Introduction

Queer studies, despite its critiques of normativity and its calls for a nonexclusionary politics, remains susceptible to forms of race unconsciousness—that is, subject to a racial unconscious shaped by nation, empire, and the dispositions of global capitalism, as well as resistant to the self-reflexive analytic standpoint that critical race theory advocates as “race consciousness.” What can be more normative to modernity than whiteness? Is it even imaginable to think the erotic—and the homoerotic—without contemplating its intercourse with race? Sharon Holland recently has raised similar questions: “Can work on ‘desire’ be antiracist work? Can antiracist work think ‘desire’? What would happen if we opened up the erotic to a scene of racist hailing?”

In addition to plotting an inside and out of queer theory, I present with A Taste for Brown Bodies: Gay Modernity and Cosmopolitan Desire a demystification of the primitive, exotic, or “brown” body commodified by dominant gay male culture. I propose regarding that brown body as an axis in the formation of a cosmopolitan gay male identity and community.

Queer theory, keenly attuned to the policing of desire, seemingly would provide an ideal field of inquiry for analysis into the racialized erotics of modernity. Yet the failures of queer theory to adequately address race are widely documented across the emergence of queer of color, postcolonial queer, black queer, indigenous queer, and queer diaspora critiques, among others. Hardly mere tributaries to queer theory, as Michael Warner would have us believe, these fields reinvigorate the very promises of queer as both a political movement and a hermeneutic. A Taste for Brown Bodies takes up Holland’s questions, particularly in regard to the place of white men’s interracial same-sex desire and its brown
objects as obligatory constituents of gay modernity. I am not interested in biographical accounts of interracial same-sex relations; more exactly, what interests me are biographies of desire and how a racialized homo-erotic capacitates the imaginations of gay modernity. The question of desire’s “traveling eye” necessarily calls into consideration technologies of mobility—both literal and imaginative—that move the subject, his body, and his desires. Those technologies include whiteness; however, the subject I isolate is not exclusively the white “gentleman traveler,” as might be expected, but also a “trade” class consisting of merchant marines, so-called rogue soldiers, and cowboys, all of whom convey the brown body to the traveling eye of gay modernity. They do so through their legendary encounters with the primitive, by themselves embodying brownness (or modes of primitivity), and by acting as intermediaries for cosmopolitan identification. That the term “cosmopolitan” is more often reserved for the “gentleman traveler” belies the misrecognized role of these proletarian journeymen in populating an exotic imaginary with the bodies of their primitive encounters as well as with their own bodies. The whiteness of this proletarian cosmopolitan—this trade, if you will—is both real (acting on the world through the privileged mobility accrued by white masculinity—a cosmopolitan mobility that originates with the white body but can be mortgaged from it) and imagined (in the appropriation of historical figures, such as the black cowboy, who are whitewashed in order to assume a national masculinity and in fact a national sexuality).

Gay modernity’s cathexis of the exotic traverses multiple routes of international trade. This fairly superficial historical observation, however, begs the question, what is the relationship of trade to trade—that is, the relation of international commerce to the proliferation of homosexual trade: rough trade, tearoom trade, military trade, and tomorrow’s competition (née today’s trade)? We also might reframe this question to consider, more broadly, the relationship of political economies to a modern gay male subject—that infamous “personage” traced to the late nineteenth century by Michel Foucault, Eve Sedgwick, and numerous
new historicists and queer scholars. I propose that trade (in their various hard and soft currencies) play a not-so-insignificant role in the development of the modern liberal nation-state. The marginalized situation of the homosexual authorizes modes of sexual exceptionalism that screen the historical collusions of U.S. empire and gay modernity, as do the peculiarly repressed queer pasts of such icons of U.S. masculinity as the sailor, the soldier, and the cowboy—collectively, the rough trade of U.S. imperialism. Neither gay liberation politics nor queer activism has ever fully reckoned with the tacit, if complex, participation of gay modernity in U.S. imperialist expansion. My objective is not recrimination but rather an injunction for queer critique to imagine alternative erotic cosmopolitanisms and to more rigorously interrogate how its institutionalizations (within academia, the nation, and liberalism, for instance) have compromised its radical political promise. Queer critique must investigate the circulation of homosexual desire within the erotic economies of both capitalism and the nation in order to guard against its cooptation into neoliberal and colonial projects. As Jasbir Puar pointedly remarks, “there is nothing inherently or intrinsically antination or antinationalist about queerness.”

