates the unconditional lease of British cultural history to the United States as a return on military investment, a transfer of stewardship mirroring the transfer of imperial assets.

Key to this narrative of the field—and to the uses of a Victorian past for another present—is thus not only the global ascendancy of the United States but also a grand vision of intellectual labor equated with its rise. Here one can start to weigh the postwar university's impact on scholars' picture of the era. To begin, which Victorians are "*the* Victorians"? For Michael Wolff, cofounder of *VS*, England's "literate elite" define the culture ("Victorian Study" 62), and for Walter E. Houghton, strictly "the middle and upper classes," elsewhere dubbed "the articulate classes." *The Victorian Frame of Mind* parenthetically states that "the working class as such is not here under consideration" (Houghton xvi)—excluding most of Britain's and the empire's population. More specifically, the figure of the intellectual predominates even as scholars claim representativeness as a criterion. Gertrude Himmelfarb centers the "representative minds of an age" (Introduction x)—one whose "truly momentous events," she maintains, "were not crises or riots but books and ideas" (*Spirit* 9).

Why the routine turn to intellectuals and frequent invocation of "minds"? This may owe less to

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the Victorian era than to the context of its study. It can be partly illuminated by Stephen Schryer's account of "literary intellectuals' relationship to the new class of university-educated knowledge workers" at the postwar moment when this "professional-managerial class became the fastest growing occupational stratum" (2). The professional-managerial class (PMC), lately a shopworn term of derision,[6] is an anomalous formation unique to advanced capitalism from the 1890s on. As analyzed by Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich in the 1970s, it was marked from the start by a contradictory class position "distinct from, and often antagonistic to, that of the capitalist class" despite their "ultimate concordance of interests"—the PMC being responsible for the social reproduction of class relations through education, media, science, and administration, yet endowed with rare professional autonomy that could set it at odds with capital (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, "Professional-Managerial Class" 22).[7] While at earlier moments it exercised that autonomy variously to vie with the ruling class for technocratic control of industry and the state (notably in engineering and management science) or to pursue activist goals within civic and social institutions (schools, social work, journalism, the culture industry),[8] this class adjusted its sense of purpose in the postwar era. Schryer identifies among mid-century knowledge workers a belief that "critical intelligence has a mysterious, indirect impact on the society around it. Rather than building institutions, the intellectual improves the culture, driving the expanding new class to adopt more complicated patterns of thinking associated with . . . professionalism itself" (6). Postwar US professors' notions of Victorians' intellectual heroism thus could be read basically as idealized negotiations of their own status.

Their interests in Victorian higher education are anachronistically shaded by this self-positioning: a 1959 article on British universities' role in forming the "class of educated men who set the tone of opinion on political, religious, and cultural subjects," or "the national intelligentsia," narrates the growth of a new Victorian professional class in terms that seem to allegorize its present (Roach 131). Describing developments that demanded "innumerable new managerial positions . . . to manage the affairs of a far more complex social and economic order," its author concludes that Oxford and Cambridge met this demand from the 1860s on, and that "the academic mind" subsequently shaped public opinion and policy as never before (134, 140). This epic of the Victorian intelligentsia's sweeping influence seems hyperbolic given the vanishingly small percentage of Victorians who attended university, but it might describe the PMC's sharp ascent in the late 1950s, its "golden age": "With Sputnik in 1957 and Kennedy's election in 1960," the Ehrenreichs note, "the prestige and public visibility of the class reached new heights" ("New Left" 8). If this moment prompted intellectuals' belief in the unique social agency of mental labor, Schryer finds literary studies' version of that fantasy diverging both from former interventionist aims and from data-driven social science. Critics like Lionel Trilling, in Schryer's account, "retrofitted Matthew Arnold for the cold war era, envisaging aesthetically attuned professionals . . . as a saving remnant who would disrupt the stock notions of the middle class" through "cultural education" (6, 4). This neo-Arnoldian idealization of culture had a part in the training of some US Victorianists.

However, the image of culture's apostles civilizing the new class differs sharply from the actual work of mid-century scholarship and teaching, as Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan attest. And indeed, Schryer's account of humanists' anti-instrumentalism and privileging of the aesthetic would miss distinctive features of Victorianist scholarship, not least its early embrace of the practical application of multidisciplinary knowledge. In the inaugural issue, the *VS* editors Philip Appleman, William Madden, and Wolff (all recently hired junior faculty members in English) identify the journal's key features as "concentration on the English culture of a particular age," "openness to critical and scholarly studies from all the relevant disciplines," and a mission to capture "the life of [an] era" (Appleman et al., Prefatory note). Its interdisciplinary mandate and effort to renegotiate English literary studies' relation to other disciplines, Rowlinson argues, make *VS* readable as "an important early sign" that claims for the university as a guardian of cultural heritage lost

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ground in the Cold War era "as universities were reconceived as centers of scientific research and training" (243).[9] Universities figured crucially, as Melinda Cooper shows, in neo-Keynesian theories of human capital investment as a core function of the US state, with newly plentiful public funding spurred by Walter Heller's contention that expanded higher education was the sole means of producing both the technology and "'quantity of brainpower' needed to compete with the Soviet Union" (Cooper 221).[10] It is some indication of the success of *VS* in meeting the moment that its founding was newsworthy not only in the *TLS* but also in *The American Political Science Review*, alongside reporting on the Ford Foundation's twenty-five million dollar expansion of the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Program to address a "mounting shortage of teachers in the nation's colleges" and "attract able college students into the academic profession" ("Other Activities" 586). Raleigh in his review of *1859* highlights state and private investment in US higher education as a condition for Victorian studies' flourishing: "part of the enormous wealth of America," he marvels, "is now being channeled into scholarship" (304).[11]

