

Teaching American Studies in Britain

Perspectives and Possibilities

Edited by
Megan Hunt and Lydia Plath

Critical Insights in **American Studies**

Teaching American Studies in Britain

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Finally, we both thank our students, who remind us why teaching American studies is so worthwhile.

Series Editors' Preface

Marking twenty-five years since Edinburgh University Press published the first titles in the BAAS Paperbacks series, we are extremely pleased to relaunch the series as Critical Insights in American Studies, in conjunction with the British Association for American Studies.

Over the last quarter-century, American studies, as an interdisciplinary field of research and teaching, has undergone multiple transformations. Not only have we witnessed the study of the history, literature, politics and culture of the United States being expanded through transatlantic, transpacific and transnational perspectives, but scholars have probed deeper into critical interpretations of micro-histories, regional literatures, grassroots politics and cultural industries. As we approach the second quarter of the twenty-first century, we see American studies being again reinvigorated by crucial debates on race and diversity, war and memorialisation, the environment and the economy, and digital and social media, among many other directions in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

Predicated on the belief that an interdisciplinary approach offers surprising, challenging and thought-provoking insights, this series introduces readers to leading-edge enquiries into all aspects of the Americas, reaching back to the colonial period and stretching forward to tackle present-day concerns in and beyond the United States. Each book in the series is designed to offer a rigorous examination of its topic that will satisfy the most demanding reader within an accessible and readable narrative, ideal for undergraduates and postgraduates seeking imaginative American studies approaches to important and intersecting topics.

We are very privileged to launch this new chapter in collaborations between Edinburgh University Press and the British

Association for American Studies. It is also our privilege to work with the talented authors who will propel the Critical Insights in American Studies series into the next quarter-century of debate and analysis.

Martin Halliwell and Joe Street
University of Leicester and Northumbria University

Introduction: The Mindsets, Meanings and Methods of American Studies Pedagogy

Megan Hunt and Lydia Plath

> 'This learning experience made me reconsider my previous assumptions and appreciate complexity.'
>
> 'The most thought-provoking and interesting module I have ever taken … It definitely differed from other classes I took.'
>
> 'In class I was strongly encouraged to think beyond traditional boundaries and challenge established knowledge.'
>
> 'This course equipped me with critical analysis, cultural literacy and interdisciplinary problem-solving skills that are transferable to academia, activism, policy work and beyond.'
>
> – Students taught by the contributors to this collection[1]

In 1958, 'at least two' members of the burgeoning British Association for American Studies (BAAS) proposed a symposium on the 'American studies concept', via letters to the Association's *Bulletin*. The response was muted, with editor George Shepperson arguing that the programmes developing in United States universities demonstrated 'a more organic concept' of American studies than was currently evident in 'most British universities, colleges and schools'.[2] Indeed, Louis Billington's analysis of the *Bulletin* would later conclude that BAAS's early newsletter provided an important platform for scholars and students interested in American topics, but little by the way of methodological discussion and development.

By the time it was superseded by the *Journal of American Studies* in 1967, the *Bulletin* had rarely demonstrated the disciplinary 'cross-fertilisation' often articulated as key to the intellectual promise and value of American studies, but had served its simpler purpose to bring the component disciplines together.[3]

In reality, and as Billington noted, early issues of the *Bulletin* demonstrated 'a distinct bias towards history, with literature as the second major theme. Other subjects were always sparsely represented, though politics and geography received some coverage.' The historical coverage was skewed heavily towards the Revolutionary era and early nineteenth century, while the realities of the Cold War, the civil rights movement and other unfolding histories seldom appeared in the pages of the *Bulletin*. Notable exceptions were confined to an article comparing presidents John F. Kennedy and Franklin Roosevelt, written prior to Kennedy's assassination, and a 1964 article that welcomed the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of that same year. Fascinatingly, 'American popular culture received no attention', while only three articles published in the *Bulletin* between 1956 and 1966 were authored by women.[4] Shepperson's appeal to schoolteachers failed to generate large amounts of material but did lead to some coverage of syllabus development and a 1965 'Study of Bias in British and American History Textbooks'.[5] Equally conscious that 'local connections' often proved 'one of the most valuable means of arousing interest in the United States and its culture', Shepperson encouraged submissions that emphasised regional connections to and impact upon the United States, particularly Scottish, Welsh, Irish and Cornish influences.[6]

Unlike the later *Journal of American Studies*, the *Bulletin* had no editorial board and functioned mostly to keep members informed of available primary source collections and the details of US-focused research and teaching across Britain. It placed an increased emphasis on publishing reviews and articles by members from 1957 onwards, and offers a fascinating window into early efforts to shape the meaning and purpose of American studies in Britain. Indeed, the questions presented within the early archives of the *Bulletin* have resonance today, and for this edited collection. Is American studies in Britain simply a means through which to support and share diverse research interests on the history, literature, politics and culture of the United States? Or does it reflect and shape unique methodologies for teaching and research?

The first volume to tackle the meaning, significance and value of American studies to UK higher education (HE), *Teaching American Studies in Britain* effectively emerged from twenty-first-century iterations of the questions posed by 'at least two' BAAS members in 1958 and many others since: To what extent is there an 'American studies concept' in Britain, and, more broadly, what does teaching American studies mean for UK-based academics, students and our universities? To answer some of these questions, we need to reflect on our distinct history. Though the historical and cultural connections between Britain and the United States are fairly obvious, and UK educators attempted to formalise study of the United States as early as the 1930s, government officials only really took notice during World War II, when wartime alliances lent 'new persuasiveness' to the argument for American studies in Britain. The ambitious programme, as historian David Reynolds has documented, involved the BBC, the Ministry of Information, the Board of Education and the Foreign Office, and appears to have been a distinctly British-led endeavour.[7] This longer history was cited in the *Bulletin* itself, alongside reconsiderations of classic works on the United States, including those by D. H. Lawrence and Thorstein Veblen. The *Bulletin*'s 'Revaluation' series, introduced by Shepperson in 1957, thus intended to educate British students of the United States of 'the traditions within which they are working' and to 'draw attention to neglected but significant British writings on American themes'. Such efforts to 'legitimise' the discipline implied a longer lineage than the post-war moment otherwise suggested, alongside efforts to spotlight the multiple and diverse parameters of what might be considered American studies.[8] However, we must also consider the extent to which such efforts perhaps developed to counteract the emerging discipline's proximity to, and economic dependence on, US state actors.

Indeed, any assessment of American studies' emergence in the UK must address the realities of American cultural diplomacy, notably that which was directed through large philanthropic organisations. Such histories remind us that BAAS was formed after a 1955 conference funded by the US Education Commission and the Rockefeller Foundation, following the Fulbright Act of 1946. While BAAS turned down an initial $100,000 grant from the US Embassy, by 1957 the organisation accepted $150,000 over five years from the Rockefeller Foundation. As a result, Inderjeet Parmar concludes,

British American studies emerged from 'an elite state-private network that united key elements of a Cold War coalition … behind an imperial hegemonic project'.[9] Today's British American studies is therefore the descendant of post-war efforts to spread American ideas and influence abroad, raising questions about its intellectual aims, historic neutrality, and even the question of complicity with US state efforts to contain the spread of communism.

While not avoiding these questions, Ali Fisher complicates Parmar's assessment of BAAS's relationship to the United States, arguing that while BAAS was never fully independent, US agents may have overestimated the extent to which they could shape an external scholarly organisation and the work of its members. Fisher's narrative, that UK-based Americanists made the discipline their own, therefore lends credence to Richard Pells's earlier suggestion that the US state 'could not in the end determine what American Studies should be, or how it might be used, after it crossed the ocean'.[10] This book, we hope, remains testament to the diverse considerations of American studies in Britain, and makes a case for its continued place within UK universities, schools and colleges.

As E. James West explains in the first essay in this volume, the development of American studies in British HE included both an investment in professorships and exchanges at elite universities like Oxford and Cambridge – which tended to prioritise 'traditional subjects' such as history and literature – as well as a more targeted pursuit of American studies departments at a wave of newer universities, including the Universities of East Anglia, Leicester and Keele, which received their university status between the late 1950s and early 1960s. Initially supported by a range of funders, from the Ford Foundation to the American Council of Learned Societies, it is not an accident that these institutions became 'important regional centres for American studies'.[11]

While our predecessors sought to define the objectives and sustainability of their discipline after its initial evolution, today's British American studies community finds itself at the forefront of a range of sector-wide problems. Searing workloads and frequent industrial action have become common across the British HE sector, while a targeted assault on the humanities has left many American studies departments and colleagues increasingly vulnerable to redundancies when departments and programmes are streamlined or entirely dismantled.

Important in this context are the distinctions between institutional 'types' in UK HE. Though it is something of a generalisation, as West notes, 'older universities such as the University of Cambridge, University of Edinburgh and the University of London sought to accommodate the development of American studies in Britain through expanding provisions in American history and culture within the remit of existing departments or academic subjects.' Meanwhile, 'newer universities appeared more willing and had greater institutional capacity to develop distinct American studies programmes that prioritised interdisciplinary research.'[12] This latter category of institution, so prominent in the development of the discipline, is nevertheless disproportionately affected by the failures of marketised education, in which larger institutions have been granted seemingly limitless opportunities to accept more and more students each year, effectively cannibalising enrolments from their younger neighbours. A consequence of the removal of enrolment 'caps', which previously limited the number of students each institution could enrol each year, American studies departments and instructors often face one of two distinct sides of the same coin. Some face high student numbers which contribute to ever-spiralling workloads, not to mention student dissatisfaction prompted by a sense of anonymity and lack of community, while others fear that one poor year of recruitment might initiate redundancies, or the complete dismantling of entire programmes or schools.

At the time of writing, American studies as a bespoke undergraduate programme is in rapid decline, with closures or significant reductions in provision at some of the most prominent departments. Though only a handful of institutions now offer bespoke American studies programmes at undergraduate level, most universities will encompass a range of Americanist academics working in cultural studies, history, literary studies, politics and a range of other departments across the arts, humanities and social sciences. Any exploration of American studies in Britain must therefore be sensitive to this reality. However, as the HE sector moves away from sustaining stand-alone American studies departments, other institutional structures of American studies in Britain continue to flourish. Organisations like BAAS, as well as smaller, more specialised networks and groups, are well placed to support the ongoing development of the American studies scholarly community. For example, the American Politics Group (APG), the British Association of

Nineteenth-Century Americanists (BrANCA), the Association of British American Nineteenth Century Historians (BrANCH), the Historians of the Twentieth Century United States (HOTCUS) and the Society for the History of Women in the Americas (SHAW) all provide space for scholarly collaboration and debate for specific subfields of American studies. Similarly, the Scottish Association for the Study of America (SASA), the Women in American Studies Network (WASN) and Green BAAS are just a few examples of wider networks that support American studies scholars in their work. Back in the 1980s, Michael Heale argued that regardless of whether scholars were based in American studies departments or elsewhere, the existence of a wider Americanist community, supported by institutions like BAAS, had created an environment in which 'variegated and vigorous scholarship … has blossomed with surprising abundance' despite the challenges of the times, and this very much remains true today.[13] In recent years those interested in American studies pedagogy in the UK have found community and shared endeavour in the Teaching American Studies Network (TASN), which was founded in 2019. With over 100 members, TASN brings together both those in specialised American studies departments and those in a range of other disciplines who use American studies topics, methods and approaches in their classrooms.

It is clear from the discussions held by the Teaching American Studies Network and in other spaces (including during panels at BAAS conferences) that teaching American studies in Britain today is less about the programme of study of a particular group of students, but instead is about how we approach our pedagogical practice as American studies scholars. This approach is encapsulated in the *mindsets*, *meanings* and *methods* constructed both within and outside of our classrooms, by teachers and students alike.[14] By *mindsets*, we mean the values, cultures and outlooks that we and our students bring to our classrooms. This includes the ways in which we are shaped by the national context in the UK, as well as our perspectives on the histories and cultures of the United States. In this context, our intentions and purposes as teachers and learners are where we make *meaning* in the classroom: why we think American studies is significant and the possibilities for the future that it enables for our students. Finally, by *methods* we mean the practices, techniques and approaches that we use in the classroom, which are often interdisciplinary in

nature and seek to disrupt and challenge traditional boundaries of knowledge.

National and institutional contexts are central to understanding the mindsets of those teaching and learning in American studies. American studies researchers in Britain have long been engaged in a debate about our positioning in relation to scholars based in the US. Should we take advantage of our national distance and contribute what Peter Parish described as 'a more balanced view, a sense of proportion and of context that is often more easily achieved by the outside observer'?[15] Or, should we seek full immersion in the field of US-based scholarship, with our nationality and position irrelevant to the publications we produce: to, as Tony Badger put it, focus 'on becoming just a good [scholar] of the United States who happens to work in Britain'?[16] (Of course, both stated postures ignore the fact that many Americanists working in Britain today are international staff including many US citizens, and/or have spent extensive amounts of time living, learning and working in the US.) In terms of their research, most British-based Americanists in the twenty-first century would embrace Badger's mindset. We claim parity with our US-based peers: we seek to publish in US journals and with US university presses; we attend American conferences; we engage in debate with American-based scholarship; and we are often highly engaged with American politics and culture. However, Badger's mindset comes with a caveat: he acknowledges that his goal is futile. 'Inevitably,' he points out, 'our work is shaped, consciously or not, by British cultural perspectives and British scholarly preoccupations.'[17] This is because in our work we must occupy, and engage with, two separate sets of scholars and institutional structures. We locate ourselves both amongst our peers in our own distinct field of study (usually Americans), and amongst our peers in our departments and national environment (rarely Americanists). In institutional terms, this means that we care what the US-based American Studies Association, American Historical Association and Modern Language Association are doing, because these organisations (amongst many others) are shaping the growth and direction of our fields as Americanists. However, we must also support the activities not only of BAAS and other American studies organisations, but of the Royal Historical Society and the English Association, for example, as they fight for the arts, humanities and social sciences in the British context, even though they are not mainly (if at all)

concerned with supporting the teaching and research of American studies in itself.[18]

Thus, while we strive to work alongside our American peers in our publications, and we are, like Parish, 'grateful for the absence of a self-conscious, deliberate, calculated "British" view of American history' and culture, we will always have a mindset shaped at least to some extent by our experience in British HE.[19] This is never truer than in our classrooms. If those of us who have spent decades immersed in American scholarship cannot extract ourselves from the local contexts in which we live and work, then our students (who, after all, are mostly not from the US and have mostly never studied the United States in any depth before they reach us in their first year of university) certainly cannot be expected to. Just as the way that we research American studies in Britain is shaped by our national context, so too is the way we must approach our teaching.

The British HE context shapes our mindsets both culturally and structurally. As we have noted, whilst the second half of the twentieth century was marked by the growth in departments specifically designed around the research and teaching of American studies, where students followed programmes that enabled them to focus their learning on the United States, recent years have been marked by a significant decline in the number of such departments. Therefore, although there remain some important centres of American studies learning in the UK, Americanist scholars in Britain are less likely to work alongside each other in an American studies department than to be based within one of the disciplinary areas that make up our field, such as cultural studies, history, literary studies or political science. For example, in 2014 only 6 per cent of historians working in the UK taught American history, and they often did so as the only historian of the US in their department.[20] As a result, university teachers of American studies are likely to be required to teach on broad survey courses for students who have received little, if any, prior teaching of American topics.[21] That said, Americanist topics remain widespread on history, English and politics degrees, not least because American culture in Britain remains incredibly popular. Students' enthusiasm for Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, Michelle Obama or the Marvel Cinematic Universe, for example, can be harnessed to garner interest in a much broader range of subject matter with which students may be less immediately familiar.[22] However, as American studies departments continue to close, American

studies teaching will perhaps inevitably continue to move towards the peripheries of students' learning. In most history, politics or literature programmes, American topics are optional, and it is entirely possible that a student will never take such an option, or, conversely, that they may choose an advanced option or a final-year module without ever having studied the US before.

But what we must remember is that whilst they may not have learned much about American history, politics or literature, our students have often learned a great deal about other parts of the world, and as such bring a mindset that includes a wealth of knowledge and experience to our American studies classrooms. Writing in 1985, Parish observed that British students were often fascinated by the events in American history that have no comparator in modern European history: 'the Civil War, or phenomena such as slavery or Westward expansion … they are attracted by what is exceptional in the American past but wary of theories of exceptionalism.'[23] Of course, Parish was only half-correct in this statement. Students in British universities indeed remain fascinated by the histories and literatures of slavery and civil rights, by Indigenous culture and by America's wars. But widening participation measures, as well as the internationalisation of HE, means that our student cohorts are far more diverse than those Parish may have encountered in the 1980s. As a result, our students are now much keener to challenge notions of American exceptionalism. Just as American studies research has taken a transnational turn in recent years, many of our students are able to place American history and culture in a wider, global perspective. Our students see the connections between American slavery and British plantations in the Caribbean; the civil rights movement, African decolonisation movements and a global Black Lives Matter; the genocidal nature of westward expansion and the actions of European empires; the warring sectionalism of the Civil War era and conflicts in the Middle East.

Our students' perspectives (and our own) are also inevitably shaped by their perceptions and understanding of contemporary American politics and culture. It has often been presumed that students' interest in American studies has waxed and waned in response to US foreign policy or presidential politics. For example, in 2004, Polly Toynbee of *The Guardian* wrote that recruitment to American studies degrees was declining due to British opposition to the war in Iraq, under a headline that decried 'a degree in

bullying and self-interest'.[24] Conversely, in 2009 British newspapers reported an 'Obama bounce' as interest in American studies resurged shortly after the election of President Barack Obama.[25] While American studies academics have been a little more sceptical that the fortunes of the discipline are this simple, it is certainly the case that universities seeking to recruit students to American studies degrees often tend towards celebratory narratives and exceptionalist tropes in their marketing. Prospectuses rely heavily on the use of Americana: images of the Capitol Building and Mount Rushmore, rippling US flags and statues of Abraham Lincoln decorate university websites.[26] In the classroom, this can sometimes result in disappointment: students who idealise aspects of American culture or venerate the idea of the 'American dream' struggle when asked to think critically about ideas or celebrities whom they admire.[27] Alternatively (and perhaps increasingly commonly), students can be deeply critical of an America that they see as defined by racism, gun culture, toxic masculinity or imperialism. In the past, American studies appealed to students because it was one of the only degrees that offered the opportunity to study abroad in an English-speaking country; now, as many more degrees include options to study abroad in all parts of the world, the United States has become less attractive as students tell us that they are concerned about the costs of healthcare, threats to their reproductive rights, and campus shootings.

In many ways, students' opinions about celebrity culture or whether they would want to visit the US are irrelevant to our classroom pedagogy: just as in the United States, British American studies modules are not designed to teach students to either 'love' or 'hate' America, and many would prefer that students leave their fandom or their politics at the door. (In that sense another marker of our context is that we are at arm's length from the front lines of the culture wars being fought about and within American educational spaces.[28]) But we do not teach in a vacuum, and as such we must grapple with the political and emotional mindsets that our students (and ourselves) bring to their learning. As Hilary Emmett and Chris Lloyd, both contributors to this volume, have pointed out, 'education is always entangled with and shaped by emotion, affect, feeling.'[29] In American studies classrooms, students are directly confronted by what George Lipsitz calls the 'cruel contradictions and painful paradoxes' of American history and culture, and often

struggle to disentangle their emotional responses from their critical analysis.[30]

It is in this space – the murky ideological and emotional gap between the United States' ideals and its realities – that American studies creates *meaning*, both in and beyond our classrooms. American studies scholars and teachers on both sides of the Atlantic have often claimed that what makes American studies meaningful is its commitment to social justice. For example, Philip Deloria and Alexander Olson explain that American studies is marked by 'a scholarship that emanates from pressing social issues, one that takes seriously the past and present of those issues'.[31] Richard King, based for many years at the University of Nottingham, described American studies as 'a movement as well as a course of study'.[32] A recent exchange in the *Journal of American Studies* explained that the 'signature pedagogy' of American studies in Britain is inherently engaged with the possibilities of the present and the future:

> it is fundamentally about giving students the tools to make sense of the texts … that both reflect and shape their lived experience and the world around them, so that they can go out into the world and create and effect change in whatever space they find themselves … to imagine alternatives and to create new possibilities.[33]

As such, what American studies scholars in Britain bring to their classrooms is a sense of purpose: our work is not simply an intellectual pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, but rather an effort to give students the tools to make meaningful change in the future. Our students are just as galvanised by calls to social, racial and environmental justice as those in the US, but by beginning from a different location and mindset, they bring different sets of perspectives, questions and priorities to their studies. American studies brings multiple perspectives together to form a radical, social-justice-oriented, pedagogy.[34] As we will see in this volume, in Britain, American studies is defined by its commitment to engaged pedagogy, to building community, and to the transgression of boundaries. We believe that it is not possible to teach American studies meaningfully without engaging with dynamics of power and lived experience both within and outside the classroom. In other words, American studies embodies the radical hopefulness of what bell hooks called 'education as the practice of freedom'.[35] As hooks explains, drawing on

Paulo Friere, the classroom is 'the most radical space of possibility in the academy … we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions.'[36]

Thinking beyond boundaries is exemplified in American studies not just in terms of the meanings that we create in the classroom but also in the broad variety of methods and approaches that we use in our work. As Deloria explained in his influential keynote address to the American Studies Association (ASA) in 2009, American studies might best be defined by 'what we *refuse* to exclude'.[37] This refusal to be contained by a particular set of approaches is at the heart of American studies in Britain, and often summed up by the term 'interdisciplinarity', which serves as a shorthand to cover the wide range of approaches that are encountered in American studies, which spans the arts, humanities and social sciences. For example, Matthias Oppermann explains that 'the field has benefited from conflicting or even contradictory programmatic and methodological influences'.[38] But interdisciplinarity is a tricky concept. The differences between multi-, inter- and trans- (and other types of) disciplinarity are often unclear, and their meanings vary significantly across scholarly fields and institutional and national contexts.[39] Generally speaking, whereas a multidisciplinary project might be identified by collaboration between scholars from other disciplines, or by borrowing a particular concept or methodology from another discipline, interdisciplinarity implies at least some integration of ideas and practices. If we agree with Michel Foucault that disciplinarity is a 'technique of modern power … [that] produces experts and administrative forms of governance', then interdisciplinarity is an attempt to challenge those structures of power.[40] However, interdisciplinarity has become increasingly embedded within institutional structures. Deloria and Olson argue that, as a result of this institutionalisation, American studies has developed into a discipline in itself, marked by the existence of American studies departments, programmes and organisations like the American Studies Association.[41] However, in the UK, the idea of American studies as a discipline has perhaps always been more unstable, especially in the light of the shifting statuses of American studies departments and programmes. As West explains, when American studies departments were established in the 1960s and 1970s, the intention was to create spaces for interdisciplinary teaching, where students

would learn from an integrated approach to their studies.[42] But many of these departments have since closed, and where American studies programmes persist, they are increasingly less likely to be situated within a particular department. Instead, scholars from multiple disciplines might be asked to offer modules to students on an American studies programme that floats between them. The student experience in these cases (structurally at least) appears to be more multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary.

But American studies teaching is not limited to those who teach from within American studies departments or on American studies programmes. As we've already noted, the vast majority of those teaching American studies in Britain today do so without ever encountering an American studies student. Instead, we bring American studies mindsets, meanings and methods to our classrooms in a vast array of different disciplinary and education spaces, as the biographies of the contributors to this volume demonstrate. We are situated in cultural studies, in history, in literary studies, in politics, in race and diversity studies, and in American studies departments; but we are also found in centres of teaching and learning, in secondary schools, in research institutes, and in charities. Often, we teach American studies with purpose and intention, with a view to embedding interdisciplinary approaches into our classrooms. But sometimes it begins as happenstance: we use images or music to liven up a discussion or help students find a way into a challenging topic. Sometimes our departments welcome our approaches as innovative and boundary-crossing; other times we must exercise our methods with stealth. Many of our students embrace our teaching as exciting and different and meaningful; others are more wedded to their chosen discipline and ask where and when the 'proper' teaching will happen, or how our unorthodox source materials will figure in their assessments.

Wherever and however we find ourselves teaching American studies in Britain, as Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Joseph Entin and Rebecca Hill argue, 'one of the benefits of having a field that is in a constant state of flux and reinvention is that it creates space for, and an openness to, modes of pedagogical experimentation.'[43] Because American studies refuses to be bound by discipline or controlled by structures of knowledge, we can embrace, and fully engage with, the possibilities that our subject matter, our students and we ourselves bring to the classroom. Rather than getting entangled in

debates about whether what we are doing is really 'interdisciplinarity' (in either the radical or the institutional definition of the word), what is more important is that we focus on ensuring that our approach to American studies is *critical*. Critical pedagogy seeks to transform structures of knowledge and to respond to issues of marginalisation, oppression and justice. Our students should be encouraged to question how knowledge is produced, who it is produced by, and for what purpose. This radical standpoint intends to deconstruct the boundaries not only between disciplines, but between 'the epistemological and the political'.[44] Using these approaches, we can encourage our students to think critically and empathetically, to ask questions, and to create new knowledge through engagement both with each other and with the ideas and arguments that have come before.

As such, the sense of refusal that Deloria identified is central to American studies in Britain. Just as our predecessors refused to define an 'American studies concept' or to allow the US government to shape how American studies research should be conducted, we continue to refuse to be bound by discipline, by methodology, by history, or even by a common understanding of what is meant to be our subject of study. After all, at the heart of British American studies is arguably a refusal to agree on what American studies actually is, in content, in discipline, or in practice.[45] We have no equivalent to the ASA's white paper that attempts to define American studies; instead, our institutional structures like BAAS remain flexible and open about how we understand our work.[46] This is to our benefit. By refusing to exclude anything from American studies, we can shift and develop as British HE continues to change and to challenge us. In his response to Deloria's keynote, Jack Halberstam explained that American studies produces scholarship 'that constructs the methodology it needs for the questions it needs to answer and follows those questions well out of bounds'.[47] In pedagogical terms, this means enabling students to identify the questions that *they* need to answer, and furnishes them with methodologies that enable *them* to follow *their* questions wherever they may lead. Our refusal to be restricted transforms our classrooms into spaces of possibility: where we 'believe that everything is possible to study, everything is worthy of study, and everything can be studied in many and different ways'.[48] In this sense, what is perhaps most exciting about the way that American studies is taught in Britain is that it is boundless.

In our classrooms, we draw from interdisciplinary approaches, we build communities, we disrupt expectations, we are innovative: we embrace possibilities.

In putting this collection together, we have been inspired not only by bell hooks' call for 'education as the practice of freedom' but also by Kevin Gannon's recent manifesto calling for 'radical hope' in HE.[49] 'A pedagogical praxis centered in radical hope', Gannon writes, 'is one that fosters openness and inclusivity, critical reflection, dialogue and conversation, and a commitment to making higher education accessible and meaningful for *all* of our students.'[50] British American studies, through its commitment to interdisciplinary and engaged pedagogy in the face of the ongoing closures of American studies departments and degree programmes, embodies this idea of radical hope. For what is hope, but a belief in the possibilities of the future?

Following Gannon, we have approached the structure of this book with critical reflection, dialogue and conversation in mind. As a result, this book deviates from the traditional collections of essays that readers may be familiar with. Our intention is to model American studies pedagogical approaches by giving our contributors the freedom to identify what is important to them about teaching American studies, and to enable them to use a range of formats to critically reflect on their practice. In other words, we enable them to identify the questions that they need to answer, and to follow those questions wherever they may lead. As such, contributions to this volume take a range of forms, including single- and co-authored essays, dialogues between multiple colleagues working across institutions and departments, and shorter case studies about particular elements of pedagogical practice. The case studies demonstrate the wide range of approaches to teaching American studies taken by academics in UK HE. In these short pieces, colleagues from across the sector reflect on their teaching methods, classroom activities and assessment practices, and share their experiences. Some describe practical examples of a specific activity or practice, whereas others are more theoretically grounded.

To foster dialogue, we have also sought to build on the good practice of several journals in the field of American studies, which have long nurtured conversations between scholars working in particular research areas. For example, *The Journal of American History* has hosted a series of 'interchanges' since 2003, which

bring together scholars for 'dialogue with deliberation'.[51] Unlike published roundtables, which are usually a collection of separate responses to a particular topic, these interchanges take place online over several weeks, and contributors are encouraged to respond directly to each other as though in conversation. Drawing on this practice, the *Journal of American Studies* has published several 'exchanges' relating to American studies pedagogy since 2018 using a similar methodology.[52] For this book, rather than attempting to pursue a discussion over weeks or months, contributors were encouraged to meet, either in person or virtually, and to have a conversation. These conversations were recorded, and then lightly edited for clarity and to add scholarly apparatuses such as referencing and quotations. The dialogues in this volume evoke the richness of a seminar discussion (which is, after all, the cornerstone of much American studies pedagogy) and as a result are meaningful, open conversations in which their contributors engage in critical reflection on their own practice and learn from one another. They are an embodiment of the engaged practice that defines American studies pedagogy, and as such are a dynamic addition to our ways of thinking and writing about teaching.

Student perspectives and reflections on their experience of studying American studies are also included and embedded throughout the book. Invited by our contributors, the students featured in this volume offer a wide variety of perspectives. Some are students who completed an American studies degree, others are those on history, English and politics degrees who have encountered American studies approaches (whether knowingly or otherwise!) during their studies. They come from a variety of different types of universities, and as such demonstrate the wide range of environments in which American studies teaching occurs. Each part of the book begins with the words of these students as they reflect on their learning, to ensure that their experiences are foregrounded and frame your reading of the essays, dialogues and case studies that follow.

Our introductory essay has laid out some of the history of American studies in Britain and the current contexts in which we teach. We have explained how we think our national and institutional contexts influence the mindsets of both those learning and those teaching American studies, and how American studies scholars use interdisciplinary methods and approaches in their pedagogy in order to enable students to create meaning both within the

classroom and beyond. The rest of this book is loosely organised into three parts, arranged according to the extent to which the contributors emphasise 'Mindsets' (Part I), 'Meanings' (Part II) or 'Methods' (Part III). However, no matter where their work features in our volume, all our contributors reflect on their understandings of the perspectives our students bring to their studies, the approaches they take in their teaching, and the ways in which they enable students to see the possibilities of American studies both within the classroom and beyond. Taken together, these contributions demonstrate the breadth and depth of American studies pedagogies, from conceptual and theoretical pieces to discussions of specific classroom practices and assessments. Readers can approach the volume as a whole, or can dip in and out, focusing on the contributions that are most meaningful to their own practice.

Part I, 'Mindsets', explores some of the perspectives that students arrive in our classrooms with, and how these can be challenged, harnessed and disrupted. In some cases, these perspectives include detailed knowledge of particular elements of American culture; in others, students have gaps in knowledge or misunderstandings. Often our students have a keen awareness of the need for social, racial and climate justice, but are unsure how these priorities might be relevant in the American studies context. Each of our contributors in this section reflects on why students studying in Britain have these mindsets, the challenges and opportunities they can present in the classroom, and how teachers can transform them into meaningful learning. We begin with an analysis by E. James West of the importance of 'spatial thinking' in the development of American studies in the UK. Building on what we have written in this introduction about how British scholars have navigated their role as 'outsiders', West explains how enabling students to think critically about 'America' as a geographical space can also encourage them to think about the development of American studies as a discipline in Britain. In a case study that follows, Tom Arnold-Forster observes that British students consume a wide range of media that presents US politics as spectacle or entertainment. Arnold-Forster discusses the challenges of this 'American berserk', and considers how to harness these modes of engagement for teaching American studies topics. Secondary school teachers Adam Burns and Sarra Jenkins continue this conversation in their essay, which reflects on their experience of teaching A level Politics, the course which is most

likely to provide in-depth coverage of the United States for British students before they reach university. Burns and Jenkins argue that the Politics A level enables students to directly compare the political systems of the US and the UK, thus providing them with an important opportunity to develop their understanding of how national contexts shape American studies learning in HE.

Also interested in the impact of national contexts, Ananya Mishra then considers how to teach students about Indigenous approaches to climate crisis in the context of widespread calls in UK HE to 'decolonise the curriculum'. American studies methods, her case study argues, can create spaces for students to engage with these complex and entangled histories. Indeed, calls for decolonisation have only grown since the summer of 2020, when the combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter uprisings created an environment in which many were forced for the first time to confront the realities of racism in contemporary Britain. A group of scholars from the University of Birmingham provide a case study on the pedagogical usefulness of framing a module around the *New York Times Magazine*'s '1619 Project', presenting it as an opportunity for students to explore the ongoing culture wars on both sides of the Atlantic.[53] These two examples demonstrate some of the fissures between American and British cultural contexts, which are also picked up by the contributors to 'Teaching Religion in US Histories and Cultures', the first dialogue of the book. In a largely secular British context, students are often fascinated by American religious culture but need support to develop their understanding of its significance. In their dialogue, our contributors explore how we can motivate students in Britain to think more critically about the power of religion in American life. Together, the contributors in Part I demonstrate that no matter what priorities or preconceptions students may begin their studies with, teachers of American studies can use these as starting points from which to create meaning.

