

# Abstracts

## **Vincenzo Bavaro, “Taking Back One’s Narrative”: *Dear White People*, Cultural Appropriation, and the Challenge of Anti-essentialism**

The essay “Taking Back One’s Narrative” focuses on the 2017 Netflix series *Dear White People*, created by director and screenwriter Justin Simien. By focusing on the lives of a group of African American students in a prestigious Ivy League university, the series both articulates and interrogates issues and debates that are crucial to an understanding of African-American identity in the US today. In particular, the essay argues that cultural appropriation and the power of narratives are at the thematic and stylistic center of the series, and that the script, the direction, and the actors’ performances contribute to question essentialist understanding of black identity, and deliberately pose more questions than they intend to answer.

## **Monia Dal Checco, “Not Your Grandmamma’s Civil Rights Movement”: A New Take on Black Activism**

The article reflects on how the failure of the post-racial ideal, evident in the many forms of institutionalized racism that still plague American society, has shaped a new approach to black activism. Weaving together several theoretical frameworks – critical race studies, the history of black social movements, visual studies, black feminism, intersectionality theory and life narrative studies – I analyze how #BlackLivesMatter and other contemporary movements for social justice have ignited a new phase of black activism which rejects many of the strategies employed by previous generations of black organizers, such as the focus on respectability politics and the tendency to favor charismatic male leadership. In this context, contemporary activism is giving space to more inclusive and participatory policies, based on the work of women and LGBTQ people and on a bottom-up rather than a hierarchical, top-down approach. The focus of #BlackLivesMatter on humanity, moreover, can be interpreted as a struggle

for human rights rather than civil rights, which further differentiates the movement from earlier phases of black militancy. In the last section of the article I briefly consider how this new approach to activism is represented in *When They Call You a Terrorist* (2018), the recently published memoir of #BlackLivesMatter co-founder Patrisse Khan-Cullors.

### **Patrick Deer, Black Lives Matter In Wartime**

The Black Lives Matter movement has been remarkably effective at mobilizing symbolic protest and policy proposals to render visible and interrupt the pervasive militarization of American society, exposing its intimate relationship to longer histories of structural racism and white supremacy. This essay distinguishes between militarist spectacles of police hardware and paramilitary SWAT raids and an uneven logic of militarization spanning the Reagan-era War on Drugs, domestic Pentagon arms transfers, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I read documentaries like *Whose Streets?*, *Do Not Resist*, and *Stay Woke*, activist memoirs and visual culture of the Ferguson protests through the ethical debate among activists, journalists and critical race theorists about the politics of representation in circulating videos of the police killings of Eric Garner, Alton Sterling or Orlando Castile. The Black Lives Matter movement has denaturalized the spectacle of police violence against black bodies and re-embedded the stories of young black men killed by police and the activists who mourn and demonstrate into a counter-narrative of militarized occupation and protest. By doing so, I argue, the movement has intervened in the historical memory of America's recent wars and challenged the embedding of military narratives and agendas within US institutions and civil society.

### **Stefano Luconi, Black Lives and the First African-American President**

Focusing on #BlackLivesMatter, this article examines African Americans' campaigns against police brutality and for racial justice during Barack Obama's second term. It compares this mobilization to the previous experiences of the civil rights movement and the Black Panther Party. It also addresses the issue of how the great expectations resulting from the first African American president's election and the subsequent unfulfilled hopes

of fairness, following Obama's post-racial politics, shaped the response to police officers' fatal shooting of unarmed blacks. Specifically, the article suggests that disappointment with the president's approach accounts, at least in part, for the growing radicalization of African Americans' reaction to law enforcers' ruthless methods as the relations between blacks and the police descended to an all-time low during the Obama administration.

### **Irene Polimante, Tracie Morris's Poetic Experience: From Slam Poetry to Sound Poetry**

The following paper draws the main lines of Tracie Morris's poetic production from the early 1990s, when she began her poetic carrier in the slam competitions circuit, to the dawning of the new millennium, when Morris left the poetic competition to explore a more composite way to create poetry, in order to dig the relations between music and voice, voice and text, body and voice. Referring to the first part of Morris's poetic research, this work focuses on her two collections of poems, *Intermission* (1998) and *Rhyme Scheme* (2012) as well as on her many interviews and performances of those years. Her poems show a strong feeling of belonging to the marginalized housing project community of Brooklyn, where she spent her childhood and adolescence. And this sense of attachment and inclusion, especially to the New York African American community, opens Morris's poetic discourse to social activism. As a matter of fact, many of her poetic works deal with topics of gender, violence, ethnicity, social class, and sexual abuse. This complex ensemble of artistic intuition, political agency, and literary research gives to Morris's works the contours, the colors, the rhythm and the tone of a contemporary poetic quest.

### **Valerio Massimo De Angelis, What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Italian American Studies – Now**

This article tries to draw a summary picture of the current trends in the field of Italian American Studies, of their "globalization" in terms of diasporic studies, of the role Italian individual researchers and organizations have gained inside the field, and of its possible future developments. The occasion for this sort of assessment of the state of the art and of the meaning(s) of "Italian American" Studies has been the second *Transcending*

*Borders, Bridging Gaps* meeting organized in January 2018 by the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute at the City University of New York (the first one was a major international conference in Bellagio, in 2014), which saw the participation of a number of scholars for the USA, Italy and the UK. Both events somehow marked significant turns in the definition of what we talk about when we talk about Italian American Studies, starting from the questioning of any easy and monolithically reified definition of “Italian” and “American,” as witnessed by a number of recent publications, and fostered the ever-growing collaboration between the two sides of the Atlantic, culminating in important international conferences organized in Italy and in the creation of new research centers such as the Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi ItaloAmericani at the University of Macerata.