The modern gay male subject remains inscribed in the nation’s imperialist project in ways that require significant analytic disentangling. I propose that the modern gay male identity often traced to the late Victorian constructions of “invert” and “homosexual” occupies not the periphery of the nation but rather a cosmopolitan locus instrumental to projects of war, colonialism, and, ultimately, neoliberalism. Arguably himself a product of fin-de-siècle innovations in visual technology, the gay cosmopolitan also becomes an agent for colonial deployments of vision—and a predecessor to the gay neoliberal citizen-subject. A range of mobilities, transformed or generated by industrialization (i.e., class privilege, whiteness, transportation technology, mass media, leisure tourism) and, eventually, postindustrial society (i.e., communication and information technologies) all animate the cosmopolitanism of the modern gay male subject.
Jasbir Puar’s thesis on homonationalism increasingly is cited beyond the fields of queer theory, gender studies, and postcolonial studies, to some degree challenging claims about the inaccessibility (or irrelevance) of queer scholarship. Focusing primarily on the early 1990s to the present—in terms of U.S. imperialism, a period framed by the First Gulf War and the ongoing “war on terror”—Puar’s thesis characterizes homonationalism as a spatiotemporal network that dynamically links the nation’s interests to lesbian, gay, and queer self-interests, so that “[t]hese proliferating sexualities, and their explicit and implicit relationships to nationalism, complicate the dichotomous implications of casting the nation as only supportive and productive of heteronormativity and always repressive and disallowing of homosexuality” (39).

Likewise, the editors of the *Social Text* special issue “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” (2005) emphasize the neoliberal turn of the 1990s in a critique of “queer liberalism” contextualized within “a number of historical emergencies . . . of both national and global consequence,” citing in particular political crises and debates defining the past two decades of American life (i.e., the dismantling of the welfare state, the “war on terror,” the center-staging of competing religious fundamentalisms, the continued criminalization and pathologizing of immigrant bodies, etc.).

My argument builds on these critiques but also elaborates on them in two significant ways. First, I enlarge the historical context, shifting from the 1990s to the 1890s, from the millennium and the “war on terror” to the fin-de-siècle and the gilded age of U.S. imperialism. Second, while Puar’s thesis on homonationalism and the critique of queer liberalism by the editors of “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” (David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz) focus mostly (though not exclusively) on the collusions of lesbian, gay, and queer subjects with nationalism as mediated either through uncritical appeals to rights discourse or through uninterrogated racial and economic privilege, I extend this analysis to the homoerotics of the nation—the incitements, accommodations, and instrumentalizations of queer desires by the na-
tion. The sweep of this analytic shift allows me to reformulate the emergence of gay modernity, attending to racial difference, the nation, and empire, all of which remain absent or embedded or at best parenthetical in the foundational accounts of a nascent homosexual personage in the writing of Foucault and Sedgwick. Without such an analytic shift, the presumably subjectless critique of queer grammar risks perpetually consigning racial difference to the parenthetical.

A pioneering work in queer studies, Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) deems works by Herman Melville, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust, and Henry James as the “foundational texts of modern gay male identity.”6 Sedgwick gestures toward an “international bond” among these texts, a quality ultimately nullified by the nationalist tenets of canon formation (49). This “international canvas,” mentioned in passing by Sedgwick, incites, I argue, newly mobile desires and a newly cathected sensibility that will be designated as “modern” and “gay.” We need to consider what material conditions produce “modern gay” both as conjunctive descriptor and as subject. The emergence of a modern gay male subject requires—like Puar’s homonational—a spatiotemporal field. He becomes his desires (a “personage” or “species,” as Foucault explains), but those desires are animated by the attendant cultures of leisure time, the modernization of travel, and advances in visual technology (not the least of which was the invention of cinema). As a cosmopolitan consumer-citizen subject, his flânerie now traverses the globe, and where his body does not or cannot pass, his eye travels (his imagination capacitated and electrified by the aforementioned technologies of transport and vision).

I use “gay cosmopolitan” to designate a subject position originating with (but not limited to) a white, urban, leisure-class gay male whose desire is cast materially onto the globe at the close of the nineteenth century. I hypothesize that the gay modernity often traced to sexology’s “invert” and “homosexual” does not neatly inhabit the margins of the nation, occupying instead a more complicated cosmopolitan condition auxiliary to colonial and neocolonial expansion.
Rather than continuing to understand the late Victorian invention of homosexuality as a moment of singular and absolute abjection, let us consider the possibility of the homosexual as a practical, if accidental, agent of neocolonial expansion (the geographies of which are redefined too by new visual and information technologies), serviceable both to modern nation building and to transnational flows of capital. John D’Emilio has argued that capitalism makes possible the conditions for a homosexual identity by creating, through wage labor, new spaces for socialization outside the family. Let us consider then how homosexual desire circulates instrumentally, incited by and engendering the erotic economies of capitalism and the nation: trade qua trade, trade cum trade.

Linguist Paul Baker defines “trade” as “ostensibly heterosexual (often working-class) men who have sex with other men, but do not identify as gay.” However, usage of the term has remained fluid. As Baker explains, “trade, which denotes a casual sexual partner, can apply to someone who is ostensibly heterosexual (possibly a male prostitute), but can also mean someone who is gay and available for sex. A gay aphorism ‘today’s trade is tomorrow’s competition’ (Gardiner 1997: 223) implies that the sexual identity of ‘trade’ is unfixed” (. The etymology of the word “trade,” especially its designation of a working-class subject, exemplifies the type of cosmopolitanism I distinguish as trade or proletarian cosmopolitanism. Although usage can be traced back to seventeenth-century England in the context of prostitution, a specifically homosexual context emerges from exchanges among merchant marines, actors, fairground workers, and criminal subcultures. Baker traces the expression “trade curtain” to merchant marine slang: “Sailors sometimes were eight to a berth and in order to maintain a degree of privacy during homosexual sex, they would hang a curtain round their bunk.”