The contributors to Part II, 'Meanings', build directly on the conversations in Part I as they reflect on the classroom as both an emotional and a political space, which can either maintain or disrupt social and racial hierarchies. In an opening case study, Chris Parkes reflects on teaching queer history in the wake of the rise of anti-queer bigotry on both sides of the Atlantic. As well as adding much-needed multiplicity to student understandings of American life and developing their analytical skills, queer perspectives,

Parkes argues, are essential to 'academic freedom and civil society'. The following dialogue then directly addresses the impact of race and racism in our classrooms. American studies research in Britain has developed with a particular focus on African American history and literature during the eras of slavery and the civil rights movement, which means that our teaching has long been a locus of discussions of race in British universities. In the dialogue, scholars from a range of disciplines and racialised social positions discuss the ways in which both teachers and students navigate the complex racial power dynamics in UK HE. Continuing this reflection on what it means to teach 'race' in British American studies contexts, Nicholas Grant then considers the role of emotions in his teaching, as he explains how white educators can seek to decentre themselves in the classroom and how journalling can be used to encourage students to think about their own positionality in relation to historical struggles for racial justice. Indeed, many of our contributors see the classroom as a space with radical potential. Ellie Armon Azoulay, Emily Brady and Olivia Wright discuss in their dialogue how an American studies approach can disrupt the traditional hierarchies of a history classroom, especially using multimedia. As early career scholars, they also discuss the role of precarity in shaping their lived experience and thus the meanings that they bring to their work.

The possibilities for American studies to push boundaries are not limited to the HE classroom, of course. In the final case studies in this section, contributors demonstrate how they have empowered students to bring their expertise to communities well beyond the walls of the ivory tower. Hilary Emmett and Thomas Ruys Smith explain how they have co-produced published scholarly editions of neglected nineteenth-century children's literature with their students, demonstrating the ongoing importance of such writing for generations to come. Nick Witham and Joshua Hollands describe how they use applied assessments, including blogs, podcasts, policy memos and data visualisations, to encourage students to consider how to translate their knowledge for non-academic audiences. It is evident from all the contributions in Part II that American studies pedagogies can create meaning both within and well beyond the four walls of our classroom spaces.

Part III, 'Methods', also explores how teachers of American studies can encourage students to think beyond boundaries. As scholars in American studies have long demonstrated, the borders of the

United States are unstable, and the role of the US in the world is far more contested than the Cold War diplomats who sought to establish American studies in Britain in the mid-twentieth century claimed. As the field of transnational scholarship has developed, it has become increasingly important to disrupt the national focus often inherent in 'American' studies. In the opening dialogue, scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds discuss their experiences of teaching students about imperialism, borderlands, indigeneity and settler colonialism. Then a collaborative essay written by historians dives deeper into recent historiographical developments that have sought to complicate our understandings of American power, most evident in the shift in terminology from 'diplomatic history' to the 'US and the world'. In both of these pieces, the contributors emphasise the importance of research-led approaches as effective methods for enabling students to engage meaningfully with challenging questions. In a case study, Elizabeth Ingleson explores the challenges of integrating Native American histories into the story of US foreign relations, arguing that doing so changes students' understanding of American power not only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but to the present day. Likewise, Hilary Emmett demonstrates how reorienting our perspective from the Atlantic to the Pacific can remind students of the ways in which American studies' connection to British colonialism did not end with the Revolution. Through an exploration of the visual culture of Black Lives Matter in Australia, Emmett generates discussions with her students about art as resistance in a transpacific context. These contributions thus all explore how teachers of American studies in the UK can integrate the methodology of the 'transnational turn' into their pedagogy.

The final three contributions consider the call to think beyond boundaries from a different perspective, as they demonstrate the wide range of skills-learning possibilities encompassed within American studies. Building on Emmett's points about the relationships between British and American histories, Marie S. Molloy's case study explores how university teachers and students can share their critical skills with secondary school students via Saturday Clubs. As Molloy explains, the interdisciplinary methodologies central to American studies can be utilised to elevate the voices of young people both inside and outside of the classroom, particularly in relation to topics exploring the legacies of racism and racial exclusion. Lauren Mottle then offers a specific example of skills

learning in HE. By using a pedagogical approach tried and tested in secondary schools, Mottle contends, university teachers can expose the hidden curriculum of American studies and increase student engagement. In the final essay of the volume, Peter O'Connor and Rebecca Stone reflect on the challenges and opportunities for embedding skills learning into American studies teaching. Despite the denigrating moniker 'Mickey Mouse degrees', American studies produces highly employable graduates. However, O'Connor and Stone argue, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that our students can confidently identify and communicate the skills that they have gained during their studies. The approaches taken by the contributors to this section demonstrate the wide range of possibilities encompassed within American studies and demonstrate the sense of refusal inherent in British American studies approaches.

Of course, the nature of an edited collection such as this means that there are some areas of American studies pedagogies that we have not been able to include. Perhaps the most striking absence is that of the role of the year abroad and its influence on student learning. Once a mainstay of American studies undergraduate programmes, as discussed above, the United States has in recent years lost its lustre as a potential destination for study abroad. As the locus of American studies teaching is no longer centred in American studies departments, and as student concerns about costs, personal safety and well-being continue to grow, the year abroad is perhaps not as integral to the American studies student experience as it once was.[54] As a result, our final-year classrooms today are much less likely than they were in the past to be filled by students who have lived in the United States or Canada, and thus that experience is no longer central to considerations of American studies pedagogy.

We also acknowledge that our perspectives as co-editors are to some extent inevitably skewed towards history and its subfields because we both currently teach on history programmes. Although we have worked to ensure representation from across the wide variety of fields that make up American studies in the UK, it might appear from the biographies of our contributors that historians dominate our volume. This is perhaps the result of our unique history: as we have discussed above, American studies in Britain has long had a 'distinct bias towards history' in its institutional formations, especially in comparison to how American studies in Europe largely takes place in English language and literary studies.[55]

But it is also the case that an identifier like 'historian' obscures as much as it reveals. For example, Lydia Plath has undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in history and currently works in a history department, but the years that were most formative to her teaching practice were while she was based in American studies, and she still considers herself first and foremost a teacher of American studies. Megan Hunt, on the other hand, undertook undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in American studies, but has always worked in history departments. Developments in her own work and career therefore see her positioned more as a historian than she might have previously expected, but her expertise in film enables her to regularly utilise and build upon American studies methodologies in the classroom. The same can be said for many of our contributors, whose career trajectories have moved across and between American studies and other disciplines.

Taken together, we believe that the contributions to this volume evidence that American studies pedagogy in the UK is radical, hopeful, innovative and, most of all, flourishing. The number and range of contributors to this volume demonstrates the breadth and dynamism of the conversations taking place in UK American studies spaces about our teaching practice. Our contributors range from recent postgraduates to full professors, but the majority are in early to mid career: they represent the present and the future of our profession. Across disciplines and across institutions, our contributors bring an enthusiasm to their work that belies any notion that a decline in undergraduate programmes might denote a decline in American studies itself. The teaching of American studies in Britain shapes, and is shaped by, the mindsets, meanings and methods that we foster and develop alongside our students. In this volume we reflect on and discuss how we can use critical pedagogies to empower our students to disrupt the status quo, challenge boundaries, and see the United States – and the world – from new perspectives. We believe in the possibilities of the future.

Notes

1. We have integrated student perspectives throughout the book, using block quotations at the start of the introduction, conclusion and each section, so that student voices frame the essays, dialogues and case studies that follow. We collected these views in a survey that was

circulated to students at a range of UK universities via our contributors. The survey, which received twenty-three responses, asked students to reflect on their learning via a series of structured questions, and they provided detailed free-text responses. 78 per cent of the respondents identified as female, 78 per cent as white, and 30 per cent as LGBTQ+. 48 per cent attended a Russell Group university, and 65 per cent were studying in England and 30 per cent in Scotland. Only one of the respondents noted that they were completing an American studies degree, with the overwhelming majority studying aspects of US history, literature and culture via modules on other degree programmes.

2. George Shepperson, 'The "American Studies" Concept', *Bulletin (British Association for American Studies)*, no. 7 (August 1958): 2.
3. Louis Billington, 'Pioneering American Studies: Ten Years of the *Bulletin*, 1956–1966', *Journal of American Studies* 42, no. 2 (August 2008): 177.
4. Ibid. 168.
5. Ibid. 172.
6. George Shepperson, 'Future Issues of the "Bulletin"', *Bulletin (British Association for American Studies)*, no. 5 (September 1957): 2.
7. David Reynolds, 'Whitehall, Washington and the Promotion of American Studies in Britain during World War Two', *Journal of American Studies* 16, no. 2 (August 1982): 173.
8. Billington, 'Pioneering American Studies', 184.
9. Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 122.
10. Ali Fisher, *Collaborative Public Diplomacy: How Transnational Networks Influenced American Studies in Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (Basic Books, 1997), 133.
11. E. James West in this volume, 41.
12. Ibid. 43.
13. Michael Heale, 'From American History to American Studies? A Snapshot of British History Writing on American History in the 1980s', in *American Studies: Essays in Honour of Marcus Cunliffe*, ed. Brian Holden Reid and John White (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 334.
14. Lydia Plath et al., 'Exchange: A Signature Pedagogy for American Studies in the UK', *Journal of American Studies* 57, no. 1 (2023): 120–49.
15. Peter J. Parish, 'American History Arrives in Europe', *New York Times*, 3 February 1985, section 7, p. 1.

16. Tony Badger, 'Confessions of a British Americanist', *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (1992): 523. Also see Shelley Fisher Fishkin, 'Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004', *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57; Nicolas Barreyre et al., '"Brokering" or "Going Native": Professional Structures and Intellectual Trajectories for European Historians of the United States', *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 3 (2014): 760–70.
17. Badger, 'Confessions of a British Americanist', 522.
18. Barreyre et al., '"Brokering" or "Going Native"'; Heale, 'From American History to American Studies?', 326.
19. Parish, 'American History Arrives in Europe'.
20. Trevor Burnard et al., 'Teaching in Europe and Researching in the United States', *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 3 (2014): 771–79.
21. Ibid.
22. Edward Clough, 'Enthusiasm and Difficulty: Teaching Popular Subjects in American Studies – The Case of Beyoncé', *Journal of American Studies* 54, no. 3 (2020): 604–26.
23. Parish, 'American History Arrives in Europe'.
24. Polly Toynbee, 'A Degree in Bullying and Self-Interest? No Thanks', *The Guardian*, 25 August 2004, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2004/aug/25/highereducation.usa.
25. 'Barack Obama Effect Sees Demand for American Studies Courses in Britain Soar', *The Telegraph*, 27 April 2009, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/5230595/Barack-Obama-effect-sees-demand-for-American-studies-courses-in-Britain-soar.html.
26. For example, at the time of writing the University of Manchester features a photograph of the statue of Abraham Lincoln in Manchester: https://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/american-studies/study/courses/; the University of Swansea features a photograph of Mount Rushmore: https://www.swansea.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/culture-communication/american-studies/ba-american-studies/; and University College London advertises the MA in United States Studies with an image of the US flag flying in front of the Capitol rotunda: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/americas/study/graduate-taught.
27. Clough, 'Enthusiasm and Difficulty'.
28. Moira Donegan, 'Schools and Universities Are Ground Zero for America's Culture War', *The Guardian*, 5 February 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/05/schools-and-universities-are-ground-zero-for-americas-culture-war.
29. Christopher Lloyd and Hilary Emmett (eds), *The Affects of Pedagogy in Literary Studies* (Routledge, 2023), 3.

30. George Lipsitz, 'What Is American Studies? An ASA White Paper', *American Studies Association* (2015), 2, available at: https://www.theasa.net/sites/default/files/What_is_American_Studies.pdf.
31. Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson, *American Studies: A User's Guide* (University of California Press, 2017), 3.
32. Richard H. King, 'Review: Present at the Creation: Marcus Cunliffe and American Studies', *Journal of American Studies* 26, no. 2 (1992): 265.
33. Plath et al., 'Exchange: A Signature Pedagogy for American Studies in the UK', 148–49. On the concept of a 'signature pedagogy' see Lee S. Shulman, 'Signature Pedagogies in the Professions', *Daedalus* 134, no. 3 (2005): 52–59.
34. Julie Sze, 'Engaging Contradictions: Teaching and Pedagogy in American Studies', *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 341–45.
35. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994).
36. Ibid., unpaginated eBook.
37. Philip J. Deloria, 'Broadway and Main: Crossroads, Ghost Roads, and Paths to an American Studies Future', *American Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2009): 2.
38. Matthias Oppermann, '"Writing in 'that other space'": Digital Storytelling and the Scholarship of Teaching in American Studies', *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 52, no. 3 (2007): 326.
39. Julie Thompson Klein, 'Typologies of Interdisciplinarity: The Boundary Work of Definition', in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman (Oxford University Press, 2017), 21–34.
40. Michel Foucault cited in Jack [as Judith] Halberstam, 'Beyond Broadway and Main: A Response to the Presidential Address', *American Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2009): 34.
41. Deloria and Olson, *American Studies*, chapter 3. American studies is also sometimes described as an 'interdiscipline', a term that we do not consider to be particularly useful. On the concept of an interdiscipline see Klein, 'Typologies of Interdisciplinarity', 27. For its use to describe American studies see Andrew Dix, *American Studies: The Basics* (Routledge, 2022), 11.
42. West in this volume, 43.
43. Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Joseph Entin and Rebecca Hill, 'Introduction', in *Teaching American Studies: State of the Classroom as State of the Field*, ed. Duclos-Orsello, Entin and Hill (University Press of Kansas, 2021), 11.
44. Klein, 'Typologies of Interdisciplinarity', 28.
45. See Deloria, 'Broadway and Main'; Nikhil Pal Singh, 'Disciplining American Studies? A Response to the Presidential Address', *American*

Quarterly 61, no. 1 (2009): 27–32; Halberstam, 'Beyond Broadway and Main'; Sze, 'Engaging Contradictions'.

46. Lipsitz, 'What Is American Studies?' BAAS has no definition of American studies on its website. The closest that the UK American studies community has come to defining our work is in the description of the *Journal of American Studies*, which states that it 'seeks to critique and interrogate the notion of "America", pursuing this through international perspectives on the history, literature, politics and culture of the United States'. Available at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-american-studies.
47. Halberstam, 'Beyond Broadway and Main', 35.
48. Plath et al., 'Exchange: A Signature Pedagogy for American Studies in the UK', 148.
49. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*; Kevin Gannon, *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto* (West Virginia University Press, 2020).
50. Gannon, *Radical Hope*, 6.
51. 'The Practice of History', *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (2003): 576.
52. See for example Kate Dossett et al., 'Teaching African American Studies in the US and the UK', *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018): 528–54; Plath et al., 'Exchange: A Signature Pedagogy for American Studies in the UK'.
53. *The 1619 Project*, ed. Nikole Hannah-Jones, *New York Times Magazine*, 14 August 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html.
54. British Council, 'Broadening Horizons: Addressing the Needs of a New Generation', *Education Intelligence* (November 2017), available at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/mta-bh_2017.pdf.
55. Billington, 'Pioneering American Studies', 168; Burnard et al., 'Teaching in Europe and Researching in the United States', 778.

PART I

MINDSETS

'I think the current political climate is fascinating.'

'I think it has enabled me to take a bit more of an outside perspective and consider things from a distance, which I don't think is a bad thing. I knew about the civil rights movement before, but not much else.'

'I realised that all the things I care, love and am passionate about are linked to the United States: music, literature, culture and social history. Being able to explore this academically just made sense to me.'

'I felt a great deal of concern for the country following COVID and Joe Biden's election, especially off the back of Trump.'

– Students taught by the contributors to this collection

CHAPTER 1

ESSAY: Spatial Literacy, Disciplinary Identity and American Studies in Britain

E. James West

In a 1973 article for the *Journal of American Studies*, Roger Minshull bemoaned 'the absence of a strong geographical element in American Studies in Britain'.[1] Minshull, a geographer by training and an instructor at Bishop Grosseteste College in Lincoln, believed that this was in large part due to the privileging of faculty with advanced degrees in American history (and, to a lesser degree, American literature). Geographers and an emphasis on American geography were marginalised, and this marginalisation fostered confusion and scholarly miscommunication between self-identified 'Americanists', whether based in traditional departments or some of the new American studies departments that were springing up across the country. In the latter instance, Minshull worried that the inherent interdisciplinarity of American studies – a perceived strength of the discipline and a contributing factor to its rapid expansion in Britain during the decades following World War II – was also a source of weakness. The difficulty of speaking across and between disciplines incorporated within the unwieldly 'beast' of American studies thus made it 'just as easy for the geographer to misunderstand the others as for them to misunderstand him'.[2]

More than half a century after Minshull penned these complaints, I would argue that his concerns over 'the absence of a strong geographical element' in American studies hold significantly less water. Writing in 2005, the Loughborough-based Americanist Brian Jarvis contended that American studies in Britain, perhaps more than any other discipline, had been transformed by the

'spatial turn' and the 'cross-fertilisation between cultural geography and forms of critical theory' invigorated by the work of philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault.[3] The continued impact of what Christopher Castiglia and Susan Gillman describe as the 'spatializing of American studies' can be mapped in a multitude of ways: from large-scale work on American imperialism and globalisation, to the revitalisation of regional history, to work on 'vernacular localities … charting the impact of economics and technology, race and region, gender and sexuality on cities, suburbs and nature'.[4] These currents have migrated from scholarship to teaching, with questions of geography and space now an organising focus for many upper-level or special option American studies courses at British universities.

Nevertheless, it is also true that many American studies undergraduate students in Britain – a phrase I use here for both students who are enrolled in distinct American studies programmes, and those taking American studies-themed modules as part of separate degrees – could still benefit from a more nuanced geographical understanding of 'America', particularly during their initial forays into the discipline. In its most literal, cartographic sense, this understanding can be nurtured by challenging students to (re)consider how they conceptualise 'America' spatially from the outset – their understanding of what it 'looks like', which cities, peoples, areas and borders it encompasses, and how these different locations and identities sit alongside, across and against each other. In my experience, even the most rudimentary map-making exercises – introduced consistently and strategically – can provide useful opportunities for first-year students to interrogate their own assumptions about what constitutes (and what doesn't constitute) 'America'. Accordingly, in this chapter I reflect on why I introduce survey courses on United States history to first-year undergraduates with a basic map-making exercise: asking students to draw a map of 'America'.

As I hope to demonstrate, such deceptively simple exercises can, from the outset, impress upon students the importance of space in American studies and encourage them to think about how we define the field's terrain – beginning with the land mass at its centre. As this chapter argues, map-making exercises can help familiarise students with the concept of 'spatial literacy' – defined here as 'the ability to use the properties of space to communicate, reason, and solve problems' – and encourage them to employ what the National

Research Council describes as 'spatial thinking', namely, the capacity to utilise space as a vehicle for 'finding answers and expressing solutions'.[5] Moreover, by encouraging students to reflect critically on what spaces we include and exclude when using the term 'America', we can also introduce them to key ideas and debates within American studies as a discipline. In particular, map-making exercises highlight the impact of what Shelley Fisher Fishkin describes as 'the transnational turn in American Studies'.[6]

This chapter also highlights how a closer attention to geography and spatial concerns can better connect students to the development of American studies in Britain. In my experience, an overwhelming majority of undergraduate Americanists arrive at British universities with very little knowledge of the discipline's history in this country. Encouraging students to think about the emergence and evolution of American studies in Britain can thus be another useful tool for getting them to 'think spatially'. By tracing the development of American studies in Britain, we can further complicate the notion that 'America' (as a region) and American studies (as a discipline) are static and uncontested labels. And, by more explicitly linking their experience of American studies to the institutions, cities and regions within which they are studying, we can encourage students to consider how their own engagement with American studies might vary across the institutional and geographical landscape of British higher education.

In his 2006 work *Learning and Teaching with Maps*, Patrick Wiegand begins with two broad assertions. First, he contends that maps 'have never been so popular'.[7] To justify this assertion, Wiegand highlights a number of cultural and technological signifiers which have arguably become even more prominent during the two decades since his book was first published. These include the mass appeal of popular history and geography books that focus on maps and map-making, such as journalist Simon Winchester's 2001 work *The Map That Changed the World*, which documented the work of English cartographer William Smith and his efforts to create the first geological map of Great Britain.[8] More recent writers have continued this work with aplomb, perhaps most notably Tim Marshall, with books such as *Prisoners of Geography* (2015) and *The Power of Geography* (2021) becoming bestsellers.[9]

Wiegand also highlights the development of geo-information science and mapping software as a major part of the information

economy.[10] The development of digital Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) from the 1960s onwards helped to democratise digital mapping technologies and expanded the public's ability to make and use maps. Shortly after the publication of Wiegand's book, Apple launched the first-generation iPhone, which brought portable web mapping on hand-held devices to a mass audience for the first time. As a growing body of research demonstrates, such digital tools have not only dramatically changed our use of maps and mapping technologies, but have also altered our behaviour and relationship to the world around us.[11]

Second, Wiegand declares that maps 'have never been so relevant to education'.[12] In this regard, he maintains and expands upon the earlier emphasis on maps, and the ability to read maps, by educators such as William Balchin and Alice Coleman. Indeed, in a 1972 article for *Geography*, Balchin contended that 'graphicacy' – a term defined as the ability to understand and create visual representations of information – should be placed on a par with articulacy, literacy and numeracy as a core educational skill.[13] Recent trends in the humanities and social sciences (broadly) and in fields such as literary and cultural studies, history, sociology and political science (specifically) have revived and expanded this focus. The literal use of maps as well as the theoretical and conceptual applications of 'mapping' are both part of a growing awareness of 'space' as 'a social construction relevant to the understanding of the different histories of human subjects and to the production of cultural phenomena'.[14]

For American studies specifically, the impact of such trends may appear self-evident, particularly because American studies as a field has been defined through understandings of space – in this case, the space that constitutes 'America'. Unsurprisingly, most American studies undergraduate students arrive at the topic with a sense of geographic specificity that is often missing from more general humanities and social science disciplines. This specificity is often shaped by a belief in the United States – usually equated with both 'America' and American studies – as a 'knowable space'. Proximity to the United States through popular and political culture, facets of what scholars such as Mark Glancy and Howard Malchow have described as 'the Americanization of Britain', provide a sense of familiarity.[15] For many students, this is complemented by physical acquaintance: the United States remains the top destination for

British people travelling outside of Europe, with around four million making the transatlantic voyage in 2024 alone.[16]

One way to immediately foreground these contestations and complexities – to unpack the geographies of 'America' that many undergraduate students arrive at university with – is through practical map-making exercises. I have taught and convened multiple iterations of first-year survey modules on United States history at a number of British universities and have made a point of asking students to complete a simple map-making task early in the course, sometimes even during the first seminar. Providing students with a blank piece of paper and five minutes, I have asked them to 'draw a map of America'. These images provide the basis for a larger class discussion regarding our understanding of 'America' as a term, which is complemented by additional maps and reading. At later points in the module, we return to these initial maps as an opportunity for individual and collective reflection.

The diverse and occasionally surprising ways that students have engaged with this exercise offer rich terrain to foreground questions about what the 'America' in American studies looks like. Some of the outcomes from the maps that students have produced over the years are perhaps predictable. Overwhelmingly, students interpreted my request as a directive to create a map of the United States. Within these assumed – not prescribed – national borders, students tended to draw political maps organised around state boundaries and cities, although some did highlight topographical and physical features such as the Mississippi River and the Grand Canyon. Students were far more likely to include New York and California on their maps than Oregon or Oklahoma, a pattern that arguably reflects the imbalance of cultural significance and demographic weight across the states. Similarly, New York City and Los Angeles were by some distance the most commonly named cities on the thirty maps that I have saved over the years.

Nevertheless, the open-ended nature of my request invited students to populate their maps in different ways, helping to reveal interesting overlaps and slippages between their knowledge of 'American' geography on a city, state and regional scale. On a city level, the details of student maps were often heavily weighted towards coastal cities, particularly on the East Coast. With the exceptions of Atlanta and Chicago, the inclusion of major urban centres in the South and Midwest were much less frequent. However,

students tended to be just as – and in some cases more – likely to include Southern states such as Mississippi, Florida and Alabama on their maps, compared to states in other areas of the country. Moreover, students who chose to highlight regional areas were far more likely to identify 'The South' on their maps, compared to the other three major statistical regions used by the US Census Bureau – the Northeast, the Midwest and the West.

An initial mapping exercise immediately complicates student understandings of their existing geographic knowledge vis-à-vis the United States. As noted above, many first-year students arrive at American studies modules with an assumed (be this by the students themselves or by their educators) familiarity with the United States. This familiarity has benefits – in many ways, the survival of American studies as a distinct discipline in Britain has been and continues to be contingent on an enduring student and indeed British fascination with the United States. This interest far precedes the discipline's formation and continues to be shaped by understandings of and attitudes towards the so-called 'special relationship' that the two nations allegedly enjoy.[17] The cultural primacy of the United States in the lives of many young British students – viewed by some scholars as no less than 'cultural domination' – very likely makes them more familiar with its geography than that of comparably large nations such as Brazil, China or India.[18]

However, as demonstrated through the maps produced by my students, this perceived familiarity can also contribute to a flattening of space and can underplay the extent to which geographic knowledge is contingent upon scalability – hence students being much more familiar with cities outside of the South, but more familiar with 'The South' as a distinct geographic region. In subsequent discussions, many students connected city-level geographic knowledge with exposure through popular culture (the classic example of this trend is the enduring popularity of the 1990s sitcom *Friends*, set in New York City).[19] This was also true of cities less commonly identified on student maps. Several students included Baltimore on their maps, on account of their familiarity with the HBO drama series *The Wire*, which was initially broadcast between 2002 and 2008 and subsequently garnered a cult following. A student at another institution included Portland, based on their watching of the IFC comedy series *Portlandia*, which aired between 2011 and 2018.

Yet when pressed on their regional knowledge, and in particular the decision of some students to include 'The South' on their maps, this familiarity was less well defined. In such instances, references to popular culture set in specific locations were seen as a stand-in for 'The South' as a whole. For example, several students cited the first season of HBO crime drama *True Detective*, which originally aired in 2014, as a catalyst for their map-making decisions, but did not include Louisiana, the state in which the show was primarily located, on their maps.[20] More generally, students expressed a familiarity with 'The South' through connections to historical institutions and attitudes, most notably chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation and anti-Black racism.

Identifying and critically reflecting on these tensions from the outset can encourage students to reflect on the overlapping and often highly contested geographies and boundaries that their interpretation of 'America' contains. This can be done on various scales, stretching from neighbourhood level to national level. Through class discussion, students have responded particularly well to discussions of regional identity, with their own maps being used as a starting point for further exploration and as a point of reflective return throughout the course.

I would like to flag two additional mapping sources, which can be introduced to students after the creation of their own maps to help stimulate further discussion. First, comparative maps on regional identity created by websites such as FiveThirtyEight, a polling aggregation site known for its mapping and infographic content. An example that I have found useful is a map from 2014, when FiveThirtyEight ran two public polls asking members of the public to identify which states they considered to be part of the Midwest and the South.[21] For the South, respondents identified states as far north as Pennsylvania and as far west as Arizona. This data underscores the extent to which United States citizens themselves disagree on the regional identity of individual states, and how regional affiliation can stretch far beyond the parameters established by the US Census Bureau.

Further discussions on regional identity can also encourage students to interrogate the connections between cultural, political and physical geography. In this regard, I have found introducing maps that focus on cultural or linguistic differences across individual states or regions to be incredibly effective for stimulating critical

self-reflection. Again, there are a wide variety of infographics and mapping tools available that students could engage with here. One example is a carbonated soft drink mapping project created by cartographer Alan McConchie, appropriately titled 'Pop vs. Soda'.[22] As sociolinguist Valerie Fridland notes, what US residents call soft drinks are heavily shaped by their regional identity, with Midwesterners tending to 'enjoy a good pop', Northeasterners drinking 'soda' and Southerners 'asking for coke'.[23] However, within and across these regional distinctions are a plethora of inconsistencies and overlaps that speak to the complexity of US regional identity and its connections to other components of identity such as race, class and socioeconomic status. Through such simple map-making exercises, we can challenge students to reconsider what they know about the assumed geographies of 'America', and to emphasise that a vast array of different factors – be these racial, cultural, political or otherwise – serve to both consolidate and complicate this terrain.

Connectedly, by encouraging students to reflect critically on what spaces we include and exclude when using the term 'America', we can challenge them to look beyond a US-centric paradigm for American studies. As noted earlier, an overwhelming majority of students interpret my prompt to 'draw a map of America' as a request to draw a map of the modern United States. For a significant minority of students, this means a map of the continental United States, one excluding Alaska and Hawaii, the forty-ninth and fiftieth states admitted into the Union. No students have made any reference to overseas territories such as Puerto Rico, Guam or the US Virgin Islands, or American military bases across the world.[24] Across the many years in which I have used this exercise, I can recall only a handful of students who have authored maps acknowledging countries outside of the United States. Most commonly this has occurred through labelling of the border countries of Canada and Mexico. I can recall only one student whose map envisioned 'America' as a hemispheric formulation (perhaps significantly, this individual was an exchange student from North America who was studying in Britain for a year).

Nevertheless, asking students to think about the slippages between 'America' and 'the United States of America' can offer an opportunity to develop spatial literacy through considering the different geographical definitions, and implications, of these terms. Upon reflection, students have again reiterated the influence

of popular culture in shaping their assumptions about the mapping exercise, with 'America' and the 'United States' synonymised constantly through entertainment and news media coverage. Students have also responded well to the introduction of additional maps visualising different or alternative ways in which 'America' as an entity can be constituted. This includes a collection of images published on the website Brilliant Maps under the heading 'What Is America?'. These images show 'the different Americas that exist' when accounting for regional and linguistic differences, such as North America, Central America, Anglo-America and Iberian America.[25]

In turn, such simple exercises can offer a springboard into more substantive discussion about the development of American studies as an academic discipline. In particular, they can help introduce students to what Shelley Fisher Fishkin describes as 'the transnational turn in American Studies' over the past four decades.[26] For example, thinking about the conflation of 'America' and the 'United States' reflects the long shadow cast by US government actors and state-affiliated funding bodies in the development of American studies as a discipline. This influence ensured that the notion of 'American studies' had become synonymous with the study of the United States by the World War II era, and the centrality of the United States to American studies continues to represent the discipline's dominant paradigm in North America, in Britain, and in other locations around the world.

However, in tandem with growing critiques of US foreign policy and military interventionism during the early Cold War, scholars began to challenge the geographic parameters of American studies as a discipline. At least initially, this continued to centre the United States through formulations of 'America and the world'. American studies scholars took a keener interest in the United States' place within the global world order, something that horrified government operatives who had cultivated the field's development and continued to envision it as an important incubator of 'American' values at home and abroad.[27] As the multivalent influence of the United States beyond its own borders became increasingly apparent – most obviously through military aggression in Southeast Asia and broader efforts to shape Cold War politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America – American studies scholars pushed to develop a more critical and capacious understanding of the field.

By the 1980s, these trends had intersected with the 'transnational turn' that reshaped American history and literary studies during the latter decades of the twentieth century, and which continues to exert a significant influence over a diverse range of academic fields.[28] For scholars such as Isabel Duran, the transnational turn has been 'one of the most prominent developments in American studies' over the past forty years.[29] Donald Pease agrees, contending that the transnational turn effected 'the most significant re-imagining of the field of American studies since its inception'.[30] At both an individual and institutional level, the result has been a collective shift away from American studies as a discipline 'based upon the supposedly exceptionalist qualities of the US', and towards the adoption of a more explicitly internationalist framework.[31]

However, as Ursula Heise attests, this theoretical and geographical 'stretching' is by no means uniform.[32] It is increasingly common to see academic monographs and edited collections that characterise American studies as 'transnational' and 'global', moving 'beyond the national frame to consider regions, areas, and diasporan affiliations'.[33] Scholars have sought to examine American studies hemispherically 'by linking explorations of Anglo-American and Latin American literatures and cultures', and have explored transatlantic or transpacific connections to situate both the United States and the Americas within global systems. The influence of cultural history and a demand for greater attention to be paid to the histories and cultures of marginalised groups has also expanded the boundaries of American studies to incorporate various diasporas and has birthed enormously influential concepts such as the 'Black Atlantic'. Yet at the same time, most self-identifying American studies programmes continue to centre 'the cultures and politics of the United States'.[34]

The purpose of highlighting such variations for first-year undergraduate students is not to push them towards one approach to American studies over another. As Fishkin noted in her 2004 presidential address at the annual conference of the American Studies Association, 'there probably are as many definitions of American Studies in this room as there are scholars'.[35] Rather, it is to reiterate the value of reflecting critically on such variations – be these geographical, conceptual or otherwise. Today, as they have been throughout its history, the spatial and disciplinary borders of American studies remain fluid. By encouraging our students to apply 'spatial thinking' to their engagement with American studies

as a discipline, we can help them to reassess existing questions and to pose new ones about both the United States (as a nation) and 'America' (as a region).

I want to use the remainder of this chapter to argue for a third way of challenging first-year undergraduate students to 'think spatially'. Namely, I argue that thinking about the development of American studies in Britain can help to better connect students to American studies in the present, at a moment of perceived crisis for the discipline.

Certainly, a better understanding of the close involvement of both British and American governments in the field's development can encourage students to embrace a more critical engagement with American studies from the outset. This involvement was arguably most pronounced during World War II, aided by the large numbers of American military and diplomatic personnel based in Britain, and a strategic push 'to breed the new generation of informed "Americanophiles"'.[36] As historian Harry Allen recalls, 'Hitler made Americanists of us all', with the international ascendancy of the United States guiding the development of American studies as a 'growth industry' in Britain.[37] While efforts to institutionalise American studies spread across much of Western and Central Europe following the war's denouement in 1945, British scholars had the advantage of a shared language, better research collections, and an educational infrastructure less severely impacted by the carnage of war than neighbours such as France and Germany.

