

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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After months of preparation, *NeoAmericanist* is pleased to release Volume 4 no. 2 in our newly redesigned and much improved format. To build on our mission of making the journal an interactive and accessible environment, we have moved to a web 2.0 system, which allows for extensive feedback, discussion, better archiving and a host of other features. Aside from the obvious move from a Flash format (which presented accessibility issues and problems with archiving), articles will now be available in HTML and PDF format, making them easier to search and access.

The journal is also pleased to release the first *NeoAmericanist Forum*, the kick-off to an ongoing series that will be featured in each future issue. Meant to bring some of the most respected minds in a field together with up-and-coming faculty, students and non-experts, these forums push the boundaries of scholarship into underexplored disciplinary borderlands. This issue's *Forum* features an exploration of what is being referred to, rather crudely, in policy circles as the "AfPak" question. Revolving around *literal* borderlands, the implementation of war-time strategies and "rebuilding" in the controversial region between Afghanistan and Pakistan has enmeshed the Obama Administration in host of international and domestic political problems. As both cause and result of this engagement, the region has become the major fulcrum for American foreign policy and, by extension, visions for international order within the US and much of the liberal West. As the *Forum's* panelists show, the very conception of "AfPak" is problematic, revealing as much about American culture as it does about the nature of events unfolding in the re-imagined colonial borderlands. In particular, it shows how the Obama Administration, non-state policy circles and (insofar as they react to the domestic socio-political environment) the general population seem intent on eroding the national sovereignty of other nations through visions of supranational problems. On the other hand, as the authors show, this goal is stated without apparent contemplation of the assertion that the very right to invade Afghanistan emanated from the imperative of assuring *its* national sovereignty and protecting the population it contains. As Andrew Johnston observes in his piece, "had the name of William A. Williams not been tarred by the politics of the Cold War in the American academy, we ought to have known long ago that the US has never been able to intervene in the name of self-determination without undermining its own moral and strategic position in the societies it liberates."

It was these and other tensions in "AfPak" which attracted *NeoAmericanist* to it as a subject. The editors, and especially the managing editor, Simon Toner, were concerned with how "AfPak" offers a vista onto the way thinking about that conflict reaches beyond nation-states while still anchoring solutions to a particular and localized (one might even say American) notion of the nation as a base unit for governing. For us, this particular debate reaches across disciplinary boundaries because it drives at the overarching problematic that unifies the majority of the work published in *NeoAmericanist*: what is America, how is it imagined and how does thinking about America as an idea and a place affect societies around the world? For sociologists the answer may rest in an examination of solidarity and conflict in the face of difference. For the intellectual historian analysis of the ideas, such as liberalism and republicanism, might play a central role. For the anthropologist and cultural historian this may reveal particular behaviors that show the cohesiveness of cultural alignments inside and outside the US. To flush out these sort of disciplinary differences and the overlap therein we encourage teachers and students to use the "Questions" section

that follows the *Forum*.

Over the coming issues, *NeoAmericanist's* forums will explore this central and entirely unwieldy question, what is America, through a variety of multi-disciplinary lenses in the hopes of pointing out some new directions in for study and analysis. We encourage readers to think, write, reply and submit work on anything they read in these pages.

As always, we are enthusiastic about the variety of essays in this issue, exploring cultural products, consumption, values and identities within America. However, to push the boundaries of the publication, the editors of *NeoAmericanist* would like to encourage readers and students to equally contemplate the study of American culture and society from outside America. To that end, the journal will also be launching, in coming issues, a series titled "American Studies Outside" featuring a panel of intellectuals and students in various locales, exploring what it means to study America outside of the US and to explore how local intellectual and popular cultures conduct and interpret particular ideas about what America is and represents.