The growth of the merchant marine, as an aspect of industrial capitalism, heralds also the decline of sailing vessels and their modes of sociality, heterotopic but also potentially utopic spaces of male labor and camaraderie in Herman Melville’s fiction. The novella Billy Budd in fact
opens with the narrator’s nostalgic reverie for a “time before steamships.” This nostalgia exemplifies the temporal aspect of Foucault’s heterotopias, what Cesar Casarino terms “heterochronies.” Casarino expands on Foucault’s treatment of time in his reading of Melville:

Melville’s ships embody the following paradox: it is only from within the precipitous and disastrous flux of the history of modernity that one can turn a longing gaze back over the ruins of what has been destroyed, that one can brush that history against the grain. If Foucault’s dictum was that the ship is the heterotopia par excellence, that dictum needs now to be reformulated: the ship is the heterochrony par excellence.10

Casarino’s elaboration on Foucault, his notion of a heterochronology, extends just as readily to the modern histories of the soldier and the cowboy. Similar to the sailor, each also experiences displacements that occasion incompatibilities of time and space, instances of “the problematic of the synchronicity of the nonsynchronous” (Casarino 5).

The soldier, sailor, and cowboy, in addition to sharing similarly itinerant careers (they do much of the initial legwork, so to speak, for a gay cosmopolitan imagination), also share historically a predisposition for “a longing gaze back over the ruins of what has been destroyed.” In other words, they share a predisposition for nostalgia, as both subjects and objects of nostalgic desire. Queer scholarship has focused on these figures as icons of archetypal masculinity, personalities desired and “cloned” through a complex of (dis)identifications. The recovery of their queer pasts, lost to the sanctioned amnesia of the nation, is overdue.

Nostalgia characterizes the modern gay male subject’s emergence in the late nineteenth century, constituting perhaps the signal modernity of his persona. A history of the idea of nostalgia is instructive in that its etymology, like that of the word “homosexual,” traces back to medical discourse. Among the detrimental effects ascribed to nostalgia by early medical researchers, according to Svetlana Boym, was a “propensity for suicide,” a susceptibility that will come to plague homosexual definition
as well. As Boym explains, nostalgia emerges during an era of mass displacements: “Unlike melancholia, which was regarded as an ailment of monks and philosophers, nostalgia was a more ‘democratic’ disease that threatened to affect soldiers and sailors displaced far from home as well as many country people who began to move to the cities” (5). This latter move described by Boym, from rural to urban, finds a twentieth-century correlation in the dominant narratives for gay male identity, traced to the gay man’s relocation from the small town to the metropolis and metaphorized as “coming out.” Yet if we persist in reading canonical narratives of gay identity through Boym’s nostalgia, we find that he does not locate the object of his desire upon arriving in the city; rather, that union seems impossibly deferred. The metropolitan may return to the country, but his nostalgia, according to Boym, is not cured. Gloria Anzaldúa famously quipped in Borderlands that homophobia is the fear of going home. If we assume, for the sake of argument, that the modern gay male inherits the disposition of the nostalgic, then perhaps the homosexual is a figure who forever longs for home, a home that remains elusive both spatially and temporally.

The Swiss physician Johannes Hofer coined the word “nostalgia” in 1688 to describe the pathologically nonsynchronous experiences of displaced peoples, especially “Swiss soldiers fighting abroad” (Boym 3). Nostalgia, it turns out, is a peculiarly modern problem. Among the qualities that perplexed its earliest students was its apparent communicability. It affected not only isolated individuals but became also a common condition of entire populations. Boym links the development of nostalgia, and its particular congealment in the nineteenth century, to the irreversible notion of time that accompanied industrial progress. The same processes of industrialization that served to universalize the notion of progress facilitated greater opportunities for travel that then exposed the unevenness of progress. “Nostalgic manifestations are side effects of the teleology of progress.” Boym continues: “Travelers since the late eighteenth century wrote about other places, first to the south and then to the east of Western Europe, as ‘semi-civilized’ or outright ‘barbarous.’
Instead of coevalness of different conceptions of time, each local culture therefore was evaluated with regard to the central narrative of progress” (10). An irretrievable past ultimately romanticized onto the figure of the primitive (or what I designate as the “brown body”) continues to shape modern gay sensibilities. A nostalgic mode of identification defines gay cosmopolitanism, animating exotic mise-en-scènes fundamental to the emergence and perpetuation of gay modernity and its complicities with U.S. empire.