Efforts to entrench American studies in Britain were well funded through bodies such as the Fulbright Commission, which was founded in 1946 with the mission of promoting intercultural learning through educational exchange, and the ongoing work of the US Information Agency (USIA) and other facets of the US government propaganda machine. Similarly, American diplomats such as Edward Myers, the cultural attaché for the US Embassy in London, made little secret of their efforts to promote American studies as a form of 'cultural propaganda'.[38] Into the 1950s and early 1960s, government agencies and private foundations continued to invest significantly in the discipline's development. For example, the Ford Foundation created a five-year grant worth $2,500,000 for 'the promotion of American Studies in Western Europe', which was administered by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS).[39]

Funding created exciting opportunities for an upcoming cohort of British academics, who were attracted to American studies as a new, innovative and interdisciplinary endeavour. While many in this generation came to think of themselves 'as rebels, outsiders, [and] people from the proverbial provinces', their development as Americanists was largely funnelled through elite educational institutions in Britain and the United States.[40] Marcus Cunliffe, a key practitioner of American studies in Britain, is an instructive example. Cunliffe was born in Lancashire but was educated at Oriel College, Oxford, before attending Yale University as a Harkness Fellow.[41] The expansion of American studies was further aided by the creation of the British Association for American Studies in 1955, which remains the de facto organisational home for many British Americanists.

Although it is too simplistic to view the development of American studies in Britain as an exclusively top-down project driven by the US State Department, it is valuable for students to understand the financial and geopolitical, as well as cultural and educational, factors that shaped the discipline's growth. On a local level, it is also useful for students to understand how strategic efforts to expand American studies were born out geographically. Although the first wave of American studies scholarship in Britain was driven by Oxbridge and the University of London, geographically disparate institutions such as Aberystwyth, Glasgow, Keele and East Anglia all became important centres for American studies teaching and research during the 1950s and 1960s, reflecting the discipline's spatial and institutional diversification. Moreover, while Cunliffe and other members of the 'new generation' had been educated at elite centres, their subsequent academic trajectories also speaks to the diversification of American studies. Cunliffe returned from a stint at Yale to take up a faculty position in American history at the University of Manchester, before later becoming one of the first professors of American studies at the University of Sussex.[42]

This dispersal can be understood as an important, and intentional, part of the discipline's expansion. In a 1962 interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*, Edward Myers contended that instead of 'trying to plaster the country with chairs in American Studies', it was more prudent for American studies advocates to 'pick out centers of influence and concentrate on them'.[43] The results were impressive. By the early 1960s, there were more than a dozen

permanent chairs or lectureships at British universities which specifically mentioned America in the title.[44] In a 1965 report sponsored by the British Association for American Studies, London-based academic Jim Potter contended that 'American Studies in universities are now healthy with some activity everywhere and intense activity in certain places'.[45] In a 1969 special issue of the *Times Educational Supplement* that focused on the study of the United States in British universities, Harry Allen described its growth as 'one of the academic success stories'.[46]

Sustained efforts to expand scholarship on the United States and to establish American studies as a distinct discipline in British academia were further aided by the wider expansion of the higher education sector. Between the end of World War II and the end of the 1960s, the number of British universities more than doubled. A major driver of this expansion was the granting of full university status to local university colleges in towns and cities such as Nottingham (1948), Southampton (1952), Hull (1954), Leicester (1957) and Keele (1962). Many of these locations, most notably Nottingham, Leicester and Keele, were identified as potential 'centers of influence' and aggressively sought to expand their American studies provisions. They were aided in this effort by funding from the Ford Foundation, the ACLS, the USIA, and similar agencies and organisations. For example, such funds underwrote the establishment of a lectureship in American history at Keele and a professorship in American studies at Hull, and also helped to fund the purchase of library and research materials at Southampton, Hull, Nottingham and Leicester.[47]

The 1960s also witnessed the creation of new universities that were immediately granted degree-awarding powers. Much of the impetus for this wave came from the Committee on Higher Education, whose findings culminated in the publication of an influential 1963 report that recommended a significant expansion of the British university system. Colloquially known as 'plate glass universities' due to their distinctive architecture, these institutions included Sussex (1961), East Anglia (1963), York (1963), Lancaster (1964), Kent (1965) and Essex (1965), many of which became important regional centres for American studies. The University of East Anglia included English and American studies as one of its seven first schools of study, while the University of Sussex included a department of English and American studies as part of its efforts

to pioneer 'a new concept of social studies designed to bridge the conventional gaps between various academic departments'.[48]

Perhaps the last major American studies 'boom' occurred during the 1990s, as a result of several interconnected factors. Chief among them was the passage of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, a major piece of legislation that granted university status to dozens of polytechnic colleges. Many of these institutions became important centres for American studies, including the University of Derby. This expansion of higher education providers underpinned a dramatic upswing in the number of university students during the 1990s, which more than doubled from 15 per cent in 1988 to 33 per cent by the turn of the twenty-first century.[49] At the same time, the end of the Cold War and the United States' consolidation as the world's only superpower sparked a revival of interest in American studies, which despite the 'transnational turn' remained closely wedded to the history and politics of the United States. The opening of the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford University in 2001, which placed itself 'at the forefront of American Studies in Britain', arguably represented the high point of this renewed enthusiasm.[50]

A greater knowledge of this disciplinary history carries enormous benefits for present-day American studies students. First, by linking the discipline's development to a range of financial, educational and geopolitical factors, we can challenge students enrolled on American studies modules or programmes to reject the idea that academic disciplines – and, indeed, university education as a whole – are ideologically or politically neutral projects. Of course, the development of all academic disciplines is both politically charged and historically contingent. In this regard, American studies has useful models for self-interrogation from scholars working in adjacent fields such as sociology and anthropology.[51] Nevertheless, the explicit and sustained involvement of the US government and its adjacent diplomatic and economic acolytes in the push to entrench American studies in Britain offers an unusually clear case study for strategic disciplinary development. Amid ongoing calls to 'decolonise the university' and demands for institutional and pedagogical change to 'transform the terms upon which the university (and education more broadly) exists', the history of American studies in Britain thus offers a valuable way for students to engage with debates around disciplinary identity and the role of universities as shapers and disseminators of knowledge.[52]

Second, by tracing the history of American studies at their own institutions, students can develop a clearer understanding of how individual universities helped to cultivate, were absorbed into, and sought to position themselves within an emerging American studies ecosystem in Britain. This is perhaps most easily traceable through the different ways that British universities responded to the pull of American studies during the second half of the twentieth century. Generally speaking, older universities such as the University of Cambridge, University of Edinburgh and the University of London sought to accommodate the development of American studies in Britain through expanding provisions in American history and culture within the remit of existing departments or academic subjects.[53] By contrast, newer universities appeared more willing and had greater institutional capacity to develop distinct American studies programmes that prioritised interdisciplinary research. One instructive example of the latter trend can be seen at Keele University, which began American studies programming under its former guise as the University College of North Staffordshire before being granted a full university charter in 1962. At Keele, American studies was envisioned as a way to 'avoid the evils of specialization and to create cooperation between the Departments'.[54] Similarly, the foundation of the University of Sussex in 1961 was celebrated as 'an unparalleled opportunity' to develop a new curriculum that centred American studies and other interdisciplinary projects.[55]

These examples suggest a dual history of American studies in Britain as both radical and conventional; as both a model for the 'new university' and a way to further develop established university disciplines and programmes. Linked with Edward Myers' desire to establish 'centers of influence', they also demonstrate that the discipline's development was institutionally and geographically contingent.[56] Making these connections through the universities at which they are based can provide students with another way to reflect on how they imagine, locate and position 'America'. As Megan Hunt et al. have argued, efforts to link local forces with larger movements – be this through individual or institutional connections between British subjects and universities and their American counterparts – can allow students to make geographically distant historical events legible and relatable.[57]

At the same time, these efforts also reinforce how the ways that individual students understand 'America' and engage with

American studies as a discipline are connected to 'far bigger historical and geographical worlds'.[58] This, at a moment of institutional contraction for American studies in Britain, is a point worth repeating. As Sarah Trott noted in a piece for *The Conversation* in 2025, undergraduate enrolments in American studies have dropped precipitously over the past decade, and many universities no longer offer the subject at undergraduate level.[59] To thrive as a discipline, it is not enough for American studies undergraduate programmes to continue at a handful of highly ranked and well-regarded universities, in a format that synonymises 'America' with the history and politics of the United States. In a functioning higher education system, there should be space for different types of institutions in disparate geographic locations to provide students with access to American studies in a variety of guises and geospatial iterations.

By helping students to locate 'America', whether through map-making exercises, discussions of the transnational turn, or through their own localised experience of the subject, we can encourage our students to think critically about the development of American studies as a discipline. Doing so will enable us to better relay American studies' continued academic, social and political importance.

Notes

1. Roger Minshull, 'The Functions of Geography in American Studies', *Journal of American Studies* 7 (1973): 267.
2. Ibid. 268.
3. Brian Jarvis, 'Cultural Geography and American Studies', *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): 1.
4. Christopher Castiglia and Susan Gillman, 'Introduction', in *Neither the Time Nor the Place: The New Nineteenth-Century American Studies*, ed. Castiglia and Gillman (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022); Jarvis, 'Cultural Geography and American Studies', 1.
5. 'What Is Spatial Literacy?', Carleton College, last updated 1 July 2020, https://www.carleton.edu/spatial-analysis/about-gis/spatial-literacy; National Research Council, *Learning to Think Spatially* (National Academies Press, 2006).
6. Shelley Fisher Fishkin, 'Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004', *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (March 2005): 19.

7. Patrick Wiegand, *Learning and Teaching with Maps* (Routledge, 2006), 1.
8. Simon Winchester, *The Map That Changed the World: A Tale of Rocks, Ruin and Redemption* (Penguin, 2001).
9. Tim Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Explain Everything* (Scribner, 2015) and *The Power of Geography: Ten Maps That Reveal the Future of our World* (Scribner, 2021).
10. Wiegand, *Learning and Teaching with Maps*.
11. Anton Nijholt (ed.), *Playable Cities: The City as a Digital Playground* (Springer, 2017); Clancy Wilmott, *Mobile Mapping: Space, Cartography, and the Digital* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020).
12. Wiegand, *Learning and Teaching with Maps*, 1.
13. W. G. V. Balchin, 'Graphicacy', *Geography* 57 (1972): 185; W. G. V. Balchin and Alice M. Coleman, 'Graphicacy Should Be the Fourth Ace in the Pack', *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 November 1965, 947.
14. Barney Warf and Santa Arias, 'Introduction: The Reinsertion of Space into the Social Sciences and Humanities', in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Warf and Arias (Routledge, 2008), 1.
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CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDY: The American Berserk as Pedagogic Challenge

Tom Arnold-Forster

There is no foreign country about which so many British students know so much as the United States. The ubiquity of American culture in modern Britain means that millions grow up with US music and television, well-marinated in Americana and the soft power of US empire. For those who choose American topics at university, some pre-existing enthusiasm for US popular culture is often present.[1] The drama of American politics, especially in presidential elections, has always been helpful for recruiting students. But lately these long-standing factors seem to have shifted. It is hard to escape the sense that students are now attracted to American studies for grimly different reasons than during the Obama years. A spellbound and somewhat morbid interest in social and political crisis is widespread today. Since Donald Trump's first victory in 2016, many students have been drawn to our classrooms by the spectacular, dizzying and violent dynamics of what Philip Roth called the 'American berserk'.[2]

These shifting patterns of student interest create specific challenges and opportunities for teachers of American studies. Compared with colleagues in medieval literature or early modern history, our students arrive with highly developed – and highly diverse – views about the United States. In this sense, we are lucky. Most university teachers cannot depend on the baseline student knowledge we enjoy. But the American berserk is also difficult pedagogically, because it attracts students with precisely that material that seems hardest to grasp, let alone teach. In a swirling and frenetic media culture, US news is often framed as political theatre. Trump in particular can overwhelm our subject. As George Blaustein argued in a 2024 essay

about teaching American studies in Amsterdam, it is almost '*too easy* to Trumpify American history, to see the whole thing as poisoned and stupid, to point out that, say, George Washington was also an odious real estate speculator, as if that were a revelation'.[3] So how should we respond to current student interest in the crises that roil the United States? What is the proper relationship between past and present in our classrooms? How can we help students move from dazed fascination to historical and cultural understanding, from merely spectating to really learning?

This chapter reflects on my experience teaching modern US history at King's College London, where I worked from 2021 to 2024. King's is fairly typical of the conditions that currently structure British American studies at Russell Group universities. Workloads are high, precarity is endemic, and institutional support for the subject has effectively collapsed. In earlier decades King's was more committed and innovative.[4] Eric Mottram, in the English Department, helped found the University of London's Institute for United States Studies in the 1960s; he later became one of Britain's first professors of American literature. King's established a freestanding Department of American Studies in 2000. It ran BA degrees, had a flourishing PhD programme, and topped university league tables for the subject. But since 2010 university managers have chosen to close both this department and its thriving successor, the Institute for North American Studies. This means that students now encounter American topics within separate departments. History undergraduates at King's come from a wide range of backgrounds, with a high proportion of Black and Asian UK students and significant numbers of international students. I designed two courses for a first-year skills module focused on developing academic skills through eight weekly seminars.[5] Readings were drawn from staff research interests. My courses were 'Making News in Modern America', which surveyed twentieth-century media history, and 'Conservatism and Fascism in the United States', which explored the political history of the American right since 1945.

Beginning with the berserk, I can report, does grab the attention of students and can help frame the weeks ahead. In both courses, we started our first seminars by discussing how the January 6 attack on the US Capitol might be analysed in historical context and seen by future historians. All students remembered it clearly, and most could recall where they were as they watched it unfold. From the

angle of media history, January 6 raised issues about global media events, the internet and the imagery of American violence. In my political history course, we discussed the relationship between fascism and Trumpism in the context of January 6. All these issues were relevant for later course readings and provided a legible starting point for students.

But the pedagogic risks here are real as well. By giving so much space to America's all-too-vivid present, do we make it harder for students to learn about the past? Blaustein stresses the need 'to break students out of the present – to break them out of *American time* itself, to show them other pasts, other futures'. This is surely right in theory, if hard to achieve in practice. The paradoxical solution, for Blaustein, 'is to cultivate an America-fatigue in the American Studies classroom'. Through a kind of strategic-pedagogic exhaustion, 'the Americanist abroad' can teach in ways that 'de-center and de-mystify their oversaturated, ostensible object of study'.[6]

I am less sure that we should aim to exhaust our students with ever more decentring perspectives on 'America'. It seems to me that we are stuck with this impossible, overstuffed, self-mythologising and ineluctably *central* study object. What is our subject without it? Can we justify our research and teaching without some reference to the world-historical position of the modern United States? To break students out of the present, we might do better to recognise and then utilise the centrality of present crises to their interests and preconceptions. In other words, the solution cannot be cultivating America-fatigue, because the actual problem is that we are always already fatigued by the American berserk. Its ongoing menace and spectacle are intensely dominant within our media cultures. Its explosions are impossible to escape. For these reasons, the real pedagogic challenge is to mobilise patterns of exhaustion with the present to spark and sustain critical engagements with the past.

My experience is that media history offers an effective teaching method for both American topics and broader academic skills. It provides tools for learning about how and why knowledge is produced, distributed and received. It helps students understand how primary sources are made, what communication means in practice, and how secondary literature relates to these historical processes. Media history can also give digital natives some crucial first-order knowledge about the modern world. Few now read a printed newspaper regularly. So it is necessary, and even revelatory, for students to explore

how and why millions of people once got their news from paper-based perishable commodities with a fixed daily content that, when read, were passed around or thrown away or clipped and saved for later. My students gained much from comparing Julia Guarneri's history of newspaper consumption, *Newsprint Metropolis: City Papers and the Making of Modern Americans* (2017), with Michael Stamm's account of newspaper production, *Dead Tree Media: Manufacturing the Newspaper in Twentieth-Century North America* (2018). Focusing on print technologies helped build historical awareness of what is truly novel in digital media cultures.

Beyond this sense of historicity, apparently familiar topics can look strange and fresh when approached through media. The civil rights movement, for example, is routinely studied in British secondary schools with textbooks that celebrate and heroise Martin Luther King Jr.[7] But with a book like Aniko Bodroghkozy's *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (2012), icons like King can also be seen as shrewd political activists and media strategists working in a complex, hostile environment. Bodroghkozy helped my students grasp why broadcast television presented very particular visions of the movement, based on racialised ideas about who audiences were and what they wanted to see.[8] When paired with Kathryn Cramer Brownell's work on cable television and Watergate, students learned how economic and technological change within a media industry related to patterns of political history.[9] We discussed the move from broadcast to cable television and whether it was symptom or cause of the move from consensus to polarisation in US politics. This also sparked wider methodological discussions about technological determinism in historical analysis.

Why does media history work pedagogically? My sense is that students like it because they live highly mediated lives and often become sharp media critics themselves. Media history feels immediately relevant to their daily experience and engagements with America. It helps students think historically about the sources we study and the multifarious relationship, both distant and close, between America's past and its looming, stormy present. Thus, my students loved Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985), which reads as prescient and trenchant in the age of doomscrolling. 'In saying that the television news show entertains but does not inform,' Postman writes, 'I am saying something far more serious than that we are

being deprived of authentic information. I am saying we are losing our sense of what it means to be well informed.'[10] How far is this from current debates about brain rot and social media? The echoes are clear. But alongside its plangent proximity, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* also framed questions about Postman's distance from us. Was he writing about broadcast or cable television, and how does the current media landscape differ? His concerns are entertainment and amusement, but can these fully capture the forms of anomie and cruelty that our algorithms create? Exploring dissonance alongside resonance was a valuable classroom exercise.

While media history worked to develop historical perspective in students, I found that political history was more helpful when teaching historiographical skills. My course on the post-1945 American right aimed to introduce students to the nature of historiographical debate, and to demonstrate that doing history at university is more about making arguments than knowing facts or dates. We focused initially on Alan Brinkley's article 'The Problem of American Conservatism', and on Leo Ribuffo's wonderfully titled response, 'Why Is There So Much Conservatism in the United States and Why Do So Few Historians Know Anything about It?'[11] We then read samples from the now-flourishing literature on the modern conservative movement, with a focus on changing views about the relationship between so-called 'mainstream' conservatism and the far right, and on the fascism debate that has raged since 2016. Students learned about key developments in American historiography by discussing how politics in the present relates to contested perspectives on the past. The aim was for students to see history and historiography as co-produced forms of knowledge. Here the political history of twentieth-century American conservatism was useful because this field connects historiographical argument to historical understanding with particular force and clarity.

However, some texts and topics landed better than others. Nicole Hemmer's *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (2016) was a big hit because it focused historiographically on the political significance of media for the modern conservative movement. As a historical subject, Phyllis Schlafly also taught well. Beyond her charisma and media celebrity, Schlafly connects Goldwater conservatism to forms of anti-feminism and support for Trump in 2016. Nevertheless, I also found that some readings in political history required more baseline

knowledge than many students had about the institutional structure and ideological terrain of modern politics in and beyond America. Students often struggled with categories like right and left, concepts like democracy and liberalism, and the specifics of the US state and party system. This entailed more contextual explanation than was needed in my media history course. In general, I encountered consistently high levels of media literacy, and comparatively lower levels of political literacy, in first-year undergraduate seminars.

Still, who can blame the students? These dynamics are deeply symptomatic of the political and media cultures through which America is currently reported, consumed and understood. When political substance gets routinely obscured by the spectacle of crisis, and when politicians wield power by monopolising attention with distraction and chaotic action, it is not surprising that politics can seem overwhelming and exhausting, rebarbative and berserk. Media history sheds light on some of these processes and their political consequences. Yet it cannot fully explain the deeper conflicts and power relations that ultimately define American life. Mass communication matters, but so do political ideas, parties, institutions, constitutions, and social and economic structures. For understanding these things, political history is both pedagogically crucial and increasingly difficult. A partial solution to this problem would be the wider uptake in schools of A level Politics. As Adam Burns and Sarra Jenkins show in the following chapter, this course offers a popular option through which students acquire core knowledge about the nature of modern politics and the structure of US government.

The American berserk is bringing us students who are variously bewildered, riveted and frightened by the United States today. Media history can provide useful tools for approaching the past without neglecting the present, and for engaging fruitfully – if also partially – with broader political themes. What media history offers is an oblique but effective angle on students' lived experience and on current American crises. Many other methods can surely work as well. But if we avoid these crises in our classrooms, and if we aim to decentre America with our teaching, we will be avoiding precisely those aspects of US history and politics about which our students most want and need to learn. We cannot hope to move beyond the American berserk in the space of a seminar, but we can help students better understand its sources and significance as historical phenomena.

Notes

1. See Edward Clough, 'Enthusiasm and Difficulty: Teaching Popular Subjects in American Studies – The Case of Beyoncé', *Journal of American Studies* 54, no. 3 (2020): 614–18.
2. Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (1997; Vintage, 1998), 86. This phrase and concept has been adapted by historians: e.g. Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (Scribner, 2010), 589. An earlier subtitle for *Nixonland*, later dropped, was *The Politics and Culture of the American Berserk, 1965–1972*.
3. George Blaustein, 'Empire as Province: On Teaching American Studies in Amsterdam', *The Dial*, 17 October 2024, https://www.thedial.world/articles/news/issue-21/american-studies-university-of-amsterdam.
4. For help in sketching this institutional history, many thanks to Uta Balbier, Andrew Fearnley, Janet Floyd and Alan Marshall (though I am solely responsible for the claims made here).
5. See Chris Parkes's chapter in this volume for another case study from this module, 103–9.
6. Blaustein, 'Empire as Province'.
7. Megan Hunt et al., '"He Was Shot Because America Will Not Give Up on Racism": Martin Luther King Jr. and the African American Civil Rights Movement in British Schools', *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 387–417 (390–91).
8. Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (University of Illinois Press, 2012), esp. 2–7.
9. Kathryn Cramer Brownell, 'Watergate, the Bipartisan Struggle for Media Access, and the Growth of Cable Television', *Modern American History* 3, nos. 2–3 (2020): 175–98.
10. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985; Penguin Books, 2005), 107–8.
11. Both essays are in the *American Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (1994): 409–29, 438–49.

CHAPTER 3

ESSAY: A Foundation for American Studies: A Level Politics in the UK

Adam Burns and Sarra Jenkins

As an interdisciplinary degree programme, American studies usually has no fixed entry requirements at UK universities. The core subjects are normally history and literature, which almost every A level provider offers for those aged sixteen to eighteen in either secondary school sixth forms or sixth form colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (as well as international schools, and some independent schools in Scotland).[1] Despite the fact that more students take A levels in history and English literature than in politics, politics offers a more uniformly US-focused route.[2] In 2024, politics was the fourteenth most popular A level nationally with over 20,000 students sitting the qualification, the majority of whom took the US route.[3] As such, this chapter explores the role of A level Politics in engaging students in the study of the United States and suggests how links between A level and university-level study could be improved for their mutual benefit. Although A level Politics was not designed with American studies in mind, and many American studies programmes contain only limited politics (rather than political historical) content, there is a clear argument to be made for these disconnects to be addressed.

A little like American studies at UK universities, politics at A level suffers from a paucity of specific pedagogical study when compared with larger, more established subject areas such as history and English literature. Similarly, many of those who teach politics are also subject specialists in another discipline. Indeed, the vast majority of politics teachers trained as teachers in another discipline as there are no specialised politics teacher-training programmes in the UK.[4] The bulk of the existing literature on politics in secondary education comes out of the United States, and much of this focuses on engaging

students in politics more broadly and the challenges teaching politics poses (the leading journal in this area is the *Journal of Political Science Education*, sponsored by the American Political Science Association (APSA)).[5] The limited UK-focused literature tends to analyse the delivery of citizenship education – an innovation of the turn-of-the-century Labour government, following recommendations from the Crick Report (1998) – which is taught inconsistently, if at all, as a distinct subject, across England.[6] Unlike history, where the Historical Association produces various publications relating to pedagogy (e.g. *Teaching History*), there is no similar publication for politics teaching, with the Political Studies Association's (PSA) *Political Insights* being focused on new research in politics presented for a more general audience. Thus, though literature on politics education in UK schools is not entirely absent, it is sporadic, disconnected and underdeveloped. This chapter, therefore, seeks to fill a gap in the literature in both American studies provision in UK higher education (HE) institutions and politics provision in UK secondary education.

The chapter starts by briefly contextualising the aims of A level Politics, the role and place of US politics within this, and how this speaks to the aims of American studies degree programmes. The chapter then goes on to present the reflections of A level teachers and those of academics working in HE American studies programmes in the UK, considering concurring opinions and disconnects.[7] By doing so, the chapter hopes to bridge the gap between the groups and provide a basis for more fruitful coordination going forward. A level Politics can and does provide a valuable context, as well as recruitment potential, for HE American studies programmes, and closer communication between these groups when it comes to future reforms at A level, as well as ideas for ongoing knowledge exchange, could boost the popularity of both courses. As the chapter shows, many of the concerns those in secondary and HE teaching hold are shared, and both seem to yearn for a greater exchange of ideas to enhance the experience of students across the transition from one to the other.

The Nature of Politics at A Level

Following years of planning during the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010–2015), the years 2015 to 2017 saw a root and branch overhaul of A levels.[8] Initially envisaged

by Conservative Education Secretary Michael Gove (2010–2014), the aim of these reforms was to ensure qualifications were more rigorous, more challenging and increasingly knowledge/facts-based. This would be achieved, in part, by removing the modular nature of the previous qualifications, and minimising the importance of coursework in favour of exams.[9] Given that around half of students pursuing A levels progress to universities, these reforms aimed to ensure that students completed the qualifications 'with the skills and knowledge needed for progression to undergraduate study'.[10] A levels, in politics and other subjects, were manifestly designed to bridge the gap to university-level study – the very focus of this chapter.

As part of this extensive overhaul, the government published a document outlining the entirety of content to be included in the reformed Politics A level, all of which had to be included in the new specifications to gain approval from the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual).[11] Prior to the reforms, the two-year A level specified that one year of the course would cover UK politics and one year could cover US politics. Under the new qualification – with compulsory study of political ideologies now included – US content was restricted to a third of the course.[12] The reformed A level specification contained all of the previous specification's US topics, although the Supreme Court and civil rights were now packaged into a single topic, and elections, parties and pressure groups were packaged into a 'democracy and participation' topic.[13] Those tasked with drafting a new specification for the Edexcel exam board ensured that content should be demonstrably cut when compared with the previous specification, whilst still ensuring that all points in the new Department for Education (DfE) guidance were covered. For this reason, caveats – such as 'presidents since 1992' – were introduced to tighten the scope of examples covered. The new guidance also included novel content: the use of 'comparative theories' – political theories that should be used to compare the politics of the US and the UK. When the Edexcel team (including one of the authors here) approached several university academics, it was found that they either disagreed on the meaning of these comparative theories, believed them to be outdated, or had not heard of them. The use of comparative theories, albeit not a major part of the course, remains a cause of concern for teachers, and a stumbling block for students.

Subject knowledge, which inevitably takes up much of teaching and learning time, is, of course, not the only rationale for studying

A level Politics, albeit one which Michael Gove put front and centre of his reform agenda. The government guidance points to a variety of key skills students would leave with: knowledge and informed understanding; critical awareness; the ability to critically analyse, interpret and evaluate political information to form arguments and make judgements; and an interest in, and engagement with, contemporary politics.[14] The three assessment objectives laid down by Ofqual echo these priorities: knowledge and understanding; analysis and comparison; and evaluate and form substantiated judgements.[15] When these are compared to the subject benchmarks for American studies degree programmes (outlined within area studies by the HE regulator, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)), one finds similar skills: written communication; analytical thinking; collection and classification of information; interpretation and evaluation. However, there is little overlap when it comes to QAA requirements for verbal and/or non-verbal communication across multiple formats, or for creative problem-solving.[16] The content and skills that emerged in the A level should provide a fertile basis for future students of American studies – yet, as the following sections show, it appears that too little communication between schools and universities occurs. This is despite the fact that both groups realise that increased dialogue is the clearest way forward.

What Do Educators Think of A Level Politics as a Route to American Studies?

In this section, we analyse questionnaires completed by A level instructors and university academics working in American studies, which reflect upon the Politics A level and its role in facilitating a successful move to an American studies degree programme. Fourteen teachers and eight academics contributed their reflections, the vast majority of the latter being political historians rather than political scientists, which in itself raises some interesting questions about the place of politics in UK American studies programmes (and echoes the situation where many A level Politics teachers are not subject specialists).[17] What their reflections show is a variable appreciation of the restrictions placed upon those drawing up the A level Politics specifications and those who teach them, suggestions for reform, and ideas about increasing the dialogue between A level and HE in order to further enhance the prospects of students

and the future of American studies in the UK. This chapter analyses them thematically to consider differing aspects of the interplay between A level Politics, the transition to university, and American studies degree programmes in particular. It ends by considering suggestions on how HE could better support schools, and argues for the importance of an ongoing dialogue between teachers and lecturers.

The Benefits of Teaching and Learning US Politics at A Level

When teachers were asked what they enjoyed most about teaching US politics at A level, five spoke of the thrill of teaching US politics, one going further to say that it was the 'excitement and controversy' of US politics that made it such an engaging topic. Others mentioned that 'Students find it fascinating and are engaged with the subject' or that they 'love the enthusiasm the students have for the subject and their engagement with current debates'.

Many went further to stress the relevance of US politics. 'I love the relevance of the subject', began one teacher, continuing, 'I love how easy it is to bring the spec to life with current examples' – a view echoed by many respondents. Another teacher noted that many 'Students find [US politics] more relevant than British politics in an international setting'. Building on this, several respondents pointed to how studying US politics allowed students a broader perspective than they might otherwise have. For one, it was the ability to 'look beyond the UK and understand a different approach to politics', where another found that the US content helped equip students with ideas such as anti-racism and preparing for a 'global society'. Others praised the comparative nature of the course, finding the drive to look at similarities and differences in the US and UK systems something they and their students very much benefited from.

The challenges respondents reported are inevitably more telling than the enjoyment factors in terms of helping inform steps forward. One of the biggest themes across responses was staying up to date with topics that seem far more distant than the almost omnipresent hum of UK politics on TV, social media and elsewhere, when one is based in the UK (or outside of the US). As various teachers put it: 'the [US] news doesn't come as easily to students as UK news so this is a difficulty for them'; 'most recent updates can be a challenge'; 'all students can name at least one British MP,

but it is much more tasking for less able students to engage with US politics'; and 'Students' knowledge and understanding of *basic* elements of democracy and Constitutional law are often very weak'. So, whilst the exoticism of US politics is a draw for students, it is also an obstacle.

The issue of limited pre-existing contextual knowledge links to another key theme in responses: that of the, as one respondent put it, 'Sheer amount of content and exam board expectations of 17/18 year olds', with another describing the course as 'Content heavy'. Added to this was the issue of resources, mentioned explicitly by a couple of respondents: 'having to rewrite resources every year as they so quickly become out of date', or 'The lack of good quality contemporary resources outside the Liberal mainstream'. Combined, it appears that respondents, yet alone their students, find themselves working hard to stay up to date with the wide array of US political topics.

Despite the challenges posed by the US politics content, teachers were, perhaps unsurprisingly (given they teach it), unanimous in feeling that studying US politics is important for their students. Despite the option (from Edexcel) to study global politics instead of US politics, many pointed to the global resonance of US politics: serving as a model for other nations, its major role in the world, influence on the UK, and as a useful starting point for those who might wish to live or study in the US.

Alongside this broader importance as a global power, four respondents pointed to the US as a valuable comparative democracy or even a 'beacon of democracy', even if, as another teacher put it, it 'can be so undemocratic'. Six of the respondents focused on the direct comparisons and links between the US and the UK as a central theme, with one mentioning the so-called 'special relationship'. A couple of others noted the military and economic status of the United States, and its disputed status as the 'world's superpower'. Thus, for many, the central place of the US in Western and international politics is still a viable justification for the separate study of a single nation, when other options – such as global politics – are available from some exam boards.

When A level teachers were asked if there was anything missing from the curriculum, many respondents led with the idea – as mentioned earlier – that there is already too much to cover. As various respondents put it: 'There is no space for content in the

spec'; 'there would need to be cuts'; 'we don't have the space'. Some connected this perception to the reform to the curriculum in 2017, with a perceived squeezing of the content, with some bemoaning that 'the US content has been reduced', or even that the 'reforms slimmed down the specifications to an unacceptable level'. Thus, for many, whilst there were things missing, there was already too much to cover within the time available.

Amongst HE lecturers surveyed, most understood concerns that the A level was already content-heavy: 'The A level curriculum is pretty comprehensive, especially considering American topics are not allocated a huge amount of time'. However, some still offered ideas about what might be usefully included, if this were possible. Suggestions included some of the themes raised by teachers, such as Indigenous cultures and foreign policy. Others suggested areas that did not arise directly among teachers, with two lecturers suggesting US political/judicial theorists, and others pointing to the environmental movement.

Furthermore, HE lecturers echoed many of the A level teachers' comments about the importance of studying US politics in schools. They pointed to the US as a leading global power, its close relationship with the UK, its position as a comparative democracy, and offering a strong foundation for future study. Where they differed, perhaps inevitably, was seeing US politics at A level as important for recruitment to US-focused courses at university. For example: 'it's only going to be beneficial to have more students learning about and engaging in American topics in terms of attracting people to the study of the US at undergrad level and beyond', and 'students learning about the US at school means they are attuned to the subject and may be more likely to look at an American studies degree than if they have done no American topics up to that point'. Some felt this was all the more important given reforms to the history GCSE and A level curricula during the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, with a far stronger/mandatory focus on UK history, which they saw as detrimental to students and teachers' ability to offer as many US history option combinations. Overall, though, there was very broad agreement among both A level and HE respondents when it came to the relevance and importance of studying the US in the twenty-first century.