Such investment accelerated many disciplines, and in Victorian studies it influenced postwar historicization of the nineteenth century. This is evident in the sheer salience of Victorian education as a topic in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which some scholars explicitly connected to state geopolitical interests. A review of a history of English scientific and technical education suggests that decades of stagnation (following an 1880s boom) abruptly ended when "World War II . . . shattered complacency, and then the Sputnik and the publication of de Witt's report on Soviet scientific manpower stimulated a crash programme of rapid expansion" (Cotgrove 62).[12] The editors of *VS* likewise evoke this moment as a warrant for Victorianist knowledge when they frame George Haines's 1958 article on Victorians' concern about German universities outpacing theirs as "an astonishing foreshadowing of the current U.S.-U.S.S.R. science race" (Appleman et al., "Comments" 307). The bearing of that context is hard to miss in an extravagant compliment from the *TLS*: "those concerned [in *VS*] have every right to see themselves as engaged in an enterprise at least as novel as that which has set a man-made moon revolving about the face of the earth" ("Lend-Lease"). If the Victorian era was not the newest new frontier, the broad identification of research with the planetary interests of the American state indeed conditioned the field. Not only did Victorian studies thrive under the Cold War–driven growth of US universities, but, alongside the social sciences in an era when "defense intellectuals" moved between academic departments and the State Department (Lee and Puckett 1), it also aspired to advance knowledge of modernization. Particularly helpful in situating this ambition is Devin Griffiths's claim that Victorian studies—in its framing of a "national or area culture" and holistic conception of a "'national consciousness' or 'mind'" (3)—emerges not only from cultural studies (well recognized as a British legacy of Raymond Williams) but also in the interdisciplinary orbit of mid-century area studies.

While literary scholars often fault literary methods for their discipline's political failings, Victorian studies' early commitments are equally shaped by its alignment with social-scientific fields. Area studies was a Cold War formation born of the US Office of Strategic Services and advanced by the 1957 National Defense Education Act, which directed federal revenue toward establishing university-based National Research Centers for regionally focused inquiry and language training. These programs encapsulated institutional forms of imperialist power-knowledge that Edward Said would critique in the 1970s. Their ties to state power were not merely ideological: Bruce Cumings documents "astonishing levels of collaboration between the universities, the foundations, and the intelligence arms of the U.S. state" in postwar area studies and international studies programs, citing Sigmund Diamond's Freedom of Information Act findings on Harvard's Russian Research Center's deep CIA involvement in the 1950s, the FBI files kept on some scholars, and the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations' roles in funding projects and sometimes "launder[ing] CIA funding" (Cumings 6, 11).[13] These fields' fortunes and aims have changed since the Cold War, and recent Victorianists, notably Banerjee, Fong, and Michie, propose collaboration

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with contemporary area studies to lateralize the nineteenth century now, while recognizing these disciplines' Cold War origins and the legacies of their "spatial compartmentalization" of the world (Banerjee et al. 7). Collaboration across languages and geographies is indeed vital, though we might also take a cue from Griffiths to assess Victorian studies' largely forgotten previous interests in area studies at a moment when such programs anchored American research universities' aims of statecraft by means of US intellectual expertise.

Though US Victorian studies diverged from these programs' largely non-Western focus, it shared their interdisciplinary drive, experimented with their terminology,[14] and sought funding from the same foundations. The *VS* editors' Ford and Rockefeller grant applications, Griffiths notes, position "the Victorian era as a prelude to the American century" and pitch the journal's potential to promote "inter-cultural exchange" and "better understanding of contemporary problems" (5). A decade later, Wolff would explicitly suggest that his field's investigation of "a given place at a given time . . . must have something in common with other so-called area studies" ("Comments" 267). The disciplines' overlapping histories indeed reveal a shared interest in producing universalist accounts of human psychological and social adjustment to global capitalism and its state forms, framed as modernization.

Here we might measure the influence of American modernization theory in casting the Victorian era as prologue to a postwar world picture. In exchange with economists, sociologists, and political scientists such as Walt Rostow and Seymour Martin Lipset, whose accounts of economic development shaped US foreign policy on "emerging nations," a cohort of Victorianists framed the nineteenth century as the paradigmatic episode of "transition" to modernity. This universalized theory of modernization, which linked industrial acceleration and education to democracy, can look like Victorian civilizational ideology redux; mid-century American hegemony indeed drew heavily on British sources, as Jed Esty stresses in *The Future of Decline*. But rather than read it as sequel, we could reverse the chronology and suggest that Cold War US geopolitics anachronistically remade Victorian Britain as its precedent in order to affirm the historical necessity of capitalism, the nation-state, and a postwar liberal order. Such theories not only made a British imperial world system prefigure an American century, but they also equated Victorian metropolitan development with postcolonial transition.

Mid-century appraisals of the Victorian era tend to treat industrialization and the rise of the nation-state less as a history that hurt than as an inevitable process of development. Howard Mumford Jones's 1959 introduction to the edited volume *1859* characterizes "the British nineteenth century as a period of gradual adjustment, of flexibility in change" (24). The portability of this narrative animates Wolff's 1964 case for interdisciplinarity, which defines the Victorian era as a collective experience that can be generalized across centuries and continents: "The Victorians . . . were, we may say, the first moderns" ("Victorian Study" 61). In contrast with Lauren M. E. Goodlad's later argument that Britain—quick to develop industrial capitalism but slow to bureaucratize and centralize an administrative state—should be particularized for its "idiosyncratic modernization" (7), postwar Victorianists often posited British modernization as prototypical and driven by universal tendencies.[15] Amid a debate, for instance, on Jeremy Bentham's influence on the reforms that "defined the Victorian administrative state," David Roberts in 1959 attributes Poor Law reform and sanitary and educational reform to predictable forces of progress, treating utilitarianism as "an implicit axiom of human affairs . . . bound to become more explicit in a more rational and democratic age" (198, 209). Such claims recall Whig historiography—but perhaps more accurately, they overlap with postwar modernization theory in the vein of Rostow and Lipset. Rostow indeed took Victorian Britain as precedent for the mid-century United States; further, drawing on his own studies of British industrialization, he extrapolated from that particular past a general theory of transition in his 1960 opus, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Nineteenth-century Britain here offered a "universal template for

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understanding economic development and change around the world" (Kamola 51). For prominent Victorianists of that moment, modernization's explanatory power was omnidirectional; it could raise the field's stakes on predictive or even genealogical grounds: Houghton proposes that "to look into the Victorian mind is to see some primary sources of the modern mind" (xiv).

