

H-Diplo FORUM 2022-2

Tribute to the Scholarship of Amy Kaplan

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 INTRODUCTION BY DOUG ROSSINOW, METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Amy Kaplan, the Edward W. Kane Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania and a past president of the American Studies Association, died on July 30, 2020, from brain cancer. H-Diplo organized this roundtable to reflect on Kaplan's impact on the historical study of US foreign relations and of America and the world. Kaplan was a major figure in American studies from the late 1980s right up to now, and part of her transformative impact on that field is the way in which she helped to transnationalize American studies. However, her forceful intellectual work also influenced many who work in the fields of international history and the history of America and the world, and the contributors to this roundtable all account for these cross-disciplinary effects of her scholarship. I offer my own reflections here, and along the way I underline some of the points the other contributors—Kristin Hoganson, A. Naomi Paik, and Salim Yaqub—make in their excellent essays.

In 2014 I taught a seminar for my university's history majors on the historiography of US empire. I was planning to make my students read several books in their entirety, and I preferred broad interpretations of US imperial history. I knew we would start with William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959) as a kind of Ur-text, but after that I ran into some trouble.¹ Following the 9/11 attacks, the descriptive and analytic language of empire had been regularly applied to the United States, from many points on the political spectrum. I knew this had marked a revival of words long disdained, not only by 'real world' political actors but also by historians of US foreign relations. Only a focused survey of scholarly literature revealed to me the full extent of this pre-9/11 blank space in our intellectual history.

The Williams school had been all the rage until the early 1970s, but its sharp decline in the profession, coinciding with the wind-down of the US war in Vietnam, had brought historians' pursuit of US empire into something of a wilderness. This does not mean that scholars stopped thinking of the United States as an empire—no doubt some continued to do so. Nonetheless, between the mid-1970s and the millennium's turn, the titles of critical overviews of US foreign relations in the Williams vein seemingly expressed their authors' efforts to reach audiences beyond New Left devotees and to preempt unobtrusive forms of liberal or conservative critique. Emily S. Rosenberg's *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (1982)—whose preference for "expansion" echoed wording used by Williams and some of his students—and Walter L. LaFeber's *Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, vol. 2: The American Search for Opportunity: 1865–1913* (1993) are prime examples, leading efforts at narrative orienteering in a post-anti-imperialist age.² Overall, the zone lying between Williams and Charles Maier's *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (2006) seemed sparsely marked.³ If *Radical History Review*, in 1993, would publish a roundtable on the question of whether "imperialism" remained "a useful category of analysis," one can imagine the prevailing contemporaneous answer to this question in the generally not-radical space of US diplomatic history. Relatively few US historians concerned

¹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, fiftieth anniversary edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009 [1959]) My thanks to Kristin Hoganson for her comments on a draft version of this introduction.

² Self-deprecatingly, Rosenberg stated that she "ran for cover by employing the term 'expansionism.'" Emily S. Rosenberg, "'The Empire' Strikes Back," *Reviews in American History* 16:4 (December 1988), 585. One could argue that Williams had done the same in the late 1950s. The e-word had not appeared in a published book title of his until 1969: *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Random House, 1969). Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982); Walter L. LaFeber *Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, vol. 2: The American Search for Opportunity: 1865–1913* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³ Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Maier, "Special Section: Imperialism: A Useful Category of Analysis?" *Radical History Review* 57 (Fall 1993): 4-84.

themselves with questions of empire in these years, notably including some who focused on African American history and on questions of structural racism in the American past.⁴

In the 1980s and 1990s, while scholars of European empire continued with their work, in new directions and without controversy about the existence of their subject, it was in literary history that narrative and analysis of US empire (particularly as something more than an erratic episode, as many historians had treated the Spanish-American War) flourished. Amy Kaplan's name was foremost, as both the co-editor of the massive volume *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993) and the author of articles and essays that worked toward the publication of her book *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002).⁵

Concerning Kaplan's numerous methodological and interpretive innovations, I can do little better than to recommend to readers the incisive essays by the other contributors to this roundtable. They will help many to appreciate the ways in which Kaplan's work, beginning with her first book, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988)—which grew from her Ph.D. dissertation, completed at the Johns Hopkins University—through *Cultures* and on to *Anarchy*, opened intellectual pathways for historians and other scholars who wrestled with questions of US power amid the intellectual ascendancy of gender and racial analysis and of cultural studies (or, as historians often phrased it, the “linguistic turn” in the humanities and social sciences). Kaplan showed generations of scholars that there were new and important things to say yet about US empire.⁶

She showed us that this category, so far from having exhausted its usefulness, remained not only valid but necessary in order to comprehend both specific elements in US history and the broad shape and direction of that national history. ‘Inside’ and

⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) concerned themselves with opposition to US empire. Edward Crapol surveyed current work in “Coming to Terms with Empire: The Historiography of Late-Nineteenth-Century American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 16:4 (October 1992): 573-597, but the publications he considered eschewed the e-word. Lloyd Gardner, “Lost Empires,” *Diplomatic History* 13:1 (January 1989): 1-13 was an isolated outpost in this zone, subdued in aspect, while Robert Buzzanco, “What Happened to the New Left? A Radical Reading of American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 23:4 (October 1999): 575-607 was a lament for a lost continent. Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995) expressed compatible interpretive sympathies. In 1986 Geir Lundestad used a question mark to ask “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952,” *Journal of Peace Research* 23:3 (1986): 263-277. By the time he amplified his affirmative response more than a decade later, in the full flower of US post-Cold War triumphalism, he omitted the coy punctuation mark (although by this time he was quoting his own title). Geir Lundestad, “‘Empire by Invitation’ in the American Century,” *Diplomatic History* 23:2 (Spring 1999): 189-217.

For a superb review of this and later work see Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 116:5 (December 2011): 1348-1391.

⁵ Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁶ Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); the articles assembled in “Empires and Intimacies: Lessons from (Post) Colonial Studies: A Roundtable,” *Journal of American History* 88:3 (Dec. 2001): 829-897; and Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) signaled the emergence of histories of US empire and gender/race even before 9/11 (as the works just listed that were published after that baleful date surely were far advanced before then).