Iconic figures of American masculinity such as the sailor, the cowboy, and the soldier represent enduring objects of queer desire, prototypes for subcultures of gay clones.12 Although these figures are memorialized (and desired) for their heroic masculinity, their own queer histories dissipate under the erasure of the nation’s sanctioned amnesia. In A Taste for Brown Bodies, I trace the foundations of gay modernity to queer cosmopolitanism, including the unexpectedly queer, proletarian cosmopolitanism of sailors, soldiers, and cowboys. Effectively screened by archetypal masculinities as well as, ironically, by their status as gay clones (achieved through the disidentifications of modern gay men), the queer cosmopolitanism of these figures was deployed to sustain and expand U.S. empire. Gay cosmopolitanism, crucial to the formation of gay modernity, has remained available to the enlistments of empire. It is crucial then to recover these routes of queer cosmopolitanism in order to understand the links between gay modernity and imperialism, links revealed for example by scholarship on the relation between neoliberalism and homonormativity. As Anna Agathangelou, Daniel Bassichis, and Tamara Spira spell out, “the violence and death we authorize and face operate through and within our libidinal, erotic, and affective investments, investments that we must engage directly and rigorously if we are to disrupt the seductive workings of power in their most intimate dimensions.”13 If a racialized homoerotics converges with U.S. empire to consolidate gay modernity, as I argue, then gay men committed to antiracist, leftist critiques are obligated to disentangle their own “intimate investments” from the projects of U.S. imperialism.
Queer studies provides me at once with a case study of racist practice and a methodology to identify and combat racism, particularly in its imbrication with the erotic. For instance, the University of Michigan’s Gay Shame conference in 2003 (explored further below and in chapter 4) demonstrated the aggressive resistance of establishmentarian queer theory to thinking about race and power while also productively, if inadvertently, demonstrating the role of the brown body vis-à-vis gay modernity, albeit in ways that were at that time excruciating for several audience members (myself included). The conference enacted in painful ways gay modernity’s desire for and dependence upon the brown body as an axis for a privileged gay male individuation and socialization, as well as the ways in which queer studies—itself also a mode of gay male sociality—aggressively defends, disavows, and disarticulates that relationship. I agree with Sharon Holland’s recent observation that “we have uncoupled our desire from quotidian racist practice for far too long” (42). Gay male sociality, including queer theory, stages quotidian racist practices. While this hardly seems controversial, it often remains surprisingly difficult for queer studies to historically appraise its own erotic investments with race and power.

I initiate just such an appraisal here by tracing how a male same-sex erotics may be unexpectedly mobilized by practices of settler colonialism and neo-imperialism that simultaneously repudiate queer desire. By “erotics” I mean broadly those libidinal and affective economies that we designate as desire, pleasure, intimacy, seduction, and in some cases even repulsion or shame.14 While expanding our vocabulary on the erotic and its relation to power, queer theory has participated at times in securing the transparency of whiteness, jettisoning questions of race as retrograde and provincial. While certainly marginalized vis-à-vis normative, national sexualities, a racialized homoerotics nonetheless was cultivated through late-nineteenth-century forms of industry and capitalism that not only generated increased mechanisms for mobility, especially for elite men, but also hastened U.S. expansionism.
Queer scholars and activists must interrogate the various potential complicities of dominant gay male sociality both to nation building and to global capitalism; otherwise, the “predatory” violations of these systems also operate across our bodies. I am interested not only in how expansion was realized but also in how it was visualized, for and through gay men. In particular I interrogate the correspondence among looking outward (travel and expansion), looking inward (the secret), and looking backward (nostalgia), modes of visuality and in(di)visuality that gay modernity both required and proliferated. Beginning with Eve Sedgwick’s claim in Epistemology of the Closet that “an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of homo/heterosexual definition” (1), queer theory has rigorously evaluated and contested the entrenched nature of heteronormativity in all kinds of social and cultural institutions. But only recently has queer theory turned its attention to the institutionalizing of “homonormativity” and more recently still, thanks to Jasbir Puar’s Terrorist Assemblages, to affects and practices of “homonationalism.” For Puar, “homonationalism” instances a “brand of homosexuality” committed “to the global dominant ascendency of whiteness that is implicated in the propagation of the United States as empire” (2). Both terms have been applied primarily to describe the neoliberal turn in gay and lesbian politics and culture beginning in the 1990s. I consider alternatively the possibility of an enduring homonationalism dating to the emergence of the homosexual in the late nineteenth century. A Taste for Brown Bodies examines how U.S. empire not only makes possible certain articulations of gay modernity but also instrumentalizes them. Empire and gay modernity in this sense become mutually propagating. This is not to say that the male homosexual occupies a “normative” position, a center of power, but it is to say that we need to complicate the margins. What I argue is that certain practices and subjectivities that we might understand historically
as forms of homosexuality are regulated and normalized in their service to U.S. empire. Indeed, the particular propagation of the United States as empire that I examine is one that necessitates the margin; its extralegal operations require and deploy an outlaw sexuality. The enterprises of the cowboy, “rogue” soldier, and merchant marine often only tenuously obligate them to the nation-state, however much they later may be variously recuperated as icons of national masculinity. Nonetheless, all three figures have also functioned, officially and unofficially, as cosmopolitan extensions of the U.S. nation-state and as agents for the expansion of its borders and neocolonial zones of influence.

