and other anxieties. I find Shapiro's interpretations of such films as *Them!* (Douglas, USA 1954), *Dr. Strangelove* (Kubrick, Gr. Br., 1964), and *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, USA, 1968) interesting and plausible. In particular, I appreciate his attention to religious and spiritual themes of American and Japanese popular culture, especially in light of the condescending treatment they are often given in academic cultural criticism. But American studies readers accustomed to well-researched thick descriptions of the historical context of cultural artifacts will find Shapiro's efforts in this direction unpersuasive. Too often Shapiro finds the meanings of symbols and names in J. E. Cirlot's dictionary of symbols, rather than in a historically specific cultural milieu. Likewise, evidence of audience response is drawn solely from the abstract psychological and psychosociological theories of Erik Erikson, Peter Clecak, and others. It is, admittedly, difficult to recover the experience of past viewers, but, solid historical research into the conditions of reception, especially of films that attained "cult" status, and so attracted a devoted and often documentable following, can, minimally, help scholars identify anachronistic or idiosyncratic readings. This criticism is particularly distressing to make in light of the chapter on Japanese atomic cinema, where Shapiro carefully combines culturally specific psychological theory with compelling research on the conditions of audience reception to produce a powerful analysis of the functions of bomb films in Japanese society. The chapters on American bomb films lack this culturally and historically nuanced accounting of the form, function, and audience of apocalyptic atomic cinema. Readers looking for solid interpretations of American and Japanese bomb films will find them here, but those looking for new insights into the social functions of American popular culture will be disappointed. *Eric Drown, George Washington University*

**David W. Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 352 pp., $19.95 (paper).**

*Death of a Nation* is a senior historian's account of the intellectual, cultural, political, and economic commitments of the founding fathers of American studies and the "paradigm dramas" enacted by their intellectual descendants. Unable to believe the Progressive faith that capitalism and democracy might be finally synthesized in a way that would preserve the autonomy of the United States, and equally unable to believe that Marxism offered Americans a usable future, Anglo-Protestant male intellectuals of the 1940s experienced a crisis of faith. Whereas once such men had been able to believe that America's natural endowment would enable it to avoid the sins of such alien ideas as capitalism and communism, the corporate and military power used to protect "American" interests in foreign markets during and after World War II meant that the United States was irrevocably part of the history of the world. Faced with the de facto end of an exceptional American history, some men tried to recover their faith by asserting the universality of American political values that had only appeared to change. Others wrote elegies for a lost America, now corrupted by international capitalism, conspicuous consumption and the decentering claims to Americanness of women, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Jews, David W. Noble's generation of scholars became "historians against history," which is to say they celebrated what they saw as the timeless essence of the United States. Conceiving of American history and culture as the product of an exclusive dialogue between Anglo-Protestant men, they monopolized the power and privileges of "American" for men like themselves. Other American histories were silenced.

Readers of Noble's previous works (*Historians Against History*, *The American Adam in the New World Garden*, *The Progressive Mind*, and *The End of American History*) will be on familiar ground. Once again, Noble reviews the foundational narratives of such American historians as George Bancroft, Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles and Mary Beard, William Appleman Williams, and such literary critics as Vernon Louis Parrington, F. O. Mathiessen, Henry Nash Smith, Robert Penn Warren, and Leo Marx. In *Death of a Nation*, Noble extends the argument of his earlier works in four ways. First, Noble reveals the personal imperatives of the first and second generation of American studies scholars' investment in the national exceptionalist narrative of United States history. In so doing Noble explains the seemingly arcane debates over interpretive method between Myth-Symbol critics and New Critics as an attempt to

locate the authority to narrate a new national epic. Second, he convincingly shows that this search for authority was conducted as much by artists (Thomas Hart Benton, Jackson Pollock), architects (Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright), composers (Charles Ives, Aaron Copeland, John Cage), and philosophers (particularly John Dewey) as by historians and literary critics. Third, Noble discusses the dismantling of the first and second generations' intellectual synthesis by feminists, African-Americans, and other scholars who rejected the postulate that history was the story of Anglo-American men. In *The Lay of the Land* (1975) Annette Kolodny "desacralized" the myths that Henry Nash Smith, R. W. B. Lewis, and Leo Marx had found to be the essence of American national identity. In *The Unusable Past* (1986) Russel Reising undermined the aesthetic authority constructed by American literary critics from Mathiessen to Sacvan Bercovitch. Finally, in an effort to chart the new main currents in American studies thought, Noble synthesizes much new and contemporary American studies scholarship in the context of postnational theory. According to Noble, the third, fourth and fifth generations of American studies scholars are committed to what he, admiringly, calls the "heresy" of cultural relativism. Unlike American presidents, and many American people, practitioners of postnational American studies share the relativist views of cultural anthropologists and modern physicists. Ironically, this relativism, itself a product of the crisis of bourgeois national authority, empowered such cultural critics as José David Saldívar, Mary Helen Washington, David Roediger, and Ronald Takaki to write new multivocal American histories placing the experiences and tactics of peoples of color and working class Americans at the heart of the story rather than at the margins.

In a review essay covering recent efforts of the field to reconceive itself, *Death of a Nation* was attacked by Alan Wolfe ("Anti-American Studies," *The New Republic*, Feb. 26, 2003). In Wolfe's view, the "new" American studies is driven by bitter cultural and political radicals who have abandoned the field's foundational humanism for European theory, ersatz activism, and shoddy research. As part of this critique, Wolfe characterizes Noble as "a generation-skipper," a scholar who "broke with his contemporaries to join the new radicalism emerging in the field." According to Wolfe, Noble is "a man ferociously eager to join [his younger colleagues] in [a] chorus of denunciation." These "anti-American" scholars need to show a little "responsibility" and "rise above their own propaganda, and muster just a smidgen of gratitude" for the nation that has ensured their freedoms. What Wolfe fails to understand about Noble's postnational jeremiad is how powerfully enabling it has been for generations of University of Minnesota students, graduates and undergraduates alike. Thirty years after leaving the university, Minnesota undergraduates remember the historical ventriloquism of lectures in which Noble stages debates in the full persona and costume of literary and historical figures. Moreover, since 1985, David W. Noble has taught the first semester of the sequence of seminars designed to initiate first year University of Minnesota graduate students into the practice, culture, and commitments of American studies. Laced with intellectual and personal autobiography, Noble's seminar recounts the paradigm dramas explored in *Death of a Nation* as a way to demonstrate to future scholars that their work is necessarily driven by personal and political imperatives, a lesson it took me three semesters with Noble to fully understand. Decades of Minnesota graduate students have found Noble's version of the history of American studies productive, some as a usable past, others as a narrative to contest. In my view, *Death of a Nation* is a book that provides hope in a post-9/11, rapidly globalizing world. Against recent American presidents' vision of a national people unified against "rogue" states and terrorists, Noble offers the vision of a transnational coalition of people mobilized against a global capitalist market and unified by the desire to live in local communities organized by a sustainable relationship to the environment. Here hope resides in broadly conceived notions of difference, home, and global limits, rather than in myths of the boundless, timeless nation or the every-expanding marketplace. Noble's vision offers more than "gratitude" to the nation, it helps generate new governing societal metaphors even as it prevents us from forgetting the conditions of their production. *Eric Drown, George Washington University.*

**Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 646 pp., $35.00 (cloth).**