'outside,' domestic and foreign, female and male, white and nonwhite, were concepts and categories incessantly violated and mutually constituted in the country's past; powerful shared energies propelled continual social, cultural, and political reconstructions that shaped the imperial space we inherit. No one who reads Kaplan's work can remain innocent of such knowledge. See Hoganson's essay, below, for an outstanding discussion of these dimensions of Kaplan's work. I personally marveled at the way Kaplan demonstrated these insights with brilliant close readings of both literary texts and of state documents—showing how unspoken meanings were right there on the surface of Supreme Court rulings and familiar works of fiction, if only we would take the time to look carefully. These readings, at least in finished, published form, showed few marks of theoretical scaffolding.

However, Kaplan's explicit intellectual debt to Edward Said in *The Anarchy of Empire* is telling. Her engagement with Said's epic explorations of the cultural constructions of 'Eastern' objects of domination, as well as with other cultural analyses of non-US empires, revealed a theoretically enriched scholar who displayed unusual discipline in presenting to readers her findings, her evidence, and her reasoning in polished and generally plain language. These influences on Kaplan also revealed that in spite of her belief that American exceptionalism was a motor of US culture and history, she rendered her interpretations of US empire commensurate with those of other empires, thus eroding the walls of frustratingly narrow exceptionalist intellectual traditions. However, in the end she seemed to be saying: just read your sources closely, and you will find new insights. It's a lesson as old as modern historical study, but one that needs periodic reinforcement by exemplary scholars. This was a point I emphasized with my charges as they followed Williams's *Tragedy* with *The Anarchy of Empire*.⁷

To be sure, these two great scholars' approaches to narrating the history of US empire were dramatically different, perhaps so different that a comparison is not useful. One point on which I wish to dwell briefly, however, is the question of whether the history of US empire ought to focus on overseas territorial conquests and suzerainty, particularly those issuing from the Spanish-American War, or whether US empire is closer to congruency with the larger sweep of United States history. Williams treated war in Cuba and the Philippines almost as a sideshow, a distraction from the main action of the relentless search for US export markets and the use of military power to get and maintain such markets. To put it crudely, in his telling such "expansion" was US elites' answer to the specter of class conflict, a specter conjured into palpable form by the depression of the 1890s. Kaplan focused much of her attention on Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, thus restoring war, colonialism both official and unofficial, and their meanings to the center of US empire's history. Following the publication of Kaplan's *The Anarchy of Empire*, Paul Kramer's landmark study, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (2006),⁸ firmly entrenched, for diplomatic historians, this 'conventional' imperial enterprise as an important, rather than peculiar and somehow detachable, part of US history as well as of world history. Further deepening this confrontation with regimes of forgetting was Alfred McCoy's massive work, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Surveillance State* (2009), even if McCoy's achievement was better known to Southeast Asia specialists than to US historians in general.⁹

⁷ Kaplan specifically cited Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), as well as other comparative works in cultural studies led by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁸ Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006).

⁹ Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009). The rapidly accelerating U.S. scholarly energies around Philippine colonization were displayed also in Anne L. Foster and Julian Go, eds., *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano, eds., *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009). In *The Contours of American History* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1961), Williams had expanded his narrative back to seventeenth-century mercantilism. J. A. Thompson, "William Appleman Williams and the 'American

In the terms of the specific chronological and geographic disparities that these contrasting generations of scholarship together form, Kaplan uniquely transcended and resolved them into a synthesis of particularity and generality. Her own words, from the introduction to *The Anarchy of Empire*, make her point better than any summary might do:

“My...project started as a study of imperial culture in the 1890s in order to counter the denial of empire that structures the discourse of American exceptionalism. Yet I found that this focus implicitly upheld an older exceptionalist historiography, which viewed 1898 as an aberration....Thus the 1890s now appear as an episode in the middle chapters of this book, situated in relation to multiple historical trajectories of the anarchy of empire that include the massive and violent continental conquests of the 1840s and the American colonization of Hawaii in the Pacific, long before it was formally annexed in 1898. Nor do I end my story in 1898, but instead examine its mixed and contradictory legacy in the twentieth century, in the development of the early film industry and in [W. E. B.] DuBois’s articulation of the global color line.”¹⁰

The standing that DuBois evidently held in Kaplan’s personal intellectual pantheon spoke powerfully to her antiracist vision and commitment. Her grasp of white supremacy and empire as deep structures of US life and history were evident, and all the more impressive as this way of understanding America led her to create works of fresh discovery and specific insight, not toward cant or cliché.

It was in the post-9/11 moment that Kaplan emerged as more than a leading-edge scholar. As Paik explains forcefully, she became a beacon of intellectual courage and a figure of inspiration within the new politics of empire that enveloped us all. Her essays of 2003, 2004, and 2005 remain as shining examples of what a prominent scholar can do *as a scholar* to meet the challenges of imperial power as it simultaneously crushes its targets and demands deference from its citizens, now seemingly become mere subjects. In particular, Kaplan’s 2005 essay “Where Is Guantánamo?” will stand the test of time as a demonstration of how a thought leader can channel outrage into the tempered glass of precise, powerfully reasoned insight and carefully arrayed knowledge, seeing through the propaganda and dislocations of an aggressive regime and exposing to light both these tactics of power and the realities underneath.¹¹

After these exemplary interventions, Kaplan turned her attention to what would prove to be the capstone of her life’s work, her project on Zionism and US–Israel relations. As Yaqub shows in his fine discussion of Kaplan’s work on these topics, her searching consideration of the term “homeland,” which was so suddenly prominent in the United States after 9/11 and had for so long been filled near to bursting with meaning in the cultural space of Zionism, formed a linkage between Kaplan’s histories of the American imperial present and her undaunted entry into the critical study of Zionism.

I first made contact with Amy when a mutual friend and colleague informed me that Amy and I were working on overlapping projects (she on the cultural history of American understandings of the US partnership with Israel, I on the history of US Zionism after 1948). We commenced extensive email correspondence, most intensely when I was living and teaching in Europe. Quickly I encountered the testimony she made in her article, “In Palestine, Occupational Hazards,” published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2010. Here she recounted the harrowing (and sometimes darkly comic) circumstances of work under military occupation for faculty at al-Quds, Birzeit, and other West Bank universities. She had gone to Palestine to participate in a set of collegial meetings at these institutions under the auspices of the Palestinian American Research Center, with funds from the US State Department. Reading her matter-of-fact witnessing of colonialism in the present day and feeling her solidarity with her Palestinian peers impressed me deeply. She decentered herself, her self-

Empire,” *Journal of American Studies* 7:1 (April 1973): 91-104 remains the most piercing critique of Williams’s location of imperialism in the U.S. crusade for export markets.