The Suitability of the Existing Politics A Level for University Study (and American Studies)

When A level teachers were asked whether A level Politics provided good preparation for university study, they were initially encouraged to consider this in relation to a politics degree. All bar one teacher felt that it was good preparation, albeit several had caveats. A couple pointed to the idea that the US content is only helpful for university courses that had US modules, and others felt that wider limitations of the Politics A level might be addressed but are not the focus here. The one respondent who answered in the negative said that there is 'little scope for teacher or student autonomy' and that it was more about 'jumping through hoops to get my students through the A level exam' – though this might be seen as a criticism made across any number of subject areas regarding the focus upon exam technique ahead of content.

When the question was steered towards American studies as a degree programme, the A level teachers were unanimous in seeing a strong place for A level Politics, with many suggesting it was a valuable 'introduction' or 'excellent foundation', and one arguing that 'a developed understanding of the political system is essential to pursuing this as an academic interest'. One respondent, though, felt that perhaps students were less enthusiastic about US politics than they used to be, and questioned, 'has US politics passed its prime?' Interestingly, one teacher pointed to their sense that US history and politics were well provided for in A level Politics, but the cultural elements less so. Another remarked that it would be 'down to the teacher' to help make the connections between A level Politics and wider US content.

Eight of the fourteen respondents said – without reservation – that they would recommend pursuing American studies as a degree option. Two said they would not recommend it but declined to comment as to why this was the case, two indicated that they do not recommend any degree courses to their students, and one suggested they had not done this because their students have been better suited to courses that were 'geographically broader'. This links to the final respondent, who said they have a 'reasonably favourable impression' but felt that degrees such as politics or history offer a more marketable broadness. This final point resonated with a respondent who is an advocate of American studies, but often feels parents and students are nervous about employability prospects.

In terms of Politics A level as a useful grounding for further study at university, there was a general consensus among the HE academics that it was helpful in introducing ideas and knowledge and providing a foundation, even if, as one put it, the specifications seemed 'quite mechanical, and quite abstract or dry' (although some caveated that this depended on 'how it is taught'). The HE respondents were divided as to where the most obvious pre-existing knowledge students brought with them from school came from, reflecting the diverse routes students who opt for American studies have taken before university. One lecturer felt that politics was perhaps the clearest influence: 'I would guess that the most in-depth knowledge is from those who have studied US politics at A level because they have the most complete knowledge compared to someone who has done a "case-study" as part of a broader history course, for example'. Another estimated that over the past decade around a third of their intake studied politics for A level, while another echoed this: 'since c. 2010, the smaller pool of students who apply to study American studies at university have tended to come through the A level Govt & Politics route'. However, others located students' political knowledge via studying history for A level (particularly the civil rights era) and feel few, if any, of their students had the opportunity to study politics at A level. What general pattern there was across responses was that, in general, pre-existing political knowledge was weak ('pretty poor', 'limited', 'very poor indeed'), and/or often based on high-profile current affairs – particularly the presidency (rather than other aspects of the US political system) – gleaned from news and social media.

One lecturer reflected that many students 'are keen to develop interests in US politics and history (especially civil rights, the Cold War and the US political system) that they had developed through the A level in Government and Politics', but that this was a signal change from a decade ago, when English literature was more often the route they had seen students take into American studies. Others, to a lesser extent, saw some impact of English and, less so, film or media studies. However, one respondent lamented that some students seemed to regard American studies as a specialism within history and were reluctant to take on modules that were more literary or cultural – something linked to the fact American studies now often sits between or across departments rather than being its own department. Here, perhaps, there is a sense that awareness

of American studies among students is low, and A levels tend to determine the sorts of students attracted to single and joint honours programmes.

By far the most frequent skills HE lecturers identified as lacking in the students arriving on their courses were those of critical and deep reading. One respondent felt this was part of a broader lack of sustained reading in students: 'My gut sense is that students read much less, and in much less depth, about US politics (from the newspapers, quality press) than they once did'. Another saw a problem with lack of trust in sources: 'Many seem to have been taught to regard sources and arguments as "biased" and therefore not worth engaging with, rather than perspectives that need to be understood, contextualised, and critiqued'. However, one respondent felt that – far from only being a problem with the nature of A level syllabuses – this remained a problem at universities, citing an 'institutional reluctance to "push" reading'.

Although many felt studying US politics or a pre-existing interest in American politics was a reason students pursued American studies, many recognised that politics (as distinct from history) was rarely on the menu once they arrived. One felt this was part of a wider trend away from US politics, not just in American studies but in university politics departments. Others, given the cross-departmental nature of many American studies programmes, also saw this link – if a university's politics department does not offer US politics modules, often, neither does the American studies programme. Those institutions who did offer more US politics described the options as 'extremely popular' and one module as 'always oversubscribed', while another at an institution only offering a single politics module said, 'I know students would like it if we could offer more'.

Overall, where almost all respondents felt Politics A level was a good basis for further study of politics at university, most also felt the same about American studies. One of the HE respondents, however, noted that it would be 'good for lecturers to be aware of [A level] content', especially as there is a lot of crossover between the AQA and Edexcel specifications at A level. Some HE respondents, however, also felt that the A level might be somewhat less useful for those pursuing American studies (rather than politics as a discipline), given the more interdisciplinary nature of American studies and that this interdisciplinarity might seem riskier to potential students.

How Universities Could Help

HE lecturers, showing appreciation for the work already done by A level Politics teachers, did offer some suggestions on ways students might better prepare for American studies at university. These included wider, deeper and/or critical reading around the subject and of sources; attending enrichment courses and inviting academics into schools; making clearer links to other disciplines (interdisciplinarity); and more promotion of different study options at university (e.g. American studies) rather than just those that mirror A levels (e.g. politics or politics and international relations). Enrichment can, however, pose questions about cost as well as time restraints for schools. Furthermore, interdisciplinarity can prove an ideal that is often spoken of but difficult to achieve at A level, given the differing focuses of A levels within and across schools/colleges.

The vast majority of the A level teacher responses to the question about the role universities could play centred on resources, something raised as one of the difficulties some of these teachers identified with teaching US politics at this level. Among the suggestions regarding such resources were: the provision of massive open online courses (MOOCs); the creation of reading lists (for teachers and students); periodic updates/supplements linked to the specification; and blogs/vlogs to add stretch and challenge. In addition to these were those linked to speakers/experts as a form of extension – either through visiting schools/colleges, or via students attending larger multi-speaker events in person or online. One respondent pointed to the potential of local versions of the US Politics Today conferences (part of Congress to Campus) run by the British Library, which bring together a variety of academics and two former members of the US Congress for a series of day-long events for students.[18] In addition to these suggestions, some respondents posited that maybe some of the above existed but were not well publicised. Others felt that it would be good to know more about American studies, what the university experience looks like, how to bridge the gap, and what the career prospects are.

Several of the HE respondents noted that the best starting point would be to 'work more closely with A level Politics (and other subject) teachers', see 'more engagement between university lecturers and schoolteachers generally' and 'more collaboration between A level and university teachers'. Many of the other responses mirrored

those of the A level teachers, suggesting lecture events, workshops and conferences; short videos on key topics; and producing 'update' resources to support teachers/students. In addition to these, a couple of respondents suggested 'CPD days for interested teachers' run by universities. However, one of them noted previous such efforts struggled because of 'limited resources (time and money) of both parties'. Even this suggestion, as with so many of the others, is grounded in the idea of increased dialogue. Many of the respondents, sensibly, noted that it would be better to ask the teachers themselves – indeed, there was a strong sense across the board that the best way forward is for more discussion and exchange of ideas.

Implications

What is clear from this brief overview of A level Politics is that, though not perfect, it provides a solid grounding in knowledge, enthusiasm and skills that help to underpin future study of American studies in a higher education setting. Whilst the intent of any A level is not to create a direct pipeline to a university subject, the interest in the US that A level Politics creates has notable potential to forge better outcomes for recruitment to American studies. With a big increase in the numbers studying Politics A level over the past decade, and the fact it has such a high proportion of students studying US-focused content when compared with other subjects, it is key that the American studies community seeks to foster a closer relationship with those designing future iterations of the qualification as well as those who teach it.

The A level teacher questionnaires analysed for this chapter reveal a group of practitioners who are largely enthusiastic about the importance and relevance of studying US politics at A level. Recognising that many students embark on the A level with little pre-existing knowledge, it is all the more evident how the qualification might encourage students to engage with and build a fascination with the US that might carry over into university. However, some teachers felt it was hard to keep up in an ever-changing political landscape and had mixed feelings as to how well the qualification pushed students, in particular whether its forms of assessment matched what universities are seeking from students.

Those working in universities teaching American studies recognised the potential of Politics A level as a recruitment tool and

a valuable foundation for university study. Although cognisant of the challenges facing the curriculum designers and the squeeze on teachers' time, the academics – as well as the teachers – did feel that perhaps some content might be sacrificed, though others had ideas as to what could be added. However, broadly speaking, the academics seemed positive about what was covered and felt that perhaps the best way forward appeared to be increased interaction and engagement between schools, colleges and universities, as well as increased focus on sustained reading and source analysis activities. Although some limited interaction with academics occurred during the A level reforms, perhaps a clearer move by the American studies community to seek involvement next time the curriculum is revisited would be a positive step. For example, some draft ideas and suggestions – a sort of "amicus brief" for the study of the United States at A level – would most likely be welcomed.

Suggestions on how to increase interaction to bridge the school/college-university gap proved quite similar across the groups, but there were few concrete suggestions on how to overcome the key limitations: cost and time. Politics is, after all, just one subject among various others and many schools and colleges lack the time, money and/or inclination to take students off timetable. Even where HE lecturers might lead the outreach by visiting schools in person or online, the problems of time and cost remain, and some A level teachers could be concerned about turnout for visiting speakers.

On the positive side, many of the suggestions on how to improve interaction already exist, and one of the key messages is that they need to be better publicised, funded and promoted by universities as well as by specialised groups such as the Political Studies Association's American Politics Group (APG) or the British Association for American Studies (BAAS). BAAS and the APG offer visiting speakers and events, as do institutions such as the British Library. Further suggestions were made that universities could provide MOOCs, update resources and blogs/vlogs that might prove more accessible to the bulk of schools, but the funding and coordination issues then fall on universities that are also pressed for time and resources.

Overall, what seems clear is that there is scope and enthusiasm from both sides for increased dialogue. As noted at the start of the chapter, A level Politics was not designed to lead to American studies at university, and the university programmes often feature

relatively little explicit politics content. Hopefully, this chapter helps to encourage those working in, and adjacent to, American studies in schools and universities to reconsider this disconnect as well as other challenges raised here. For the future of American studies in the UK, a subject area that has been in decline for at least two decades, it is essential that students are aware of and confident in making a decision to undertake a degree that lacks the name recognition of history, English literature or politics.[19] Mutual understanding and increased interaction – between A level Politics teachers and academics working in HE – is surely an essential way of ensuring American studies starts to turn the corner and grow in the UK, and the importance of A level Politics in this relationship deserves not only to be noted, but to be seen as a potential area for growth.

Notes

1. While a range of 16–18 qualifications are available, including the International Baccalaureate, by far the most common undertaken in preparation for university-level study in the UK is the Advanced Level General Certificate of Education (GCE) – universally known as an A level. Most students take A levels in three different subjects. In the UK there are five main exam boards offering A levels and, in each case, they provide different specifications for English literature and history, with a wide range of topics. As a result, many students who study A level History and English Literature might cover no US material at all, while a minority could cover a substantial amount. Although some Scottish schools offer A levels, they are the minority and are often independent schools. Most Scottish schools follow a distinct Scottish curriculum that does not offer politics as a specified topic at this level, but a different subject called 'modern studies'. See SQA, *Higher and Advanced Higher Modern Studies*, https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/47924.html.
2. Ofqual, *Official Statistics: Provisional Entries for GCSE, AS and A Level: Summer 2024 Exam Series*, 30 May 2024, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2024-exam-series/. Only four of the five main exam boards offer Politics A level; two require the study of US politics (AQA and WJEC, the latter only offered in Wales), while Edexcel offers a choice between US or global politics, and CCEA (only offered in Northern Ireland) offers a choice between the politics of the US or the Republic of Ireland. The number of routes/options within English and History A levels (the majority of which are non-US focused) are far more extensive.

3. Ibid., and *A Level Politics Exam Insights May/June 2024*, Pearson, https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/news-policy/subject-updates/government-and-politics/recordings-of-pearson-edexcel-politics-training-events.html.
4. James Weinberg, *Politics in Schools: 'What Exists' and 'What Works'?* (Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, 2020), 4. There are teaching qualification programmes in citizenship (11–16) and in social science (which includes a range of other courses, such as sociology) at a range of UK higher education institutions.
5. See, for example, Wayne Journell, 'Teaching Politics in Secondary Education: Analyzing Instructional Methods from the 2008 Presidential Election', *The Social Studies* 102, no. 6 (2011): 231–41; Alexander Patrick Fancher, 'The American Taboo and its Impact on Learning: Building Tolerance with More Politics, Not Less', *The Social Studies* 112, no. 1 (2021): 1–13. For an older example of a UK-based survey, see David Denver and Gordon Hands, 'Does Studying Politics Make a Difference? The Political Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceptions of School Students', *British Journal of Political Science* 20, no. 2 (1990): 263–79.
6. Advisory Group on Citizenship [Crick Report], *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*, 22 September 1998, https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/4385/1/crickreport1998.pdf; Gert Biesta and Robert Lawy, 'From Teaching Citizenship to Learning Democracy: Overcoming Individualism in Research, Policy and Practice', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 36, no. 1 (2006): 63–79; Paul Whiteley, 'Does Citizenship Education Work? Evidence from a Decade of Citizenship Education in Secondary Schools in England', *Parliamentary Affairs* 67, no. 3 (2014): 513–35.
7. Although some sixth form and further education college teachers use the title of 'lecturer', the term 'teacher' is used here to describe all A level educators, to avoid confusion with HE lecturers.
8. Given the devolved nature of education in the UK, this chapter will focus on reforms that impacted England specifically, as it is the largest provider of A level Politics in the UK.
9. Paul Walker, 'Tough Exams and Learning by Rote Are the Keys to Success, Says Michael Gove', *The Guardian*, 14 November 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/nov/14/michael-gove-backs-learning-by-rote; Tina Isaacs and Mary Richardson, 'The "Gove Generation": First Pupils to Live through A-Level Reforms Wait for Results', *The Conversation*, 12 August 2015, https://theconversation.com/the-gove-generation-first-pupils-to-live-through-a-level-reforms-wait-for-results-45532.

10. Michael Gove, *Written Statement to Parliament: GCSE and A Level Reform*, 9 April 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/gcse-and-a-level-reform.
11. Department for Education, *Politics Draft AS and A Level Subject Content*, November 2015, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a803d2140f0b6230269256c/Politics_GCE_AS_and_A_level.pdf.
12. Pearson, *Specification GCE Government and Politics: Issue 4*, 2013, https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/Government%20and%20Politics/2013/Specification%20and%20sample%20assessments/UA035236_GCE_Lin_GovPol_Issue_4.pdf.
13. As one of the authors of this chapter was involved directly in the reforms as they applied to the Edexcel exam board, what follows reflects that experience, though reforms to AQA were not dissimilar.
14. Department for Education, *Politics Draft AS and A Level Subject Content*.
15. Ofqual, *GCE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Politics*, 2016, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81a876ed915d74e623373e/gce-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-politics.pdf.
16. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, *Subject Benchmark Statement: Area Studies*, April 2024, https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/sbs/area-studies-sbs-the-basics-24.pdf.
17. Eleven teacher respondents taught in the southeast of the UK and three in international schools, working at a mix of independent schools, academies and state-maintained schools. Twelve respondents were using Edexcel and two were using AQA. Eight HE lecturers at universities that UCAS lists as offering undergraduate single or joint honours American studies degrees contributing to politics or modern history modules on those programmes also agreed to be surveyed (one respondent is a literature specialist). They represent the following institutions: University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Manchester, Northumbria University, University of Sussex, Swansea University and York St John University.
18. The British Library has started to extend the reach of the events outside of London (where they were restricted during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic), and in 2024 events were held in Norwich and Leicester.
19. 'Letters: US Studies a Vital Interest', *The Guardian*, 28 August 2004, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/28/usa.guardianletters.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY: Teaching Place-Based Indigenous Texts in UK Higher Education

Ananya Mishra

In contemporary British universities, Indigenous voices and their literary cultures and methods remain in the margins, even following the advances in environmental humanities and Anthropocene studies. Indigenous studies scholars working in American studies in the UK have led a critique of this inadequate engagement with Indigenous histories and have carried out strategic and much-needed interventions. The Centre for Indigenous and Settler Colonial Studies (Universities of Kent, York, London College of Communication, UK, with University of Alberta, Canada), and the renewed Indigenous Studies Research Network, to name a few, have initiated and continue to be part of this dialogue. Furthermore, Rebecca Macklin has written about the necessity of rethinking and restructuring American literature curriculums through an environmental justice lens that takes an intersectional and transnational approach to texts foregrounding different voices. She states:

> Restructuring American literature syllabi to account for the climate crisis in many ways means revealing the geopolitics of settler colonial nationhood, the enduring realities of environmental racism and racial capitalism, and the heteropatriarchal hierarchies that these logics depend upon. Additionally, it requires a shift in terms of whose narratives are being included, to enable the representation of a wider range of histories and worldviews, including distinct ways of relating to the nonhuman.[1]

This case study supports the 'shift' proposed by Macklin to rethink American studies by critically positioning environmental humanities as a lens to understand the connections between race and capital, and how contemporary conditions of Indigenous peoples emerge from historical injustices of colonialism. I specifically argue for the need to teach North American Indigenous place-based texts in UK higher education curriculums, as these are rich textual exemplars that situate the above connections. This case study reflects on the challenges that emerge while approaching these place-based literatures in British classrooms and the need to historicise settler colonialism for contextual analysis of a literary text. I provide two examples from my experience in redesigning, reframing and teaching curriculums and syllabi at Queen Mary, University of London: 'After Postcolonialism' (year three) and 'The Long Contemporary' (year two). While working on these curriculums between 2021 and 2024, I have revisited a refrain of the following questions: how to centre and communicate the *relevance* and nuances of Indigenous place-based knowledge in environmental studies curriculums? How to address the continued implications of Britain's historical links to Indigenous lands in North America within American studies as taught in the UK? And finally, how to practise *responsible* and *respectful* vigilance against reproducing the extractive relationship between academic disciplines and Indigenous peoples in our contemporary classrooms? I share these reflections not as methods, but rather as instances of pedagogical considerations and ongoing learning as an educator teaching Indigenous texts.

In my first year at Queen Mary, University of London, I was tasked with redesigning and convening a pre-existing module titled 'After Postcolonialism' for BA English year three students. In the last three years, the module has undergone several iterations that has included co-thinking with the expertise of my colleagues Mafruha Mohua and Ed Charlton. Currently, it runs as a four-hour-per-week specialised course with lecture, workshop and seminar components introducing Indigenous, Black and decolonial literatures, methods and theory published (mostly) in the last two decades. Below is an account of 'After Postcolonialism' in 2023, when students studied Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's chapters on 'Nishnaabeg Anticapitalism' and 'Land as Pedagogy' from her book *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom*

through Radical Resistance (2017), alongside the film *Biidaban: The Dawn Comes* (2018) by Amanda Strong (Métis).

Simpson's chapter 'Nishnaabeg Anticapitalism' builds on her interview in *Yes! Magazine* with Canadian writer and social activist Naomi Klein titled as 'Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More's Leanne Simpson' (2013). In her own words, she reiterates Māori educationist Linda Tuhiwai Smith's account of the exploitative extraction of Indigenous communities by settler-colonial states, framing it within global capitalism. She states to Klein:

> Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating. My land is seen as a resource. My relatives in the plant and animal worlds are seen as resources. My culture and knowledge is a resource. My body is a resource and my children are a resource because they are the potential to grow, maintain, and uphold the extraction-assimilation system.[2]

In the module, we studied how the chapter theorised expansively about the 'alternative to extractivism'.[3] Simpson uses the story of Nanabush to elucidate deep reciprocity and anti-capitalist ethics within Nishnaabeg place-based thought and practice. Through critically close-reading Nanabush's story, she writes about Nishnaabeg socialist societies and their resistance to capitalist greed. We analysed how this text can be read as an Indigenous critique of Marxist theory: stages of accumulation are not a required conduit for a society to develop anti-capitalist modes of living.[4] This was also an example which clarified for my students how to approach Indigenous story as theory, and to understand the composite nature of Indigenous literary forms that do not separate the literary text from the texts for critical methods and concepts.

The second part of the workshop furthered this intervention, where students read Binoojinh's story as text narrated in Simpson's 'Land as Pedagogy' and watched Amanda Strong's animated film *Biidaban: The Dawn Comes*. By approaching multiple forms to the story where Binoojinh and Biidaban learn to harvest sap and make maple syrup, we engaged with Simpson's account of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg knowledge where 'Aki [land] is both context and process … "Theory" is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community, and generation of people.'[5] Now, this is a difficult instance of critical

thinking and pedagogy in a UK classroom, not simply because of geographical distance from a place-based practice. Students readily tried to understand how knowledge is context-based and co-exists with practice. Harvesting maple sap (practice), beside an understanding of Binoojinh's story (theory), is rooted in embodied living in the community. However, in this workshop, and in some others, I noted that students tried to understand method – land as pedagogy – by a tendency to extrapolate and read subjective settings and experiences as the graspable transit into the text's world. I must clarify that most of my third-year students and I belong to [post]colonial Global Majority backgrounds in the UK. Because of shared histories of colonial oppression, from varied contexts, there is an inclination to draw equivalences; such a practice is not limited to Global Majority communities. Stories by their emancipatory nature create relational thinking, which is the critical necessity of reading literatures today, more than ever. And it is vital to cultivate these intersectional modes of thinking for an anti-colonial politics of solidarity as well as intertextual analysis across diverse contexts, and such comparative understandings by students were encouraged in the seminars.

What is necessary at the same time is stating method itself as a problematic: Indigenous methods have a risk of becoming the new 'resources' up for extraction. Methods need not always be replicable in all settings for them to function as methods. Scalable replications underpin capitalist thinking, which is the subject under critique in these texts. Therefore, it required discussions to understand that Indigenous methods are (a) situated and (b) require safeguarding by a clear delineation of context because the knowledge and practice exist *despite* (as resurgent and refusing) and *against* (as resisting) continued conditions of coloniality and assimilation in settler-colonial states. Learning Indigenous theories and methods in the UK is to understand when the text refuses to cede its context, and when it allows engagement elsewhere. Such a form of close reading for an intuitive (and arguably difficult) arrival is critical, lest methods become appropriated to serve white, liberal or far-right agendas of Indigenisation in the UK. In British classrooms, grappling with place-based texts as sovereign systems of knowledge, which refuse the legible brackets and teaching outcomes of dominant modes in Global North institutions, and additionally, resisting the exercise of drawing equivalent or subjective comparators as the exclusive mode for critical analysis and understanding, are, I believe, forms of

reading practice for place-based Indigenous knowledge. These two practices situate Indigenous texts from North America in the place from where we are engaging: an imperial centre and colonial metropole that remains implicated in Indigenous dispossession through the afterlives of colonialism, that is, the settler state, generational delinking and deaths in residential schools, stolen wealth, and profit from fossil-fuel industries on Indigenous land and seas. This place-based engagement from London took an embodied form through a tryst with the historic centre in the final week of the module. As a group, we embarked on the 'Indigenous London Walking Tour', listening to the audio-guide narrated by Kahu Burrows (Māori: Ngāti Maru) and Nathan Woodworth (Native American: Karuk) that was developed in the *Beyond the Spectacle* project directed by David Stirrup, based on the research in the book by Coll Thrush titled *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (2016). We walked from Covent Garden tube stop to Westminster Bridge, stopping at central locations, listening to the audio-text that narrated historical, hidden and forgotten Indigenous presences in London, with some stories of political negotiations and some of brutal treatment of those Native American, First Nations and Māori travellers who had previously visited the city.

Reading place-based texts is central to Indigenous knowledge and environmental humanities. To arrive at these knotty and critical pedagogical issues in a year three classroom demands that students have foundational ideas about the material impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous communities. Much of this work was accomplished in the second-year course 'The Long Contemporary', which I co-taught with the convenors Zara Dinnen and Sam McBean. We agreed that to challenge ethnographic confines and correct absences within UK curriculums, Indigenous literatures needed their due placement as contemporary literatures in the literary thoroughfare of emergent conversations, as much as they need specific and specialised modules. My colleagues had designed the module for the academic year 2018–2019 and had already been teaching climate fictions and the Anthropocene in the course, which reflected on contemporary subjects. They had included Jamaican writer and critic Sylvia Wynter's interview with David Scott, 'The Re-Enchantment of Humanism'. When I joined the teaching team, therefore, I already had an excellent foundational text and curriculum design within which I could situate Indigenous literatures. In Scott's interview,

Wynter traces the beginnings of global colonial histories from 1492 onwards that began an unequal 'history' of the 'human', as largely conceived from the position of the European 'Man'.[6] We approached the paradoxes that 1492 as a year presented; the expansion of knowledge about the world created divisions between the human and the natural world (the non-human), and the conception of the human became predicated on 'the other' to the European 'Man'. Hence, the text served as theoretical background to complicate the universal 'we' of the Anthropocene that implicates an apolitical category of the 'Human'. We addressed how Wynter traces the combined workings of 'knowledge' and imperialism that rested on the dehumanisation of Indigenous and Black peoples; her arguments are intertextual with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's in *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), which the students who had chosen to opt for my course would then read as part of 'After Postcolonialism' in year three.

As part of this year two module, we engaged with Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz's collection *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land* (1980) to study resource exploitation. By the second year of this iteration, I felt that we needed to categorically consider settler colonialism as a structure that contours Indigenous land and life, without which Ortiz's poetics felt untethered from its politics. Patrick Wolfe's 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native' (2006) was chosen as the supporting text for the lecture that clarified settler-colonial tactics as specific (and repeated) in different contexts (North America, Australia, Palestine) as well as explained the opposing forms of racialisation of Black and Indigenous peoples in North America. Most importantly, the text worked to establish the settler-colonial logic: 'Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element.'[7] With Wolfe's component introduced in the workshop, students could situate Ortiz's collection in twentieth-century American political contexts, when, following the Termination Era and subsequent invasion of mining industries, land remained the central concern for Indigenous communities. In discussions, we approached the co-relations between resource extraction, settler colonialism and Indigenous labour in the Grants Mineral Belt, as well as close-read Ortiz's documentary poetry on the plight of Navajo and Laguna workers in uranium mining sites. In connecting Wolfe's and Ortiz's texts, we considered how Ortiz seeks to historicise the precarious position of the twentieth-century

Indigenous factory worker as one within the long history of settler colonialism, and his anti-colonial poetics as equally anti-capitalist.

I have shared two cases from my experience in redesigning and teaching on modules where I have centred Indigenous texts in environmental humanities from the settler-colonial contexts of the US and Canada. My reflections are concerned with respectful approaches to place-based texts, and the foundational need for the material politics of land in settler-colonial states, in pedagogical projects of centring Indigenous knowledge in the UK. The current debates in environmental humanities and climate emergency are incomplete without the history and politics of settler colonialism and its impact on Indigenous peoples; equally, educators in UK classrooms need to reflect and devise creative and critical ways to approach Indigenous place-based knowledge from the UK, to resist old forms of extractivist learning, and adapt with the knowledge systems that students bring into the classrooms each year.

Notes

I thank my colleagues Mafruha Mohua, Ed Charlton, Zara Dinnen, Sam McBean and David Stirrup, without whom these modules and thinking would not have been possible.

1. Rebecca Macklin, 'Decolonizing the American Literature Curriculum through an Environmental Justice Lens', *Transatlantica* 2 (2022): 3, https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.20426.
2. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 'Nishnaabeg Anticapitalism', in *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 75.
3. Ibid. 75.
4. My prompts and discussions were informed by ideas presented in detail in Dene (Yellowknives) scholar Glen Coulthard's work; see *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 6–15. See also Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 'Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity', *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (June 2016): 251–52.
5. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 151.
6. David Scott, 'The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter', *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000): 119–207.
7. Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDY: Teaching *The 1619 Project* in Boris Johnson's Britain

Nathan Cardon, Michell Chresfield, Tom Cutterham and John Munro

A lot was going on in the spring and early summer of 2020. Waves of industrial action across UK universities ran right up to the moment COVID-19 took hold and lockdowns started. Higher education entered crisis mode, and senior leadership became briefly obsessed with 'resilience' in teaching. Normally, it takes a year or more of bureaucratic hurdles to get a new module up and running. But the sudden demand for 'resilient', team-based approaches created a window for quick action. Meanwhile, in the United States, the murder of an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, by a white police officer had kicked off a wave of anti-racist protest that spread internationally, including to a United Kingdom still immured in the cultural and political fallout of the Brexit referendum four years earlier. As transatlantic scholars hailing from Canada, the United States and the UK, teaching United States history at the University of Birmingham and looking for a way to meet the moral and intellectual demands of that moment, we sketched out a new course to begin that autumn.[1] Through it, we hoped to respond to the sense of manifold crisis, and the experience of profound loss, that we shared with our students that summer.

Published the year before in the *New York Times Magazine*, to mark 400 years since the first enslaved Africans were brought to colonial Virginia, *The 1619 Project* was at the core of our team-built module from the outset.[2] The scholars and journalists whose work appeared in the magazine had been set the task of explaining the iniquities of the American present by tracing their origins in the

system of racial slavery. They had to do so for an audience whose pre-existing knowledge of those histories was unreliable at best, and whose patience for the niceties of scholarship was scant. In other words, the *Project* was an ideal starting point for undergraduates with no background in US history. By using race and slavery as lenses through which to encounter a four-century American past, it matched our goal of emphasising that past's burning relevance to our own crisis-ridden times. *The 1619 Project* had, moreover, been the subject of both serious critique and politically charged controversy. That entanglement between the scholarly understanding of the past and the ongoing conflicts of the present was part of what we wanted to explore with students. Rather than simply teaching *The 1619 Project* as history, we set out to teach it as a historical object, the product of moving historical forces.

Each week of the ten-week module involved pairing an article from *The 1619 Project* with several other readings – either directly in conversation with it or, more often, work that had preceded and helped underpin the magazine's interpretations. Beginning with the concept of capitalism and its relationship to slavery, and moving through themes of incarceration, health, mobility and politics, the module drew on our own areas of expertise but also pushed us to engage on broader terms with the whole history of the United States. Towards the end of the module, our focus shifted to critical responses. In particular, we spent time addressing the magazine's national and global contexts. With our students, we asked how its story spoke (or failed to speak) to the structures of inequality and racial oppression experienced here in Britain as well as around the world, and to the global movements of emancipation with which the Black struggle in the United States is closely connected.

Teaching the Crisis in the Crisis

It was clear immediately that this module, more than anything that we had taught before, drew its energy from students' everyday experiences. Our discussions gained a sense of urgency and significance that is sometimes hard to find in the classroom. This was not only the case for Black British students, who came to the module in part as a way to develop, however obliquely, an understanding of their own racialised encounters and identities. *The 1619 Project*'s unabashedly critical stance towards powerful, deep-rooted institutions

chimed with many of our students' feelings of disorientation and betrayal in the midst of a series of crises that had marked their whole adult lives. That includes the university itself, for these were students whose careers in higher education had been marked by strikes and lockdowns. Zooming in from isolated bedrooms in the autumn of 2020, with Donald Trump's re-election campaign playing out on their screens at the same time, many of our students were receptive to one message that *The 1619 Project* broadcast: that our times, and our societies, are deeply broken.

Teaching the history of medical racism during a global pandemic, for example, made the line between past and present vivid. Linda Villarosa's *1619 Project* article traces the long history of medical racism, including J. Marion Sims's experiments on enslaved women in the mid-nineteenth century.[3] It points to a 2016 study, revealing that medical residents believed Black people were less susceptible to pain, as evidence that racist assumptions and practices persist in today's healthcare settings. Students also read work by the historians Rana Hogarth and Deirdre Cooper Owens, expanding and deepening the magazine's account.[4] At the same time they were witnessing how the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted the mortality rates of Black communities in both the UK and the US. By unpacking the various medical theories that framed Black bodies as innately different, students could grapple with how these beliefs obscured the very real role that class, environment and racism play in shaping unequal health outcomes.

If public and personal health were on students' minds as we taught the module for the first time, so was mobility. The lockdown orders through which the UK government tried to tackle the spread of the virus confronted many of us with the contingency of our ability to move around outside our homes or dorm rooms. Contingent (im)mobility was a through-line in *The 1619 Project*, and one easily grasped by our students. For white Americans, their whiteness rested on the privilege of mobility; for Black Americans, mobility and immobility have often been imposed by force, shaping the unequal Black experience of American citizenship and democracy. Few technologies better represent the promise and peril of Black mobility than the automobile, few mundane moments more deeply riven with racialised power than a traffic stop. As the historian Kevin Kruse's *1619 Project* article demonstrated, political choices over infrastructure like highways empowered some Americans at the expense of

others, often along racial lines.[5] Beyond its environmental consequences, few British students have had to consider the deeply embedded inequalities that automobility represents. Confronting that reality on the module helped them perceive the structural processes of anti-Black racism in and beyond the United States. With differentiated access to mobility themselves, students readily grasped how the freedom to move is tied up with power, privilege and status.

Students' own experiences also proved a gateway to the potentially abstract problem of capitalism and its relation to slavery. *The 1619 Project* emerged on a wave of renewed public and scholarly interest in the concept of capitalism after the 2008 financial crisis. In the magazine, an article by the sociologist Matthew Desmond synthesised some aspects of that recent scholarship, emphasising the notion that the United States had developed, on the back of cotton slavery, a particularly brutal, 'low road' form of capitalism.[6] But it was talking to students about their jobs in hospitality and retail that really helped them grapple with the notion of surplus value and begin to think about varieties of exploitation. With the help of Peter James Hudson's historiographical excavations, we could then connect the recent work informing Desmond's article with a deeper tradition of Black Marxism on which it drew.[7] Students experiencing the crises of twenty-first-century capitalism for themselves were well prepared to learn that, as much now as during Reconstruction or the Gilded Age, wage labour does not necessarily mean economic freedom.