In framing my study, I return to the late nineteenth century also to trace capital’s privatization as it extends to the self in the production of homosexual particularity. That particularity is grounded initially and perhaps most powerfully through pathologization but ultimately extends as well into the late twentieth century through the adoption by a mainstreamed gay liberation movement of discourses of liberation and freedom that celebrate the individual and his or her right to privacy. The reduction of freedom to privatized space (whether that of the bedroom or that of the individual psyche) ironically reifies the closet, in this case not only as the space of shamed (internalized) gay sexuality but also as an exclusionary space that defends a privileged and particularized homosexuality from consideration of its interdependency with class, race, and gender formations, hence inhibiting a more totalizing analysis and the political possibilities of coalition building. Such is the case with the gay cosmopolitanism at the Gay Shame conference that I critique in chapter 4 and in the global queer cinema represented by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s Fresa y chocolate, discussed in chapter 3. However critical queer theory remains of mainstreamed, assimilationist gay politics, it shares a certain nostalgia for the particularized closet I describe. The mobility of the gay cosmopolitan, whether it be the more contingent, working-class kind of the soldier or the privileged variety of what Joseph Massad calls the “gay international,” presents a constitutive quality of gay modernity. The reification of a homosexual personage depends on
this cosmopolitanism. Uninterrogated, gay modernity’s cosmopolitanism elaborates itself, including—and often characteristically—in queer theoretical approaches. Hence, I extend the critiques offered by scholars like Duggan and Puar beyond the homonormative to modern homosexuality itself as a normalized practice in the margins of but instrumental to U.S. empire.

Writing primarily in the contexts of the Anglophone Caribbean and the United States, M. Jacqui Alexander (2006) argues that modern state apparatuses generate a regulatory heterosexualization at once necessary to the state’s reproduction (ideologically, materially) but also intrinsically unstable, one might say “productive,” in the Foucauldian sense. Following Jonathan Goldberg, Alexander traces sexual modernity to Balboa’s mass execution of six hundred “sodomites” in a Panamanian village, inscribing notions of perversity onto imperialism and onto the racialized difference between savagery and civilization. The nation-states that emerge from settler colonialism remain ghosted by perverse origins, defending a normative heterosexuality derivative of sodomy. These origins in fact need to be perpetually sublimated, redirected, re-instrumentalized. What Alexander identifies as the constitutive paradox of heterosexualization provides a critical point of departure for my own analysis. Where Alexander inquires into the role of heterosexualization within the state apparatus, I ask instead about the imperial state’s instrumentalized homosexualization, particularly in its deployments of what new historicists designate as modern gay male identity.

Puar’s critique of homonationalism develops at least in part through her scholarship on queer tourism. Following her work on a special issue of *GLQ* devoted to “Queer Tourism: Geographies of Globalization” (2002), Puar contributed the essay “A Transnational Feminist Critique of Queer Tourism” to the journal *Antipode*. One of the primary objectives of the essay is “to tease out the neocolonial impulses of all queer travel by highlighting the colonial history of travel and tourism and the production of mobility through modernity and vice versa” (937). She builds here on M. Jacqui Alexander’s groundbreaking work, and in particular
Alexander’s argument that “white gay capital follows the path of white heterosexual capital,” in order to ascertain in her own critique of tourism how “queer women, queers of color, and postcolonial lesbian[s] and gays [are] implicated in this process” (937). One of the primary objectives in *A Taste for Brown Bodies* is to test the hypothesis that white gay capital may in fact clear a path in service to white heterosexual capital. Like Puar, I too am interested in how modernity is linked to mobility in ways that complicate “white.” For this reason, my deployment of “brownness” remains deliberately slippery, referring to bodies perceived, or at least described, literally as brown but also to the fantasies about racial and sexual others who fascinate modern gay male identity with their instinctive, earthy, volatile, scatological, savage, and dirty allure. In fact, the link here between “brownness” as a simultaneously abject and idyllic primitive condition and “brown” as racial vernacular (say, for Latino, Arab, Mediterranean, immigrant, terrorist, taxi driver, or “banjee boy”) should immediately suggest symbolic origins for all racial difference signified by color (yellow, red, black, brown, white). This seems obvious enough, yet our tendency to intellectually underestimate the cruder aspects of racialization functions only to screen their monumental influence at the levels of both individual consciousness and a popular imaginary.

Puar links the decriminalization of homosexuality in the United States to mass consumption and the globalized markets of late capitalism:

As a result of fears that labor will be able to traverse international boundaries as easily as capital does, globalization is increasingly responded to through heightened national border policings of various kinds (Alexander 1997). Within this context, gay and lesbian tourism is an ironic marker of an elitist cosmopolitan mobility, a group momentarily decriminalized through its purchasing power while immigrants are increasingly criminalized and contained. (942)