¹⁰ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 17.

¹¹ Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo,” *American Quarterly* 57:3 (September 2005): 831-858.

effacement as well as her characteristically controlled prose a welcome relief from the excessively performative tendencies of progressive politics. Amy's position in academia was prominent and secure, and she was using these assets to raise up to attention struggles and oppressions that many of us find too hot to touch, much less to discuss in detail.¹²

Amy offered me the opportunity to comment on draft chapters and the full manuscript of what became *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (2018). This gave us the chance, in addition to working through various points of interpretation, to geek out over our shared researchers' glee around odd bits of Zionist trivia. I knew how important the book might be. Amy was clearly taking care, even more than she had in past projects, to write for a general educated audience, without sacrificing any scholarly depth, cogency, or honesty. I would still say, as I wrote to her at one point, "A handful of previous scholars have been nibbling around the edges of this topic in recent years, but you charge right into its heart." Her unyielding analytical rigor and perfectly rational tone, her sure command of sources and her illumination of both hegemonic thought and neglected fissures, ambiguities, and contingencies in American thought about Israel, all make *Our American Israel* a tour de force. I told her that I could think of a lot of people I knew who ought to read it, but I could only hope that they would.¹³

Finally we were able to meet in person when I was in Philadelphia for a SHAFR meeting in June 2018. In October I happened to be there again doing research and we could talk in more leisurely fashion. In the intervening four months, I had learned of Amy's surgery to remove a glioma and of her continuing cancer treatment. We walked from her home to a café where her robust appetite for lunch heartened me—the kind of feeling one recognizes, in retrospect, as the fleeting hope one has for a friend who is very badly ill. We talked of the past and the present, she offered analysis of current discourse on Palestine and Israel, particularly in the American professoriate, and we learned something about how each of us had come to see Zionism as a subject for serious, critical analysis after upbringings in which it had been simply part of the air we had breathed. She probably could have completed some of my sentences for me, but her manners were too refined to have permitted that. She was probably one of the least pretentious or egotistical 'big names' in academia whom I've ever met. Other participants in this roundtable also testify to her superb collegiality.

Amy Kaplan made distinctive, powerful, highly generative contributions to knowledge. Their impact will continue. She was, however, an unusual scholar in more than these most conventional ways. She rose to the moment(s) that she met—intellectually, politically, personally—and her professionalism and her basic seriousness never faltered in the process. I thank all the roundtable participants for helping to describe her work's significance and the personnel at H-Diplo for instigating the roundtable.

¹² Kaplan, "In Palestine, Occupational Hazards," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 7, 2019, https://www.chronicle.com/article/in-palestine-occupational-hazards/?cid=gen_sign_in.

¹³ Kaplan, *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). For related scholarship, see the foundational works Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), as well as studies including: Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009); Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (New York: NYU Press, 2012); Keith P. Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Emily Alice Katz, *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture, 1948–1967* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015); Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.–Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Shaul Mitelpunkt, *Israel in the American Mind: The Cultural Politics of US-Israeli Relations, 1958–1988* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Daniel G. Hummel, *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); and Geoffery P. Levin, "Before the New Antisemitism: Arab Critics of Zionism and American Jewish Politics, 1917–1974," *American Jewish History* 105:1–2 (January–April 2021): 103–126.

Contributors:

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 ESSAY BY KRISTIN HOGANSON, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

When Amy Kaplan agreed to write letters for me in the waning years of the last millennium, I never imagined that I might someday write for her. She was such a luminary, even then, in mid-career. I am tremendously sad that she is not here to write about her own professional journey for H-Diplo but nonetheless grateful to have the opportunity to honor her contributions to historical understanding. Foremost among these, to my mind, is the role she played in galvanizing the cultures of U.S. imperialism field, especially through her co-edited (with Donald E. Pease) anthology, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Duke University Press, 1993).¹⁴

This cutting-edge volume rightly receives credit for sparking a movement that has transformed US history, American Studies, and related fields. But it was not Kaplan's first word on the subject. My admiration for Kaplan began with her 1990 essay, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s," published in *American Literary History*.¹⁵ I stumbled upon this when prepping for prelims. It was a revelation.

Despite being an American Studies major, I did not learn much about the popular imperialist romance novels of the 1890s as an undergraduate. My coursework focused more on highbrow than popular fiction and it skirted the topic of US imperialism. To be fair, I had some exposure to books such as Patricia Nelson Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987) and William Appleman Williams' *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (1969). I had read texts such as W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and Frank B. Linderman's *Pretty-shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (1932).¹⁶ Yet most of my coursework was relentlessly national or else focused on official relations between nation-states. The characters who starred in accounts of war and diplomacy were overwhelmingly well-to-do white men, but that apparently went without saying, for the authors of the books I was reading on policymakers were not saying much about class privilege, whiteness, or gender. Kaplan, in contrast, brought her terrific capacities as a cultural critic to her analyses of imperial politics, and she had plenty to say about gender.

"Romancing the Empire" starts with a statement by Senator Albert Beveridge on Philippine annexation as an opportunity for "all the glorious young manhood of the republic – the most virile, ambitious, impatient, militant manhood the world has ever seen" (659). Kaplan unpacked this statement, showing that Beveridge depicted overseas empire as an arena for American men to become what they already were and to enact their essential manhood before the admiring eyes of the world. She then proceeded to locate Beveridge in his cultural context: the best-selling historical romance novels which laid out the claims that Beveridge eventually echoed.

Although her essay focused on the kinds of historical novels in which characters would unabashedly declare: "Oh what a man you are! What a man" (676), it provided a primer on how to read a wider array of sources, including news accounts, political speeches, and government documents. Kaplan taught her readers how to analyze efforts to embody American

¹⁴ Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁵ Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s," *American Literary History* 2:4 (Winter 1990): 659-690.

