For the past two years, we and other colleagues at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (U.K.) have taught a one-year master’s program, “The Americas: Histories, Societies, Cultures.” The degree has the stated aim of providing “an innovative, interdisciplinary MA that seeks to develop understanding of the political, historical, and cultural formations of the modern Americas, including North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean.” Our goals in establishing the program shared much with the aims of this issue of *Radical History Review*, whose editors express the desire to “move beyond the bifurcating paradigms of Latin American area studies and American (U.S.–based) studies . . . [to examine] relationships among North America, Latin America, Caribbean, and other island societies and cultures, including histories of colonization, slavery, migration, capitalist development, and nation-state formation.” In designing and teaching the program, we have had to confront the power of both disciplinary and nation-/region-based formations of knowledge, manifested both in our own backgrounds and training and in that of our students. Equally important, disciplinary habits and administrative practices at the university level have sometimes made running an interdisciplinary program unnecessarily complex. Although interdisciplinarity is supposedly an institutional goal, in practice, the conventional institutional structuring of scholarship does not always provide support for it. However, the resulting program has been challenging and exciting to teach and has stimulated our own research, in particular by posing sharp questions about the conceptual tools necessary for making comparisons and tracing connections among American societies.

Students in the program take two short compulsory courses, “Identities in the
Americas: Racial and National Formations” and “Resistance, Accommodation, and Consent in the Americas,” undertake research training, and choose additional courses from a list of options. In addition, they write two short independent research papers linked to their courses and a final 18,000-word thesis (“dissertation”). There is room for students to study advanced-level Spanish or Portuguese in place of some of their options, although so far our students have not had the linguistic background to do so.

Why “the Americas”? We could, after all, have established new programs in American (i.e., U.S.) studies, Latin American studies, and/or Caribbean studies—all of which already exist in Britain. Indeed, one of us did his first degree in such a program. American studies in Britain suffers from a particularly acute case of the divided soul that has always characterized this field: part cold war–influenced cultural Marshall Plan, part Birmingham-style Marxist cultural studies. It has been left-leaning and highly critical of U.S. hegemony, yet often drawn toward (a particular version of) U.S. culture inflected by the peculiarities of Britain's perceived relationship with the United States. U.S. history and literature has a fairly strong research and teaching base in departments of history and English across the country. Latin American studies, meanwhile, has been based in a number of institutes established in the 1960s and in departments of modern languages, but it has struggled to find a place in disciplinary-led departments such as history, politics, and music. Caribbean studies (which in practice has tended to mean the study of the anglophone Caribbean) is more marginal than either of the other two “areas,” frequently being positioned as a subordinate part of the study of the British Empire (and “Commonwealth”) whose agenda has been set by studies of the “white dominions” on the one hand, and the “second British Empire” on the other. This framework, while allowing for fruitful connections in terms of comparative colonialisms, downplays the anglophone Caribbean’s connections with other parts of the Caribbean, let alone with North America and mainland Latin America.

Unsatisfied with all of these frameworks, we chose to move beyond them into comparative teaching. The decision to do so in part derived from our own intellectual trajectories and interests. Of the two of us who contributed most to the design of the program, one is a historian of slavery and emancipation whose research on Jamaica has been enmeshed in debates around comparative slavery and emancipations. The other, after writing a book on American (that is, U.S.—involvement in this program has led all of us to be more aware of our use of adjectives) modernism, is now working on cultural practices in the southwestern United States, a region that, possibly more than any other in the country, continues to complicate and challenge national and ethnic boundaries. Our collaborators included a scholar of Latin American (including Latin Caribbean) popular music and literature, a historian of African
American popular culture, a student of twentieth-century Caribbean poetry (the third author of this article), and a political historian who specializes in Brazil.

As far as we know, there is no other comparative and interdisciplinary Americas-focused graduate degree in Britain. Nevertheless, our program is part of a wider reformation of the way in which American societies are studied here. Warwick University recently launched an MA in the “History of Race in the Americas,” building on its successful and long-standing BA in comparative American studies. The year 2003 saw the launch of a new journal, *Comparative American Studies*, edited by Richard Ellis of Nottingham Trent University. At the University of Central Lancashire, a program entitled “Americanisation and the Teaching of American Studies” (AMATAS), funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, has used a series of workshops to encourage university-level teaching about the United States to adopt a transnational and transatlantic focus.

