Contesting the Foreign/Domestic Divide: Arab Revolutions and American Studies

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Rapidly unfolding events in African and Asian Arab countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, Iraq, and Palestine) call for both the dissemination of information as well as critical analysis. Conventional wisdom in the American academy suggests that Arab revolutions should not be intellectual concerns for students of American Studies; instead the canon places these issues in Middle East Studies, international relations, or foreign policy think tanks. I argue that American Studies is a most essential site for research and analysis on these developments, given the central role the U.S. has historically played and continues to do so in the region as well as the role diverse (indigenous communities, communities of color, poor and marginalized) communities in the United States have played during the 1960s and 1970s and can potentially play today in influencing policies away from Islamophobia, Orientalism and racism and toward mutual respect, dignity and solidarity.

This paper will discuss what Arab revolutions/uprising/popular protests mean for theory and pedagogy within the academy, in particular, and with regards to social change in general and draw conclusions as to what lessons that can be drawn and employed in the production of justice-centered knowledge in the U.S., the Arab world and globally.

Scholars and other public intellectuals whose work is critical, analytical, historically-informed and justice-centered will be brought together to collectively make the case for why Arab revolutions should be a concern for students of American Studies, in general, and for scholars whose scholarship and pedagogy is concerned with issues of justice, in particular. Panelists will be arriving from a fact-finding mission to the region to hear from and engage with activists, leaders and other intellectuals of Arab revolutions in North Africa and South West Asia.