¹⁶ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987); William Appleman Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society*, 1969 (New York: Vintage Books, 1970); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903, edited and with an introduction by David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997); Samuel Langhorne Clemens, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1889 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982); Frank B. Linderman, *Pretty-shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows*, 1932 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972).

power, assert individual and national masculinity, feminize colonial subjects, and wield nostalgia in bids for power. Even as she emphasized efforts to link masculinity to political subjecthood, she considered how swashbuckling romances recruited women into empire. She cautioned her readers to avoid uncritically reproducing the outlooks of historical actors. And she insisted that cultural production matters. Novels, she argued, are not just political allegories. They have reconfigured the relations between masculinity, nationality, and empire. At the close of the nineteenth century, they helped shift understandings of virility from a means to the end of empire building to an end in itself.

This essay appeared the same year as the first U.S. edition of Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Pathbreaking scholarship on gender and imperialism such as Gail Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* and Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* was in the pipeline, but there was not much already in print.¹⁷ For my prelim field in Comparative Empires, I had to search far and wide to find readings that spoke to my interest in women's and gender history. When I turned to my prospectus, I struggled to make a case for a cultural approach to the study of imperial policy, and more specifically for one attentive to gender. Kaplan helped me make the case. Her work opened a door that I had not known existed, giving me a glimpse into new realm of possibility for historical analysis.

The publication of *Cultures of United States Imperialism* in 1993 made it easier to make the case for the value of my research on masculinity and policymaking because the title of the volume put a name to a nascent field and the subsequent pages thoroughly demonstrated the significance of this field. Kaplan's introductory essay, "Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," made a compelling argument for foregrounding empire in the study of American culture, applying cultural analysis to histories of U.S. imperialism, and addressing the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism. Rejecting consensus approaches to national histories, Kaplan advocated for analyses attuned to the fissures of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Rejecting the binary opposition between the foreign and domestic, Kaplan cited borderlands and ethnic studies scholarship as models for understanding the interconnections between internal and external colonization and the imperial constitution of seemingly national cultures. In advancing these points, the twenty-three essays in the volume also assert a more fundamental point: that the United States was less exceptional than empire-deniers liked to think; that its twentieth-century struggles against totalitarianism did not prove the anti-imperial case but rather, revealed additional aspects of US imperial reach.

Among the essays included in *Cultures of United States Imperialism* is another by Kaplan, "Black and Blue on San Juan Hill." This essay analyzes representations of US combat efforts in Cuba in 1898. Linking the Cuban war to the issue of Civil War memory, Kaplan contends that "the vitality of the male body became the symbolic medium for national restoration, as manliness figured the common ground between previously warring factions" (219).¹⁸ Kaplan shows how representations of the charge up San Juan Hill spoke to the topic of North–South reconciliation and the position of African Americans in both the nation and overseas empire. She finds that long after the guns had been stilled, San Juan Hill remained a battleground over political meanings, rights, and power.

Against the backdrop of accounts that rendered Cuban combatants invisible, and thus presumably less worthy of political authority than American combat troops, US military personnel and civilian commentators fought over how to represent

¹⁷ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 1989 (First US edition: Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁸ Kaplan, "Black and Blue on San Juan Hill," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 219–236. Note that this essay appeared around the same time as Nina Silber's *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993) and that it predated David W. Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

African American men. Whereas President Theodore Roosevelt diminished the capacities and accomplishments of African-American troops, thus linking the political fate of African Americans in the United States to that of Cubans in Cuba, the Black press disputed the special connection between white manhood and the American nation and imagined solidarities with colonized peoples in places such as Cuba and the Philippines.

To fully grasp the nuances of this essay you should read it yourself, for it is too layered, multivocal, and richly contextualized to capture in a brief summary. Suffice it to say that in this essay Kaplan brings an implicit thread from “Romancing the Empire” to the fore: “the foundations for the construction of the white male body as a figure for American nationhood lie in the subjugation of black male bodies” (233). Kaplan made it clear that cultural analyses of U.S. imperialism must be explicitly and thoroughly intersectional and that intersectional analyses of U.S. culture must consider national and imperial positioning as well as class, ethnicity, race, and gender.

Kaplan’s research continued to be foundational to my own even after I moved away from masculinity and war in my second book. Her 1998 essay, “Manifest Destiny,” followed through on her earlier call to break down the binary between domestic and foreign relations.¹⁹ Writing against the tendency in women’s studies scholarship to contrast the domestic with the commercial and the political, Kaplan reframed the domestic in opposition to the foreign. Part of the cultural work of domesticity, she concludes, is “to unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined at home” (582). Refuting the assumption that the domestic should be viewed as fixed and self-evident, she instead argues for a process of domestication that “entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien” (582). In this sense, domestication is related to the imperial projects of race-making and civilizing, with the conditions of domesticity becoming markers that distinguish civilization from savagery.

Although my own research took a different direction, focusing on a later time period and globavore consumption, I was still indebted to Kaplan for unpacking connections between domesticity, nationalism, racism, and empire. I wanted, after my first book, to center women’s agency in US foreign relations history prior to the passage of the U.S. Constitution’s Nineteenth Amendment, and I appreciated Kaplan’s work for helping me find a way to do so. Centering domesticity provided a way to center women, on their own turf, and not just as helpmeets, exceptions, and symbols. Centering women in turn helped advance Kaplan’s point that histories of American empire encompassed far more than policy-making, that empire could be a lens through which to reconceptualize even histories previously understood as quintessentially domestic.

A version of Kaplan’s “Manifest Destiny” essay subsequently appeared in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. She published this book in 2002, the same year that Thomas Bender’s edited collection, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, hit the shelves.²⁰ Bender’s call for transnational histories amplified Kaplan’s dissatisfaction with histories that uncritically took the nation-state as the unit of historical analysis. Like Kaplan, Bender saw the value in histories both smaller and larger than the nation. And yet lost in some of the scholarship that answered Bender’s call for border-crossing histories was the attention to empire found in Kaplan’s work. So once again, her thinking inspired my own and indeed served as a launching pad for a recent volume that Jay Sexton and I co-edited: *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*.²¹

I met Kaplan in person only a few times, the first time close to the publication of her “Manifest Domesticity” article. She graciously agreed to comment on a conference panel that I was on. This was back in the day when I had few senior women

¹⁹ Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” *American Literature* 70:3 (September 1998): 581-606.