The latitude of these claims is crucial: they meant not simply that Victorian modernization finds an analogue—or heir—in the post-1945 United States but also that it models the situation of the postcolonial Global South. "Victorian England," Wolff indeed argues, "can be seen . . . as the first of what we now call the emerging nations" ("Victorian Study" 62). He borrows a term from a 1960 foreign policy report, *Economic, Social, and Political Change in the Underdeveloped Countries and Its Implications for United States Policy*, to describe those poised between traditional and modern societies: "transitional man" (68). Wolff approaches Victorian culture quasi-anthropologically through the lens of this study, commissioned by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to generalize "the psychological effects of modernization" ("Victorian Study" 62). Its authors at MIT's Center for International Studies grant considerable agency to the mind and to imaginative self-projection in facilitating social mobility. "Modern man," they propose, "is psychically mobile, his distinctive characteristic being his ability to imagine himself performing all manner of tasks and roles," while "traditional man" regards it as "wrong and dangerous even to move mentally out of his place in the social order" (*United States Foreign Policy* 21), and an interstitial generation is torn between. They stress ambivalence toward change among "the literate elite in transitional societies," who "may talk the language of modernization with fluency and apparent conviction, but latent within them is a conflict between the modes of action and the values which modernization requires and the engrained habits and attachments of the traditional society" (21).[16]

In positing Victorian England as the original "emerging nation," Wolff puts Victorian studies in dialogue with social-scientific prescriptions for US statecraft in the developing world.[17] The Cold War stakes of the report he cites are clear: "The United States," as its authors preface their research, "confronts a world in which more than a billion human beings under non-Communist rule are passing through the complex and lengthy transition from life in the setting of a traditional society to life in a modern setting" (*United States Foreign Policy* 9). Presupposing that "transition to modernity is inevitable," they argue that the United States has crucial strategic interests in influencing the form it takes in all transitional societies, backing modernization against repressive traditionalist forces while also preventing Communist alignment (9). Implicitly distinguishing this from imperialism, they maintain that US development priorities need not conflict with "the legitimate interests of the people of any independent nation" (10).[18] Such framing imagines a consensual world order led by the United States—squaring the circle, as Perry Anderson suggests, between "formal independence of onetime colonies" and "informal reduction . . . to U.S. clients" through a messianic universalism (71); "true hegemons," Esty notes, "insist that their power serves the general cause of humanity," and their ruling elites claim capacity to judge "the 'best interests' of other nations" (*Future* 42–43). To recognize these interests is styled in the report both as an imaginative exercise, requiring Americans to "enter more deeply, if vicariously, into the experience of transition," and as an impetus for interdisciplinary research (*United States Foreign Policy* 11). The authors grant social scientists a key role in shaping policy accordingly by "linking their perceptions to the concrete choices governments confront" (12). If Thorstein Veblen's "vision of technocracy—a government by experts" at the turn of the century "smacked too overtly of PMC self-interest to gain a wide following" (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, "Professional-Managerial Class" 24), this Cold War moment positions scholars and the state as interdependent—the federal government their sponsor and, in this case, publisher and audience.

Linking academic "perceptions" to policy choices was above most humanists' pay grades, yet some Victorianists based in the United States aspired to contribute their own comparative knowledge of

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transition. Their ambitions, not just in the poetry of grant applications but also in the prose of published research, diverge from familiar accounts of the mutual isolation of humanistic and social-scientific disciplines. As an interdisciplinary field, Victorian studies is a counterexample to Schryer's claim that the "disciplinary consensus represented by Parsons's sociology and the New Criticism lasted until the mid 1960s," the former hostile to interpretation and the latter to the sciences' "technocratic tendencies" (51, 32). John Crowe Ransom and his fellow New Critics' purportedly apolitical approach to literature through methods of formal analysis that dispensed with sociohistorical "background" knowledge indeed enjoyed ideological prevalence in Cold War English departments (though Buurma and Heffernan offer evidence of far more varied pedagogy).[19] While postwar Victorianists note New Criticism's currency, their research and teaching suggest other priorities. With a flagship journal that published in urban studies, history of science, economics, and social history at least as often as literary scholarship (and that added the economist H. Scott Gordon to its editorial board in the mid-1960s), Victorian studies promoted eclectic methodologies that did not privilege close reading as method or literature as object.[20] Indeed, *VS*, which in its first decade regularly announced the founding of new journals, welcomed the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* into "the interdisciplinary family" with the same gusto the editors had expressed for *Studies in Romanticism* (Brose et al. 206), and some Victorianists celebrated scholarship that placed history "among the social sciences" (Harrison 263). In teaching too, mid-century journals published accounts of courses on Victorian society cotaught by historians and literary scholars, a Darwin course "radiating out into all 'disciplines'" (Appleman et al, "Comments" 307), and literature surveys organized by topics including industrialism, education, science, and reform.[21] Victorian studies thus bucks the seeming ubiquity of New Criticism, which, as Andy Hines argues, "institutionalized the separation of the literary from the historical, the social, and the political" in many US English departments and enshrined anticommunism, anti-Blackness, and Southern Agrarian state fantasy in curricula (32). The subfield is no less bent than many contemporaneous fields by racial capitalism and state legitimation, yet these investments at mid-century might proceed less from notions of aesthetic autonomy or attachment to literary canons than from an endorsement, by analogy, of US modernization paradigms repackaged as originally Victorian.

