

CFP
Proposed Volume: *The Platinum Age of American Television*

Publisher: Brill Publishers (series, European Perspectives on the United States)
Working Title: *The Platinum Age of American Television*
Editor: Ben Alexander
Contact: Benalexander@fas.harvard.edu

I am collecting proposals for chapter length studies that broadly address, *The Platinum Age of American Television, 2000 - 2010*. The volume is intended for inclusion in Brill's *European Perspectives on the United States* series. This is not a blind (or random) submission. Brill has expressed interest in the volume.

In a 2015 interview with David Simon (creator of *The Wire*) President Barak Obama offered that *The Wire* is, "one of the greatest -- not just television shows, but pieces of [American] art in the last couple of decades." We can certainly consider that *The Wire* remains poignant because it does not simply depict American culture *The Wire is* American culture. *The Wire* combines hyperrealism (from a quasi anthropological capture of syntax and dialect that recalls the language of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston to a preference for actors who lived "the game" in Baltimore's inner city) with the reinvention of fundamental American themes (from picaresque individualisms to challenging American exceptionalism) within a (at the time) emerging convention: the premium cable serialized drama.

The Wire, of course, did not single-handedly reshape American television. Scholars like Martin Shuster refer to this period of television history as "new television." That is, the product of new imaginations that felt television had exhausted its normative points of reference, subject matter and narrative technique. Many of the shows from this period sought to reinvent television for interaction with an evolving zeitgeist shaped by disorientation amid a world of rapid change. Series that fall within this rubric include (in chronological order): *The Sopranos*; *The Wire*; *Deadwood*; *Madmen*; and *Breaking Bad*.

These shows also share a reimagined concern for what scholars like Astrid Böger term America's "documentary aesthetic." Borger, however, situates this aesthetic amid artistry of the 1930s much of which was shaped by a government initiative to "introduce

America to Americans” in order to justify sweeping government intervention amid national crisis. Alfred Kazin observed that, “one of the most remarkable phenomena of the era of crisis . . . the WPA guides to states and roads . . . the half-sentimental, half commercial new folklore . . . ; the endless documentation of the disposed in American life – it testified to an extraordinary national self-scrutiny . . . Never before did a nation seem so hungry for news of itself.” The corpus of television that comprises the “Platinum Age of American Television” (approximately 2000 – 2010) share an investiture in a similar aesthetic. Weather concerned with historical verisimilitude (*Madmen, Deadwood* etc.) or with a Naturalist aesthetic (*The Wire, Breaking Bad* etc.) American culture of the early 21st century cultivated a new interest in unflinching examination of the dispossessed.

We welcome the submission of article length proposals (between 5,000 – 7,000 words). We are especially interested in submissions that compare (or at least reference) two or more series. Additional points of entry include (but are certainly not limited to):

- America’s “documentary aesthetic”;
- A “New American Naturalism”;
- The reinvention of American literary themes:
 - American exceptionalism
 - Picaresque individualism
 - The American Dream
 - Alienation
 - Commercialism and Consumer Culture
 - “Survival of the Fittest”
 - Anxiety
 - The family
- Portrayal of women;
 - The female detective
 - The female outlaw / gangster
- Portrayal of LGBTQ characters
 - Gangsters
 - Detectives
 - Living a double life
- Reading television scripts as literature;
- Teaching the Platinum Age of American Television;

- Race relations;
- Depictions of the American frontier
- Depictions of “the game” – the business of drugs in America;
- Depictions of the “war on drugs”;

Calendar

- January 15, 2021: 2000 word outline due.
 - Yes, you read this right. I ask that we please submit a 2000 word proposal. These will be reviewed and then selected authors will be asked to submit full chapter length studies that will be submitted, as single collection, to Brill.