²⁰ Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

²¹ Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, *Crossing Empires: Taking US History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

as role models in the US foreign relations field. Kaplan took the time and trouble to comment thoughtfully on our papers and she then went out to dinner with us and dished on the challenges we were facing in the profession. Later, when I screwed up the courage to ask her for letters, she said yes.

Although I continued to benefit from her work over the years, I now recall her most vividly at that time, twenty years ago: brilliant, interdisciplinary, sparky, and encouraging; generous, principled, and humane. Her personality shines through in her scholarship, which has had and continues to have a tectonic impact on US history and related fields.

ESSAY BY A. NAOMI PAIK, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, CHICAGO

I come to this roundtable recognizing the legacy of Amy Kaplan with deep humility, both saddened by her loss and humbled to have this opportunity to reflect on her formative and continuing impact. Though we had met and engaged in dialogue, I did not have the privilege of knowing her, and I continue to send my loving condolences to those who did. I approach these reflections as a fan and one of the many scholars who has long looked to her scholarship as a model and guide to understanding the complexity of US imperial power in its multiple dimensions. While this forum clearly speaks to her impact in diplomatic history, Kaplan's work influenced generations of scholars across disciplinary siloes. Indeed, her interdisciplinary approach to unraveling the entangled threads of empire stands, in my view, as one of her most important contributions.

As Kristin Hoganson notes so well in her remarks here, Kaplan worked to break open American Studies, US history, and US literary and cultural studies by focusing on imperialism and the importance of culture in securing imperial power. While her work, of course, grapples with transnationalism, it sought, crucially, to highlight how capital, people, military forces, and cultural forms and ideas have moved across borders along imperial lines and the power hierarchies they rely on and manufacture. Picking up where Hoganson left off, my comments focus on pieces Kaplan wrote in response to the United States' cataclysmic response to the September 11, 2001 attacks— "Homeland Insecurities" (February 2003), "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today" (October 2003), and "Where is Guantánamo" (2005).²² We are now twenty years past the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, two iconic nerve centers of US imperial economic and military power, and the resurgent imperial power the US has deployed in response, waging a global war on terror with no limits in time or space, while shoring up its own borders and sovereign power guided by the logic of homeland security.

Kaplan was grappling with these world-changing shifts as they were happening with a velocity that left no time for reflection, the collective angst many of us felt mobilized into the "dry grief of an endless political rage," as Judith Butler phrased it so eloquently.²³ At the time Kaplan published "Homeland Insecurities" and "Violent Belongings," the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had just formed as part of the most significant restructuring of the federal government since World War II, overseeing twenty-two agencies, including those newly created to target noncitizens like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Her critical interventions also arrived amid the US invasion of Iraq, which was driven by the Bush Administration's big lie about weapons of mass destruction and leading to an eight-year occupation and ongoing insurgent warfare.

In "Violent Belongings," Kaplan highlighted how discussions of the United States as an empire moved from analyses suppressed and dismissed as "left wing polemic" to interpretations openly embraced—interpretations that aimed less to reckon with histories of violence and oppression than to describe an ethos that advanced US global power. Both conservative and liberal pundits advocated extending North American force and influence to remake "the world... in our image"—whether justified by a renewed "white man's burden" against the uncivilized of the darker nations or as a liberal empire spreading human rights and democratic values.²⁴ Under such changing conditions, with US imperialism "coming out of the closet" (Kaplan quoted the conservative, openly imperialist pundit Charles Krauthammer using this phrase, as he

²² Amy Kaplan, "Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003): 82–93. Amy Kaplan, "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 17, 2003," *American Quarterly* 56:1 (March 2004): 1–18. Amy Kaplan, "Where is Guantánamo," *American Quarterly* 57:3 (September 2005), 831–58.

²³ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004): xix.

²⁴ Kaplan, "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today," 5.

appropriated the metaphor of a progressive movement), she found the limits of her own “method of exposure,” noting that “unpacking ...often seems irrelevant.”²⁵ There is no power in exposing what is openly embraced.

Speaking as president of the American Studies Association, Kaplan called on scholars to use their varied modes of expertise not just to unveil, but to understand the meanings of US imperialism and their “lessons for the present.” Historians could demonstrate how, because imperialism festers as a root cause of the problems we face, it cannot possibly offer “solutions to a broken world.” Literary and cultural studies scholars could assert alternative meanings of key terms “hijacked” in service of empire, like “freedom,” to articulate alternative imaginaries and paths forward.²⁶

Kaplan took up her own call. In “Homeland Insecurities” and “Violent Belongings,” she traced the genealogies and shifting meanings of terms with emerging salience—“ground zero” and “homeland”—extending her interest in investigating how language shapes our understandings of “the conceptual, affective, and symbolic”²⁷ borders between the domestic and the foreign, home and abroad. By focusing on these terms, she showed how discourses of American exceptionalism were escalating to new heights, drawing on long traditions of silencing histories that might show how US imperialism might be responsible for the problems we face. For example, in musing over “ground zero,” the term describing the 9/11 ruins of the World Trade Center, Kaplan noted how it became linked to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, as a site exemplifying US vulnerability to foreign attack and to the country’s heroic response in WWII. This link between the World Trade Center and Pearl Harbor, however, effaced the history embedded in the genealogy of “ground zero,” which originally referred not to a US military base on occupied territory in Hawai’i, but to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, obliterated by the only atomic bombings in history, launched by the United States as imperial victor. But as Kaplan stated, this connection to the US atomic bombings, which destroyed lives and launched a global arms race in weapons of mutually assured destruction, cannot be acknowledged “because to do so would be to trouble the very binary oppositions and exceptionalist narratives erected on that ground.”²⁸

Just as the DHS took flight (buoyed by massive budget allocations), Kaplan’s cognitive mapping of “homeland” elucidated how this term worked to buttress national borders that had been made too permeable by the forces of globalization, leaving us vulnerable to attack. “Homeland” marked a shift in the self-conception of the United States, from one characterized by metaphors of mobility (like the nation of immigrants or manifest destiny) to one claiming shared origins rooted in the national territory and implying a racial nationalism of shared bloodlines.