Teaching With and Against *The 1619 Project*

The 1619 Project was intended as a provocation, and as a riposte to the kinds of historical memory – self-consciously committed to American 'exceptionalism', more or less explicitly white supremacist – that were invoked by Donald Trump's political movement and its slogan 'Make America Great Again'. This element of dramatic conflict over wildly divergent visions of the US past added to the sense of contemporary significance with which students approached the 1619 module. At the same time, critiques of the magazine rapidly emerged from across a wide range of political and institutional perspectives. Challenges to the thrust and framing of the project came from American liberals and the left, as well as from the more predictable conservative quarters.[8] As a result, teaching *The 1619 Project* became, in part, an exercise in parsing

complex debates over history and memory, fact, narrative and historical reconstruction within the shifting context of ongoing crises. To this task, both we and our students brought our own varying perspectives and backgrounds, including the vantage point of Boris Johnson's Britain.

Critics like Lauren Michele Jackson have noted that each contribution to *The 1619 Project* is 'shaped according to the conventions of the magazine feature'. In other words, its presentation of historical contexts and processes is streamlined and stylised, 'dilating here and leapfrogging there until the writer has traversed the promised four hundred years and established a neat causal connection'.[9] This approach presents advantages in the undergraduate classroom: it makes such *longue durée* arguments impossible to miss and easy to grasp. It gives students licence to think at scale about issues that actually affect them, and to conceptually embed them in deep structural forces. On the other hand, though, it can lead to arguments sustained by implication and innuendo as much as by evidence. Students sometimes struggled to see any change at all in the Black experience of unfreedom over those 400 years. Our work on the module therefore involved adding some of the texture and difficulty back in, cautioning students to take the magazine pieces as starting points, not short cuts, to a proper historical understanding.

For all its many insights, moreover, *The 1619 Project* rarely looks beyond the boundaries of the United States. The stars-and-stripes patriotism of Nikole Hannah-Jones's profound opening catalogue of racial oppression, resistance and Black achievement announced the project's national framing at the outset.[10] Such a frame enables the magazine to speak clearly to its presumed American audience, bringing an unfamiliar history of slavery to bear upon a panoply of everyday experiences, from economic and health inequalities to the taste of food and sound of music. It also allowed us to explore, in the classroom, the assumptions and shared understandings that ground the project's radical critique of American historical consciousness. For decades, historians have inveighed against perspectives that treat US history as uniquely significant and disconnected from the rest of the world. They have warned against treating US conquest and possession of the continental west as a natural inevitability.[11] These were lessons that our module sought to weave back into *The 1619 Project*'s history, in the process identifying the limits of the magazine's historical imagination.

We spoke at length in class about two aspects of African American history that were not *The 1619 Project*'s focus. One was the Black freedom movement's global vision of liberation, the other anti-Black racism's relationship with other structures of power, namely settler colonialism. Introducing a range of recent scholarship that takes these traditions and problems seriously allowed us to deconstruct the national and patriotic framing that runs through *The 1619 Project*, reinstating a transnational perspective on racialised slavery, racial capitalism and the work of empire.[12] Just as 1619 helps explain 2019 or 2020, the framework of settler colonialism helps us grasp how 1492 – Columbus's Atlantic voyage – might help explain 1619. Our discussions of *The 1619 Project* helped students make sense of slogans like 'From Gaza to Ferguson', and to understand why Black anti-colonialism, transnational solidarity and Indigenous insurgence continue to animate political struggle today.

Lastly, public and scholarly debate over *The 1619 Project* mirrors, in some respects, controversy on this side of the Atlantic over the nature and effects of the British Empire. Just as Trump and his precursors in the US attached their political message to a mythology of pristine origins and lapsed national greatness, so Boris Johnson and the Brexit campaign drew upon fantasies of former imperial grandeur. A procession of historians in recent years has sought to dismantle such notions from every conceivable angle, sparking predictable backlash among the right-wing press.[13] Here in the UK, just as in the US, this is at its core a conversation about race: imperial nostalgia is a vehicle for white supremacist feeling. We have found that for our British students, teaching with *The 1619 Project* can create new analytical space from which to engage with the British versions of these questions. Even while the magazine itself is limited by national boundaries, as an educational tool we have used it to cross borders, draw comparisons, and see our world from new perspectives.

Conclusion

Our module, '1619 and the Making of America', ran for three years from 2020. By the end of 2022, the public furore over *The 1619 Project* had died down considerably, and it had lost name-recognition among students. A teaching project so deeply embedded in its own moment – including the management-driven imperative

toward team-taught synoptic modules – was never destined to continue indefinitely. The experience of building and teaching the module, though, has had a lasting impact on the way we think and feel about teaching American history in the United Kingdom. The reflexive, multi-layered approach we developed in order to teach with and against *The 1619 Project* has fed into our teaching on American empire, political thought and social change. Likewise, the intense experience of that autumn in 2020 has given each of us a renewed sense of the urgency and possibilities of humanistic higher education. Every problem, every crisis we addressed, is still with us in one form or another. We and our students will continue to confront them.

Notes

1. In addition to the authors, Dr Steve Hewitt took part in the design and teaching of the module from the outset, and Dr Tom Ellis taught and convened the module in subsequent years. We gratefully acknowledge their contributions to shaping this pedagogical project.
2. *The 1619 Project*, ed. Nikole Hannah-Jones, *New York Times Magazine*, 14 August 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html.
3. Linda Villarosa, 'Myths about Physical Racial Differences Were Used to Justify Slavery – and Are Still Believed by Doctors Today', *New York Times*, 14 August 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/racial-differences-doctors.html.
4. Rana Hogarth, 'The Myth of Innate Racial Differences between White and Black People's Bodies: Lessons from the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania', *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 10 (October 2019): 1339–41; Deirdre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (University of Georgia Press, 2017).
5. Kevin Kruse, 'What Does a Traffic Jam in Atlanta Have to Do with Segregation? Quite a Lot', *New York Times*, 14 August 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/traffic-atlanta-segregation.html.
6. Matthew Desmond, 'In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have to Start on the Plantation', *New York Times*, 14 August 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html.
7. Peter James Hudson, 'The Racist Dawn of Capitalism', *Boston Review*, 14 March 2016, https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/peter-james-hudson-slavery-capitalism/.

8. Our syllabus included Tom Mackaman, 'An Interview with Historian Gordon Wood on the New York Times' 1619 Project', *World Socialist Website*, 28 November 2019, https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2019/11/28/wood-n28.html; Adam Serwer, 'The Fight over the 1619 Project Is Not about Facts', *The Atlantic*, 23 December 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/historians-clash-1619-project/604093/; and Leslie M. Harris, 'I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me', *Politico*, 6 March 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248.
9. Lauren Michele Jackson, 'The 1619 Project and the Demands of Public History', *The New Yorker*, 8 December 2021, https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/the-1619-project-and-the-demands-of-public-history.
10. Nikole Hannah-Jones, 'Our Democracy's Founding Ideals Were False When They Were Written. Black Americans Have Fought to Make Them True', *New York Times Magazine*, 14 August 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html.
11. Ian Tyrrell, 'American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History', *American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 1991): 1031–55; Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (Hill and Wang, 2006); Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Anne Hyde, *Empires, Nations and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800–1860* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011).
12. Essential readings included Rosalyn Narayan, '"Creating insurrections in the heart of our country": Fear of the British West India Regiments in the Southern US Press, 1839–1860', *Slavery & Abolition* 39, no. 3 (August 2018): 497–517; and Stephanie Smallwood, 'Reflections on Settler Colonialism, the Hemispheric Americas, and Chattel Slavery', *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (July 2019): 407–16.
13. Among many examples, see Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (Bodley Head, 2022); and Sathnam Sanghera, *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain* (Viking, 2021).

CHAPTER 6

DIALOGUE: Teaching Religion in US Histories and Cultures

Uta Balbier, Emma Long, Stephen Shapiro and Randall J. Stephens

In a significant 2004 article on the place of religion in US history, Jon Butler noted religion's significance to almost all accounts of the pre-Civil War era, but that it was seldom considered in coverage of later periods. Describing twentieth-century religion as something of a 'jack-in-the-box', Butler argued that religion 'pops up colorfully on occasions', most notably through the 1925 Scopes Trial, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and the later development of the Religious Right. Failure to 'grapple seriously with religion in modern American private and public life' risked 'substantial misinterpretations of that history', Butler argued, and an assumption that, since the Civil War, religion's significance has receded rather than grown or evolved.[1] Such arguments are particularly interesting in the United Kingdom, where many students can instantly identify religion as a key indicator of American exceptionalism (at least within the Western world). UK students are often fascinated by the obvious power of Protestantism in American life, and yet ill-equipped to analyse its power beyond the most obvious iterations of civil religion, which often convey religious reverence for American institutions and founding figures within the vein of an apparently universal Judaeo-Christian tradition. The frequent refrain of 'God bless America', for example, would be familiar to UK students; however, sustained analysis of religion as a serious force in American life and culture can be hard to motivate amongst British students, many of whom are deeply entrenched in a secular political culture.

In this dialogue, we discuss the challenges and merits of teaching American religions, reflect on religious diversity in the US and the UK, and consider the extent to which religious plurality, both within the United States and in our classrooms, can further expand our understanding of religion as a powerful force in American life.

What is the context in which your teaching engages with the topic of religion in the United States?

Emma Long (EL): I'm based in the Department of American Studies at the University of East Anglia (UEA). I have tried teaching courses on American religion and religion in American history, and on each occasion, the course hasn't recruited the number of students the university requires to run it. So mostly, when I'm touching on religion, I've worked it into broader courses. For instance, I have a week where we look at the role of religion in American politics in my 'Intro to American Politics and Government' class. I also have a week on religion in the context of the sixties and seventies in my twentieth-century American history survey. It's not the only time religion comes up, but I have very specific weeks that focus on it, and then it's threaded through other topics.

Stephen Shapiro (SS): I teach in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. I've never taught a course directly and solely on American religion, but religion is always present in some form. A lot of my earlier scholarship was on Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810), who stands, to the degree we can say something like this, as one of the first literary analysts of religion in America outside of doctrinal orthodoxy. Brown was raised within a Quaker background, which exemplifies a Nonconformist version of Christianity in the US.

I teach contemporary American literature and a course on American horror, and religion appears there, usually in a negative form. Some of my work deals with the rise of speaking in tongues in American Pentecostalism in relation to weird fiction, especially H. P. Lovecraft. My research and my teaching on religion is more about cultural influences than doctrinal practices or life rules.

Randall J. Stephens (RJS): I am a Professor of American and British Studies at the University of Oslo. I haven't taught a dedicated religion

course here, but I have taught one in the US (Eastern Nazarene College) and in the UK (Northumbria University). That was a 'Religion in American History' course from pre-contact to the present. Religion also appears in my courses on the civil rights movement and on rock music. For the latter, I assign material on the religious roots of the genre, with special attention to the South. Students seem interested in these topics. At Northumbria, the religious history course had the pre-colon title 'Hellfire Nation', which drew attention. It usually had between eighteen and thirty students.

My own research has often been on Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism and white backlash in the context of civil rights. More recently I've been researching and writing about religion and environmental history. I find students are interested in religion and politics, religion and culture – topics that come up in multiple classes.

Uta Balbier (UB): I'm Professor of History at the University of Oxford, so I don't teach in an American studies context, but I used to. I've been offering specific modules on religion in the United States for over a decade. At King's College London, I offered a second-year module, 'Faith and Belonging in the Post-1945 United States'. It proved popular, partly because it attracted students who wanted to interrogate their own religious affiliations, backgrounds and themes around diversity that were not addressed in other courses. I've always offered – and I still do – Masters-level modules on religion and politics. I have moved with my research interests: it became a history of global Evangelicalism, and now it's called 'Religion and American Empire'. But, like many, I'm also committed to weaving religion into my second-year survey courses in twentieth-century US history or US history after the Civil War. I really teach it through the 'trinity' of capitalism, race and religion.

Let's talk demographics. What do your classrooms look like?

RJS: I was pleasantly surprised at the level of diversity at the University of Oslo. We have a significant minority of students of colour from Muslim backgrounds, who bring very different experiences, which enriches seminar discussions. I distinctly remember two young Muslim women who were really excited by the imagery and power of a Malcolm X speech I was teaching. More broadly,

having Erasmus students from the UK, France, Germany or other places can really add a great dimension to the seminar experience, by bringing distinct assumptions and training.

SS: My classes are fairly racially diverse, and I think this has improved due to efforts to improve access to the university over the years that I have been here. One structural factor of my courses that may make them attractive to a diverse group of students is that my assessments are open-ended, meaning that students are encouraged to develop their own essay titles. I am convinced that this invitation to take agency over their work draws in a wider demographic range of students.

Historically, about 85 to 90 per cent of my students identify as female, which is typical in literary studies, but even now, in what were traditionally considered 'male genres' like horror and science fiction, I am teaching overwhelming majorities of women.

EL: UEA is pretty white, although not necessarily privileged. I wouldn't say it was homogeneous in terms of economic background, but it is largely white and secular. In politics, we get more international students than in American studies, who bring different cultural perspectives, but they sometimes share the same media narratives about Donald Trump and white evangelicals as our British students.

I find that my students can be dismissive of religion, seeing it as a form of hypocrisy – particularly in a political context. They're coming with an assumption about Donald Trump and how religion is used for political gain. They don't have wider historical context, so religion is something they might not take seriously or see as having a positive influence on society until they see more examples. International students often help, because they have different experiences of faith and religion. They think about American religion in a different way, and can press UK students to consider alternative viewpoints, rather than it just coming from me.

Megan Hunt (editor): That chimes with my experience at the University of Edinburgh, Emma, where our student body in undergraduate history is predominantly British, and many classrooms are dominated by white students from the south of England. But I am sure that others working in our field have more diverse classrooms,

and students of faith may be more common in certain institutions or parts of the country. It's also perhaps worth considering whether students from religious backgrounds feel comfortable discussing belief in what can often feel like very secular environments, or at the very least where secularism is assumed to be the norm. They might also struggle to relate their experiences of religion with the impression they have of religion in the United States.

UB: While there are no doubt many students in Britain from religious backgrounds, the reality of my experience is that the students in my classroom simply aren't familiar with religion, full stop: they have no knowledge of Scripture or doctrine. They don't know what Jesus preached on the Mount, which makes it hard to explain the religious left and how they build claims on Scripture.

EL: My literature colleagues have to explain the Bible when they're teaching Puritan texts. Students know it exists, but that's it. They come with very little theological literacy, which shapes how we approach early American literature.

RJS: Robert Alter has a book called *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* where he writes that, if you don't understand the Bible and biblical traditions, it's hard to fully grasp American literature or the speeches of Abraham Lincoln.[2] It's a hook for students to see how religion is integral to the modern world we live in, not just to Sunday school.

UB: A great example is the rhetorical tradition of the jeremiad, from Jonathan Edwards to Martin Luther King, and then Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union' speech from 2008, which Joe Biden has referenced in more recent years.[3] That rhetorical tradition is continuous.

What do your students think or see when they hear 'religion in the United States'? Do they have clear ideas of what that might mean?

RJS: I used to do an exercise where students brainstormed their impressions of religion in America or studying the history of American religion. I'd write up their ideas on a whiteboard.

Then we'd repeat the exercise at the end of the course to see how their ideas had evolved. In the beginning, they'd usually say things like 'politicians say God bless America', or they would reflect on how 'weird' American public religion is. They might say Americans are very religious because they're not well educated, or, in previous years, they'd make associations with the George W. Bush administration, or see religion in a general pop culture, informal way. I think some can assume 'religion in America' through the lens of white Evangelicalism or a politicised post-Reagan-era kind of Evangelicalism. That's what I would hear from students initially.

UB: I'd offer the same observation. When students hear 'religion in the United States', they think of the Religious Right – and are thinking almost exclusively in white racial terms. They're often surprised when I say, 'What about the Black church? What about the civil rights movement?' That's part of the learning process. The other point is: 'Oh, the US is more religious than we are in the UK', which is the entry point to say, 'Hold on, maybe not.' Yes, they have higher numbers of church attendance, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're more religious. We bring in the concept of civil religion – that's where Emma comes in.

EL: My experience is exactly the same. More recently, because I teach more politics modules than history, students tend to think about religion in the context of modern politics: Donald Trump and white evangelicals. They don't look beyond that. They're always surprised when I teach about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X in a week focused on race in American politics, and I show how their religion shaped their approaches. Or we talk about the evangelical left on climate or social justice. Students are surprised and often say, 'We didn't know this existed.' Because my modules are taught in a politics context, that primes them to think about the here and now, not the historical background. They don't always have a sense of how we got from point A to point B historically.

SS: I concur with the idea that Christian fundamentalism is the base standard for many British students. There are reasons for this, given the resounding return to Christian fascism prevalent in American politics and media.[4] Another problem is that many UK students don't have a good sense of non-Protestant denominations.

The distinctiveness of Catholicism, especially in its service ideals, the impact of an immigrant background on religious identity – these are difficult concepts for them to grasp. Religion is so often a complex nexus of doctrine, convention and ceremonies, but also foodways and ritual. In British culture, religion is often defined as subtractive rather than additive, partly due to a traditional Marxist or leftist rejection of religion in British academia. That's a tremendous error, because in the US, religion is a crucial element to activism, from the Catholic Worker movement to Quaker traditions of nonviolence as well as strands of liberation theology.[5]

It's also difficult to convey how American religion is world religion, in the sense of moving beyond initial or expected social groups. For instance, one of the fastest-growing populations of Vodou adherents is white Americans; in American Judaism, the fastest-growing demographic is Black Americans.[6] There's always complexity and intersectionality within communities of faith. For instance, Pentecostalism, which I and Philip Barnard have argued is the first truly multiracial American movement in which Black Americans were acknowledged as leaders, developed well in advance of the civil rights movement.[7] These timelines and concepts prove challenging, especially if it's a student's first introduction to religion in America.

In your teaching, do you do anything to connect these themes to Britain or Europe, to show that such religious ideas and expressions are not all uniquely American?

UB: The main point for me is always that the UK, on the whole, is actually the exception – highly secularised – and the US is not the only religious country in the world. The largest megachurch is in South Korea, and we have a megachurch in London, a Pentecostal immigrant church. There are important global flows, and it's not that America is just 'exceptionally religious'; it's that we are exceptionally secular in comparison.

RJS: I've used data on global religion from the Pew Research Center, showing the US as an outlier within the West, but with more in common with the wider world than, say, most of Western Europe.[8] This data also prompts us to think about the questions posed; for

example, 'What do they mean when they ask people about their "religious commitment"?'

In an American religious history course, I've also used David Chidester's argument that pop culture (baseball, Coca-Cola, rock and roll) can function in religious ways.[9] It's the classic religious studies question: 'What is religion?' We connect it to football in the British context, or to other communal practices or fandoms with rituals and sets of values.

EL: I sometimes talk about civil religion and get students to think about national identity, the monarchy, the NHS – things in the UK that might be viewed almost as sacred or as national icons.

SS: One of the issues with teaching these issues in Britain is that we are based in a country in which religion is generally perceived of as backwards rather than dynamic. And there are good reasons for why people might feel that way. But we must understand that religion in the US isn't just a question of the past; even its most retrograde forms are changing constantly. There's a dynamism and heterogeneity, even a transformational quality to religion in the US, which is hard to convey in Britain.

So, for example, students aren't typically aware how, for instance, Pentecostalism factored into the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King's last speech was in a Holiness-Pentecostal church (the Church of God in Christ in Memphis), but Pentecostals are often written out of mainstream civil rights narratives. Also, many aspects of Catholic and Jewish support for the civil rights movement are unfamiliar. It's not solely a Protestant or Baptist affair, which is why it's good to introduce multiple strands of religious commitment to equality, rather than isolate one faith lineage from another.

Let's consider the challenges: if students have very little background in American religion, or even American geography or history, how do you introduce specialist themes? Are there good materials that you find work well?

EL: One recent example: I had students read excerpts from Beth Allison Barr's *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*.[10] It's a personal

story from someone in the evangelical tradition who questions complementarianism, and it's very accessible. It challenges students' preconceived ideas of evangelicals. That personal approach gets them engaged. Other readings sometimes yield silence, but that book prompts more direct responses.

SS: I have taught some books explicitly about religion, for example Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of a Violent Faith*, although I think I'd be less willing to use that title now.[11] I have also taught a journalist's account of snake handling, *Salvation on Sand Mountain*, which I thought was just excellent and bombed in the classroom for reasons I don't understand.[12]

More broadly, I'm convinced if you want to teach religion in the US context, you have to do it in conjunction with media studies. It's one of the few ways in which students can learn to complicate their relationship to religion, and to see its ongoing impact and dynamism. I'm thinking particularly of the American production of the show *Homeland* (2011–2020), which I thought made a relatively sympathetic presentation of why a white American from a Christian background might find solace in Muslim practice. I also think that it may be one of the first representations of a complete daily prayer in American mainstream culture.

RJS: I like teaching debates between religious scholars or historians. For instance, with the civil rights movement, I have assigned Jane Dailey on the religious underpinnings of white supremacy, contrasting it with David Chappell's argument that civil rights leaders had a robust theological foundation that white supremacists lacked.[13] Nowadays, it would be fun to pit Matthew Avery Sutton's, Anthea D. Butler's or Kristin Kobes Du Mez's arguments about Evangelicalism's political, cultural, racial and gendered orientation against David Bebbington's, Mark Noll's or George Marsden's more theology- or practice-focused approach.[14] It's a way to see these topics as debated over and contested rather than set ideas. That approach can help model the use of evidence, analysis and the construction of an argument.

UB: I love to show them a great Super Bowl opening montage from 2011, called 'The Journey', narrated by Michael Douglas.[15] It's got everything: religion, civil religion, sport. My students just love it.

Civil rights is also very effective. Students realise religion can be progressive, not just conservative. I assign the question: 'Is the civil rights movement really a religious movement?' and they'll say, 'No, it's political', but then we read Barbara Savage as well as David Chappell, and they begin to see the nuance – how important religion is in driving prophecy and activism.[16] By the time we watch Martin Luther King's 'I've Been to the Mountaintop' speech, students are convinced that the movement can only really be fully understood if we take religion seriously.

SS: People often forget that King made that speech in a Pentecostal church, and he says at the beginning that he'd never been in one before. Pentecostals are often written out of mainstream Black history, but it's so interesting how King makes this speech there, which is often cited as his first explicit mention of labour rights. Emmett Till also came from a Pentecostal family, but this is never mentioned in the history of his death and the political outrage that surrounded it. There is no mention of Black Pentecostals at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

RJS: Stephen's point raises important questions about the archive that we need to discuss with students, like the extent to which the historical record that we have is a curated one.

UB: It's important to reflect on who often gets forgotten. That's why I love to teach Amy Koehlinger's *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s*, which shows that support for civil rights came from beyond the Protestant world but was rooted in Catholic and Jewish communities too.[17] There is some great work on Rabbi Heschel, for example, that's great to teach with.[18]

Have wider changes in UK higher education changed what students want and expect, in your opinion?

SS: We used to have an English and American Studies degree at Warwick, but it's now ended. The underlying 'glue' that used to hold an American studies programme together is gone, meaning that students rarely have the prerequisite learning we could previously expect when they took specialist modules.

EL: I used to teach mostly American studies students who had taken the introductory modules, so I could assume some background knowledge. Now, as our American studies numbers decline, but interest in American topics remains, we get students from history or politics who have no context. Some ask, 'What is Congress?', so I have to think carefully about what I do in the first week – sometimes a big-picture reading overview or a session on the historiographical debates. I can't spend an entire semester giving them an introduction to American history, so I point them to resources and then fill in gaps each week.

Our ever-declining body of American studies students is especially keen to ask questions about power and identity. They want to challenge narratives, including on race, gender and empire. But if they're not in an American studies programme, they might be surprised that we're asking such questions about the US. They're used to more traditional approaches in other history or politics modules. American studies has led the way in these critical approaches for a long time. With the loss of American studies programmes, the question becomes, 'What happens to us who teach in it? And what happens to the modules that don't easily fit into traditional departments like history or politics?' We risk losing that unique interdisciplinary perspective.

SS: It's hard not to be pessimistic, because we see the same trends across Europe, with universities in the Netherlands closing foreign language programmes. There's also the historical factor that, post-World War II, the State Department helped fund American studies in Europe, either explicitly or implicitly. That support is gone. But on a more optimistic note, there's still interest. Maybe we just need to reorganise how we deliver that content.

RJS: At recent conferences in the United States, I have attended sessions about teaching American history amid the 'history wars'. Many people there have been from Texas and Florida. They've talked about the right-wing politicisation of classrooms and curriculum. The pressures these scholars and teachers are under are enormous and incredibly unfair and unjust. Hearing them, I thought, 'I have it so good by comparison.' So that's a silver lining: it could be worse.

In Oslo, I see students wanting to write about civil rights and racial injustice, gun control, legal politics, the Christian Right or

Japanese internment. That indicates to me a more critical perspective on the US, though it can be superficial. I see it as positive: they're open to analysing these issues.

UB: Yes, we can be hopeful. Many of us have emerged from closed American studies programmes but remain in other departments. It's our way of teaching – shaped by an American studies mindset – that makes the difference for students. That perspective is still there, even if the institutional structure isn't.

SS: There is a paradox here – there is still so much interest in the material, but not under the rubric of a formal degree. It's a social shift. American studies in Britain is threatened, even though student curiosity remains. In the same way, fewer Americans go to church, but they are more religious than ever.

Notes

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PART II

MEANINGS

'I think these discussions were able to provide an outlet for me to better understand how the turmoil of these events happening around us affects me.'

'I found the classes very emotional and political. We debated whether studying whiteness was a political act and I certainly felt that way … It has impacted how I view our history and how I have experienced life and my education.'

'I felt shame and guilt, yet also felt part of a collective that wanted to fight systemic issues home and abroad.'

'I am keen to discuss my research and studies with others as a way to spread awareness and develop conversation regarding these important themes.'

– Students taught by the contributors to this collection

CHAPTER 7

CASE STUDY: From TERF Island to Trumpistan: The Art of Teaching Queer History in Perilous Times

Chris Parkes

Teaching is seldom thought of as a science, but on occasion it offers chances for experiments. Traditionally, this means using innovative methodologies, or novel classroom techniques and assessment styles. The year 2024, however, offered the chance to conduct something unusual: a natural experiment. From January to March, I taught one seminar of the introductory undergraduate module 'Historical Skills, Sources and Approaches' (HSSA) in the History Department at King's College London. A veteran of this first-year methodology course, I opted to centre my lessons around the theme of 'LGBT Americans in the Twentieth Century'. Subsequently, from August to December, I participated in a faculty exchange with the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, where I taught a first-year special subject course of my own design, informed by the HSSA material, entitled 'Queer Americans in the Twentieth Century'. Two countries; two universities; two sets of students; one subject. What were the results?

Adapting queer history to the requirements of these different modules, schools and student bodies presented challenges both predictable and novel. KCL's HSSA module imposed multiple structural constraints. HSSA is short and rigid, only nine one-hour roundtable discussion seminars with mandatory biweekly 800-word assessments. As an introductory methods course, every seminar had to impart a tangible skill (note taking, copyediting, etc.) around which queer history had to contort itself.

Perhaps unexpectedly, HSSA's many constraints proved little obstacle to teaching queer history. The opening session, focused

on historiography, provided a perfect frame to examine arguably the most salient moment in US queer history: the Stonewall Riot. Contrasting historians' accounts of the Riot fuelled an energetic discussion of how historians select their evidence, create emphasis, and the impact of those choices on popular historical memory.[1] So, too, did a look at lesbian culture in 1920s Harlem the following week.[2] The frequent assessments motivated regular exercise of the students' skills in synthesis, with encouraging results. Students drew thematic links between Harlem and Greenwich Village as loci of queer political consciousness that were not part of the curriculum as taught. The students were using queer history to both learn and apply their skills as historians.

The UK-based students in the seminar had little difficulty understanding Stonewall as a historical event. To some extent this was unsurprising; Stonewall is nearly as ubiquitous a reference point in the UK as it is in the US.[3] However, this proved the high-water mark of their historical knowledge. In subsequent weeks' sessions on the queer Harlem Renaissance and the 1970s anti-gay backlash, students struggled to understand the significance of these moments for lack of a firm grasp of wider contextual issues. Ma Rainey's career makes less impact without a firm grounding of the racial, sexual and urban politics of 1920s Harlem and the US more generally.[4] All teachers of US history in the UK must contend with this, but the added learning curve of introducing students to sexuality as a historical subject in addition to studying a foreign country compounded the challenge.

My solution was to stress the common positionality of the subjects at hand. Queer Americans faced challenges particular to the US, but their struggles could be understood on a more fundamental level that transcended national boundaries. To contend with a state hostile to their existence, or a public indifferent to their suffering, was a fate afforded to British queer people (and other marginalised groups) as much as American ones. Students empathised and overcame their unfamiliarity with American specifics. The greatest constraint of teaching UK students about US queer history was the challenge of getting them to understand that Americans and Brits – the queer ones, anyway – are not so different as they might appear.

In contrast to teaching HSSA in the UK, the special subject course at UNC Chapel Hill offered a paradise of flexibility: twenty-eight sessions of seventy-five-minute lectures; complete freedom to set

assessment style, length and due dates; absolute discretion on content. For an academic based in the UK, the latitude afforded to module convenors by the US system stimulated gleeful creativity and ambition. I chose assessment methods that aligned my pedagogical aims with the course content.[5] As my lectures always included multiple primary sources, one assessment instructed students to pick one of those sources and write a gobbet analysis of it, submitted at a time of their choosing. Students also wrote a book review, selected from a curated list, and a final essay on a question of their choosing (with my approval). Considering the impressive breadth of topics chosen for the essays and the critical edge evident in the book reviews, the flexibility afforded to me in designing the course proved a worthy gift to pass to the students.

With so many classes to fill during the term, I ventured well beyond the standard catechism of twentieth-century LGBT American history (the Lavender Scare, Stonewall, HIV/AIDS, etc.). I prepared deep dives into subjects often elided but crucial to the history of queer people in the US: eugenics, sexology, the interaction of queerness and conservatism, and local histories beyond big cities, specifically Florida and the queer Redneck Riviera.[6] Some of these were wildly successful. A three-instalment set of case studies about queer culture breaking into the mainstream, focusing on the 1930s Pansy Craze, disco in the 1970s, and 1990s/2000s sitcoms, inspired the best in-class discussions of the entire term. Other ventures were less well received, specifically a study of rumour and gossip in the case of former Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles. The story of Welles, whose queer sex scandal was the focus of my own doctoral dissertation, elicited mostly befuddlement, both at the relevance of Welles's story to American history generally and at the abstruse literature assigned to teach it.[7]

This is not to say the students were disengaged. The starkest contrast between teaching this material in the UK and the US was the enthusiasm of the US students to finally learn the queer history of their own country. Few students had learned about LGBTQ+ topics at university or secondary school. They were, by turns, fascinated and gobsmacked to learn how queer Americans had been treated by their government and fellow citizens. Lessons on eugenics and its influence on reproductive health and psychiatric care for trans people left students asking fundamental questions about the notion of freedom and the US state. A lecture on queer soldiers during World

War II, which featured an account of a soldier's last moments with a fellow soldier/lover, moved one student to tears.[8] By contrast, there was palpable glee in the room when playing Sub-Radio's 'Stacy's Dad' or a clip of Anita Bryant being pied in the face.[9]

There was something more profound at play, too. More than once, students reached out to me in office hours to express how the course material was helping them understand their own identity, or the intersections of race, sexuality, gender and community in their life off campus. One student taking the course as an optional credit remarked they never realised queer history fitted into grander narratives of American history, and that queer history was much bigger than they anticipated. In course feedback, students remarked on the relevance of the subject matter to current American history. However, it was not necessary to wait for the end of the year for that to become apparent.

Every experiment must attempt to control for variables and confounding factors. However, no amount of careful planning could have anticipated the extraordinary shifts that 2024 would bring for the teaching of queer history in the UK and US. Before, during and after the teaching of these modules, contemporary affairs barged their way into the classroom, leaving student and teacher alike uncertain about what to do with the knowledge we possess.

Teaching queer US history to students in the UK in early 2024 afforded no shortage of parallels to draw with contemporary events. Students required little prompting to detect similarities between the transphobic media coverage of Christine Jorgensen, an ex-GI trans woman whose transition made her an international celebrity in the 1950s, and present-day UK media coverage of trans people.[10] Meanwhile, a lesson about homonationalism – the theory that Western states use sexual orientation inclusiveness to justify imperialist policies – which took place as the Gaza war ground on interminably laid bare the layered narratives of US imperialism both past and present, though few students made this connection.[11] In both these cases, I found myself wondering how best to strike the balance between imparting lessons about queer history for its own sake and using it instructively to prepare students to engage with these topics proactively in the present. For a course explicitly based around skills acquisition like HSSA, the latter option seemed obvious. Yet, the lessons that resonated most with students leaned heavily toward self-contained historical vignettes that were as much entertainment

as informational. Was it possible to make queer history seem more urgent? Famous last words.

For its first eleven weeks, teaching 'Queer Americans in the Twentieth Century' at UNC Chapel Hill inspired a mix of passion and frivolity. I was thrilled to lecture on these topics for the first time, to put my own spin on them and to inculcate a new roster of students into the kind of history that had spurred my own intellectual curiosity as an undergrad. Equally, because I assumed my passion stood on firmer ground than turned out to be the case, I approached it with a joyful fleet-footedness; this was going to be fun, I insisted.