One of the difficulties in designing a program on something as vast as the Americas was our constant awareness of our own ignorance, of the impossibility of providing “coverage” of even a fraction of the important questions and problems that arise in studying the Americas. Could our program be legitimate given that we had no specialist on Canada or Venezuela, for example? In the end, we answered yes to this question, even while recognizing that our graduates would not be able to claim a “complete” knowledge of the “histories, societies, and cultures” we were teaching them about. Complete coverage is an illusory goal anyway, we concluded, even were we to limit ourselves to an examination of, say, the Caribbean, Brazil, or the United States. Recognition of the blank spaces in our own program forced us and our students to see that what we taught and they learned was neither representative (in the sense of providing a key to all aspects of American societies and cultures) nor canonical (in the sense of introducing students to the “best” or “most significant” aspects of these histories and cultures). Indeed, we began to stress that our purpose was precisely the opposite of a canonical one—even while the necessity of providing syllabi and reading lists forced us to include some things and exclude others.

Because our goal was neither to establish a canon nor a grand narrative, we chose not to organize the compulsory elements of the program chronologically or geographically. Instead, we focused on themes, problems, and theoretical debates that seemed to us to have been the most generative of productive work in the various fields that we sought to link. Because the concepts introduced have to be able to speak across disciplinary boundaries, indeed, to move the students toward interdisciplinary rather than merely multidisciplinary modes of analysis, these core elements of the course are pitched at a fairly abstract, conceptual level. In the first two weeks of each of the six-week compulsory courses, students read and discuss material designed to introduce that course’s key ideas. Thus, in the course on “Resistance, Accommodation, and Consent,” students begin by reading selections from Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* and James Scott’s *Domination and the Arts of Resis-
In discussion, we analyze Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony, contradictory consciousness, and the organic intellectual, with the course leader attempting to place Gramsci’s work within a Marxist tradition with which most students have very little familiarity. The students find Scott’s writing far more accessible and generally find his critique of both “hegemony” and “false consciousness” attractive, although some of them modify this view in the course of discussion and in particular in the light of later readings.

The first two weeks of the course on “Identities in the Americas” introduce ideas about the concepts of race, nation, and diaspora. Students read extracts from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, as well as José Martí’s essay “Our America” and work by Werner Sollors and Carole Boyce Davies. We discuss the ways in which these works expose and examine the constructedness of identity boundaries, both national and ethnic, and how they may offer new critical reconfigurations for identity formation. Students have responded positively to these arguments and certainly carry with them into their future work a healthy skepticism toward national and racialized discourses.

To avoid a sense of separation of “theory” from analysis, the compulsory modules then move to a series of case studies in which students read material that either directly draws on the first two weeks’ readings or where the theoretical framework established at the beginning of the course seems to make most sense. While the first two weeks of the courses are taught by one course leader, the seminars during these so-called case-study weeks are led by three different teachers. In line with our desire to provide relevant analytic examples rather than a comprehensive overview, the content of these weeks, and indeed the person teaching them, can and does change. The “Resistance” course has included the following case studies: Richard Burton’s *Afro-Creole* alongside C. L. R. James’s *Beyond a Boundary*; Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent’s *Everyday Forms of State Formation*; Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* taught with Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno” and “Bartleby the Scrivener”; the Argentine film *The Official Story* examined alongside work on the Madres de la Plaza del Mayo; and the poetry of Guyanese radical Martin Carter paired with an extract from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. Students in the “Identities” course have read and listened to James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-coloured Man* paired with writings by Anzia Yezierska and Gish Jen; Greg Grandin’s *The Blood of Guatemala*; Roberto Schwartz’s essays on Brazilian culture with Derek Walcott’s essay “The Antilles”; and Cuban *son* alongside articles on Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturation. (*Son*, a hybrid musical genre originating in the region of Oriente, Cuba, in the late nineteenth century, is regarded as one of the bases of Cuban popular music in its fusion of African rhythmic and Spanish harmonic and melodic elements. Its syncretic form and capacity to evolve and adapt make it a key example of transculturation in practice.)
At the end of each six-week block, the three course leaders jointly conduct the final seminar, which attempts to make connections across the disciplines and regions discussed and, at the end of the second course, between the two compulsory courses.

