

Preface

The idea for this volume germinated in the wake of three events—the breakdown of the Cold War, the breakup of the Soviet Empire, and the “emergence of global democracy”—whose impact on global politics was registered in the collective recognition of a postnational world. In its making heterogeneous cultural histories available to public and scholarly debate, multiculturalism was representative of this new political formation. It no longer authorized belief in an Americanness that somehow contained a plurality that it also transcended. In place of the melting pot capable of assimilating immigrants, the United States was understood as but a single unit in a global network.

To facilitate the production of an alternative to the national narrative confirmative of the “melting pot,” I have gathered essays in this volume that trace the grand narrative of U.S. nationalism from its inception in antebellum slave narratives to its dissolution in the aftermath of the Cold War. The contributors examine the various cultural, political, and historical sources—colonial literature, mass movements, health epidemics, mass spectacle, transnational corporations, super-weapons—out of which this narrative was constructed, and propose different understandings of nationality and identity following in its wake.

Except for the essays by Rowe and Lindberg, this volume first appeared as a special issue of *boundary 2* (vol. 19, no. 1). For their help

with this volume, I extend my gratitude to the contributors as well as the entire editorial collective of *boundary 2*. I am particularly indebted to Paul Bové, its present editor, and Meg Sachse, its managing editor, for seeing this volume into print as a *boundary 2* volume, and to Reynolds Smith for his enthusiastic and loyal support for the New Americanists Series.