The sobering result of the election put an end to that naïve gaiety. The result was shocking, though not unexpected; there were warning signs of a rising reactionary tide. Just six weeks earlier, the student newspaper *The Daily Tar Heel* published its DEI Edition (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion), a fifteen-page examination of the damaging effects at UNC Chapel Hill of anti-DEI regulations enacted by the state government.[12] At a staff meeting the next month, the history department circulated a memo with recommendations for the new state-mandated 'Foundations of American Democracy' course to be taught to all students across the UNC system the following year.

In one sense, a second Trump administration proffered a motherlode of relevance for teaching queer American history. The blisteringly transphobic rhetoric of the campaign, later translated into an avalanche of executive orders targeting LGBTQ+ people, drew obviously on historical homophobia and transphobia, from anti-vice laws and the Lavender Scare to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.[13] There was hardly a time when taking (or teaching) a course on queer Americans could be more useful. Yet, the onslaught of anti-queer bigotry that began on 20 January cast doubt on my approach to teaching over the preceding months. That approach rested on the assumption that the relevance of queer people to the broad sweep of US history was self-evident and unimpeachable; 2025 proved me wrong. Classes I taught on the Stonewall Riot covered the raw emotion of the moment, the heroism of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, and how their defiance reverberated down the history books. But did those lessons prepare students to make sense of the Trump administration deleting all mention of trans people from the Stonewall National Monument webpage?[14] By the same token, did my single seminar on trans history in HSSA genuinely help students recognise ongoing efforts in the UK

to upend trans people's access to healthcare, legal recognition and accurate representation in government statistics?[15]

Glancing backward, it is tempting to slouch into pessimism. The battle cry of bigotry screeching through 2024 irrevocably altered the context of what queer historians do. Teaching queer American history is just not the same in a world where that history is being erased by government edict. However, I detect a new and urgent utility of queer history for students and scholars alike. American or British, queer history offers a way to ground frightened and bewildered people amid an unpredictable anti-queer moral panic. Recounting queer history and applying its analytical insights helps cut through the bullshit spewed from formerly respectable outlets. Far from losing their relevance, the lessons of queer history resonate more powerfully in a hostile world, as does their instructiveness for those wishing to mount a resistance. Learning and teaching queer history helps identify the forces that led to this moment and inoculate against their attempts to erase the past.

Ultimately, the natural experiment of teaching queer history in 2024 produced results simultaneously invaluable and tainted. Queer history helps American and non-American students gain insight into the broader history of the United States. It inspires personal revelation and intellectual curiosity, too. Equally, 2024 demonstrated how those insights have a shorter half-life than most scholars anticipated. Whatever country it takes place in, queer American history cannot be taught in the same way after 2024; it faces a transatlantic threat. Vandalism and persecution by government agencies, intimidation and institutional insecurity of queer historians, and the duty of care we owe to students facing the same threats with even fewer resources at their disposal, compel more forceful action. For queer history to survive, its practitioners must confront easily intimidated administrators and politicians who wither in the face of assaults by malevolent and bigoted actors. We must insist, publicly and loudly, on queer history's indispensability to academic freedom and civil society.

Notes

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CHAPTER 8

DIALOGUE: Encountering 'Race' in the British American Studies Classroom

Rebecca J. Fraser, Christopher Lloyd, Christine Okoth, Jonathan Ward and Xine Yao

Understandings of 'race' in American studies in Britain have developed with a particular focus on slavery and civil rights, as a result of the research interests of both historians and literary scholars. An emphasis on African American history and culture has also often been prioritised over learning about other marginalised peoples, including Indigenous, Latinx and Asian Americans, or confronting the invisible constructions of 'whiteness'. Students in the UK are far more likely to learn about Martin Luther King or Frederick Douglass than they are about Black British people, both at school and at university, and they are most likely to do so whilst being taught by white teachers and academics.

In this dialogue, five scholars discuss how students in the UK encounter and understand 'race' in their university classrooms. Participants reflect on their own teaching practice, including their social positions, how they navigate the complexities of racial power dynamics in their practice, and how staff can engage students on these topics in a way that empowers students to make social change in the future.

Editor's note: *This dialogue has been edited for clarity, and in the process of translating the conversation to the page, what may have been lost is the collegiality, laughter, vulnerability and uncertainty which permeated the discussion. There are no easy answers to*

questions about what it means to encounter race in the classroom, but the ways in which we conduct these conversations are vital to our anti-racist work.

Let's start with introductions. Where do you teach?

Jon Ward (JW): My research looks at American visual culture and representations of identity and the body. I teach at King's College London in the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries. Prior to that, I taught in the English Department of King's, and before that in the American Studies Department at the University of East Anglia (UEA).

Christine Okoth (CO): I work in the English Department at King's College London. My job title is Lecturer in Literatures and Cultures of the Black Atlantic, and I teach across the degree programmes in the English Department: a first-year course on literary theory, a second-year course which is an Afro-diasporic literature survey, and a third-year course on Black studies with a focus on environment.

Christopher Lloyd (CL): I am an associate professor of learning and teaching at the University of Hertfordshire. I mainly teach contemporary literature, usually American, and I also lead a cross-institutional module on Black Lives Matter and Black studies for staff, students and external people to study. It's an asynchronous online course and that's one place where I've started to develop my thinking in terms of teaching race within a broader classroom than just American studies.

Xine Yao (XY): I am at University College London (UCL) in the English Department, and my title is Associate Professor in American Literature to 1900. The sort of teaching I do includes being a part of UCL's new – as in it did not previously exist – colonial and postcolonial literatures module, and a lot of my teaching out of necessity has been on race, across BA, MA and PhD. Perhaps most significantly, in response to 2020, I teach the first-year criticism and theory module's lecture on race after many demands from the students for that sort of work.

Rebecca (Becky) Fraser (RF): I'm based in the Department of American Studies at the University of East Anglia, and I'm a professor

of American history and culture. I focus on the nineteenth century, with modules on racial slavery in the US, with a specific focus on the politics of Black protest struggles. At MA level I also co-teach an interdisciplinary module on race and resistance, thinking about theories of race and strategies of resistance comparatively across the Americas. Finally, I convene a module around gender and age in American culture, which is really contemporary and allows students to consider the intersections of gender and age with other aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, sexuality and disability.

Where, when and how do the students in the UK encounter race in America in university classrooms?

CO: In my experience, students encounter race predominantly in relation to African American literature and history. I get the sense that students have encountered race in this context at school; often they come to us with some knowledge, for instance, of the civil rights movement or recent protest movements, and some kind of literary knowledge of canonical African American writers like Toni Morrison. And often at university, that's also the framework in which they first encounter thinking about race. What's interesting is that there is already a good basis that we can build on, but it also means we have to do a bit of work of complicating, in the classroom, what it means to think about race. So for instance, it's good and important to think about race in the context of the United States, but as Becky's already said, the comparative aspect of it is also important, both in terms of thinking about the Americas more broadly, but also complicating the association between race and Blackness. And then the association of race and slavery, which presents its own interesting avenues for discussion, but also complications for how we might situate these discussions and think beyond spectacular violence, for instance.

JW: Christine, I feel bad because now my response seems way more egotistical than yours! But I would say that one of the ways in my experience that they encounter race is because of my presence. When we talk about race, my presence as a Black British person means that students pay attention to the specificities of that experience and that history. When I taught at UEA, which was a much whiter demographic of students, I was often the only person of colour,

let alone the only Black person, in the room. At King's, where it is much more diverse, often I was still the only Black person in the room. So that, in my experience, has meant that there are particular sorts of confrontations, and encounters with race. What I find really interesting about the American studies classroom is that the students are much more explicit about coming into that space wanting to think about race in ways that they might not signal within other educational contexts. But I think that there is often a kind of exceptionalism about how they think about the US and Blackness particularly. They're like, 'oh, let's think about racism', but they don't necessarily even think about slavery being transatlantic: they think about it being 'an American thing'. So, I think that the undoing and the complications that lie therein are that Blackness within the US and beyond is more than just about slavery.

The other thing that I am thinking about is that, because of their introduction to Blackness through the civil rights movement, and in relation to the US, students' conceptions of race, and their expectations of what we'll cover, are quite restricted to Blackness. So, I think they're not necessarily thinking about indigeneity, about Asian identity, about defining terms like Latine and Latinx. So, it's quite a narrow conception, I would say, in terms of what they're expecting to do with race. But it's also quite easy to quickly break that open and complicate it.

RF: I agree with what both Christine and Jon have said. Thinking about expanding students' definitions of what race entails means deep reflection about the ways in which I teach about racial slavery in the US. Students come to the classroom expecting narratives of sorrow, of trauma, and of the spectacular violence that Christine mentioned, and I think it's really important that we shift their understandings of the dynamics of systems of power and privilege: thinking too about the ways in which African Americans, both enslaved and free, had agency; focusing on Black protest struggles; and thinking more about the Black Atlantic. Slavery didn't just happen in the US or colonial America, it was the Americas, it was the Caribbean, and Europe got rich off the back of the slave trade and slavery. Thinking about the concept of race, a point Jon talked to as well, 'race' for many of my students just means Blackness, and African Americans in particular. At UEA we have experts in Indigenous and Latinx cultures, histories and literatures, and so it's

vital to disrupt and challenge those kinds of assumptions as soon as students enter the classroom.

XY: I think it's worth stating for the record that I only came to the UK academic context for this job, and so I also have the perspective of seeing what this looks like in the US and Canada. I was the first person of colour to be a permanent member of faculty in my department, and also the only one with expertise on race and comparative fields of racialisation. I realised that as an Americanist there could be a very obvious burden of the way that my expertise would actually lead to the assumption that everything race-related had to be in relation to America. This motivated me to think and research even more comparatively and transnationally; for instance, I have an article for the special issue of *Early American Literature* about teaching Phillis Wheatley in the former heart of empire.[1]

To speak more about the lack of recognition of how race operates beyond specifically Black Americanness, I feel like my own outsider status helps to model and signal ways of thinking about non-Black, non-American, racialisation, particularly in the form of the international student and the way that they are entering the classroom. Students, often not from the West, are finding themselves plunged into what seems to be a completely new racial context, where they're being racialised in ways that they're not accustomed to from wherever they come from, or in ways that are otherwise informed by a lot of different regimes, and so making my teaching comparative has been really important for me. I'd also acknowledge that in my department at least, change to existing modules and the development of new ones since I started in the 2018–2019 academic year is very much the result of student activism. I think this is analogous on a mini-level to something like the Third World Liberation Front strike that happened at San Francisco State University much earlier in the twentieth century.[2] I tend to bring this up when I discuss this as well, because I think it helps to make legible the institutional histories around thinking about race in the American classroom; the way it seems more 'naturalised' for them to think in that context actually comes out like a very deliberate collective action. And then putting that in relation to where we are in the UK, whenever I tell colleagues who are not in the UK that 'wow, academia is super white here' and they're always saying 'but London is so diverse': that ends where my institution begins. It's really useful in this context to have

students think about who's in the room, who is not in the room, and how we are all definitely implicated in the room.

The other thing I'd also particularly emphasise is that it's necessary to critique essentialism. To make race important as a topic, students have often been taught that race is a thing, a thing that's palpable, in an uncritical, essentialised, way. A lot of the more critical approaches to race that students are encountering are actually not within the classroom but in popular discourse. And so, I need to lay out methodologies of approaching race in ways that critique the easy morality, as well as the easy disavowal of racism, and also to ask more complicated questions as literary scholars. I always also have to say that 'race' isn't simply when there's a person of colour or someone with more melanin in a text. I ask students, of all the texts that you've studied so far, how is whiteness also a factor, for instance? Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* is always really useful as a point of departure to get them to think about this.[3] In the first year of our curriculum, you cannot only talk about race when it comes to Douglass and Morrison; race is also everywhere else. It is in Milton; it is in Shakespeare. I hope that I help to model a number of ways of thinking about it. Recently I've added Rey Chow's work as well, thinking about the problems of postcolonial mimesis, and I've also added a little bit of Stuart Hall to just also help to further disrupt thinking about the instrumentalisation and the modernisation of Blackness.[4]

CL: One thing to jump off what you were just saying, Xine, is that we have a long-standing second-year literary theory module at Hertfordshire that, for a long time, had just one week that was explicitly thinking about racialisation, which was like the 'postcolonial week', and even that was very of its moment and time. So, a couple of years ago, I introduced a week that was called 'reading race'. We used 'Recitatif', the Toni Morrison short story, as an example of how race is a construct, as something to be read, interpreted, understood, written, and found that the students started to think about whiteness also as racialisation. Students find that story, in which Morrison refuses to tell you who is what race, very uncomfortable to begin with, because they want to *know*, rather than accept that race is either not knowable or is always open for discussion and that signification is an endless process.

At my university the students are majority students of colour, but my department has majority white staff, so there is already interest

there for the students in terms of how race or ideas of race are circulating in those classrooms. I invited Jon to co-teach one of my MA classes and one of the students of colour said, 'I never noticed that all of my staff were white until right now.' Only at postgraduate level did he articulate that, so we had a conversation about it, and I've been trying to think more about how to embed discussions of whiteness in those early classes as part of a conversation about race. I have used some of Sara Ahmed's work before, but some of it is quite difficult for first years.[5]

JW: I remember that student and I was so surprised that it had not occurred to him that he'd only been taught by white people. When I came to King's I was really taken with how the college markets itself to students. The idea of studying in London, surrounded by culture, is actively used to recruit students. So, one thing I've found quite useful to talk with my students about is how we're all implicated in colonial legacies, and how those legacies still have very material impacts. Students will often be quite ready to critique museums and galleries about their lack of diverse representation, but they won't then think about how the university is trading on that kind of capital. That has been a useful way of getting students to engage critically without being defensive.

CL: I agree, Jon. When it comes to the American modules I teach, there is a sense sometimes of 'over-there-ness' in terms of racial dynamics whereby American stories are very different from UK stories. So, I've been trying to think more about how we approach that. It is about distance and perspective and orientation. But it is hard to balance my desire to bridge that gap, and discuss how this is a much more enmeshed story, with the need to teach the specific text, or close-reading skills!

XY: What's useful for me as a Canadian is that I often use my identity to help students understand that Britain is not the only country guilty of deflecting all of its problems of thinking about racism to America; Canada also does that a lot. This helps the British students, but also the international students, to understand what another former colony has done in terms of deflecting and disavowing racism.

Because of my expertise, I've also been the person to be parachuted into a lot of other teaching across the university. For example,

I teach one session on an MA in Gender, Society and Representation, on queer colour critique. It is important to bring in how white queer theory is in the UK; Black queer studies and Black trans studies have not travelled here at all. So, I think that's one way it's particularly important to intervene. A challenge in regard to teaching race is not having students thinking about it as a single modality, but assessing it alongside gender, alongside sexuality, etc. Students have encountered intersectionality as a generic term which has been denuded of its particular methodological history and conditions of emergence.[6] I find intersectionality a limited framework for thinking about the ways that these things are implicated, but it is a useful point of departure, at least for talking about how even more complicated it is. I've been trying to steer students towards terms like 'racialised gender', from C. Riley Snorton's work, that all gender is racialised, as opposed to thinking of them as specifically separate things.[7] This is something that students have been incredibly grateful for because I think that they're already encountering these more sophisticated senses of how these aren't just simply operating as separate categories. But often this hasn't yet made it into the pedagogy that they've encountered thus far.

There's also a generational conversation to be had about being conversant in race. Because of social media, younger generations are more conversant in the discourses of race in other countries, whereas I find that older generations in the UK are not in the same place as their equivalent generations and demographics are in the US or Canada. The average mainstream white liberal in the UK when I arrived was in such a different place than the average white mainstream liberal in the US and Canada – that was also incredibly jarring for me.

JW: Over the past few years, I've definitely seen that students are already familiar with complex terms like 'performativity' because they've encountered them on social media. But at the same time, their interest in racial justice is often quite simplistic. They're interested in whether there is diverse representation within our culture, which is obviously a valid question. *Bridgerton* is a useful text here because students often think it is great because it has so many people of colour in it.[8] I ask them, what does it mean when we're looking at a screen full of folks of colour, but we're using that as a way of avoiding talking about the impact and legacies of empire? There's a

scene in the first season where a Black character and a white character are on a date, and a lot of flirtation is around what they're drinking, which is fuelled by sugar. But we're not thinking about the sugar trade. Similarly with the Queen being a person of colour, and so racism is 'over'. It's interesting to see the students stretching their understanding of race beyond where they are already comfortable thinking about it.

Have the ways in which students encounter race in our classrooms changed over time?

RF: When I first started teaching about thirty years ago at the University of Warwick, it wasn't a diverse classroom at all, not just in terms of race but also in terms of other components of identity. There are also far more international students coming to the UK than there were when I started teaching, so the classroom is a much more diverse place.

CL: I started teaching in 2014, but at so many kinds of institutions that the narrative of those things hasn't been equal. When I started, I was working at London South Bank, Goldsmiths, UEA and Westminster. And then I was doing adult education classes. It was a very broad range of institutions, and the classrooms were very different. For example, at UEA I would maybe have one student of colour in that room, and then I'd go to London South Bank and there was one white person in the room. So, for me it is the institutional context and the disciplinary context, but there isn't a straight line through them. When I got to Hertfordshire that was a very different room as well. I have been lucky to experience so many different kinds of teaching settings, but at the same time it makes it harder to track different ways that students are engaging with these issues. So, my narrative is a bit muddier and stranger, but in a productive way. I always have to remind myself that the context of the classroom in a particular institution is shaping so much of what is happening in that classroom.

RF: I think you're absolutely right, Chris, that the institutional context is really vital. I have been at UEA for twenty years, where the student body has only a handful of students of colour, so it's a very different institutional setting to teaching in London or in Leeds or in

Manchester, where there is a much more diverse student body. But there is a potential to disrupt and challenge assumptions wherever your institutional base is.

CO: I just wanted to jump in here to say the very brief note of gratitude that we're talking about questions of institutions and institutionalisation, because of course, many of the discussions that we're having and the intellectual traditions that we're referring to come out of, as Xine said, these moments of an antagonistic relationship to an institution. In many ways, I've found it very productive to think with students about the position of the university as a concrete space in which these structures are replicated, and also the university's place as a location of accumulation of the kind that exacerbates racial inequality. The third-year course that I teach on about Blackness and environment is really getting students, especially in the final week of it, to ask questions about how the concrete composition of their daily life and encounters with environment point them towards histories of race and racialisation. That allows them to think more about specificity, but it also allows them to reflect on what they're participating in: what are their investments in these structures, what is my investment in these structures? Why am I here, and how can we have a more critical relationship to a university in which so much of what we are opposed to and want to undo is actually being reinforced? For instance, who gets access to the kind of education in which you get to have difficult conversations about race and think about the complexity of race? With the total attack on intellectual traditions that are comparative, multilingual, and that are all central to understanding what race is, I think it's really crucial that in those areas where we are still able to have those discussions that we highlight the extent to which that is under attack through the very institutions that we're part of. For instance, I work at an institution that benefits enormously from the demise of other institutions by accumulating more students and seeing students as consumers that are bringing in tuition fees. This is something that is important for us to discuss.

XY: Thank you so much, Christine, for bringing that up. Yes, it's definitely disconcerting to see the real-time dismantling of UK higher education in a much broader sense and to see the anxiety around admissions, and whether or not institutions will survive.

Something else I wanted to touch on is that we've all talked about how the understanding of race in the British classroom is overwhelmingly one of thinking only about Blackness in relation to America. Speaking as a non-Black person of colour, I find that my expertise as someone who works in Asian diasporic stuff and as an Asian diasporic person myself, I feel that particularly acutely. In my teaching, there are very few Black students. The students of colour that I'm going to see are primarily East Asian and South Asian students, for instance. There's also a whole conversation to be had about how all Western institutions, not just within the UK, are desperate for students from Asia. On the one hand, my presence does a type of work toward recruiting, but also, I think that there's been an institutional move to accommodate the specificity of Chinese students, because universities know that they're such an important market, but to do so in a politically denuded way, which is about treating them as consumers, as opposed to giving them the tools to understand how they're racialized in these spaces. The type of East Asian students who come to me do deeply care about these things, but often they've never encountered any other form of racialisation being taught to them critically other than Blackness. An interesting thing that I've encountered in the UK is an insistence that nothing exists for Asianness. For example, one time someone approached me as a potential PhD supervisor who had done all her degrees in the UK, and the way that she put it was that there is white feminism and there's Black feminism, and there's nothing else, and so she wanted to try to develop an Asian feminism based on white feminism! That's the dilemma; all students who are not racialised as either white or Black tend to face a sense that it's all or nothing. It also becomes a way of either further putting their lot alongside whiteness, or engaging with Blackness in a way that is not critical or comparative of how their own positionality can play a role here, because they haven't been given the tools to do that. I think some of the most important work I do has to do with helping to direct the political consciousness of non-Black students of colour, to be able to understand that more fully in their lives and the work that they are doing. Also to give them more citations, so that when they look at literature by non-Black peoples of colour, they can do so with more nuance and more criticality.

Can you give any examples of specific pedagogical practices, or things that readers could be doing differently in their classrooms?

CL: I think one quick example from me is thinking more about assessment type, and especially about writing or spoken forms where the student's own position is engaged more. I've avoided that for a very long time, but I'm now moving to assessment types where I'm asking students to foreground themselves in everything we're discussing. There is no neutral position on any topic that they're writing about or thinking about, and so I want to develop this further with students, whether that's tracking their own learning history, or their own engagement with the topic, or what texts they read normally, and using that as a springboard into the learning outcomes. I think this is one of the places where we can surface what we have been discussing: our implications in what we do, whether that's the material histories or institutions that we're part of, or even just the personal histories that we're bringing to texts. For example, I've been able to encourage students to think about position and subjectivity rather than 'bias', and that seems to be a useful way to open up better dialogues, whether about race or in broader conversations that we're having.

CO: Thank you for introducing this question of assessment, because assessment in the UK in particular is such a strange structure to have to deal with. There's so little room for manoeuvre. At King's there are still stipulations on how much students have to write at each level in terms of word count, so it's almost impossible to change assessments and to make space for the kind of nuanced and difficult discussions that we want to be having with students about race. But within that, I'm trying to imagine alternative spaces. I've really appreciated talking to my colleagues who work in different contexts where they have a bit more flexibility on what it means to assess. There's something to be said about the specific space that the university opens up. How often do students, or any people who would like to have time to think, actually have time to think? There is actually something remarkable and special about the fact that each week they have two or three hours in a room together in which they can just have space to think and discuss. What does it mean to really *use* that space and not to think of it as time on the clock or

time that needs to be used to prepare students for the actual thing that 'matters', which is their assessment? Actually, the work that matters is the work that they are able to do together in this room, a protected space for thinking and writing, and a great space to start to complicate questions around race. So, I wonder whether there's something to be said, for instance, about getting students to write in class. This is an idea that I've borrowed from my friend Anna: getting students to write in class more, and to get them to respond and not have to be polished in the same way as an essay is polished.[9]

JW: My most optimistic self sees academia and what it can be as really f****** amazing … having that space to engage critically with each other. But that protected space is shrinking so much. For all of my time in academia, whether that's as a student or as an educator, it's always been infused with inaccessibility; it's an exclusionary space. What's happening now is that because of the squeeze on a lot of the students I'm teaching, the seminar space really feels it, because a lot of the time they're not able to do the preparation, because they have a full-time job. And so, I've had to shift my teaching in terms of the kind of texts that we look at.

But I also wanted to go back to something that Chris was saying that I found really interesting: this idea about objectivity and subjectivity and bias. I showed my students a music video this week, and one of my students said, 'If I was just being myself, I would say this, but to be a "proper student", this is my response.' I had to explain that their response is a proper student response, because it's what they thought! And it was so much more critical because the student was invoking their lived experience. They were in their third year, and we've taught them that they have to engage in particular rhetoric and try to be objective. There's no such thing, and objectivity itself is hugely racialised: who gets to be 'objective' and 'neutral' and 'unmarked'.

In terms of pedagogical practice, this has only become easier as I've become more experienced, because I'm more comfortable admitting what I don't know. When I first started, I was so insecure about saying 'I don't know'. The students are really lured by the notion that they're paying all this money for an expert, and that we know everything and what we have to give them is the meaning of the text. And we have to unpack all of that: that we don't have all the answers. Like Christine was saying, these pockets of potential,

of joy and liberation that can exist, are so negatively impacted by how the university structures itself and markets itself.

RF: I agree particularly with what Christine and Jon have said about this tension between the privilege of a university education – the classroom space as a two-hour time to engage in discussion and debate and thinking – and the other side of that which is assessment. One way I've begun to challenge that slightly is developing alternative assessments, such as video essays and podcasts where students engage with each other about particular topics as part of their assessments.

Is there anything else anyone wants to add? How can we engage our students to think about race in a way that empowers them to make social change in the future?

CL: For me, it's trying to take American studies methodologies and approaches to a wider audience. I pitched this cross-institutional module on BLM and activism and equity, as a cross-disciplinary thing. There have been lots of people involved and staff and students study together, and it's going into its third year. There is still an appetite for it, and it's one of the spaces where I've seen interesting and nuanced thought, where students and staff are seeing each other in new ways, and power dynamics are slightly shifted, or at least tempered. There are units to study on healthcare, the law, sport, music and all these other things, and in each unit, everyone is asked to reflect on their position in relation to that subject matter and how they might be able to do things in their own life in relation to it. Getting people to itemise some of their individual steps of rethinking, challenging, reflecting as a practice and a praxis has been really exciting to see.

JW: One of the conversations I'm always interested in having with my students is getting them to think critically around how they're implicated in these systems: that it's not just stuff that is happening, but that they are connected to it. As King's students, what kinds of forms of control, domination and surveillance are they implicated in? King's was the first university campus I came to that had a securitised nature, but the students don't see that they have to

swipe in through these gates as a way of accessing the buildings. What does that tell them from the minute they step in? That this is a rarefied space that only certain people should be able to access. So that question of how we're implicated in structures, but you also have agency, and you have power. It also goes back to what Chris was saying: one of the things that I have deliberately done with the assessment in the modules that I convene is that I explicitly tell students that they have to include a reflection on their positionality, that it's important that they understand that the way we move through the world, the way we come to a text or a space, isn't neutral. Students often make a division between the classroom and the world outside, and I ask them why. Paying attention and being attentive to the expectations of a particular space is great, but that sense of how you can reflect on your positionality has been really useful. For the last couple of years I haven't had to teach students about the meaning of privilege, whereas I remember as an undergraduate having an entire lecture on Peggy McIntosh – things have moved on.[10] But while the students are still very good about thinking about the ways in which they lack privilege, they're really not very good at identifying the ways that they possess it. That makes sense, as it's harder to see the privilege we possess. But those two things – how are you implicated, and what's your position – have been useful ways of getting them to think about their agency, and hopefully they go on to make progressive social change. But that's beyond what I can see.

CO: I really like your emphasis on the idea that students feel a sense of agency and power and what their role is both in maintaining these structures, critiquing them and undoing them. I think all I'd like to say at the end of this is that many students, as we said at the beginning of this conversation, think that talking about race is about taking a moral or ethical stance against racism, and what we must do in order to undo these structures. But something that we get to do with our students is think about what it means to consider these structures as being made and created and maintained, and that work needs to go into maintaining them. So what would it mean to recognise that if they are materially constituted, then we can actually undo them or work towards finding instances in which the process of making and remaking these hierarchies is not quite working, or instances in which writers and

activists have thought about what it would mean to take advantage of these moments or temporary breaks in which something isn't quite operating as smoothly as it should? Sometimes literary engagement, close engagement with texts, allows us to have conversations about how we can make our way out of these structures. Something I have always found useful is to introduce C. L. R. James's meditation on the history of Black studies, and the invocation that this intellectual effort is invested in the 'complete reorganisation' of the 'outlook … of world civilisation'.[11] If we take that seriously, that also means that we are all responsible for maintaining these hierarchies, but that we also have the tools to unmake them and build something else. Even if that sounds a bit utopian, maybe that's a way to consider what it would mean to take that further beyond this into the world and into what students can do with that knowledge.

XY: I haven't said anything yet. Thanks to long COVID, my brain is becoming increasingly a noodle. I guess one thing that I could add to that is we need to encourage students to think about how whatever struggle they feel is the most relevant to them, is interconnected to all these other struggles. They can do this through thinking about race. Seeing that a particular struggle is not just something that is 'out there' or that they could come in and help with but is deeply tied to the anxieties and the aims of their lives, is a way to make it become real for them beyond the classroom.

RF: This has been such a great conversation. As a historian as well, sometimes my students see this as 'the past', so I work really hard to make it relevant to the present, to take contemporary examples and think about how we might dismantle those power dynamics, to empower students for the future.

Notes

1. Xine Yao, 'On Being Brought from Africa to America to London: Teaching Phillis Wheatley in the Former Heart of Empire', *Early American Literature* 57, no. 3 (2022): 843–49.
2. Karen Umemoto, '"On Strike!" San Francisco State College Strike, 1968–69: The Role of Asian American Students', *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989): 3–41.

3. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 1992).
4. Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Columbia University Press, 2002); Stuart Hall, 'What Is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', *Social Justice* 20, nos. 1/2 (1993): 104–14.
5. Sara Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–68.
6. Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', in *Gender and American Law: Feminist Legal Theories*, ed. Karen J. Maschke (Routledge, 1997).
7. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
8. *Bridgerton*, 2020–. Created by Chris Van Dusen. Produced by Shonda Rhimes. Netflix.
9. Anna Thomas at the University of Toronto, https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/english-drama/people/anna-thomas.
10. Peggy McIntosh, 'White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies', in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Temple University Press, 1997), 291–99.
11. C. L. R. James, 'The Black Scholar Interviews: C. L. R. James', *The Black Scholar* 2, no. 1 (1970): 43.

CHAPTER 9

CASE STUDY: The Personal Is Historical: Journalling About Race

Nicholas Grant

Every year, I try to explain to my students how and why I've ended up teaching a second-year module on the Black freedom struggle. In my first lecture, I outline how I first encountered African American history, as a white person who grew up in the UK, and why I decided to go on to study this topic to PhD level. I discuss how my identity informs my relationship to these histories, while making it clear that I do not profess any definitive knowledge of the issues we'll be discussing. I stress that I will never truly know exactly how racism affects people's lives. I do this to decentre myself in the classroom, to create a space where people feel empowered to speak, and to make it clear that how we study and engage with history is always deeply personal.[1]

While I think being open about the way in which privilege and structures of power shape the way in which we teach is useful, this kind of declaration has always felt inadequate. Such statements, on their own, are performative. A tokenistic acknowledgement of 'positionality' that can sometimes feel like a self-conscious attempt to justify my presence within a higher education system that is so painfully white.[2] White people can teach histories of race. They can do it well, with care and attention. But in order to do this, white educators should always feel a deep responsibility to the history they are teaching, while also working to continuously reassess their pedagogical practices with the aim of making the classroom a more open space, where students – regardless of their background – feel comfortable speaking, and where we actively acknowledge that we do not all experience the past in the same way.[3] The history of the Black freedom struggle, then, is not simply an object of study.

These histories are deeply entwined with people's individual identities and are always shaped by the racial politics of our contemporary moment. As Annette Joseph Gabriel notes, we need to centre 'The concrete needs of … students' so we can help them 'gain the linguistic and conceptual tools to better articulate their responses to their own diverse realities and experiences'.[4]

How can educators proactively respond to these dynamics when we teach? How can we foreground our innately personal engagement with the African American freedom struggle and broader histories of race in the classroom? As ever, bell hooks provides us with some important things to think about. hooks insists that the professor should be decentred in the learning process, while noting that educators need to make sure that 'everyone's presence is acknowledged' in the spaces where we teach.[5] Indeed, she argues that 'The classroom should be a space where we're all in power in different ways', adding that 'we professors should be empowered by our interactions with students'. To achieve this, hooks rejects notions of intellectual detachment and objectivity in favour of recognising the value of experience and emotion. As she notes, 'Critical pedagogies of liberation … necessarily embrace experience, confessions and testimony as relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any learning process.' Ultimately, hooks points out that we should not try to separate out the analytical and the experiential, but instead centre and learn from the diversity of experiences and identities that make up the classroom space.[6]

The radical pedagogical practices that hooks details directly speak to my own concerns about failing to build upon the ideas, concerns and principles that I outline in my first lecture. In response, I've tried to think about how to practically foreground the experiences of students in ways that might deepen classroom discussions throughout the semester, while providing a way for them to reflect personally on the significance of history that we are studying – if, that is, they feel comfortable engaging in this process.[7] I was inspired by the Historical Association's report on 'Teaching Emotive and Controversial History' in British schools, which insists that 'Emotional engagement is a feature of effective teaching of controversial issues', and argues that 'personal engagement is much more likely when the students are themselves encouraged through history teaching to have a sense of their own personal identity and their place in the world'.[8]

I developed a journalling exercise as an attempt to create an alternative space where students might feel safe and supported to individually respond to the racial politics and history we are studying. It has formed part of the assessment for this module for the last four years (worth 50 per cent of the final grade). Students are asked to submit a journal entry every other week. They are provided with a prompt to respond to, but it is made clear that if they feel comfortable doing so, they should feel able to foreground their own thoughts, feelings and experiences relating to specific issues that have been raised in seminars, lectures and the reading. In the assessment brief, I make it clear that 'I'm especially interested in you drawing out how and why the history we've been studying might speak to our present moment'. I also ask students to 'try to address why this history/these questions matter. Are they relevant now? How do you feel about this subject?' I don't set a hard word limit but suggest that each entry should be roughly 300 words, while making it clear I'm happy to read work that is longer. I reassert that there is no obligation to share aspects of their personal lives, thoughts and feelings, but that this is a space where it is possible to write in a more personal way without being marked down for not meeting some of the conventions associated with a standard essay. I point out that the criteria we mark by encourages 'originality and creativity', and that journalling can provide a useful space to critically reflect on the learning process as a whole, while also connecting key themes, ideas and topics that are central to the module.