Of course, we might have chosen to order our compulsory courses around a number of other key words and analytic categories: gender, sexuality, class, labor, colonization, postcolonialism, space, memory, modernity. The list could go on. Many of these terms do in fact feature extensively in both the readings and the discussion for the courses. Yet in the end, the sets of debates around resistance and hegemony on one hand, and race, nation, and ethnicity on the other, seemed the most pertinent for what we were trying to achieve. We do make it clear to students at the outset that our categories and case studies are methodological and analytical pathways we have chosen to follow and that others would also be possible. Indeed, we encourage students to think beyond or through our structuring framework, to offer alternatives, and to reflect critically on their, and our, practice.

Thus we resolved our anxieties about coverage and representativeness by adopting a thematic approach. And yet these anxieties would have been less easily assuaged had the blank spaces in our map been where the United States, rather than Venezuela and Canada (among others), should be. For all our recognition of the constructedness of regional knowledges, an “Americas” program without “Americanists” would have simply been another Latin American/Caribbean studies degree. The United States, then, turns out not to be simply one nation among many in the Americas, but the crux of the comparison. This results in part from the prior configuration of Latin American and Caribbean studies (which were already comparative) on the one hand, and American studies (which was not, although in the United Kingdom the existence of “U.S. and Canadian studies programs” is in itself suggestive) on the other, but it is also a manifestation of a U.S. cultural dominance that we could try to understand but could not ignore. The absence of U.S. specialists was not a practical problem for us, nor would it be at any British university, given the extent of resources in Britain devoted to the study of the United States in comparison with any other part of the Americas. To give a crude example, few British history departments lack a U.S. historian, but few include a historian of any other part of the Americas. But in trying to see the Americas whole, we did confront an important intellectual and political issue: the geopolitical, economic, and cultural dominance of one part of what we are trying to compare over all the others.

Obviously, we should not be teleological about this. One of the optional courses in our program, “The Renaissance in the Atlantic World” examines Anglo-American and Latin American texts from a period when future U.S. dominance over Latin America was neither envisioned nor inevitable. And yet the fact of global U.S. power sets the parameters of what we do in many ways. Our students (who so far
have been mainly British, although students from Spain and Cyprus have also studied with us, while lacking the “insider” knowledge that comes from growing up in any of the cultures they are studying, have far greater everyday cultural knowledge of the United States than of Latin America or the Caribbean. Like us, they watch American films and TV, listen to American music, and buy the products of American consumer-capitalist culture (even if these are more likely to be made in Mexico or Taiwan than in the United States itself). The actions of U.S. politicians might transform their lives by throwing the world into war. In contrast, although they may listen to some styles of Cuban and Jamaican music, could see Mexican or Argentine films if they went to an art house cinema, and (with our encouragement) will follow Brazilian politics, their knowledge of Latin America and the Caribbean comes far more exclusively via an academic route. Even in terms of academic knowledge, most of our students have taken many more undergraduate courses about the United States than they have about the Caribbean or Latin America.

This fact has shaped the trajectory of the course. In the first year of the program, we gave students a completely free choice of options. With the exception of one student, the options they chose dealt almost exclusively with the United States. We were somewhat demoralized: for all our work in establishing the importance of comparisons between and relationships across the Americas, the students seemed to be inventing for themselves a more traditional, and more conservative, American studies program. Part of the problem here was structural: the students had to choose their options before they had begun the program, and in general made choices that seemed safe because they built on existing knowledge. As they came to the end of the program, several of the students said they regretted that they had not chosen more challenging, because less familiar, optional courses. To address this, we introduced a system that attempted to channel student choice. For the program’s second year, we divided the options into two lists, one of U.S.–focused options and one of Latin American, Caribbean, and comparative options, and required students to choose at least one option from each list. (We also required that their optional choices should encompass at least two disciplines.) In addition, several members of staff whose options had been purely U.S.–focused reframed their teaching to include substantial elements of Latin American and/or Caribbean literature, history, and music. (In fact, the system threatens now to implode, with so many of the U.S. options migrating to the “comparative” list that the U.S. list seems thin. We may yet have to insist that students take a “purely” Latin America/Caribbean option as well as a “comparative” one.) The results have been positive, with most of the students choosing more than one of their options from the Latin America/Caribbean comparative list.

It is early days, but we have been encouraged and stimulated by the range of our students’ interests and the sophistication of their approaches. So far, they have
not attempted large-scale comparative work, and it is unlikely that future students will do so given the limitations of the master’s-level thesis (dissertation), a piece of work produced in three or four months at the end of an extremely intensive year’s work. Nevertheless, their studies, including an analysis of gender and law in post-emancipation Barbados and a study of the cultural politics of white U.S. independent hip-hop artist El-P, while focused in terms of time and place, have situated the particular in relation to the broadly comparative and have both used and critiqued the conceptual problematics established in the core elements of the program.