Was Victorian studies' aim to apply knowledge of a British imperial past to the American present, or vice versa? "Our own involvement with the present," argues Wolff in 1964, "can help us understand the Victorian's involvement with his time" ("Victorian Study" 70); Marcus highlights Victorian history's lessons for current affairs, and Jones's centennial reflection on 1859 imagines studies of Victorian industrialization's "sober progress" easing nuclear-age anxieties (24). Comparison operates in both directions—sometimes generatively, sometimes in ambivalence as to whether historical judgment benefits from proximity or distance. Some precision thus seems needed to distinguish among ways of linking Victorian Britain to the postwar United States: historical analogy, genealogy, and allegory. Analogy proposes comparison across difference. Genealogy, by contrast, entails connection; it may track cultural forms or historical problems to their roots, or find a past pedigree for a present regime. Allegory, with unmarked anachronism, encodes one historical narrative in another. Despite sharp epistemological distinctions in principle, a certain equivocation makes these approaches converge in practice. Comparisons between world powers become claims to succession; allegory creeps into historical exposition. Rowlinson's account of the field's recursive character is thus important in flagging the inevitable anachronism and bidirectionality of all such comparisons—with notable stakes, I would add, in a US context for illuminating a postwar present.

The analogy between hegemons was sometimes aspirational for US statesmen. It found literary expression for Harry Truman, who turned to Alfred Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" during the Big Three conference, roused by its speaker's prophesy of an era when "the war-drum throbbed no longer and the battle flags were furled, / In the Parliament

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of man, the Federation of the world" (Tennyson 54). A 1945 *New York Times* article quotes these lines Truman famously kept in his wallet and credits them with inspiring his speech envisioning "a republic of the world" and asserting "the necessity for the United States to take the leadership" in the United Nations "to preserve future peace" ("Truman").[22] The universalist rhetoric and material interests in play certainly bore comparison. Eric Williams, in his landmark *Capitalism and Slavery*, could already anticipate in 1944 what the economic forces that had made and unmade a British colonial world system portended in a coming postwar order, including how decolonization would unfold in Asia and Africa. Just as the ascendant industrial power in 1833 upended relations with the Caribbean and supplanted the slave economy that had enabled capitalism's rise, "the incomparably greater productive power of today will ultimately destroy any relations which stand in its way"; historical comparison did not "invalidate the urgency . . . of arguments for democracy, for freedom," he observes, "but *mutatis mutandis*, the arguments have a familiar ring" (210). As Esty notes, "the architects of Cold War US foreign policy deliberately invoked the example of Victorian liberal imperialism," and he cites Radhika Desai's account of US officials at Bretton Woods aspiring "to emulate the success of British hegemony" (*Future* 53). But we should not miss the contradiction operating in this comparison: if it offers a model for global ascendancy, it undercuts American exceptionalism—premised on a disavowal of imperialism[23]—in so doing. The mid-century flavor of such disavowal is distilled in Lipset's influential *Political Man* (1960): "Americans are, of course, naïve about the relationship of economic to political power" and "the realities of economic imperialism," he admits; "But anyone who seeks to understand American foreign policy must recognize that it has rested primarily on the commitment of the United States to extend democracy and to oppose political imperialism ever since the country overthrew its colonial rulers" (xxvi).

Partly because the postwar United States embraced the soft-power rhetoric of humanitarian influence, global development aid, and support for national self-determination (often an anticommunist stance), Victorianists with a stake in the comparison were sometimes apt to downplay Victorian imperialism. To be sure, there was active research on the subject; numerous reviews of books on empire (including work published in India on the centennial of the 1857 rebellion) appear in *Victorian Studies*.[24] Yet a 1958 article on periodization goes so far as to assert that "the very 'imperialism' with which [Kipling's] name will ever be associated was not really a Victorian phenomenon—only Disraeli of the mid-century statesmen really cared about it; and . . . Kipling was as much concerned to ridicule its hubris as to laud its achievements" (Reckitt 269). More often, empire was euphemized or handled indirectly, and it could pass unmentioned in broad surveys of the era. But because a real ideological contradiction lingers in the comparison between British past and American present, so too does the suggestion that the United States is indeed an empire. The implicitly imperialist framework of US foreign relations at times almost uncannily injects itself into the framing of problems Victorian studies is tasked with solving.

Perhaps these liabilities of standpoint are also affordances of historical reflexivity. Postwar reflection on the nineteenth century could attune scholarship to shifts in the world system: comparing 1859 to 1959, Jones marks a post-1945 shift as "the passing of the European age" (24). Without framing imperialism as such, he conceives a bygone Pax Britannica "transforming itself before our eyes into something even more exciting though as yet undefined—the welfare state, the aspirin age, the age of the United Nations, the age of Asia and Africa, the age of the total destruction of mankind or of its total triumph" (24). Jones decenters both the United States and Britain in sketching this present. Though he does not specify, for instance, the 1955 Bandung Conference and Afro-Asian solidarity movements; independence in India, Burma, Sudan, and Ghana; and the Malayan and Mau Mau rebellions, among numerous other liberation struggles, his nod to a dawning "age of Asia and Africa" recognizes the historical stakes of decolonization. Meanwhile, it affirms a Cold War policy

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vision for a "decade of development" in the Third World—and, extending a mid-century conception of American power as "global and universal rather than territorially specific" (Harvey 50), his universalizing rhetoric of shared interest in preventing nuclear war implicitly narrates a Eurocentric world order ceding to a Pax Americana.