The response has been varied: not wholly positive, but ultimately – I think – the exercise has been beneficial. The level of engagement from the majority of students has been excellent. Many students do this work and submit it on time – something which is most likely because the work counts towards their final grade. However, the depth and quality of engagement from many on the module has also been good. While some students do prefer to provide more dispassionate, 'academic' responses to the prompts, others have chosen to use their journals to express their own political views and frustrations, while sometimes sharing their own personal experiences relating to the history and politics of race. When students use their journals in this way it can open up a space for dialogue. I make a point of responding to their entries in the week they've been posted and try to ask follow-up questions. Occasionally, students respond

to these and we're then able to go into more detail about a specific issue they're thinking and writing about.

A good example of this was when an international student, studying in the UK for a semester, chose to reflect upon the differences of how histories of racism and resistance were taught in the UK in comparison to their home institution in the United States.[9] This became a repeated theme in their entries and, over the course of the semester, they made some incredibly astute points relating to the hostility of some white Americans towards grappling fully with the breadth and complexity of the long civil rights movement, while at the same time questioning why some British students seem more comfortable looking to the US, as opposed to the UK, when talking about racism. These exchanges helped me to better address issues relating to historical memory and memorialisation when it comes to the African American freedom struggle in the United States. It also served as a reminder of the need to show how racial histories travel and are reinterpreted in different national contexts. While I was careful not to single out this particular student in class, these exchanges provided a prompt for us to discuss why and how we study African American history from the UK, as well as the tendency of British people to 'offshore' discussions relating to racism.[10] Journals can therefore be a way that teachers can learn from and be led by students, while also doing the preparatory work to enable students to engage in meaningful discussions with one another and potentially make connections.

Another example centred around our discussion of Ashley Farmer's brilliant book *Remaking Black Power*.[11] The prompt for this week asked students to consider the gender politics of Black Power, and specifically Farmer's emphasis of the role of women in the Black Panther Party and their work constructing the figure of the 'Black Revolutionary Woman'. I thought that this would be a good way for students to think about how women challenged masculinist conceptions of Black Power, as well as their vital work in organising and leading the Panthers. However, journal entries authored by Black British women have consistently taken this topic in a direction I was not initially expecting. While the important work these women did is recognised, there has often been an overriding sense of frustration at the gendered expectations that were placed on these activists, as well as the amount of labour they were having to do within the movement. Journal entries have mentioned the unrealistic pressures

placed on Black women and pointed out the problems associated with stereotypes of the 'strong Black woman'. One year, two students wrote about how they grappled with this stereotype in their own day-to-day lives. I had assumed that the reading and discussion would result in a triumphant heralding of Black women's leadership in the Black Power movement. I was wrong. I had interpreted this history in a very different way than some of the students in my class. Ultimately, these differences in understanding and experience became a way of better integrating discussions of race and gender across the semester, while also prompting more nuanced discussion of how power is constructed along intersectional lines.

While I think the student journals have improved this module and have helped, to some extent, 'decentre' myself as a teacher in the classroom, there are still issues with this assignment. The majority of white students still show a reluctance to share their own political views or their own personal relationship to the specific topics that we've been studying. Again, this is fine as I know it's hard to be vulnerable in the classroom and that this exercise may be unfamiliar to many. However, it troubles me that white students can seem less willing to openly interrogate their own relationship to these histories or think through what reading and writing about Black activists and intellectuals might offer them in terms of how they see the world. I'm not wanting declarations of 'white guilt', or to encourage what Cheryl E. Matias refers to as a 'White Whiteness study … that is oftentimes too narcissistic because it indulges the White racial epiphany'.[12] However, I would like to see more reflection from white students on exactly how whiteness operates as a system of power (both in the past and in the present), as well as more active questioning of what might be required to resist and act against these oppressive structures.

Secondly, there are still clear power dynamics that continue to shape this exercise. Even though I'm careful to give qualifiers and make it clear that I really do want to hear from students about their experiences and how they navigate these topics, this is still work that is assessed and I am still seen as 'the teacher' in what has been an increasingly diverse but usually a majority white classroom space. Marking this type of work is not straightforward in this context, and I'm conscious of not pushing students to feel that their journals have to be overly personal in order to achieve a good mark. To counteract this, I flag to students that there are different

ways to write journal entries that adhere to the marking criteria's emphasis on 'critical analysis and/or originality and creativity' and a 'High level of self-reflection'. Finally, there is also the potential here for teachers to 'say the wrong thing' when responding to journal entries. Great care needs to be taken when it comes to tone, especially when a student is being vulnerable. Journal responses need to be well thought through and to strike a balance between being open and still maintaining appropriate boundaries and respecting a student's opinions, ideas and privacy.

It is imperative, especially when teaching histories of race, that we engage students on a personal level. Indeed, all history is personal. As Stuart Hall notes, 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.'[13] This case study has hopefully provided a practical example of how this might be done in a way that opens up conversations, centres the experience of the student throughout the semester, and allows for meaningful connections in the classroom space. It's far from perfect and has potential pitfalls. However, asking students to journal about the Black freedom struggle and race has helped partially complicate classroom hierarchies between 'teacher' and 'student' by emphasising the emotive and politically relevant aspects of this history. Over the last four years, the journals have challenged key myths associated with the civil rights movement, have consistently linked the past to the present in the context of the global movement of Black lives, and have opened up important additional dialogues concerning the flawed way in which we often engage with histories of race and resistance in the UK. They have also challenged my own preconceived ideas and misconceptions about aspects of this history, forcing me to engage with alternative interpretations and to rethink the way I teach particular subjects. It has been a way, to again quote the Historical Association, of 'making the strange familiar and the familiar strange' with the aim of personally connecting people to the history of the Black freedom struggle, while actively thinking through its legacies.[14]

Notes

1. See Kate Dossett et al., 'Teaching African American Studies in the US and the UK', *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 2 (May 2018): 534–35; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum, 1970), 59.

2. 'Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2022/23 | HESA', https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/16-01-2024/sb267-higher-education-staff-statistics#notes; William Ackah, 'There Are Fewer than 100 Black Professors in Britain – Why?', *The Conversation*, 10 March 2014, http://theconversation.com/there-are-fewer-than-100-black-professors-in-britain-why-24088.
3. Amanda Behm et al., 'Decolonizing History: Enquiry and Practice', *History Workshop Journal* 89 (1 April 2020): 169–91; Eleanor Newbigin, 'What Does It Mean to Decolonise History Teaching and Research at SOAS?', *History Workshop*, 11 February 2019, https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/2019/02/28/history-workshop-what-does-it-mean-to-decolonise-history-teaching-and-research-at-soas/.
4. Dossett et al., 'Teaching African American Studies in the US and the UK', 359.
5. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994), 8.
6. Ibid. 88–89.
7. Rich Heyman, 'Why Advocacy Isn't Enough: Realising the Radical Possibilities of the Classroom', *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* 10, no. 2 (April 2001): 174–78.
8. The Historical Association, *T.E.A.C.H.: Teaching Emotive and Controversial History, 3–19* (London: The Historical Association, 2007), 4, https://www.history.org.uk/resource/780.
9. Megan Hunt et al., '"He Was Shot Because America Will Not Give Up on Racism": Martin Luther King Jr. and the African American Civil Rights Movement in British Schools', *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 387–417.
10. Ibid. 387–88. See also Gary Younge, 'Lest We Remember: How Britain Buried its History of Slavery', *The Guardian*, 18 April 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2023/mar/29/lest-we-remember-how-britain-buried-its-history-of-slavery.
11. Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), chapter 2.
12. Cheryl E. Matias, 'On Whiteness Studies: Hope and Futurity: Introduction', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 35, no. 7 (August 2022): 697–98.
13. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 225.
14. The Historical Association, *T.E.A.C.H.*, 19.

CHAPTER 10

DIALOGUE: Multimedia-Informed Pedagogies and Academic Precarity in American Studies

Ellie Armon Azoulay, Emily Brady and Olivia Wright

This dialogue came about as a result of the authors' shared experiences of studying and working within the UK American studies community. We all received PhDs in American Studies during the COVID-19 pandemic and have since taught in various institutions and departments across the UK. Through our engagement with the various American studies and American history organisations in Britain, we have co-organised events and workshops that combine our positions as early career researchers with our commitment to the themes and methodologies that underpin our own research. Our ways of working emphasise interdisciplinarity and histories of social justice and activism broadly defined. In this dialogue, we reflect on our shared experiences of teaching with a range of media – print culture, photography and music – in higher education settings, and how our backgrounds in American studies have informed our practice when teaching in a history classroom.

Emily Brady (EB): At the time of writing, I am a Junior Research Fellow at the Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford, following a year as a Teaching Fellow in American History at the University of Leeds (2021–2022). Having been precariously employed, I am used to adapting my teaching to institutional requirements and courses; from the tutorial setting at Oxford to the seminar rooms at Leeds. The interdisciplinary nature of American studies has allowed me to develop a pedagogical style informed by fluidity between history, art history, gender studies, Black studies

and American studies itself, but a core component of my teaching involves the employment of visual culture. As a photographic historian, getting students to treat the images we use on our lecture slides as three-dimensional objects to be analysed, rather than flat visual aids, remains at the heart of my pedagogy across institutions.

Ellie Armon Azoulay (EAA): I'm a cultural historian, DJ and curator, and have been able to call on this diverse background and interdisciplinary approach from the beginning of my teaching journey as a PhD student at the Centre for American Studies and the School of English at the University of Kent. The critically engaged, interdisciplinary landscape of American studies and the open-minded and trusting qualities of the Centre and its staff were crucial to my ability to experiment with visual and sonic source material and apply the various frameworks and schools of thought that shaped my research – from Black studies, visual and culture studies, theories of the archive and musicology and sound studies – in my teaching. Taking up a two-year lectureship at the History Department at Newcastle University was a chance to put that trust into practice in a different setting, making a case for the urgency of searching for and analysing a variety of source materials and the possibilities and responsibilities that come with it. I was lucky enough to shape existing modules and lectures and offer new research-led teaching using photography, paintings, films and music, even when working precariously as an hourly paid associate lecturer.

Olivia Wright (OW): Since graduating with a PhD in American Studies, I have worked as a Teaching Fellow in various history departments before joining Leeds Beckett as a Lecturer in History in 2023. Moving between institutions whilst on precarious contracts has meant that my teaching has, by necessity, been malleable and adaptable. Yet teaching various modules (both inherited and of my own design) within different history departments has also provided an opportunity to engage with 'multimedia' in the classroom in differing ways. Over the course of five years, I have managed to embed women's prison periodicals (the subject of my own research), as well as feminist periodicals more broadly, into modules ranging from specific US history modules (e.g. 'Cultures of Confinement' or 'Prison Nation') to conceptually broader and skills-based modules (e.g. 'Approaching Race and Resistance' and 'Making History').

Regardless of the specific module or historic context, incorporating print culture allows me to draw on my own research knowledge and skills to shape not only what I teach, but also how I teach.

EAA: My research, in broad strokes, is about the role of music in community-building practices and cultures of resistance. I am therefore committed to thinking critically about the archive as a site where hegemonic relationships and power are being reproduced and maintained, and of archiving as a radical practice carried out by marginalised and minoritised groups. This entanglement of power, resistance and communities is a core feature in American studies and American history. Teaching modules such as the 'Civil Rights Movement in the US', 'Violence in the American South' and a team-taught module on the year 1968 enabled me to use music and photography in class as a point of departure to explore these issues.

EB: My research focuses on Black women photographers in the civil rights movement, but I employ visual sources copiously throughout my teaching. The 'multi' component of 'multimedia' is significant, too: I frequently utilise music and video in educational materials. This is inspired by my own undergraduate experience of modules such as 'Pop Cultures and Countercultures' at the University of Nottingham, which would always start with music related to the subject as students filed in. It made me realise that consideration of multimedia in all its facets not only produces reflexive learning materials but establishes a dynamic learning environment as well.

When I think about my pedagogy, 'multimedia' often takes a back seat to 'visual culture'. I often reflect on how photographers and artists of the time attempted to record and preserve historical moments in perpetuity. Whilst my own focus is on photography, visual sources such as political cartoons, fine art and folk art all act as a kind of historical testimony. In recognising visual culture for what it is – a valuable primary source that is not a neutral object, but something that can be analysed and engaged with – students are given the skills to apply such a framework to other historical materials as well.

OW: Like Emily, I rarely use the terms 'multimedia' or 'media' in my teaching. I find the latter evokes ideas of '*the* media' – mass

media conglomerates, or perhaps social media – in ways that are not entirely helpful. Instead, I tend to use 'print culture', which can refer to all manner of printed materials: books, posters, magazines, pamphlets, graphic novels, newspapers, flyers and other ephemera. This term raises, I think, pertinent discussions around technology; communication; social and cultural contexts; authorship and publishing; the paratextual and the digital. Within certain modules, like 'Cultures of Confinement', where we examine print, podcasts, film, photography and art, I refer more broadly to 'culture'. In both instances, my use of these materials is explicit and intentional, as they often form a core component of the modules' concept and design. In 'Cultures of Confinement', for instance, we explore how cultural tools and artistic expression can be, and have been, used as a form of resistance that questions the limitations and possibilities of American freedom.

Given that we are all describing teaching in history departments, what can attention to media sources provide that other source material cannot?

EAA: In my undergraduate model 'Black Radical Archives of the US: Sound and Image', I invited my students to think more critically and creatively about one of the most fundamental aspects of the history discipline – the archive. Fundamental questions therefore included:

- What constitutes an archive?
- How have different communities and individuals used the archive?
- Who forms archives and who gets access to them? Who is excluded?

As Ashley Farmer and Tina Campt remind us, these questions and considerations are even more crucial when researching and writing about African American history and other histories of underrepresented and minoritised groups whose lives have been and still are shaped by oppressive systems and structures.[1] Framing this exploration of archives and archival practices around sound and image encourages students to pay attention to how these sources can be centralised in historical research and generate new knowledge.

EB: As a cultural historian specialising in photography, I believe that incorporating image analysis into the classroom can empower students to articulate original interpretations, develop critical analysis skills, and consider the merit of interdisciplinary approaches. Photographs are not neutral visual aids that stand apart from the contents of our teaching – they are an essential articulation of it.

From the visual aids we employ in lectures, to the images we use to illustrate our syllabi, the images that we choose to represent history to students have a deeper significance. For instance, an image of Martin Luther King Jr. speaking at the March on Washington (1963) undoubtedly presents students with an important moment in American history. But interrogating who took that image and for what purpose – with attention to the male-centric canon of civil rights photography which obscures the work of women, both as activists and as documenters – helps empower students to critically engage with visual media in an increasingly image-driven age.[2]

OW: What I think Ellie and Emily highlight is the power of different media sources' ability to destabilise dominant historical narratives and canonical texts. Feminist periodicals (particularly those established during the 1960s and '70s Women in Print movement) act as an alternative to mainstream media, and challenge the patriarchal, male-dominated spaces of publishing houses and newsrooms. Instead, they evidence the powerful, women-led, grassroot networks and communities that defined the era. They act, as Agatha Beins describes, 'as maps of the women's liberation movement' – as ideological atlases providing a point of access for women at the time, and as guides for us as researchers to trace the moments and movements that sparked change.[3]

Examining periodicals (or music or photography) also encourages interdisciplinarity by default. Given my background in American studies (or perhaps it is a legacy of job insecurity), I don't always see myself as a 'historian'. While I appreciate that academic disciplines are important, I prefer to sit somewhere in between them and draw upon methods derived from history, literary criticism, gender-, race-, area- and cultural studies, philosophy, sociology and geography. I find periodicals particularly useful at blending these methods and approaches within a history classroom and teaching students interdisciplinary critical analysing skills. This is why I often use women's prison periodicals/feminist periodicals in

theory- and skills-based modules. As rich visual and cultural texts, periodicals teach students to read between the lines. If we study the processes of production, composition, paratext, readership and context, feminist periodicals can animate historical questions of power and protest and invite us to interrogate the innovative, collaborative and sometimes radical practices of various women writers, editors and publishers, and implement their methods and ideas in the classroom.[4]

Is there something unique about teaching these topics and methodologies in the UK, as opposed to elsewhere? Do you or your students often reflect on positionality?

EB: In the institutions that I have taught in, the student body is mostly white and British. While students are keen to learn about Black and African American history, they often convey a sense of separation – that the United States is an exceptional nation with a particular history of racial injustice. For such students, memory studies can be a rewarding framework. It allows students to think about how historical narratives are created, cultivated and globalised. Considering prosthetic memory – or how mass media affects collective memory – allows students to confront their own positionality, including any racial, gender and geographic biases, through a lens of pop culture and media.[5]

In a seminar environment, inviting students to Roland Barthes's idea of the 'studium' and the 'punctum' can be a powerful teaching device.[6] If a 'studium' is a general reading of an image, what happens when we invite students to contemplate their 'punctum', and cultivate space for the discussion of their honest, emotional reaction? Such an approach can empower students to assert their own critical analysis based on individual responses. For instance, an oft-circulated image of the civil rights movement is the image of Walter Gadsden being attacked by a dog and a police officer during the Birmingham campaign in 1963. If I were asked to apply a 'studium' reading for this image, I might comment on pacifism and nonviolence and the role of the press. However, if asked to think about a 'punctum', the Coca-Cola sign in the background of the image evokes in me a sense of nostalgia for childhood, causing the relative contemporary nature of this historic episode to resonate more emotively with me. However, such an approach requires nuance – Barthes himself

has been criticised for his attitudes to questions of race.[7] I am arguably centring my own white, British upbringing in the 1990s into a discussion of race in the 1960s – a point which must be thoroughly reckoned with. Inviting students to deconstruct such a choice helps to maintain accountability, but can also display vulnerability and a desire to subvert classroom hierarchies.

EAA: As Emily noted, the average student body in UK history and/or American studies departments is predominantly white British, which is a problem the disciplines need to unpack. This fact, though, provides the opportunity to manifest the importance of positionality and intersectionality, and to motivate our students to identify and confront historical and historiographical biases, oppression, marginalisation and exploitation, including when such forces shape the discipline, our institutions and our lives. For example, some of my students have explored and challenged histories of whiteness, while others have explored working-class, gender and disabilities issues as part of their own background and interests.

OW: My experience largely echoes Emily and Ellie's descriptions of the student bodies they have taught. Students are predominantly white and British and have a broad understanding of US history from studying the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and the Cold War at school. Across the board, I have found that questions of race, gender, power, inequality and resistance are consistently well received by all cohorts of students and, as both Emily and Ellie highlight, encourage reflections on current events and our own lived experiences.

I think print culture is a useful tool for thinking about positionality as it highlights our complex role as readers. We might read a periodical from cover to cover, yet as a contemporary audience of students and scholars, our interpretations and understandings of the text will be informed by our own experiences and ideas. Periodicals invite us to therefore think about the many voices and influences that have informed a text. As Sean Latham and Robert Scholes highlight, periodicals are 'dialogic' enterprises, and it is through this dialogue – between editor and publisher, reader and author – that we can understand the processes of production and acknowledge the various interlocutors who have informed a text, including ourselves.[8] In doing so, we might consider whose voices

are absent, what role editing and censorship play, and how we may (consciously or otherwise) replicate these processes in our work.

One challenge that I have found when teaching histories of print culture, however, is that few students regularly engage with magazines, zines or newspapers themselves. Understanding the significance of print media in a world where digital media rules is therefore sometimes challenging. I have found that focusing on certain aspects of a publication (editorials, letters pages) and focusing on the processes of print production helps students to understand how print culture has played a pivotal role in shaping (and continuing to shape) the United States and the world. Crucially, women's periodicals demonstrate the value of the written word and the importance of art, writing and language in understanding and challenging the world around us.

On the subject of challenges, what should someone who is keen to foreground more media in their classrooms be aware of?

EB: This speaks to one of the tensions of being both a historian and an American studies scholar. As American studies departments continue to decline in the UK, the desire for interdisciplinary historians is being (somewhat) absorbed into history departments. As such, there is core historical teaching to be delivered, alongside innovative methodologies. To deconstruct the multimedia of the civil rights movement, for instance, students must first know what the civil rights movement *is*. In my own experience, I also found that history students at the University of Oxford felt under considerable pressure to perform well in the centralised final exam, which covered core concepts from the course. Some may have been less motivated to engage with concepts that stepped outside of this core framework, such as visual media or memory. As such, integrating such work alongside core teaching – using multimedia supplementally but reflexively – remains essential.

EAA: I think source methodologies should be presented as part of the introduction of new topics rather than as an aftermath or as a specialist approach. Visual or sonic materials can serve as a window into such new topics and explorations, as well as case studies into historiographical debates. But as Emily says, it must be implemented

and enabled on a departmental level through module delivery and assessments too. For example, when tasked with delivering three lectures and a supporting seminar to 'Violence in the American South', covering the civil rights movement until today, I realised that I could only cover so much, and that a thematic approach would allow a narrower focus. It was a prime opportunity to use visual sources and invite students to think about the role of photography in the history of racialised violence, from lynching photography to the reclamation of the image as a tool of resistance. This concluded with a theoretical discussion about ethical questions around photography, including issues relating to production, research and display.

OW: On a practical basis, we need to think about how technology plays a really important role in working with print culture, as does accessibility. Visiting archives and physically handling periodicals is the ideal scenario. However, as the majority of these resources are housed in institutions in the United States, this is simply not possible for UK-based teachers and students. The next best thing is digitised resources; however, even this option has its limitations. Primarily, these resources often exist behind a paywall and paying for institutional access can become exorbitantly expensive, and few universities have the budget to subscribe to numerous databases. Thankfully, in recent years, digitisation has become more egalitarian with platforms like JSTOR's Reveal Digital providing incredible access to prison newspapers, Black periodicals and many other forms of alternative or 'underground' print.[9]

There is also the impact of consuming these materials digitally vs physically, as aspects of the physical appearance of the publication get lost when viewed through a computer screen. However, I would argue that this offers the potential for new conversations about digital history: how do we digitise texts? How much data and information can we gather to make the digitised text more useful? What information gets lost? What gets digitised and who chooses? These are all important considerations for students who work primarily with digitised primary and secondary sources, and using digitised periodicals, newsletters, zines and pamphlets provides a great springboard to do so.

EB: I would echo the point about technology and access – image rights in the United States and United Kingdom are strictly controlled,

making their reproduction challenging. Whilst many images are available through online resources, exhibitions and websites, there are archives outside of the digitised space that remain inaccessible to students. Photographs and photobooks can be tactile objects infused with meaning – engaging within a purely two-dimensional framework can be limiting.

As we bring this conversation to a close, please introduce readers to a secondary text, primary source or teaching method that your students respond particularly well to.

OW: One primary source that I particularly enjoy discussing with students is *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery*. The sixty-page periodical was published in response to a protest that took place at the North Carolina Correctional Centre for Women (NCCCW) on Sunday, 15 June 1975. The spontaneous three-day rebellion and the publication that followed are great examples of incarcerated women's activism in the 1970s. From the rich and varied content (including accounts of the protest, open letters, illustrations, poems and a four-page list of demands), students understand how incarcerated women theorised the prison as a physical manifestation of the racist, capitalist and patriarchal state, and how they used art, writing and protest to resist.

EAA: I've had the most success when I ask students to identify the sources that resonate with them, rather than ones I choose. Whether I teach a thematic or research skills module, I ask my students ahead of our first meeting to do two things: (a) to choose and bring ONE image/object/song/document related to the topic that can serve as a point of departure or shed light on their interests or existing knowledge of the topic, and to be prepared to present it briefly to the class; and (b) to choose one secondary text that will accompany it, whether by providing historical context or by serving as a theoretical framework to read/analyse the first item.

This approach was a weekly task in my module 'Black Radical Archives', where students were invited to choose an image or sound from the archive under discussion that week. By prioritising visual and sonic materials and expressions, students had to develop their forms of engagement and articulation, thinking about the role of

storytelling and animation, or juxtaposition and display. From week to week, students experimented with cropping and pasting and reflecting on the outcome of such interventions, forms of curation, and deep reading/analysing of images and sounds from these archival projects, both alone and as a collective.

EB: I agree with Ellie that students offer the most original analysis when motivated to select their own sources. A similar technique I employ is to bring in exhibition guides and/or photographic books of civil rights photography. I allow time for students to handle the books, explore them at their own pace, and critically respond to them as historical objects in their own right. Students reflect on which images have been selected, how they have been presented, and whose perspective(s) they emphasise. As such, students develop tactile critical skills and are challenged on any previous notions that such collections are neutral. Such an activity contributes to a kind of three-dimensionalising of photographs – understanding them as material objects reproduced in specific print contexts.

Notes

1. Ashley Farmer, 'Archiving While Black', *Black Perspectives*, 18 June 2018, https://www.aaihs.org/archiving-while-black/; Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017), 3.
2. See Emily Brady, '"I Take the Pictures as I See Them": Doris Derby as Womanist, Activist and Photographer in the Civil Rights Movement', *Journal of American Studies* 56, no. 4 (2022): 565–88.
3. Agatha Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity* (University of Georgia Press, 2017), 43.
4. Paratext refers to the extraneous materials that surround and inform a text: a preface, cover, blurb, adverts, forewords, afterwords, title and acknowledgements. This 'liminal' space acts as part of the interrelation and dialogue between text, author, editor and reader, and can complicate or further illuminate a text's reading. See Gerard Genette, Richard Macksey and Jane E. Lewin, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
5. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 9.
6. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Vintage, 2000; first pub. 1980).

7. Lydie Moudileno, 'Barthes's Black Soldier: The Making of a Mythological Celebrity', *Yearbook of Comparative Literature* (2019): 6257–72.
8. Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, 'The Rise of Periodical Studies', *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 121, no. 2 (2006): 528.
9. Reveal Digital, *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/site/reveal-digital/.

CHAPTER 11

CASE STUDY: Students as Co-Creators: Recovering Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature

Hilary Emmett and Thomas Ruys Smith

Like all good children's stories, we should start at the very beginning: for all that this pedagogical experiment took shape in relation to a variety of disciplinary and institutional pressures and opportunities (some unique, some less so), its initial impetus was a simple one. We wanted to launch a long-discussed, interdisciplinary final-year module framed around nineteenth-century American children's literature. While that might sound like a relatively straightforward concept, institutional logistics meant that we needed to think carefully about how to position this module within the wider teaching landscape. We were acutely aware that student enthusiasm for selecting modules focusing on pre-twentieth-century America was low and that many nineteenth-century American studies modules had fallen out of rotation as a result. How to avoid that fate here? We also sought to respond to institutional imperatives around embedding employability across courses in a way that would not simply be a box-ticking exercise but be meaningful and engaging for our students. Where Jo March would undoubtedly have some useful advice on the postbellum publishing industry, and Tom Sawyer might try and tell you how to get rich quick, it was not immediately clear how nineteenth-century children's literature could speak to that agenda.

Handily, it was at this moment that a mysterious benefactor entered the narrative: the Managing Director of the UEA Publishing Project (UPP), Nathan Hamilton, was looking to collaborate on practice-based learning projects.[1] And so, in April 2020, in the midst of the first pandemic lockdown, we made our pitch: while

we explored the history of American writing for young readers, we would simultaneously produce a collaborative scholarly edition of a classic piece of children's literature to be published by the UPP. Even if we couldn't meet face to face, students would take something tangible away from the module: a material object that they would be able to hold in their hands at the end of our time together. The UPP is committed to providing practical experience in the creative industries, recognising not only that these fields are notoriously difficult to break into without existing connections or the funds to pay for self-funded internships, but that access to these industries is even more prohibitive for those outside of London and in regions like East Anglia. Our module would provide a diverse range of regional students with key industry experiences and contact with a wide range of industry professionals.

At all points, student input and involvement would be prioritised. Their assessment task would be to co-write an introduction to the text in groups, giving the book a fresh, interdisciplinary critical framing that would equip contemporary readers with a sense of its rich history and its potential meaning in the twenty-first century. But just as importantly, students would work with a designer to produce the book's final look – from the cover to its internal layout and font choices – via a masterclass in the art of book design. Planning this at a time of pandemic dislocation, we hoped that this hands-on experience would not only drive student engagement but foster a communal sense of purpose between us and our students.

The final piece of the puzzle was the question of which text to choose. We settled on Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did*, first published in 1872. The book was about to celebrate its 150th anniversary, and while it still had some name recognition amongst readers it was hardly as famous as contemporaries like *Little Women* or *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Jacqueline Wilson's 2015 retelling of the story, *Katy*, and its subsequent BBC adaptation had helped to keep the book in the popular consciousness, but it was not a text that had been republished in a critical edition with a scholarly introduction and a contextual framework for modern readers. This book would therefore be breaking new ground in scholarly terms but, just as vitally, it was a text that had plenty to say to a modern audience. Katy's experiences of being trapped in her room by illness and disability for a number of years was an apposite text for our locked-down times.

Happily, students embraced the critical and creative possibilities that both this project and this text offered them, but we, as educators, would need to be equally as adaptable and open-minded as our students – and in ways we hadn't predicted. The most straightforward element was the collaborative introduction. After early discussions we decided collectively that the interdisciplinary introduction would cover Coolidge's biography and career, the context of the novel's creation, its key themes, its reception history and its potential resonances in the contemporary moment. Students indicated which aspect of the introduction they would be most interested in contributing to and we sorted them into groups accordingly. We met with each group to discuss their plans in the week before the Easter break. Formative drafts were due immediately after the Easter break to maximise the amount of time students had to work on their sections, while leaving plenty of time before the end-of-semester assessment period for editing and revision. To model the scholarly publishing process, we asked an external colleague to serve as a peer reviewer who would also provide feedback on their drafts; this also provided the most crucial aspect of the process – a hard deadline for formative work. This scaffolding has thus far proved highly effective in producing a full working draft of the introduction by the first week following the Easter break. Our second readers were American studies colleagues chosen for their expertise in the subject matter of the text but also for their pedagogical commitment to the principles at the heart of this project. This project relied on their goodwill and the hallmark generosity of American studies scholars in taking the time to read and comment upon c. 10,000 words produced by students that were not their own.

With a working draft of the introduction in hand, we turned our attention to the design process. After students had been introduced to the text through standard American studies pedagogy – discussion of assigned critical readings, exploration of historical context, close reading of key passages and identification of salient themes – they each created a mood board of images that captured the themes and the aesthetic of the text. These were submitted to the designer in advance of their session where initial ideas for a cover, colophon image and any illustrations were discussed. It was during the design process that we as editors had our own masterclass in the kind of 'radical collegiality' that destabilises classroom hierarchies and democratises classrooms.[2] One key issue on which we relinquished

the reins was the inclusion of illustrations in our edition. As editors with antiquarian sensibilities, we had intended to use the illustrations from the first edition of the novel in our version. Our students, however, had a strong desire not only to make this a visually unique edition but to disrupt the cosy narrative of domesticity imparted by the nineteenth-century illustrations. This resistance pushed us all to think about the role of image and illustration in a critical edition of a children's novel: should they work with or against the grain of the text? In *Katy*'s case, students rejected the implication that the imaginative and energetic Katy should be grateful for her painful and life-changing back injury and learn to see it as a corrective to her impulsive ways. Moreover, as they wrote in their introduction, 'the reality of being in enclosed quarters, even with loved ones, is not always the key to the spiritual awakening Coolidge presents in this book; the home can quickly become an emotionally and physically volatile space.'[3] While the introduction worked through this aspect of the text discursively by unpacking its exploration of the pain of coming of age as a young woman in nineteenth-century America, with our designer's guidance the book itself materialises this critical work through its use of a series of evocative, antique 'found' photographs peppered through the text. These both chimed with our students' insistence on the book's morbidity and sentimental masochism and provided contemporary readers with a new sense of Katy's world. It also enhanced the interdisciplinarity of our discussions, bringing questions of visual culture, technology and design to the centre of the project. Co-creation is thus a 'threshold concept' for staff arguably even more so than students in the sense that this has been both 'troublesome' and 'transformative' for our pedagogy.[4]

The most surprising and, ultimately, most rewarding aspect of our design discussions coalesced around the issue of accessibility. Drawing on their own experiences and leading on from discussion around the role of disability in this text, students were passionate that the volume needed to be accessible to readers with visual impairments or dyslexia without sacrificing aesthetics. Our designer worked with us to source a typeface that was specifically designed by the Braille Institute for its readability; she also experimented with a wealth of page layouts to work out the most accessible and attractive combination of font and paper size. One student paid testament to her experience of the module in relation to this issue:

> I have a visual impairment which meant that I was able to access a particular understanding of this book and to experience the process of publishing *What Katy Did* from the perspective of a partially sighted reader. To be given the opportunity to share the difficulties I face when reading was really important to me, but also for the project as a whole. For the publication of a story which is fundamentally about disability to value the input of disabled students really sets this edition up to consciously and decisively bring this novel into the twenty-first century. I feel honoured to have been able to contribute to that.[5]

All future books in this series have followed that key design choice. By offering students the opportunity to influence the materiality of the book – not simply offer their critical reading of the text – our module has become in this respect an emancipatory endeavour of genuine co-creation. To put this in bell hooks's well-known terms of 'engaged pedagogy', it was our students that offered us the object lesson in 'mutual engagement … that allows us to move together with and beyond the classroom'.[6] Indeed, intellectual life beyond the classroom lies at the heart of what Karen Halttunen called the 'groundwork' of American studies: its twinned commitments to interdisciplinarity and public engagement.[7]

Even as this project has been rewarding, our student-staff partnership has been demanding, destabilising and time-consuming as each further iteration of the module has provided different challenges.[8] Each year we begin anew: what text will allow us to illuminate American children's literary history without retreading the same paths that we have already broken? We have answered that question in a variety of ways. In our second year, republishing Margaret Sidney's *Five Little Peppers* (1881) enabled us to push our students to think about the resonances between that book's evocation of poverty and wealth in the Gilded Age and the contemporary disparities of the twenty-first century. In our third year, we took a different tack, putting together a collection of Lydia Maria Child's writing for children. This anthology project took us back to the roots of American children's literature and resulted in a very different volume from the two that preceded it, more clearly directed towards a scholarly audience. In 2024, we excavated the groundbreaking American fairy stories of Frank Stockton, allowing our students to meditate more widely on the fairy tale as a fundamental

building block of children's culture in this distinctively American expression.