The primary strength of the program is, we believe, its inclusiveness, not only in terms of content but in its capacity to be constantly revised by the new perspectives introduced by staff from different disciplinary backgrounds. This kind of fluid interdisciplinarity, where the epistemic coordinates from new sources might, conceivably, take the program into unexpected, unplanned directions, is a necessary contingency. It is also rewarding for both staff and students to create a classroom environment in which the shirking-off of old paradigms need not be achieved by the substitution of a new, equally prescriptive model. The curriculum refuses to remain stable, and one important advantage gained from acknowledging our concerns about canonicity has been our students’ willingness to reflect on the relevance of the themes, problems, and theoretical debates explored in the core modules in relation to their own academic interests. Equally, the problems involved in interdisciplinarity have fuelled rather than stalled the inquiries of staff and students. The lip service sometimes paid to interdisciplinarity can veil an often confusing conception of what such a project might entail. This confusion can drive instability in both positive and negative directions, generating productive self-reflexive debate, yet also exposing the possible incommensurability of parallel discursive universes. The need for foundational disciplinary models, professional vocabularies, career pathways, and the other institutional paraphernalia that, for better or worse, anchor scholarly activity will not recede in the future, but we believe that this master’s program enables students to speak across disciplinary boundaries. In the future, we hope to see the introduction of team-taught optional modules, as this will provide one practical way to complement the disciplinary structure imposed by the university. It may well be that the advantages of interdisciplinary study of the Americas will only be accurately gauged through the future work of a younger generation of scholars, a generation that has responded to the conceptual demands of understanding the political, historical, and cultural formations of the Americas.
University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Introduction
This MA degree program is designed to provide students with a foundation in the comparative study of the modern Americas. Recognizing that the societies and cultures of Latin America, North America, and the Caribbean share extensive common experiences (for instance, colonialism, slavery and emancipation, consolidation of “postcolonial” states, exploitation of and resistance by indigenous peoples), as well as interaction (through migration, U.S. hegemony over the hemisphere), this program provides students the space to explore similarities and differences across the hemisphere within several disciplines.

Structure
You will take the following compulsory modules:
- Resistance, Accommodation, and Consent in the Americas (10 credits)
- Identities in the Americas: Racial and National Formations (10 credits)
- Faculty of Arts Research Training (10 credits)
- School of Modern Languages (subject-specific) Research Training (10 credits)
- Extended Study—an independently written research project, which must “extend” one of the other modules taken (10 credits)
- Dissertation Preparation
- Dissertation (60 credits)

You must choose optional modules to the value of sixty credits from the following lists. At least ten credits must be from list A and at least ten credits from list B. Optional modules from lists A and B must be taken within at least two subject areas. A maximum of twenty credits may be taken from list C (language options [not listed here]).

List A: North American Options
- Postwar American Poetry—John Beck, School of English
- The Western: The Evolution of the Hero—John Saunders, School of English
- The Hollywood Musical—Bruce Babbington, School of English
- Memory, History, and Trauma in Seventeenth-Century Women’s Writing—Kate Chedgzoy, School of English
- North America in Glorious Technicolor: Racial Dynamics from 1619 to the Present—Andrew Kaye, School of Historical Studies
- The First New Nation: The Development of American National Identity—Susan-Mary Grant, School of Historical Studies
- Studying Popular Musics—Richard Middleton, School of Arts and Cultures
List B: Latin American, Caribbean, and Comparative Options

- Cultures of the United States–Mexico Borderlands—John Beck, School of English
- Caribbean Creolization—Gemma Robinson, School of English
- The Renaissance in the Atlantic World—Kate Chedgzoy, School of English
- Gender in the History of the Americas—Diana Paton, School of Historical Studies
- U.S. World Policy and Inter-American Relations—Jens Hentschke, School of Modern Languages
- Women in Latin American Cultures—Vanessa Knights, School of Modern Languages
- Questions of Identity in Latin American Popular Musics—Agustín Fernandez, School of Arts and Cultures

COURSE INFORMATION:
RESISTANCE, ACCOMMODATION, AND CONSENT IN THE AMERICAS

Semester 1, 2002–3
Course leader: Diana Paton
Also contributing: John Beck and Gemma Robinson

Introduction
This module is designed to introduce you to a set of concepts and debates that have been widely used in the study of the societies, cultures, and histories of the Americas. The concepts of resistance, accommodation, and consent center on issues of power: how it is organized, exercised, enacted, and contested.