Allegory here tints historical analogy. It takes the shape of self-critical comparison when Marcus, reflecting in 1963 on Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger*, reads Victorian England's reformist "consciousness of . . . social injustice" and simultaneous culpability for the Irish Famine as clear "lessons for modernity" (16). Modernity's US location is implied by analogy ("we, too, are . . . a reforming society") and by the catalog of unattributed failures that a past atrocity is used to measure: "Whether we consider domestic problems—civil rights, unemployment, the farm problem—or international ones—the Cold War, aid to underdeveloped areas—the difference between what might possibly be done and what . . . is actually being done, is staggering" (16). The American state is both magnified in its unrealized scope of agency and elided by the passive voice. Wolff puts this history to similar purpose in "Victorian Study: An Interdisciplinary Essay" when he proposes that one can better understand Charles Trevelyan's part in the Irish Famine by asking "how we would treat the inhabitants of India if we were Dean Rusk" (70). Taking the US State Department's relation to post-independence India (at a moment of friction after the Kennedy administration temporarily reduced aid and threatened to sanction India through NATO for the 1961 invasion of Goa) as an analogue for the Victorian Treasury's relation to pre-independence Ireland under British rule, this hypothetical situates the United States in a colonial relationship with a postcolonial nation.[25] The geographic referents of Wolff's analogy also involve a striking triangulation. Introducing Trevelyan to exemplify seemingly unbridgeable rifts in judgment of past regimes, Wolff focuses on the Victorian statesman's notoriously Malthusian opposition to relief for Ireland, not remarking that Trevelyan was also a colonial administrator in India—a role that aligns him with his counterpart in Wolff's analogy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk. (US interests in India, notably, are front and center in the foreign policy report Wolff elsewhere cites; as "the largest free-world nation" and "foremost example of a non-Communist state engaged in the takeoff process," its preface asserts, India "will bulk large in American lending policy" [*United States Foreign Policy* 8], and US military support for India in the 1962 Sino-Indian War attests to its strategic stakes.) Wolff's conclusion implies that the object requiring understanding is not Victorian England at all: "In a generation or two, I suspect and hope," he remarks, "our callousness about famine in Calcutta will seem as hard to understand as Victorian callousness about the Irish famine" ("Victorian Study" 70). Conflated with citizens' attitudes and collective will in an "our" that ambiguously merges British culpability for the 1943 Bengal Famine with US aid obligations in the 1960s, the American state seems called to act (perhaps through further involvement in India's Green Revolution) on a planetary scale. As the comparison of twentieth-century Indian and nineteenth-century Irish famines also silently evokes Victorian El Niño famines in colonial India, the historical frame of reference expands and contracts uncannily, positioning India—though presented as an analogue for Ireland—as a silent hinge between two empires.

The analogy between Victorian past and American present licenses further substitutions, notably between class and race. Writing at a pivotal moment in the civil rights struggle, Wolff sees "a good deal to be learned about the respectable Victorian's attitude towards the non-respectable worker by looking at the range of the modern white American's attitudes toward his Negro fellow-citizen, or, indeed, the general white attitude toward the non-white" (70). The stakes of this turn to US racism are shaped by Cold War global affairs no less than relations with India. By Nikhil Pal Singh's account, "State Department officials routinely argued that white supremacy was the 'Achilles heel' of U.S. foreign relations," delegitimizing US authority abroad; resolving "racial discord and division at home" was thus key to stabilizing "the expanded American realm of action" (7). Mixing these imperatives with local antiracist commitments, Wolff approaches the color line in a framework of Victorian ruling-class anxiety. Claiming that "[t]he

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profligacy of the lower classes and their predilection for what Matthew Arnold called 'fun' was uppermost in everybody's mind," he gives this large generalization a counterpart in US anti-Blackness: "A useful parallel is to be found in the commonplace that 'white supremacy' in the Southern United States is based in part on a fear of the supposedly greater sexuality of the Negro" ("Victorian Study" 66). Conjecturing similarly "suppressed" sexual anxiety in British elites' moral panic about working-class mobilization, Wolff psychologizes (and obviously genders) the US racial order. Further, in emphasizing different internal divisions as comparable between two hegemons, the race-class analogy misses these categories' intersection. It risks misrecognizing the import of class in the United States (at stake in postwar scholars' portrayal of Victorian culture as essentially intellectual) and of race in Victorian Britain and its global empire of predominantly nonwhite Victorian subjects. (To attend to both and to their overlap now may also involve observing the historical unevenness and geopolitical contingency of racial categories.[26]) This early presentist-Victorianist thought experiment thus pulls in two directions: on the one hand, critical attention to contemporary racism grounds Wolff's case for the interdisciplinary methods he prescribes. (Decades later, he would recall the editors' participation in a 1960 march in solidarity with the lunch-counter sit-ins as foundational to his sense of the field's purpose —responding to conditions "connecting *VS* with the real world" not just analytically but through "a practical commitment to social change" [Burgan et al. 84].) On the other hand, the comparison detaches the category of race from Victorian culture through the very analogy linking it to the United States.