While she briefly raised the “terrible irony” of this term to Indigenous peoples without pushing further, the terms Kaplan draws on all refer to the settler colonial origins of the United States—from the discourses justifying the invasion and colonization of the lands to those assuming that the settler colonial project is somehow complete—that the territory it claims belongs fully to, and thus must be secured by, the US sovereign state. But this security over the homeland can never be realized. And it is this certain failure of “homeland security” that mobilizes its endless project in permanent warfare both at home—waged against internal enemies like migrants excluded from this “fusion of nation and nativity”²⁹—and anywhere “terror” can be found. As she highlighted, “homeland” performed “cultural work of securing national borders,” while simultaneously producing a sense of “radical insecurity.” This radical insecurity, so exposed by 9/11, points toward what

²⁵ Kaplan, “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today,” 3.

²⁶ Kaplan, “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today,” 6.

²⁷ Kaplan, “Homeland Insecurities,” 82.

²⁸ Kaplan, “Homeland Insecurities,” 84.

²⁹ Kaplan, “Homeland Insecurities,” 87.

Mark Neocleous calls the “paradox of security: in security we find insecurity.”³⁰ No matter what that state does to make the homeland secure, deploying its “unparalleled power,”³¹ it forever remains “utterly vulnerable” and insecure, necessitating more security measures and state violence in an endless, escalating spiral.

Homeland security raises another core paradox of US imperialism that Kaplan had long been investigating. Though seeking to “cordon off the nation as a domestic space from external foreign threats, it actually breaks down the boundaries between inside and outside, about seeing the homeland in a state of constant emergency from threats within and without” (90). She continued to delve into this paradox by investigating the prison camp installed at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base to indefinitely detain “enemy combatants” of the War on Terror. By asking “Where is Guantánamo?” she illuminated the proliferation of sites blurring the very boundaries of the foreign and domestic that “homeland security” ostensibly fortified. As she argued, Guantánamo was both a product and symbol of US imperial deployments of ambiguous sovereignty, which served to bolster its reach and to assert its sovereign power however it deemed necessary.

Kaplan’s article blew open my brain, lucidly articulating foggy, nascent thoughts I could not yet pull together. As a clueless grad student, I was still struggling to make sense of a messy dissertation prospectus when I had the opportunity to workshop my first stab at making sense of the “HIV prison camp” built at Guantánamo to detain Haitian migrants alongside Kaplan at the 2006 Tepoztlán Institute for the Transnational History of the Americas. Though I was obviously intimidated by participating in the same session as such an illustrious scholar, whom I deeply admired, Kaplan was exceedingly generous in her comments to me and to the broader conversation. (I was also comforted to see that we shared a certain academic social awkwardness.) Her work helped congeal lines of thinking that would ultimately come together in my first book, *Rightlessness*.

Publishing the essay in 2005, Kaplan again tracked a moving target as her object of study. The Abu Ghraib torture scandal had broken into public consciousness in May 2004, and one month later the US Supreme Court had ruled on *Rasul v. Bush*, its first case on the “enemy combatants” detained at Guantánamo, deciding that the prisoners did have rights to habeas corpus. *Rasul* compelled the United States to hold Combatant Status Review Tribunals (CSRTs), kangaroo court performances, lacking any due process protections, that substituted for habeas hearings. While the CSRTs made a mockery of justice in their cosmetic adherence to Court’s ruling, *Rasul* did ultimately lead to the release of the prisoners’ names to the public for the first time in March 2005. Until that point, we could grasp only glimpses of whom the US government was holding in indefinite detention.

Kaplan was making sense of the “strange temporality” and legal status of Guantánamo as a site of indefinite detention located in “indefinite legal borderland between the domestic and foreign.”³² How did the United States come to possess and how has it deployed this “useful corner of the world”?³³ Kaplan unfolded the layers of imperial history that had accumulated at Guantánamo. She outlined its history of colonization by Spain to the Spanish-American War and the US intervention that wrested this struggle for independence from any outside power into a vector of neocolonial control over the new nation, sealed through the 1901 Platt Amendment, which gave the United States authority to intervene in Cuban affairs and, crucially, the ability to lease Guantánamo Bay for a US naval base. This lease, with its temporal provision that it lasts for the indefinite future until both parties agree to cancel it, and its juridical provision that Guantánamo lies under the “complete jurisdiction and control” of the United States, while remaining under the “ultimate sovereignty” of Cuba, stands at the core

³⁰ Mark Neocleous, “Against Security,” *Radical Philosophy* 100 (March/April 2000): 12.

³¹ Kaplan, “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today,” 6.

³² Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo,” 837, 847.

³³ Paul Kramer, “A Useful Corner of the World: Guantánamo,” *New Yorker*, July 30, 2013, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-useful-corner-of-the-world-guantnamo#slide_ss_0=1.

of the paradoxes Kaplan sought to understand. US leaders made good use of the lease, essentially granting the United States permanent control over the Bay—gaining a military foothold in this key strategic site in the Caribbean, good for refueling its ships, launching interventions in Latin America, and, later, for imprisoning migrants it deemed undesirable and excludable. As Kaplan argued so cogently, these histories of race and empire have sedimented at Guantánamo and cling to the so-called “enemy combatants” caged there—“shackled slaves, infected bodies, revolutionary subjects, undesirable immigrants.”³⁴ Indeed, the US state created a new legal category of person, the “enemy combatant,” in ways that “erode the distinctions among citizens and aliens, immigrants and criminals, prisoners and detainees, terrorists and refugees.”³⁵

She elucidated this erosion or blurring of categories as a longstanding, core vector of US imperial power, drawing on the “ambiguous legacy”³⁶ of the Insular Cases, which grappled with the question of whether the Constitution followed the flag wherever the US empire roamed beyond US borders and essentially answered, “sometimes for some people, but not for the colonized.” As she noted, “this differential application of the Constitution created the legal edifice for imperial rule.”³⁷ This legal edifice has endured, rendering rightless the Haitian migrants interdicted, detained at Guantánamo, and forcibly repatriated (in violation of international law), as well as the “enemy combatants” tortured and indefinitely imprisoned there years later. And even though the judiciary sought to check executive power in *Rasul*, this case is “not a decision against empire.”³⁸ It instead extends the Insular Cases’ ambiguous legacy by creating a second-tier legal structure that shields the state from accountability and exposes prisoners to rightlessness. In years following this article’s publication, we can see how the state has deployed this two-tiered structure in the CSRTs and the military commissions, or what survivor Binyam Mohammed called “con-missions,” used not to determine guilt or innocence but to affirm their status as “enemy combatants” and justify their punishment.³⁹ This is why I have argued that we cannot turn to the state or its legal system to find justice when the state is the agent of injustice.