Puar’s analysis is striking for many reasons, including the continued link between a gay cosmopolitan and a criminalized, “browned” body.
My interests within this study, in many ways similar to those of Puar and Alexander, differ in my concern with the emergence of gay male modernity and the scholarship of queer theory that traces that origin in ways that potentially obscure and collude with the inequities of power and mobility described above by Puar. An elitist gay and lesbian cosmopolitanism may not be so momentary, may provide a pivotal as well as ironic counterpart to criminalized brown migrations, and may in some epochs colonize space in service to the converging interests of the nation and capitalism. The most significant way in which *A Taste for Brown Bodies* diverges from Puar’s and Alexander’s projects is in my return to nineteenth-century monopoly capitalism as an imperialistic cultural foundation necessary to the formation of “gay male modernity” (a historical demarcation that I argue in some ways proves redundant). Secondly, I point to how a reconsideration, through queer of color analysis, of foundational and canonical gay texts such as Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd* shifts the emphasis from the elite cosmopolitan to cosmopolitan trade in the figures of colonial labor traversing and securing anxious national, cultural, and bodily boundaries. The seemingly accidental if inequitable relation between elite gays and criminalized migrant bodies (displaced overwhelmingly by globalized markets and the neocolonial politics of receiving nations) provides in my study a pivotal dynamic of eroticized racialization, one that is surprisingly destabilizing. Hence, I argue in chapter 1 that Herman Melville’s obsessive attention to Billy Budd’s whiteness ultimately marks the character’s brownness. That brownness is narrativized through a familiar trope of orphaned identity that so commonly raises the specter of racial indeterminacy (exotic or miscegenous) in U.S. and British cultural production but perhaps more significantly through Billy Budd’s situation as a merchant marine, crossing international waters not as an elite gay tourist but as a stuttering subaltern. In addition to tracing how gay male identity has been variously instrumentalized by the nation and by capitalism, I also inquire into how gay modernity makes some identities unintelligible in the process of canonizing others as proper liberal subjects.
I suggest then an alternative formation of homonationalism in the nineteenth century and trace its legacy to the present neoliberal moment of gay and queer assimilation. Alexander and Puar argue that white heterosexual capital invites and accommodates white gay capital in the late twentieth century; I propose a longstanding synergy among capital, whiteness, and homoerotic nationalism. What if homo- and heterosexual capital functioned concomitantly to reinforce and secure racial boundaries at home (defining a modern national culture) and to locate the primitive, sexual other abroad, at the margins of the nation’s boundaries, or in occupied and/or international spaces often symbolically designated liminal (i.e., spaces of disputed or disregarded national sovereignty)? Modern gay male identity, at its foundation, I argue, is not so clearly peripheral or abject vis-à-vis the center. Its situation is much more fluid and ambiguous, flirting from the very start with heterosexual masculinities. Icons of celebrated national masculinity—such as the cowboy, the sailor, and the soldier—boast complex and contradictory sexual histories.

The cowboy, for instance, is endurably romanticized, first by dime-store fiction and then by Hollywood, as the West’s knight errant, a figure of unshakeable virtue in a lawless region of brown savagery (dusty Indians and Mexicans; queer, mustache-twirling ladykillers dressed in black; castrated or debauched “Orientals”; and foreign speculators, typically effete and unsuited to the rugged frontier terrain). However, as I detail in my closing chapter on *Brokeback Mountain*, the cowboy begins his career as a cattle thief and outlaw figure in many ways queer. Yet it is precisely his queerness that becomes serviceable to the nation in a project of westward expansion. He performs the dirty, unseen labor of Manifest Destiny—unseen in that his heroic cultural recuperation in the twentieth century obscures a violent outlaw past.

*A Taste for Brown Bodies* traces to unexpected figures the circulation of homosexual desire within the erotic economies of the nation and empire. I assess the legacy of gay cosmopolitanism in contemporary articulations of gay identity and queer “anti-identity.” This book is my modest
contribution to a literary and cultural genealogy of gay cosmopolitanism, without which, I argue, contemporary antiracist queer politics remains imperiled.

I begin in chapter 1, “The Queer Afterlife of Billy Budd,” with a return to Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd, Sailor: An Inside Narrative*, acknowledging Eve Sedgwick’s evaluation of the novella as a text foundational to understanding modern gay male identity. The numerous twentieth-century adaptations of *Billy Budd* testify to its canonical significance to gay modernity. The African sailor, the narrative’s original (originary) beautiful sailor, mediates same-sex desire in the novella as both a highly sensual and a highly nostalgic figure. I use the notion of the primitive, brown body to locate that ambiguous but charged fantastic object that cathects Victorian male same-sex desire into modern gay male identity. Billy Budd’s primitive body, the object of Lieutenant Claggart’s disowned desire, requires the confluence of global naval and commercial expansion (within the narrative, Billy moves from merchant vessel to a naval ship) together with histories of colonialism and slavery (that account for the presence of the story’s African sailor in Liverpool). Furthermore, the narrative’s resistant identification with Claggart is both mediated and disavowed through its comparison of Claggart to the Native American Tecumseh.

Billy Budd and the African sailor become unknowing architects of the closet. The narrative’s homosexual desire is never entirely displaced onto Billy, as the African sailor remains the original fetish, the original “beautiful sailor.” In that space between the African sailor’s blackness and Billy’s pallor (which we might read either as colorlessness—an allegorical veiling of blackness—or as rosiness, the allegorical blush of innocence), desire stirs backward, into the preindustrial “time before steamships” and onto the primitive body. The novella’s constant deferral of desire, both in the form of the narrative and in the figure of the sexually frustrated Claggart, ironically constructs a model of autonomy for gay modernity in constituting its interiority, what Eve Sedgwick will identify as an epistemological closet. The “inside story” is a foundational
account of gay interiority. Performative in its labyrinthine turns and evasions, the novella epitomizes Sedgwick’s epistemological closet. *Billy Budd*, as a narrative, is the secret that begs to get told again and again, adapted numerous times across various mediums for over a century despite its performatively abstruse prose. The secret may not be articulated exactly, but it will be staged and visualized repeatedly.