If such mid-century comparisons and their world picture now warrant historicization, so too can we historicize the transformation of Victorian studies by feminism (Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar), postcolonial theory (Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Patrick Brantlinger), and queer theory (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, D. A. Miller) in a phase of broader theoretical innovation in the 1970s and 1980s. These paradigm shifts owe to the diversification of higher education; to student movements that demanded curricular changes including Black studies, women's studies, and ethnic studies; and to social movements that won affirmative action, tuition-free college, and unionization (Berry and Worthen 4). Reactionary responses to these gains and to the 1968 uprisings—neoliberal defunding of higher education and the post-1977 shift to debt financing and adjunctification[27]—further contextualize the "capital flight" that John Guillory described in the 1990s (45), which was not just symbolic or unique to literary studies. Federal disinvestment and broader privatization of state functions also clarify the conditions for scholars' shifting conceptions of the state and of institutions.[28] Current attacks on academic programs and academic freedom, diversity and equity policies, international students and workers, campus speech, and civil rights dramatize an overt antagonism between state power and universities, enabled by decades of structural attacks on education's public mission and the labor it requires. On the one hand, modifying methods or syllabi in already forcibly downsized disciplines clearly does not in itself redistribute power or resources (or redress universities' perpetuation of racial capitalism through real-estate accumulation, racialized displacement, policing, and labor exploitation)[29]; confronting oppression symbolically in elite contexts has often yielded, as Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò stresses, a conversation that "stayed in the room, while the people most affected by it stayed outside" (71). On the other, the expanded educational access and political mobilizations that have driven curricular changes, and the stakes of right-wing efforts to suppress the study of racism and gender and to monopolize so-called Western culture's meanings, affirm that universities are not only sites of cultural and class reproduction but also sites of struggle.

Under altered conditions across a decade of accelerating crises that make current struggles still more urgent, Victorian studies again considers its timeliness, asking what the British Empire might clarify or foreclose about a late-capitalist world system and how education and culture relate to power. It does so across wider institutional geographies;[30] less clear is whether Victorian studies constitutes one field or whether scholarship in Britain, India, Canada, Australia, Singapore, and elsewhere has developed in disparate

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directions with a broader range of publishing venues, conferences, curricula, and contexts—though claims about its contemporary stakes remain large. "The business of discovering modernity in Victorian Britain goes on," Rowlinson noted twenty years ago, "though it is no longer the modernity familiar to the founders of *Victorian Studies*" or even "the modernity of perverse implantation that Michel Foucault taught 'we other Victorians' to recognize" (247). From ecocriticism to Black feminist theory, trans studies to transimperial labor history, a range of approaches reconsider what the twenty-first century reveals about the nineteenth and vice versa.

These are vital contributions, calibrated to broader efforts to rectify an Anglocentric focus and often valuably alert to the nonneutrality of their context. Yet in attending to it, US scholars (myself surely included) can overstate the continuity of British imperial culture, in a critical rather than congratulatory spin on the *TLS*'s cultural "lend-lease" conceit. In challenging Victorian studies' frame, we may unexpectedly echo a field-forming gesture of some postwar scholars who staked the value of Victorianist knowledge on inheritance of a coherent Anglo-American world. To be clear, it is essential to understand the United States in many ways as the geopolitical "inheritor of previous European empires" (Goyal). Nineteenth-century genealogies of the twenty-first century illuminate crucial contingencies and unsettle historical closure. But because we always read history backward, accounts of a Victorian world can also refashion that past in the image of a tacitly US-centered present. One might now ask, What convictions about American succession to Victorian hegemony in a phase of US decline—and about the humanities' ideological power amid forced downsizing—shape our own reflexive theorizations of a global political present? What is lost and gained when we read the nineteenth century after the American Century?

Increasingly apparent crises, ironically, have made Victorian studies lively in its obsolescence as in its heyday. Conferences on the era's "aftermath," special issues, new teaching resources, and research collectives have injected renewed purpose into conversations for which "Victorian" is not a container. The ruthless contraction of employment in most fields—already overwhelmingly precaritized and despecialized through imposed austerity—is conspicuous as a context in which nineteenth-century scholarship gets wider, longer, and deeper. Long-term social-reproduction crises can make even vital disciplinary transformations feel compensatory. Collective action to reverse untenable conditions, reclaim public resources from oligarchic capture and war, fight fascism, and democratize higher education is more obviously pressing than ever. If cultural pasts and mixed histories of their study can offer resources for contending with as well as teaching and studying in that present, then perhaps, recognizing Buurma and Heffernan's wisdom on the tendency of attritional conditions to intensify zero-sum assessment, it is worthwhile to read for usable pasts both beyond and even within compromised legacies.

Rather than prescribe a method or assert a singular genealogy, then, I conclude by suggesting some uses and disadvantages of a field's history and of observing the American state's shifting place in constructing Victorian histories of the global present. For those invested in rejecting a view from nowhere on a static English past, mid-century Victorian studies may offer welcome precedents. Some foundational scholarship, as we have seen, was unapologetically presentist in claiming consequence for the nineteenth century. It can likewise illustrate that cultural-historical particularism and universalism, now aligned with contrasting critiques of Victorian studies, were more often dialectically synthesized than mutually exclusive. The field's relation to the postwar state was at once materially enabling, generative of comparative insight about hegemonic cultures and of critical attention to shifts in the world system, and susceptible to flattening the political geography of historical analogy—yielding a sort of them-and-now, then-and-us logic of comparison—or projecting Cold War modernization theories backward. Comparative analysis could valuably relativize its object and bring reflexiveness to its own context, though it was prone to transmute into genealogy or allegory and to genericize whiteness, masculinity, and a

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specific class position and institutional situation. State support for research and education could invite variously inflated and deflated conceptions of intellectual and political agency, and it enabled an extraordinary range of projects as well as many unanticipated forms of contestation and mobilization, all of which are instructive now.