The module begins by examining two important approaches to understanding power: the concept of *hegemony*, developed by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, and the rejection of that idea in favor of attention to “everyday forms of resistance” in the work of the American political scientist James Scott. Neither of these thinkers focused their attention specifically on the Americas, but their approaches have been extensively used in the analysis of American experiences (as well as modified by scholars in the light of their understanding of American societies and cultures).

The second part of the course will examine some concrete historical and cultural situations in the light of the theoretical material studied in the first two weeks. These case studies will draw on material about different parts of the Americas and on the work of scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds. We will, therefore, be thinking comparatively along a number of axes: space, time, discipline, and theoretical stance.

Organization of the Course
We will meet for two hours weekly for six weeks on Thursdays. Most of the seminars will be led by Diana Paton, but those in weeks 4 and 5 will be led by John Beck and Gemma Robinson, respectively. All three staff members will attend the last seminar of the course.
Assessment

Assessment is based on one 2,500-word piece of work, submitted at the end of the term.

Your submitted work should be either a bibliographic review essay on a subject of your choice related to the course material or a detailed research proposal. If you have written or intend to write a review essay for the “Identities in the Americas” module, you must write a research proposal for this module, and vice versa. Tutorials to discuss your ideas for your review essay or research proposal will be held in the fourth week of the course, but you are welcome to meet with the course tutors at other times to discuss ideas or problems.

Seminar Timetable and Core Readings

Week 1
Introduction: Studying the Americas and American Studies (DP)
This week’s seminar will introduce you to the teaching team and to our interdisciplinary and comparative approach to studying the Americas. We will also begin to discuss some of the central concepts of the module: resistance, accommodation, consent, and hegemony. To prepare for the sessions, please think about what these four terms mean, and read the following:

Week 2
Hegemony and Resistance (DP)

Week 3
Caribbean Cultures of Hegemony and Resistance (DP)

Week 4
Slavery, Resistance, and Representation in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature (JB)
Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861).
Herman Melville, “Benito Cereno” (1855).
Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener” (1853).
Week 5
Writing Resistance and Anticolonialism in the Caribbean (GR)

Week 6
Revising Hegemony, Resistance, Accommodation, and Consent (DP, JB, GR)

COURSE INFORMATION:
IDENTITIES IN THE AMERICAS; RACIAL AND NATIONAL FORMATIONS

Semester 1, 2002–3
Course leader: John Beck
Also contributing: Diana Paton and Gemma Robinson

Introduction
The aim of this module is to introduce students to theoretical and methodological issues related to the interdisciplinary study of the Americas, with particular reference to racial and national formations. This aim is pursued through the analysis and discussion of a variety of theoretical, critical, historical, and cultural texts. As a compulsory requirement, this module also aims to prepare students for further study within the program by introducing important contexts, issues, and approaches.

The construction, policing, and maintenance of racial and national boundaries are pivotal in the protection of the hegemonic structures that legitimate the modern state. The historical and cultural practices articulating and preserving these boundaries, and various forms of resistance to them, are properly the subject of this module. We will initially consider some of the theoretical implications of national and “racial” identity. We will then examine in detail, and from different perspectives, three case studies: Guatemala, Cuba, and the United States. Our final session will attempt to draw together the diverse strands of our reading and analysis.

Assessment of the module takes the form of either a bibliographic review essay on a subject of the student’s choice or a detailed research proposal. The module should, then, be
considered as a testing ground for ideas and as a means of building up understanding, as well as research resources, for future work during the program.

**Organization and Structure**

Seminars are two hours long and held weekly for six weeks. While John Beck is course leader for this module, seminars for weeks 4 and 5 will be led, respectively, by Gemma Robinson and Diana Paton. All three staff members will attend the final seminar.

**Week 1**


**Week 2**


**Week 3**

Rethinking “Race” and “Nation” in the Literature of the United States (JB)


Anzia Yezierska, *America and I* (1923).


**Week 4**

Misplaced Ideas in Brazil and the Caribbean (GR)


**Week 5**

Historicizing Race, Class, and Nation: The Case of Guatemala (DP)


**Week 6**

Summation (JB, GR, DP)