Flexibility, the blurring of foreign and domestic and of the legal categories of personhood, works to extend and embolden imperial and state violence.

As we memorialize Kaplan’s passing, we are marking multiple macabre anniversaries: 9/11; the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan (and now, the disastrous withdrawal and Taliban takeover in 2021) and the launching of the permanent War on Terror; the opening of a global martial detention regime, including the Guantánamo camp in January 2002; the creation in 2003 of DHS (and the state-sponsored terror of ICE and CBP) and its massive surveillance, incarceration, and policing capacities.

When Kaplan made her key interventions, I did not see myself as taking up her call to scholars to “bring to the present crisis our knowledge from juridical, literary, and visual representations about the way such exclusions from personhood and humanity have been made throughout history, from the treatment of Indians and slaves to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.”⁴⁰ (I could barely figure out what people were saying in class.) But, with this opportunity

³⁴ Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo,” 840.

³⁵ Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo,” 853.

³⁶ Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo,” 851.

³⁷ Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo,” 842.

³⁸ Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo,” 846.

³⁹ Quoted in A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in US Prison Camps Since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016): 153.

⁴⁰ Kaplan, “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today,” 7.

to reflect on her legacy, I realize the depth of her influence and the power of this call on my work. This says little about anything I have done but speaks volumes to her overall impact on the fields and questions she encouraged us to immerse ourselves in.

Kaplan also reminded us that empire is contingent and full of fault-lines that we can pry open, not only to unveil or denounce it, but also to shift understandings of it so thoroughly that the dismantling of US empire becomes common sense, as necessary for a shared future. It takes discipline and work to maintain this hope, as abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba argues.⁴¹ Kaplan steered us in this direction during a prior inflection point of this moment of crisis. It is on us to continue the work.

⁴¹ Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (New York: Haymarket, 2021): 26-29.

ESSAY BY SALIM YAQUB, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

Unlike other participants in this roundtable, I did not know Amy Kaplan personally. I met her only once, at the 2018 SHAFR annual meeting in Philadelphia, and there was no time for more than a quick exchange of pleasantries. I was aware of and admired her work but wasn't steeped in it; I became much more familiar with it after her death. From the tributes that have poured forth, it is clear that Kaplan was an extraordinary colleague, mentor, and friend, and I now wish I had gotten to know her well. But I can claim no real acquaintance beyond what I have met on the page.

Happily, what *is* on the page is endlessly illuminating. Among the many themes Amy Kaplan so brilliantly explored over the course of her scholarly career, I'd like to address the conceptual juxtapositions she discerned while critiquing U.S. policies toward the Middle East. By examining how certain ideas evoked their own opposites, Kaplan captured the suppleness and flexibility of ideologies underlying U.S. involvement in the region. These paradoxes emerged most vividly in her scrutiny of the discourses surrounding two broad subject areas: the U.S.–Israeli relationship in the decades since Israel's founding, and the U.S. “Global War on Terror” launched after the attacks of September 11, 2001. An evident aim of such discourses has been to make disproportionate military action by both Israel and the United States seem morally justified and destined for success.

In her 2018 book *Our American Israel*, Kaplan noted that American opinion leaders have long ascribed two contradictory qualities to Israel, seeing it as “a moral community of both concentration camp survivors and heroic warriors . . . a state that is both vulnerable and indomitable, an invincible victim.”⁴² Powerfully fueling this dual conception were the circumstances of Israel's creation in 1948: a decisive military victory against a seemingly formidable coalition of Arab armies, achieved just a few years after millions of Jews had been slaughtered in the Nazi death camps. In the version of Israel's founding popularized for American audiences, it appeared that “Israel's only option for survival was military preeminence, a logic that has explained the perpetual state of war forced on a peace-loving people.”⁴³ This view comported with America's own self-image as a fundamentally peaceful nation that used military force only as a last resort, and usually only in self-defense or in the defense of other innocents.

Later events in Israel's history also lent themselves to this public narrative of triumph snatched from the jaws of threatened annihilation. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 came on the heels of a diplomatic crisis in which Arab leaders and polemicists employed wild and menacing rhetoric, arousing fears of another Holocaust among Jews around the world, a concern shared by many sympathetic non-Jews. Military analysts tended to be more sanguine about Israel's prospects in another war, and Israel shortly won an overwhelming victory against its Arab neighbors. In witnessing this rollercoaster event, Kaplan wrote, “Americans could vicariously experience both the dread of vulnerability and the thrill of invincibility.” Indeed, on this occasion Israel surpassed even the United States, achieving a lightning triumph at a time when Washington was mired in Vietnam.⁴⁴

Consequently, many Americans came to believe they had a lot to learn from Israel, and public discourse increasingly reflected this view. In a fascinating turn, Kaplan showed in *Our American Israel* how Israel's dual narrative eventually became the story of the United States as well. It was the culmination of a broad transformation in American portrayals of the U.S.–Israeli relationship since the late 1940s, from what Kaplan called “the Americanization of Israel to the Israelization of America; from the admiration of Israel as a mirror of America's self-idealized image to the emulation of Israel as a model

⁴² Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 3

⁴³ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 7.