There may be several plausible responses to the Americanness of Victorian studies. One can decenter both British and US contexts and embrace, as Banerjee, Fong, and Michie propose, a wide nineteenth century; Lisa Lowe's *Intimacies of Four Continents* and Jessie Reeder's *Forms of Informal Empire* might exemplify such projects. One can study literatures of a racial-capitalist world system and mediations of globally uneven development along comparatist lines.[31] One can downscale and particularize British cultural history. Alternatively, one can surface the American frame with a view to historicizing the contemporary United States; some scholars strategically redeploy UK-US comparisons by shifting emphasis to autumnal moments in the lifecycles of empires. Hensley's Arrighian experiment in "discontinuous historicism," through readings of empire's "late style" in Robert Louis Stevenson, Giorgio Agamben, and Jonathan Franzen, links British hegemony's declining phase to a declining American phase a century later as "structurally cognate moments" (277). Esty salvages the analogy between waning hegemons to promote a model of "revival through contraction" that the contemporary United States might learn from the British New Left (*Future* 123). Since Cold War intellectuals embraced Victorian lineage as a *translatio imperii* that both undercut and reformulated American exceptionalism, its imprint on scholarship reactivates tensions and overlaps between analogy and genealogy, historicism and presentism, crisis theory and universal history. It bears on all these that, despite its still catastrophic power and flagrant imperial brutality, the centrality of the United States to global capitalism, as Esty stresses, is history. Viewed from that angle, Victorian literature may well have things to tell us about the American state, sharpened by attention to its uses for statecraft, racial formations, negotiations of mental labor, and geopolitics in a prior present.

Notes

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1. For an analysis of nineteenth-century depth hermeneutics (interpretive modes that find latent meanings below or within manifest ones) that draws fruitfully on White to illuminate both rupture and continuity between eras, see Samalin, "Plumbing the Depths."

2. "The embarrassment of Victorianism," as Gikandi defines the structure of feeling expressed in James's *Beyond a Boundary*, "emerges from the unanticipated fact that forces, values, and cultures intended to consolidate colonial conquest could so easily be transformed into the foundational narratives of black self-determination" (167). Friedman, returning to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to assess queer theory's stakes for the field, contends that Victorian studies can redress its "entanglement with white supremacy" only through "rapprochement with the concept of universalism" (142).

3. Notable exceptions to this broader inattention include Rowlinson; Griffiths; see also brief but insightful reflections by Vernon; Miller.

4. On area studies see Miyoshi and Harootunian; on American studies see Rodriguez-Jimenez; on creative writing see McGurl; Bennett; Nadal; Spahr; on US global literary and cultural programming, see Brouillette; on structuralism and proxy wars, see Lee and Puckett; on New Criticism see Hines; Nadal.

5. See Popescu; Kalliney; McCarthy; Hines; Edwards; Barnhisel; Cleary.

6. On the term's abuse see Winant, who revisits the Ehrenreichs' account of the PMC's contradictions and stakes for class struggle to remind us that "the point is not to abandon the PMC, but to turn it against its masters."

7. Cf. Wright's response that the PMC's social function does not define it as a class position—an apt point, though arguably consistent with the Ehrenreichs' analysis (8–10).

8. For a historical sketch of the PMC's formation and conflicts with capital in the Progressive and New Deal eras, see Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, "Professional-Managerial Class" 18–28.

9. Graff suggests that commitments to cultural-nationalist ideology in English—more often preached than coherently practiced—collapsed earlier (12–13, 131–32), and that US English departments from their 1880s inception promoted their discipline, initially more allied with philology than literature, as a science (67–72).

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10. Kerr's *The Uses of the University* from 1963 makes an influential version of this argument, crediting higher education and the skilled workforce it produced with nearly half of national economic growth and prescribing a shift from Fordist production to the "knowledge industry" as the engine of future growth (87).

11. On the impact of public research funding (particularly from the National Endowment for the Humanities after its 1965 founding) on Victorian studies, see Wyland.

12. Nicholas DeWitt's 1955 NSF report, *Soviet Professional Manpower: Its Education, Training, and Supply*, was published during his doctoral studies at Harvard's Russian Research Center (closely linked to US intelligence agencies). By the time this review appeared DeWitt was a colleague of the *VS* editors, joining Indiana University's Russian and East European Institute in 1962.

13. See Szanton 1–33 for a contrasting narrative of how these fields resisted the state agendas behind their funding and helped decenter Western societies. Cf. Macharia, who regards area studies as intractably bound to the hegemony of the United States "as the place from which information flows," doubting it can now be decolonized by researchers who encounter their objects thanks to a US passport (187).

14. See, e.g., Goldman, whose 1959 essay on Victorian anthropology claims that "there is ample evidence for general theories of cultural evolution drawn from concrete studies and from a comparison of stages and processes that are revealed by culture area studies" (72). See also Wolff's use of anthropological terms drawn from foreign policy scholarship applied to Victorian culture, discussed later in this essay ("Victorian Study").

15. Such claims anticipate what Esty describes as a "second-order universalism" that UK scholars like E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams invested in English history and culture at a decolonial moment (*Shrinking Island* 191), though its compensatory uses in British social history and cultural studies contrast with expansionist uses in the United States.

16. Such comparisons have a surprising if differently inflected echo in postcolonial criticism. C. L. R. James, in Mufti's analysis, offers an arguably similar picture of Victorian cultural production in his autobiographical reflections: James's lingering attachment to Thackeray and Dickens owes to an account of their work as expressive of feeling "not at home in the age of industrial modernity" (399).

17. We might find a foil for these transition tales in the work of Stuart Hall, whose 1960 editorial introduction to the *New Left Review* voices skepticism toward contemporaries happily "advanc[ing] into the calm waters of an 'American' future" (Hall, "Introducing NLR" 1), and who later reverses modernization theory's UK-US comparisons as he analyzes the British right's ascent from the mid-1970s to his 1987 conjuncture in "Gramsci and Us." Reading Thatcherism not just as reactionary but as a modernization project, he suggests that it is grounded in the underacknowledged fact that Britain never made the "transfer to modernity. It never institutionalized . . . the civilization and structures of advanced capitalism—what Gramsci called 'Fordism'. . . . It never became a second capitalist-industrial-revolution power, in the way the US did" (Hall, "Gramsci and Us" 164). Hall's wager is on a counterhegemonic modernization project for the British left, and his case for it scrambles familiar genealogies from the British past to the American present that authorized Victorian studies.