The brown body reappears in chapter 2, “‘Going to Meet the Man’ in Abu Ghraib,” as the sodomitical (or Saddamitical) bodies of Iraqi men incarcerated and tortured at Abu Ghraib. In order to link domestic regimes of race with U.S. imperialism, I turn to James Baldwin’s short story “Going to Meet the Man” for an optic that insists on reading the Abu Ghraib archive as symptomatic of a racialized homoerotic of the nation. Baldwin’s story suggests a rescripting of Freud’s oedipal scene, introducing the black male as a triangulating figure vis-à-vis the (white) male child’s identification with each parent. Hence, for Baldwin, fantasies about black male sexuality necessarily mediate the resolution of the oedipal complex in the American scene. A desire both to possess and to be possessed by the black man, to annihilate and be annihilated by him, functions to consolidate white indivisibility across the division of heterosexual and homosexual identifications that resolves the oedipal. I extend Baldwin’s reading of this race secret to the abuses that occurred at the Abu Ghraib military prison not only in order to better understand the racialized and sexual nature of the violence but also to determine what about it was symptomatically American. I ask how the race secret in this instance is cast violently onto the globe and consider how digital technology restructures colonialism’s field of vision.

I explore both the value and the limitations of a comparative analysis of lynching (and lynching photography) next to the abuses of Abu Ghraib (and the digital photographs of those abuses). My contention is that the domestic race secret—for Baldwin, the white man’s desire for the black male body, regardless of sexual orientation—is globalized via U.S. neocolonialism. This casting of the American race secret onto the globe recruits a gay cosmopolitan archive, especially in its imagination.
of the exotic, or “brown” (in this case, Arab, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Muslim, “Oriental”). Jonathan Goldberg’s reading of popular culture imagery of Saddam Hussein in the introduction to his book *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities*, published in 1992, shortly after the Gulf War, seems prophetic today. Goldberg identifies fantasies, common to both English Renaissance and contemporary U.S. cultures, attributing specific sexual vices to regions broadly demarcated as “the Mediterranean” and “Islam.” The reading that Goldberg provides of a November 1990 *Rolling Stone* ad for a t-shirt bearing an image of Saddam Hussein’s face superimposed over a camel’s ass, his mouth taking the place of the camel’s asshole, gives the lie to George W. Bush’s case that the actions of the “rogue” U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib are incongruous with the American way. In response to the Abu Ghraib controversy, Bush expressed disgust, describing the photos as an aberration of national values: “Their treatment does not reflect the nature of the American people. That’s not the way we do things in America” (Stout). The responses from both the Pentagon and the White House invoke a “perpetrator perspective” all too familiar to students of U.S. racialism. In other words, they attribute the torture, characterized as anomalous, to isolated (and deviant) individuals; U.S. race ideology and the failures of racial justice at home move onto the world stage. I argue that the torture (and the vexed nature of its “mechanical reproduction”) does indeed reflect something deeply American despite the president’s protest. A national unconscious seizes on the brown body as a site onto which it can project the “unnatural” sex acts it disavows. This hegemonic imagination has traditionally cast the Arab as sodomite. The stills, generated from army intelligence film shot at the prison as well as from digital photographs circulated by soldiers as electronic forms of the postcard, underscore cosmopolitanism’s serviceability to military occupation through its archive of material and imagined travels. In other words, a tradition of gay cosmopolitanism provides the mise en scène for the Abu Ghraib photos. My reading of Baldwin reveals not only homosociality at the consolidation of white masculinity but also homoeroticism.
Chapter 3, “The Global Taste for Queer,” traces a similar homosociality and homoeroticism in the anxious nationalist rhetoric of José Martí’s “Nuestra America,” an essay first published in Mexico and completed while the Cuban patriot lived in exile in New York City. Focusing on Martí’s treatment of racial hybridity, I argue that the miscegenation that produces Martí’s mestizo America is in fact a metaphorical miscegenation occurring between men. Hence, we again encounter an iteration of homoeroticism as the locus of nation founding, in this instance sublimated within Martí’s baroque prose. The baroque quality of the prose, as I argue, itself may contain in fact another queer stratum to the postcolonial founding of the Cuban nation. Reading Tomas Gutiérrez Alea’s film Fresa y chocolate (1993) next to Martí’s essay, I explore the entanglements of race and sexuality in each text. I consider how gay male spectatorship in the United States projects a problematic variety of cosmopolitanism onto the film; alternatively, I insist on reading the film within its more local context, situating it as a contemporary expression of Martí’s foundational yet anxious nationalism. In other words, U.S. spectators may not be wrong to recover Gutiérrez Alea’s film as a text that is cosmopolitan in its queerness, but they misrecognize their own aggressively universalized model of gay identity in the film’s specifically Cuban contexts. The film’s articulation of modern Cuban gay identity originates in a cosmopolitan model, that of Martí’s anticolonial and hemispheric dialectics.