⁴⁴ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 100.

for fighting America's worst nightmares."⁴⁵ The shift had been years in the making, but it became unmistakable after 9/11. In the official U.S. discourse following the shocking attacks, Kaplan wrote, "the United States took on Israel's paradoxical role as an invincible victim. In this view, America was confronting, on a global scale, murderous enemies who threatened nothing less than total annihilation. Terrorism would force the United States to fight a never-ending battle for national survival, even as the country was providentially destined to vanquish all evil."⁴⁶

The post-9/11 urge to identify the United States with Israel's presumed existential predicament was evident in countless ways, some of them obvious, as in the frequently heard expression, "Now we are all Israelis," and others more subtle. Kaplan highlighted this revealing passage from the 2003 book *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*, by President George W. Bush's neoconservative advisors Richard Perle and David Frum: "There is no middle way for Americans; it is either victory or holocaust."⁴⁷

Our American Israel mined another, more sensitive irony: anti-Semitic support for Israel's creation. Overwhelmingly, the Zionist movement was a response to pervasive and often murderous persecution of Jews. In the early aftermath of World War II, however, some American politicians hoped that a Jewish homeland in Palestine would provide an alternative haven for Holocaust survivors who might otherwise seek refuge in the United States. "Support for Zionism," Kaplan wrote, "allowed some Americans to have it both ways: they could support rescuing the suffering victims of the Nazis while keeping their distance from the same people."⁴⁸ In a 2017 article, Kaplan addressed a contemporary version of this irony, chiding American Zionist groups like the Anti-Defamation League and the Zionist Organization of America for accepting the support of Christian evangelical organizations that, in some cases, had flirted with anti-Semitism. When these mainstream Zionists did allege anti-Semitism, Kaplan wrote, they all too often directed their ire at pro-Palestinian activists whose only offense was anti-Zionism. "To be sure," Kaplan acknowledged, "there are critics of Israel who also express hostility toward Jews, and anti-Semitism should not be tolerated on the left or right," though she did not elaborate on the matter.⁴⁹ Had she lived to witness more recent American demonstrations against Israeli state violence, in which some pro-Palestinian protesters have verbally and even physically assaulted Jews—incidents far less evident in earlier pro-Palestinian manifestations in the United States—I like to think that Kaplan would have had more to say about this distressing phenomenon.⁵⁰

But let's return to the notion of the "invincible victim," a theme Kaplan explored a decade and half prior to the publication of *Our American Israel*, with reference to the United States alone. In her 2003 presidential address to the American Studies Association (which A. Naomi Paik analyzes far more thoroughly than I do), Kaplan noted that, in all the belligerent talk about the need for the United States to flex its muscles on the world stage and discipline its Middle Eastern adversaries in particular, "there's a paradoxical sense of invincibility and unparalleled power and at the same time utter and incomprehensible vulnerability—a lethal combination, which reminds us that the word *vulnerable* once also referred to the

⁴⁵ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 7.

⁴⁶ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 239–40.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 241.

⁴⁸ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 26.

⁴⁹ Kaplan, "The Old 'New Anti-Semitism' and Resurgent White Supremacy," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 283 (Summer 2017), 13–15.

⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 2021, B1; *New York Times*, May 22, 2021, A17.

capacity to harm.” What made this combination so lethal, Kaplan argued, was its call for endless, militarized vigilance against never-ending threats, its invocation of “an empire in perpetuity.”⁵¹

The elusive—and seemingly unstoppable—nature of this “empire in perpetuity” came through most vividly in Kaplan’s discussion of the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where the U.S. government has held suspected “enemy combatants” since 2002. In her 2005 essay “Where is Guantánamo?” (again, Paik does this piece far more justice than I can), Kaplan eviscerated the Bush administration’s Kafkaesque justifications for operating the facility, whereby U.S. officials maximized their sovereign power on the ground by disavowing it in legal theory:

“The most outrageous claim of the Bush administration about Guantánamo continues to be that the Republic of Cuba has ‘ultimate sovereignty’ over this territory, that therefore neither the Constitution nor U.S. obligations to international treaties apply, and, as a result, that the prisoners at Guantánamo have no rights. Nor, according to this argument, do Cuban laws hold sway there. In other words, because the U.S. *lacks* formal sovereignty, it can do whatever it wants there, and the military can act with impunity to brutally control every aspect of the prisoners’ lives.”⁵²

If Americans (like Israelis) could be invincible victims, why couldn’t they also be unauthorized authoritarians?

In her American Studies Association presidential address, Kaplan explored the varied meanings of another word: “homeland.” This term is of course deeply embedded in both Zionist and Palestinian discourses of belonging, exile, diaspora, and return, but it became weirdly ubiquitous in the United States in the wake of 9/11, most conspicuously in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2002. With her unerring eye for the protean and the paradoxical, Kaplan demonstrated how “homeland” conjured up contradictory meanings that, working together, tended to reinforce America’s dual status as invincible victim:

“An odd thing about the use of the term *homeland* for the United States is that it refers often to a nation that lacks a state and territory, one to which a people or ethnic group aspires, such as Palestine, Kurdistan, or the Sikh, Tamil, or Basque homeland. Such groups are often viewed as underdogs whose legitimate claims to territory have been usurped by another state. . . . In this meaning, *homeland* may evoke a sense not of stability and security, but of deracination and desire. This also seems to be an appropriation and inversion. The idea of America as aspiring to a lost homeland depends on evoking terrorism as the constant threat to sever Americans from their legitimate aspirations. Thus the idea of the homeland works by generating a profound sense of insecurity, not only because of the threat of terrorism but also because the homeland is a fundamentally uncanny place, haunted by all the unfamiliar yet strangely familiar foreign specters that threaten to turn it into its opposite.”⁵³

Here, Kaplan showed how even the most extravagant assertions of U.S. global power could be accompanied by rhetorical turns that enabled Americans to claim some of the aura of Jewish, and even Palestinian, suffering and displacement. Inversion indeed!

⁵¹ Kaplan, “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 13, 2003, *American Quarterly* 56:1 (March 2004): 4; italics in original.

⁵² Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo?” *American Quarterly* 57: 3 (September 2005): 834; italics in original.

⁵³ Kaplan, “Violent Belongings,” 9; italics in original.

In these searching passages, as in so many other areas of her work, Amy Kaplan displayed a rare combination of scholarly virtues: clarity, rigor, ethical commitment, appropriate indignation, and a boundless capacity for conceptual and linguistic playfulness. We are bereft at the stilling of such an original voice, but sustained by its lasting reverberations.