18. Though the authors identify colonialism as a catalyst of change in "static traditional societies," they treat it as an inevitable cause of "collective humiliation," provoking demands for independence (17).

19. Graff claims that New Criticism's dominance pitted "critics" against literary "scholars" from the 1940s to the early 1960s (183–194); cf. the notable Victorianist Richard Daniel Altick's argument in 1963 "that the scholar and the critic are engaged in a common pursuit and that each is indispensable to the other"; Altick stresses social history as essential to interpretation (4). Cf. also Buurma and Heffernan, who likewise suggest that the divide is exaggerated. For varied accounts of New Criticism's political legacies, see Hines; Bennett; Nadal. Examining New Criticism's export to literary peripheries including the Philippines through Rockefeller Foundation funding, Nadal contends that its theories of autonomy and organic unity—contra US aims of Cold War cultural diplomacy—offered "a powerful vocabulary of form" that Filipino writers repurposed to enter economic and political debates and to defend "literature's autonomy" from attempts to conscript writers as "agents of national development" (561).

20. Appleman, for one, weighed Charles Darwin's impact on Walter Pater to frame a historicism/impressionism antinomy in Pater's criticism—a dilemma he applied to a 1959 institutional present marked by New Critical hostility to context: "Literature, even that written yesterday," he counters, "is a historical phenomenon" (93). Even Victorianist poetry scholars often found New Criticism unhelpful; its emphasis on irony and ambiguity, Slack argues in 1961, was ill suited to teaching Alfred Tennyson's *Maud*, for instance (345).

21. See Adams and Winkler; Dahl. See also Buurma and Heffernan 107–32.

22. The elision of the poem's own military context, as Servitje remarks, is key to its afterlife as a quotable, geographically unfixed vision of internationalism (179).

23. A rare exception that proves the rule is William Appleman Williams's 1955 challenge to his fellow historians' denial of American empire, whose absence Williams identifies as a central theme of American historiography even among those who describe America as a "World Power" (379).

24. An early issue (vol. 1, no. 4, 1958) features the economist Daniel Thorner's review essay on a cluster of books on the 1857 rebellion, including Surendra Nath Sen's *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* and the proceedings of a centenary symposium, *Rebellion: 1857*, edited by P. C. Joshi. The editors also published George Shepperson's 1965 review of *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840–1960*, which concludes that "those who are entitled to have the last word are the new, native-born historians of Africa and Asia" (374).

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25. Though American policy discourse avoided such framing, Gunapala Malalasekera (Ceylon's ambassador to the USSR) among others in the Afro-Asian coalition had criticized NATO interference in this conflict as a predictable vestige of colonialism, while Chinese officials, conversely, pilloried Nehru as an imperialist (Singhal 80–81, 88).

26. On the historical variability of whiteness in the United States, see Omi and Winant.

27. To address defunding while the demand for higher education remained high, Berry and Worthen note, administrators lowered costs by "expanding a once small group of part-time contingent faculty into a permanent second tier" (81). See also Cooper, who shows that neoliberals and conservatives saw a correlation between educational access and student militancy in the 1960s (217–28), prompting Reagan's reframing of free public education (alongside welfare) as a "perverse incentive"—a move used to advance white grievance politics and familial dependency through debt. For a relevant Thatcher-era analysis of the right's targeting of education after 1968, see Hall, "Great Moving Right Show."

28. Several scholars observe that neoliberalism coincides with an uptick in theories that either deemphasize the state (e.g., Michel Foucault's governmentality) or treat all institutions as mechanisms of social control, imagining emancipatory promise in their destruction—a trend Kornbluh deplores (*Order* 156–62). See especially Brennan's account of "the theoretical foundations of the left academy" since the 1980s as uncritically "anti-statist" (148). See also McCann and Szalay, who argue that the New Left's locally justifiable dissatisfaction with academia (identified with Cold War liberal statism) extended a critique of institutional politics generally and yielded libertarian theories of power centered on the cultural apparatus that mistake analysis of symbolic forms for political action and empower neoliberalism by abandoning unions, parties, and the state in favor of fantasies of spontaneous action. North's *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* and Woloch's introduction to *Or Orwell* historicize other trends in the 1970s and 1980s: cultural studies and structuralism, which North treats as diagnostic rather than interventionist, and the historicist-political turn associated with Fredric Jameson, which Woloch ascribes to the Reagan-Thatcher moment.

29. See Baldwin.

30. The Australasian Victorian Studies Association and its *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies* were founded in 1973. Canada-based journals include *Victorian Periodicals Review*, founded in 1979, and *Victorian Review*, in 1989. Centers for Victorian studies have been founded at Jadavpur University and at several British universities since the first decade of the twenty-first century. While *VS* remains international in reach, ironically its contributors may be less so than at mid-century when it was the subfield's sole venue.

31. The Warwick Research Collective notes Said's comparatist recognition that the "constitutive Eurocentrism of old-style 'Victorian studies' . . . would not be transformed were we merely . . . to 'add colonialism and stir'" (30). Neither, we might add, would the less studied and nonsynonymous US-grounded interests that shaped the field.

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Abstract: Where is the present? Responding to calls for strategic presentism and "undisciplining" that set the nineteenth century into dynamic relation with the twenty-first, this essay stresses the US-centered conception of contemporaneity shaping debates in Victorian studies. If these interventions seem like a swerve from the nationally enclosed historicism for which that field was known, not only the turn to the present but its predominantly American frame of reference are foundational to Victorian studies' emergence in the 1950s and 1960s. Examining postwar claims for Victorian studies' relevance to another present shaping scholars' picture of a "transitional" era and their emphasis on mental life, I argue that the field from its start fashioned Victorian culture as portable historical analogy for US hegemony. Confronting its legacies of empire and whiteness entails attention to the afterlife of its prior entanglement with projects of global statecraft carried out through American intellectual expertise.

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