According to Joseba Gabilondo, a “global taste” for “queer” film characterizes the international film market during the 1990s. In effect, he identifies a film archive of gay cosmopolitanism, including Fresa y chocolate in the catalogue of global queer cinema produced outside Hollywood, together with such works as The Crying Game (1992), Farewell My Concubine (1993), The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994), and Madame Butterfly (1995). Insisting on reading Fresa y chocolate within the multiple contexts of its global, local, and alternative cosmopolitan (hemispheric and anticolonial) meaning making, I build on Gabilondo’s argument that these films negotiate “different national
situations and globalization... us[ing] the same discursive strategy of mobilizing a desiring male queer character in order to relegitimize and articulate a new global hegemony around the different national masculinities and hegemonies set in crisis by globalization” (236–37). The theme of seduction in *Fresa y chocolate*—the gay Diego’s seduction of the communist youth, David—mirrors both the project of reconciliation to which the Cuban state deployed the film internationally as well as the Anglo American projection of erotic desire onto a fetishized Cuba. The global taste for queer cinema then directs us back to modern gay male identity’s need for and production of the brown body.

In the fourth chapter—“You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!”—I expand on my notion of the primal “brown body” mediating gay modernity. I argue that this brown body (frequently embodied as “Latino”) mediates gay male shame. Andy Warhol’s film, *Screen Test #2*, Douglas Crimp’s essay on that film, “Mario Montez, For Shame,” and the Gay Shame conference held at the University of Michigan in 2003, which opened with a showing of the Warhol film, provide the primary texts for my analysis. Crimp (and Gay Shame, by extension) deploys monolithic constructions of “Puerto Rican” and “Catholic” in order to project and universalize (the urbane, white gay man’s) shame onto Montez’s othered (or browned) body. I argue that Montez, rather than merely providing the passive object of Warhol’s experiments in camera technique and exposure, skillfully pirates the film’s authority in ways that remain illegible to Crimp’s construction of gay shame. His performance works to shift the film’s scrutiny—its discomfiting modes of exposure—alternately onto Warhol, Ronnie Tavel (Warhol’s collaborator, off screen), and the spectator. I conclude the chapter by considering critiques of my original response to the conference.

In chapter 5, “Gay Cowboys Close to Home,” I queer the nation-founding iconicity of the cowboy in the U.S. imagination. The chapter reviews what became a common critical reading of Ang Lee’s *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) as “not a gay movie.” I contest the prevailing reading of Ennis Del Mar as repressed homosexual, instead inviting his difference
to help open both “gay” and “queer” to new narratives. Ennis's queerness is concentrated unexpectedly in the cowboy ethic that guides his life; because nationally that ethic is memorialized as heroically and uniquely masculine, its queerness has dissipated from legend. This chapter restores the queer in cowboy, insisting that we situate Ennis close to home (Wyoming, ranch labor, rural) in order to appreciate his difference. Hence, I challenge a metanarrative for modern gay identity largely founded on migration—to metropolitan locales, such as New York and San Francisco—and on a certain gay cosmopolitanism. Readings that characterize Ennis as either “repressed,” “closeted,” or “not gay” often resort to a cosmopolitan logic that then situates Jack as properly gay. What these readings fail to account for are the socioeconomic and geographic differences that estrange the characters as the story develops. Jack’s greater mobility, especially his ability to travel outside the boundaries of the nation (as a sex tourist in Mexico), contributes to an articulation of sexuality that many viewers more readily label as “gay.”

In contrast to most readings of the film, mine turns to both Annie Proulx’s story and Lee’s cinematic adaptation to critique gay assimilationism and the prioritizing of same-sex marriage in contemporary neoliberal (“homonormative”) gay and lesbian politics. It is precisely Ennis’s refusal to accommodate Jack’s demands for domesticity that encourages gay assimilationists to read Ennis as closeted (even “cowardly”) and Jack as tragically heroic. I locate the narrative’s queerness not in Jack’s domestic longing but rather in Ennis’s nostalgia. *Brokeback Mountain* is all about queer space and time. It is the place where two “high school dropout country boys with no prospects” (256) scratch out a time “when they owned the world and nothing seemed wrong” (255). Ultimately, Jack Twist embraces a bourgeois lifestyle. While Jack Twist memorializes Brokeback Mountain as a rehearsal for marriage, Ennis Del Mar regards Brokeback Mountain, through a critical nostalgia and in classic cowboy style, as a circumvention and postponement of the law, as a queer space and time.

We find then in queer cultural production (including queer theorizing, such as that exemplified by Gay Shame) competing nostalgias,
critical and reactionary. And in these figures of the cowboy, soldier, and sailor—as both subjects and objects of queer desire—we encounter the cultural mediation of nostalgias, critical but more often reactionary. These figures also perform colonial labor for a cosmopolitan desire that I argue is fundamental to gay modernity, a desire for the primitive, the exotic, the brown body. That desire, I argue, is excited, accommodated, and instrumentalized by U.S. empire in ways that remain undertheorized.