Inevitably, each year we have also had to find new answers to questions of finance. Publishing books costs money. Alongside the support of the UPP, we have also sought money from our institution to develop the experiential learning aspects of the module. One-off events, such as a masterclass with a publicist in 2022, have enabled us to develop resources – how to write a press release, for example – to be used in each new iteration of the module. To cut printing costs, we moved to a print-on-demand model, which will make the project more sustainable long-term. On a fundamental level, however, the module has achieved a number of successes, winning internal and external awards for both its pedagogy and its research elements. Students also clearly recognise the value of the experiential aspects of this work, and this is evidenced in the short reflective essays they submit as part of the final assessment for the module. These reflections complete the knowledge-activity-reflection cycle of learning described by David Kolb and encourage students to narrativise their experience for future endeavours, whether this is postgraduate study or employment.[9] To quote one student from our most recent group, echoed by others: 'The professional aspect to this module was something I appreciated, as I found it gave me a glimpse into the industry of publishing and editing that I have not experienced in many other courses during my degree. Getting to be a part of the book design process, having real deadlines to meet and the chance to talk with external viewers and editors felt very affirming.'

Empowered by those successes, we continue to innovate and with ever larger cohorts. With more students come new challenges: how do we scale this task so that each student can still see their fingerprints on the finished book? Our plan is to add a new range of teaching resources to the books, in collaboration with the School of Education at UEA, thereby adding in some pedagogical experience for students who might be interested in a career in education. Children's Corner Critical Editions, as they are now known, will thus continue to grow as a definitive resource for readers and educators alike. Still attempting to channel the spirit of nineteenth-century figures both fictional – Jo March's ambition and Tom Sawyer's resourcefulness – and actual – the commitments to access and inclusion demonstrated by writers such as Lydia Maria Child, Sarah Mapps Douglass and Harriet Jacobs – this American studies

project continues to thrive on interdisciplinarity, creativity, collaboration and a willingness to reimagine the past for new generations of readers.

Notes

1. This project would not run without the generous support of the UPP and the unpaid labour of our second readers – Michelle Coghlan, Stephanie Palmer, Melissa Gniadek and Erin Forbes – to whom heartfelt thanks are due. We are grateful too to the British Association for American Studies for the 2024 Teaching Development Award to support the next extension of this project.
2. Michael Fielding, 'Radical Collegiality: Affirming Teaching as an Inclusive Professional Practice', *Australian Educational Research* 26 (1999): 1–34.
3. Hilary Emmett and Thomas Ruys Smith, 'Introduction' to Susan Coolidge, *What Katy Did* [1872] (UEA Publishing Project, 2021), 30.
4. Jan H. F. Meyer and Ray Land, 'Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge (2): Epistemological Considerations and a Conceptual Framework for Teaching and Learning', *Higher Education* 49, no. 3 (2005): 373–88.
5. '*What Katy Did* Launch Event', 30 November 2021, available at: https://www.youtube.com/live/SEoDXtNS3tM?t=2108s.
6. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 2004), 205.
7. Karen Halttunen, 'Groundwork: American Studies in Place: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 4, 2005', *American Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2006): 13.
8. Catherine Bovill, Alison Cook-Sather and Peter Felten, 'Students as Co-Creators of Teaching Approaches, Course Design, and Curricula: Implications for Academic Developers', *International Journal for Academic Development* 16, no. 2 (2011): 133–45.
9. See the suite of resources based on David A. Kolb's 1984 theory of experiential learning at https://learningfromexperience.com/.

CHAPTER 12

CASE STUDY: Contemporary Issues in the Americas: Translating Academic Knowledge via Applied Assessment

Nick Witham and Joshua Hollands

The 'meanings' of an undergraduate degree in American studies, to borrow the title of this section of this volume, are as multiple and varied as the number of students who choose it as a programme of study. That said, one meaning that has forced itself on to the agenda of American studies educators in recent years is that of *employability*. We have all been asked a variant of the following question by prospective or current students, by their parents, or by colleagues in quality assurance: how does American studies equip graduates with the skills and understanding to translate their academic knowledge in the professional world?

This question animates 'Contemporary Issues in the Americas', a final-year, capstone module on the BA History and Politics of the Americas programme at University College London's Institute of the Americas. The degree is unique in the UK in providing students with multidisciplinary training in the Institute's areas of specialism: history, political science, international relations, anthropology, development studies and political economy. It is also unique in its hemispheric approach to the Americas as a meaningful geographical unit spanning North America, the Caribbean and Latin America. At the same time, students on the degree are cosmopolitan, study in an enormously diverse global city, and thus have unsurprisingly international career ambitions. Nonetheless, we think there are elements to our approach, especially the ways in which we navigate

the question of employability, which can be usefully shared with American studies educators in the UK and beyond.

This short case study traces our approach to the module, in particular the way it enables students to translate the academic knowledge they have developed during their degrees and apply it to assessments that demonstrate the multiple meanings that American studies can have beyond a university setting.

'Translating' Academic Knowledge via Contemporary Issues

What is 'employability' and how can it be fostered in the American studies classroom? We start with the insight that, in the humanities and social sciences, as Peter O'Connor and Rebecca Stone point out in their chapter in this volume, those using the term all too often expect academics to provide direct career support for students (helping them identify career paths, take up internships, work on CVs and interview skills, and so on). Instead, our module proposes a different agenda for 'employability', prompting students to think about how they can translate their academic knowledge and understanding so that it makes sense to audiences outside of the university, especially, but not limited to, those in the worlds of journalism, business, public policy and international NGOs. This, we feel, is much more appropriate terrain for American studies scholars because all of us can and should be able to naturally articulate how our research and teaching intersects with pressing political, social and cultural issues in the contemporary world.

A year-long module taken in the final year of their degree, 'Contemporary Issues in the Americas' encourages students to reflect on their expertise as they think about their career routes after undergraduate education, and to focus on augmenting and developing skills that allow them to share this expertise with a range of non-academic audiences and stakeholders. Over twenty weeks of teaching that mix skills training with seminar discussion and formative feedback, students draw together knowledge and understanding developed over multiple years to think in multidisciplinary terms across history, politics and other relevant fields of study, and in transnational terms across the Americas.

To help them do so, the module is structured via four key contemporary 'issues', each of which they engage over a three-week

block, and which they address in an individual assignment. These themes are inequality, climate crisis, migration and security, each of which has specific resonances in the Americas, but also connects to students' own geographical frames of reference, no matter their nationality, and to their situation in London. They reflect the way that our department's version of interdisciplinary American studies tends towards the social sciences rather than the humanities, but they could easily be adapted to suit more conventional UK American studies curriculums and student bodies focused on the intersections between literature, culture and history. Each class primarily focuses not on the acquisition of knowledge about these topics, but on the way in which expertise is communicated by academic communities (including the students themselves) who intervene in public conversation and policy development relating to them.

For example, one session in the block on inequality asks students to pay close attention to the *New York Times*'s '1619 Project' (the subject of more detailed attention in Chapter 5 of this volume) and reflects on the project's co-production of new forms of popular national history by journalists and professional historians, as well as the controversy it has created in the public sphere. Another session, this time in the block on climate crisis, focuses on the polarised nature of environmental politics in the United States, and prompts students to think about ways they can intervene in public policy debates across the Americas.

These sessions are interspersed with two other types of class. The first focuses on providing students with concrete training in writing op-eds, recording podcasts, creating data visualisations, and profiling policy actors to address them via policy memos. The second type of class brings together the university's careers staff with recent alumni of the degree programme, to highlight to students the employment possibilities open to them, and to underscore the value of the ways in which their training in American studies sets them up for the world of work. The module consequently empowers students to see the 'real world' impact of the knowledge, understanding and skills they have developed.

Applied Assessment, Inclusion, Student Voice/Choice

Assessment is via a portfolio of short op-eds, policy reports, data visualisations and podcasts. Students have significant flexibility as

they design their assignments and can focus on almost any topic they choose. As such, they are 'assessed for learning' as they hone skills in journalistic writing, profiling policy actors, data handling and audio production.[1] This approach promotes inclusion by supporting students to pursue their own specific interests. They explore issues that are close to their own personal experiences, that build on their extra-curricular activities, and that provide them with ways of explaining and translating their specialist learning to audiences who do not necessarily share such expertise (including, but not limited to, potential employers).

Students in their final year encounter an intense workload compared to previous years of study. Outside of this core module, they also work on a traditional 10,000-word dissertation, and they have multiple other assignments across the programme. In designing 'Contemporary Issues in the Americas', we were therefore keen to provide space for students to practise independent research while also avoiding inappropriate workload pressures. Students craft outputs on contemporary issues which allow them to be assessed on their knowledge of the region and grasp of the format while also equipping them with new skills and supporting them in developing a portfolio of examples that will be recognisable and attractive to future employers. As our programme is interdisciplinary, it is logical to offer learners a diversity of relevant assessment options to demonstrate their ability in a range of formats. In doing so the module also helps to equip students to address interdisciplinary challenges, a principle of UCL education that is especially relevant to American studies students.[2]

The module allows student independence in selecting the types of output for their intended audience, to draw upon knowledge from across the programme which they might not otherwise be tested on, and to develop practical skills of most interest to them. In the original iterations of the module, students submitted four assignments in response to the four broad themes, with each weighted at 25 per cent of the overall mark. Following student feedback that highlighted concerns about over-assessment and workload, we have since reduced the number of assignments to three, each of which is equally weighted at 33.3 per cent. We continue to train students in how to produce the original four formats: op-eds/blogs, podcasts, data visualisations and policy memos. However, there is now a further layer of choice for students in terms of which of the

four formats they will select for the three assignments. This requires students to consider their intended audience, the knowledge they want to convey, and why the format is the best vehicle for that audience. The variety of student responses here is vast: while some students choose to address policy memos to the President of the United States, others design data visualisations for the websites of Chilean NGOs or create podcasts for UK audiences interested in Caribbean music.

The module design is informed by a wealth of studies that suggest students 'develop a sense of ownership and commitment to their learning' when they are involved in the assessment process.[3] Ljungman and Silén argue in their research on assessment in higher education that 'involving students in assessment as equal partners with faculty makes it possible for students to apprehend the metacognitive competences needed to be responsible and autonomous in learning'.[4] This is especially important for students in the final year of study who experience a more intense workload and the added pressures of working out their next steps after university.

The Challenges and Benefits of Applied Assessment

While delivery of the module has been a pleasure for both of us, it has not been without its challenges. Some of these (for example, inconsistent or low student attendance in class) are common in contemporary higher education. Other challenges are more specific to our institution and the novelty of our programme. One of these has been delivering the module at scale. We first delivered the module to twenty-five students, but now the cohort is closer to eighty-five. This poses a challenge to the module convenor(s) to provide consistent levels of direct support to each student as they navigate applied assessment. Where possible, sharing the convening duties between colleagues with complementary skills in qualitative and quantitative methods has made the triaging of student support more streamlined and manageable.

Students have tended to achieve excellent grades each year that the module has run. However, in early iterations, they complained that they had not been offered opportunities to practise the assessment formats earlier in the programme. Students also complained about over-assessment in all year groups. Here, taking a programme-level view of assessment has been helpful. The knowledge that the diverse

assessment types offered in the module have been received positively by students has encouraged colleagues to diversify their assessment at earlier levels. This means that students now have opportunities to practise video presentations and op-eds in their first year, while they develop skills in developing podcasts, policy memos and data visualisations in their second year.

Despite its challenges, the module has received very positive feedback, with students praising 'the freedom, creativity and variety' of the assessment structure, as well as the flexibility to 'focus assessments on topics of interest'. Furthermore, they appreciate the applicability of the module to the world of work, telling us that it has helped them understand 'what I'd want to do as a career' and that they have been able to refer to the skills they have developed in job applications and interviews. This evidence highlights the module's significant interventions in developing skills and careers adaptability for finalists, supporting them to champion their own interests and expertise. The module thus exemplifies innovative and inclusive forms of American studies assessment that provide dynamic, skills-based learning at the culmination of their degrees.

Conclusion: Enabling Global Citizenship

A core principle that animates education at UCL is how we prepare students to engage with the world as 'global citizens'. Students who undertake degrees in area studies are perhaps already more attuned to this idea compared to their peers who undertake traditional humanities and social science degrees. Around half of the students on our programme undertake a year abroad at a partner institution in the Americas or teach English as a second language via the British Council. 'Contemporary Issues in the Americas' allows them to reflect on their time at UCL and to draw on their experiences on the year abroad if applicable. For all students, the assignments prompt consideration of challenges that affect the Americas, but which also have impacts and possible solutions for those outside of the hemisphere, in Britain and beyond.

While attention to careers and employability informed part of the design for this module, an equally important concern was our desire to allow students to grapple with current affairs, to consider local, regional and Indigenous perspectives on challenges confronting the world, and to develop their confidence in intervening in debates

that will shape the future of our planet. 'Contemporary Issues in the Americas' confronts these issues head-on and allows students to directly consider what knowledge and skills they have developed over three or four years, and how they can use this to make an impact in the world. This demonstrates clearly and tangibly how the skills students develop during American studies degrees can be translated to areas beyond academia and professional careers. Skills such as communication, self-awareness, evidence, constructive criticism, digital and technical skills, and a global outlook are all vital to activism, cultural understanding, human well-being and sustainability.

Examples of coursework on this module demonstrate most effectively how American studies students understand the challenges our world faces, and their ability to intervene and shape the future. From op-eds and blog posts on 'Favela Feminism', about tackling inequality in Brazil, to podcasts on 'Climate Denial in the Media', data visualisations on the displacement of refugees from Venezuela, and policy memos that offer potential solutions to cyber insecurity and electoral interference, our students consistently demonstrate their knowledge, skills and ability to confront the issues that challenge us. In doing so, they surprise and challenge us as educators at every step.

Finally, the module provides the space and guidance for students to articulate their perspectives on the world around us, providing them with choice in their assignments, and opportunities to undertake independent research and to design their own outputs. In turn, this helps to foster student initiative and further skills development. Articulating such skills can help our students with future study and employability, as well as tackling problems through the realms of politics, social justice and activism. In doing so, they show how American studies inhabits a unique space in which it is possible to marshal multidisciplinary insights to better understand our contemporary world, and to confront and impact the problems that face students and scholars alike.

Notes

1. See Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, 'Assessment and Classroom Learning', *Assessment in Education* 5, no. 1 (March 1998): 7–74.
2. 'Connected Curriculum: A Framework for Research-Based Education', University College London, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/

connected-curriculum-framework-research-based-education; see also Dilly Fung, *A Connected Curriculum for Higher Education* (UCL Press, 2017).

3. Anne Davies, 'Involving Students in the Classroom Assessment Process', in *Ahead of the Curve: The Power of Assessment to Transform Teaching and Learning*, ed. Douglas B. Reeves (Solution Tree, 2007), 31–57.
4. Anders G. Ljungman and Charlotte Silén, 'Examination Involving Students as Peer Examiners', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 33, no. 3 (2008): 289.

PART III

METHODS

'What made it unique was the focus on seeing things from multiple perspectives.'

'We were strongly encouraged to form our own opinions and challenge traditional perspectives as well as our own views.'

'Interdisciplinarity means combining insights from multiple subjects. While studying the US, I used history, literature, politics and sociology to gain a deeper, holistic understanding.'

'I was often encouraged to question dominant narratives, especially around race, power and identity. Exploring marginalised voices and challenging traditional viewpoints pushed me to think critically, engage with complexity, and see history from multiple perspectives.'

'To me, the term "interdisciplinarity" is almost synonymous with open-mindedness. It allows for something to be investigated and explored through different mediums, sources and types of study.'

– Students taught by the contributors to this collection

CHAPTER 13

DIALOGUE: Teaching US Empire, Expansion and Expulsion

Oli Charbonneau, Fabian Hilfrich, Reetta Humalajoki, David Stirrup and György Tóth

In this dialogue, scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds reflect on their experiences of teaching imperialism, borders and boundaries in the United States context. In coming together to discuss these issues, scholars with experience at universities across the UK consider questions relating to indigeneity, settler colonialism and expansion, and the ways in which they approach these topics with their students. The panel – which features representatives from history, literature and Indigenous studies – consider how to balance emerging directions and scholarship within their teaching, while being sensitive to the limited understanding that many students have on these issues before entering university. In doing so, the panel draw on their experiences teaching foreign policy, colonial violence, American empire, expansionism and borderlands. This conversation illuminates several themes already discussed in the book, including our spatial conception of the United States, the importance of centring Indigenous voices in our classrooms, and the promising developments in a range of fields that equip us and our students to better comprehend and assess US global power.

What does 'US empire' mean in the context of your teaching? Is it a term you use with your students? If so, how do they respond or react to it?

Fabian Hilfrich (FH): As a historian of US foreign relations, I teach a third-year undergraduate course on American expansion from

roughly the end of the nineteenth century until World War I, with a central guiding question of whether the United States was imperial. I also teach on the Cold War and specifically the Vietnam War, which brings up methodological questions about using 'empire' as an analytical category. I address the Vietnam War both as a Cold War conflict and as an imperial conflict during the age of decolonisation, prompting comparisons between the American empire and the French or British empires. So yes, the question of empire is central to my teaching.

Reetta Humalajoki (RH): My research focuses on Indigenous history in the United States and Canada, and more recently in transnational contexts, including the Nordic region. In the UK, I taught broad US history survey courses and more specialised ones on race relations and minority rights in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – particularly Native American history, westward expansion, the Spanish-American War and the Philippines.

I've noticed students in both the UK and Finland sometimes want to call the US an empire to accuse it of wrongdoing, but it's still important to analyse what 'empire' actually means. In my own teaching, I've used 'settler colonialism' more often than 'empire', largely because my research focuses on Indigenous history and twentieth-century developments, as opposed to nineteenth. 'Settler colonialism' has similar implications, though, and can provoke an accusatory tone. But it also allows us to explore historical nuances. I find the theory of settler colonialism – particularly Patrick Wolfe's phrase 'destroy to replace' – very helpful.[1] It sparks conversations about how these structures might persist today. Empire and settler colonialism aren't mutually exclusive, but for Indigenous history specifically, I've leaned more on settler colonialism as my main analytical framework.

György Tóth (GT): At the University of Stirling, I teach a second-year module on US history to 1890, covering the imagining and settling of the American West, Native Americans and the closing of the frontier. Colonialism features throughout, most overtly in discussions of Native Americans. I also teach a third-year module on Native American history and policy, focusing on post-contact histories in what becomes the settler-colonial nation-state of the United States. And for fourth-year students (Scottish undergraduate

degree programmes are four years rather than the UK norm of three), I offer a year-long course on transnational histories of the twentieth-century United States, including one week on the US as an empire and other weeks on themes connecting to that concept – like 'anti-Americanism', overseas business expansion and transatlantic relations. We consider how the US both was shaped by and contributed to ideas of imperialism and empire.

David Stirrup (DS): I teach Native American literature, as well as First Nations and Métis literatures in Canada. I've taught comparative border studies (Canada–US, US–Mexico) and comparative courses on African American and Black Canadian writing. I don't tend to focus on 'empire' per se as the discursive framework; I use settler colonialism, but empire is always present. When I was trained, nobody used either 'empire' or 'settler colonialism'. Thinking back, I can't recall how people framed what we discussed, beyond a broad concept of colonialism. It's food for thought about where and how it might be useful to encourage my students to think more about empire.

Possibly the issue for me is that most of my teaching focuses on internal political relationships between Indigenous peoples and the United States. Settler colonialism is a useful language for understanding that. Where I might encourage students to think about empire is in discussions of, say, Hawaii, or aspects of nineteenth-century expansion where the language of empire pops up in texts. But generally, settler colonialism is the language that frames Indigenous–settler relations.

Oli Charbonneau (OC): Though I've taught American history at the University of Glasgow for five years, I was trained and taught in Canada. My work is very much invested in questions of US empire as a way of life in American history, and most of my teaching reflects that. I have two advanced undergraduate courses on offer: one called 'Imperial States: Race, War, and Expansion in US History', which looks at American power at the nexus of settler-colonial and overseas empire at the turn of the twentieth century, and another called 'Unsettled Histories: Indigenous Peoples in the United States', a thematic reckoning with US settler-colonial histories. I also teach at the Master's level, including a course named 'Violence and the Colonial Encounter', thinking about colonial violence across modern history in various ways.

'Empire' is a term I use often. In many ways, I think it's a more useful way of describing the US polity than 'nation-state'. I think about empire as an analytical device for understanding power asymmetries in US history, starting from the premise that the US is born out of empire and is an imperial formation from its inception. I don't think we should disentangle 'empire' from 'US settler colonialism', because they're threads of the same impulse. Obviously, there are particularities and differences in how American power manifests (e.g. in the Philippines vs the Northern Plains), but also resonant connective threads. For me, perhaps reflecting my training, empire is the lens through which I understand US history.

FH: Many of our students arrive with a broad, often vague anti-imperialist outlook, sometimes just wanting to 'prove' that the US is imperial. Pedagogically, I try to tease out nuances and examine the analytical value of the term. Not all empires are the same, and we should ask: What did people in each historical period mean by 'empire'? How do historians define it? What about concepts like 'informal empire' or 'empire by invitation'? We don't want the term 'empire' to be just a political accusation that stops deeper analysis.

GT: That resonates with me. In one module, I push students to critique and unmask empire discourses – asking how useful 'imperialism' is as an analytical category. We talk about anti-Americanism and cultural imperialism, transnational corporations and so forth. In the second-year nineteenth-century US history course, I include the dispossession of Native peoples and discuss Manifest Destiny, Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis', and how these ideas justified colonisation.[2] In my Native American history and policy class, I tend to use 'colonialism' or 'ongoing settler colonialism', rather than focusing as much on 'empire'. In my transnational module, I try to bridge the story: first the continental expansion, then the jump into overseas territories.

OC: Empire is debated differently in the UK than in North America. In Britain, nobody denies there was a British Empire, but its legacies are publicly litigated. That differs from public discourse in the US, which still often insists it broke from imperial history in the eighteenth century. British students often have a more developed sense of global imperial history in a broad sense. But at the same

time, some old assumptions – that the US parted ways from empire – follow us here. One challenge is integrating American empire into the broader history of empires. Regarding 'settler colonialism', I've watched it gain traction, but it needs deeper contextualisation here than, say, in Canada, where you might be teaching next to a First Nations reservation. In the UK, we have to foreground more historical background.

DS: I'd say students are increasingly bringing the language of 'settler colonialism' into my classroom. I used to have to offer it to them, but now there's a greater sense of what the term means, especially post–Idle No More (a grassroots movement for Indigenous sovereignty that began in Canada in 2012) and certainly after the Dakota Access Pipeline protests at Standing Rock (2016–2017). While they might not have deep historical knowledge, I see a gradual improvement in their understanding. 'Settler colonialism' is becoming well understood and something students are relatively comfortable grappling with.

I should mention that I've been working with a group of academics and teachers trying to improve resources in the curriculum where Indigenous issues come up. I think many teachers are starting to use 'settler colonialism' as the framework for discussing westward expansion in school. That helps when students come to university, but it is obviously difficult for teachers to fit further work into the existing curriculum, and to develop their own confidence with terms and concepts that they themselves were not taught.

Do you think there's something distinctive about teaching these themes in the UK, or with your specific student body?

OC: At Glasgow, we get about 40 per cent from the West of Scotland, with various socioeconomic backgrounds, and the rest from elsewhere in the UK, Europe and the world. So, there is a plurality in the classroom, though it's not as ethnoculturally diverse as one might find in Canada. We do get students from working-class backgrounds who bring particular perspectives on power asymmetries connected to empire.

In the classroom, I've never really had serious pushback about using 'empire' or related frameworks. Perhaps sometimes I'd like

more debate. But generally, my students are open-minded, though sometimes it takes a bit more to get them to speak freely. Americans are often comfortable throwing out ideas in class, perhaps due to cultural differences where open debate is more common. We tend to get more Americans in our postgraduate rather than undergraduate programmes. Some are well equipped with critical language, particularly if they attended certain liberal arts colleges in the US, whereas others haven't been exposed to it before and go through more of a shock.

FH: I taught in Germany before coming to the UK. Here at the University of Edinburgh, there's a particular background: many students come from privileged schools, often in England. They sometimes surprise me with what we might call 'anti-Americanism from the right', a perspective I wasn't used to. It can be a sort of 'empire envy', like: 'We British knew how to run an empire; the Americans stole ours and then messed it up!' This came up in discussions of Vietnam, for instance, with some students pointing to British 'success' in Malaya in the 1950s, as proof that Britain is better at counterinsurgency than the United States. It's not a majority viewpoint, but it exists.

We also have an international cohort, particularly at the Master's level, including a notable number from Asia (particularly China, Thailand and India). They bring personal perspectives on how US power affected their regions, which enrich classroom discussions.

RH: I taught at Durham University, which, like Edinburgh, has many privileged students, often from white, upper-middle-class backgrounds. However, I also taught at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities, where students were more diverse, sometimes older, and more willing, I felt, to question and debate rather than focus on 'just getting the best grades'.

Comparing UK and Finnish students, I notice Finnish students can be even quicker to accuse the US of imperialism, maybe because of Finland's own distinct history and less direct entanglement with American power. Also, in Finland, there's increasing awareness of the Sami as an Indigenous population and a growing interest in Indigenous issues, but ironically, many Finns are more fascinated by Native Americans than by the Sami. When teaching American expansion or Indigenous history, British students often don't link US expansion back to British colonial history in North America.

That's a connection that, in my view, remains underexplored in British schools. Finnish students tend to see the US as something more distant and occasionally view it with suspicion or accusations of imperialism. But they're also interested in parallels to the Sami in Finland and the broader Nordic context.

GT: At Stirling, we have a significant contingent of local or commuting students, some of whom come from working-class backgrounds. They often work part-time, which limits how much class prep they can do, and some have caring responsibilities or health issues of their own. We do get some exchange students from North America, but overall, there's less pushback on the notion that the US might be imperial. They don't strongly defend the US, nor do they vigorously critique it from the left or the right. It can be a challenge to get them engaged to the level I'd hope.

I therefore try to connect US imperialism to British and Scottish imperial involvement. Scotland has a complicated imperial legacy and sometimes sees itself as less culpable than England, but of course Scots profited from the Empire too. For example, I cover a Ghost Dance shirt from the battlefield at Wounded Knee that was previously held in Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum, before being repatriated to the Lakota in the 1990s. It's a great case study of ongoing colonial legacies in Scotland, which helps students realise it's not something that only happened 'far away'.

OC: I always try to be aware of a tendency here to criticise the US as a global hegemonic power as a way of not thinking critically about the UK itself. I draw out links – historical and ongoing – between the US and British empires. There's a trans-imperial vernacular of ideas around race and development. Students come to see that 1776 doesn't cleanly separate Britain from the US.

DS: When I introduced a course on African American and Black Canadian writing at the University of Kent, having already taught there for a long time, it was the first time I had a classroom predominantly of students of colour, which made me realise that previously I'd had mostly white students. Today, my classroom at the University of York remains a relatively non-diverse space. Students are often politically motivated, see themselves as activist or allied, but the space is not as ethnically diverse as we might hope.

At York, numbers of American undergrads aren't huge. In a classroom with just one American student, the rest often turn to them for all clarifications. Once, I had a Native student in a Native lit class, and everyone deferred to them, which can be challenging.

Can you each suggest texts or sources – primary or secondary – that you've found students respond to especially well when learning about American empire or related topics like settler colonialism?

GT: A reliable choice is Daniel Immerwahr's *How to Hide an Empire*, which encourages readers to think about all US territories and jurisdictions when considering the nation's geography, rather than simply the continental United States. I like to set up debates where students can consider it alongside older texts like Amy Kaplan's 'Where Is Guantánamo?'.[3] I also pair her article with a PBS documentary from the 'America at a Crossroads' series called *Inside America's Empire* (2007), featuring Robert Kaplan, who champions the idea of a benevolent US empire, supporting Indigenous militaries worldwide against 'terrorists' and disorder. Another useful reading for students is Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's collection *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, and its critique of the absence of empire studies from mainstream American cultural studies.[4] It's about analysing where empire is and isn't acknowledged.

FH: I do something similar and emphasise the importance of distinguishing different types of empire: formal, informal, cultural, etc. For instance, debates that emerged following the publication of Immerwahr's book, which György just mentioned, work extremely well if you want students to really see a historiographical debate in action. Paul Kramer's attack on Immerwahr's concept of the 'Greater United States' demonstrates scholarly disagreement amongst scholars who argue for and against calling the US an empire.[5] Elsewhere, I also discuss internal American debates: for instance, the fear that being an empire will lead to a Roman-style decline, or 1960s critiques that the US was acting as a colonial power in the era of decolonisation.

At the same time, I caution students not to paint all US power as straightforward 'empire'. Some want to label every Hollywood

movie as an outgrowth of Washington's imperial designs. I encourage them to analyse the differences between government policy and broader cultural influence.

DS: I love having students read Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus*, which documents centuries of efforts to maintain political sovereignty in what is now southern Quebec, where Indigenous groups refuse Canadian or US citizenship.[6] It opens up conversations about the border and differences and similarities between the US and Canada. In terms of primary texts, a consistent challenge is that students often have a crisis of confidence reading Indigenous works. They feel they don't have the 'cultural reference points', even when the text itself provides context. It's a form of exoticisation, even among students who want to be respectful. I reassure them: read it first as literature. Sometimes they find secondary sources easier.

GT: In a nineteenth-century US history context, a classic American studies source is John Gast's 1872 painting *American Progress*. It visually encapsulates Manifest Destiny, with the allegorical female figure leading civilisation westward. Students can pick apart how it portrays Native peoples fleeing, how it justifies colonial violence, etc. That's always reliable.

In my Native American history and policy course, students are drawn to the topic of Indian boarding schools, especially Carlisle Indian Industrial School. I use short primary documents – reminiscences by Luther Standing Bear, for example – and they're compelling.[7] They humanise the assimilationist policy and prompt students to consider the emotional or psychological dimension.

RH: Building on György's example, I also use Gast's *American Progress* but juxtapose it with a painting called *Reversing Manifest Destiny* by Charles Hilliard (2021), which flips the imagery to celebrate and drive the recovery of ancestral homelands.[8] I find that more contemporary issues are great for sparking debate. For instance, when Gap sold a T-shirt with 'Manifest Destiny' on it in 2012, Native activists protested, and it was pulled.[9] Putting that T-shirt next to Gast's painting leads students to ask how this concept echoes in the modern era. It drives home that it isn't just a harmless slogan; it has deep historical implications of violence.

I also bring in maps – showing North America overlaid with Indigenous language groups or treaty boundaries. Many students are unaware that Indigenous people still exist in large numbers, so I include contemporary protests – like Standing Rock and the Dakota Access Pipeline – to show their continued efforts in the face of ongoing settler-colonial structures. I'll show footage of water protectors referencing nineteenth-century treaties. Students see that treaties are not a dusty historical artefact; they're central to current political struggles.

Carlisle Indian Industrial School's digital archive hosted by Dickinson College is great, too: providing free access to photos, documents, letters.[10] Visual sources of children arriving at the school and later in 'civilised' dress are startling and effective. In short, I find direct, vivid sources – images, clothing, political cartoons – are particularly good for demonstrating the ideological and cultural processes underpinning empire.

OC: Digitised documents from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School always generate great student engagement. It's a wonderful, easily searchable collection. Students can do all sorts of creative analyses with it. For secondary sources, I don't return to the same text repeatedly, as I'm constantly changing my reading lists, to support my own engagement with new material as much as anything else. One reference I do find useful as a primer is the recent four-volume *Cambridge History of America and the World*, which is discussed prominently in the next two chapters of this book.[11] It's helpful for students looking to locate themselves in American global or imperial contexts.

FH: In my course on the Spanish-American War era, I show political cartoons that illustrate how racism intersected with pro- and anti-imperialist arguments at the turn of the twentieth century – opponents of empire used racist tropes just as supporters did. For the Vietnam War, I present the broad spectrum of US opposition: from liberal critics like Senator J. William Fulbright to radical groups like the Weather Underground, feminists such as Shulamith Firestone, plus Martin Luther King Jr and SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). It shows how the conflict connected with the social ferment of the 1960s. I also do role-play with protocols of high-level US government meetings in 1965, when Lyndon

Johnson decided to send combat troops in Vietnam. Students each take the role of a government or military official to really see the internal debates. It's fun, and it drills down into who knew what at the time and why they decided to escalate. That method can help them pick up the necessary background without me just lecturing.

Let's talk about bridging the gap between the specialised topics we want to cover (like empire, settler colonialism) and the fact that students may not know the basics of US geography or key historical events. How do you handle that?

OC: Because many of my courses look at American global ascendancy, I try to ensure students have reading that helps them anchor themselves historically – like a set of essays that track the broad story of American empire. Then in class, we can focus on deeper thematic questions without constantly backtracking to basic timelines. I use maps frequently. One of my undergraduate courses, 'Imperial States', is partly about continental settler empire, partly about overseas empire. We denaturalise US territoriality, showing how the US was not a fixed shape after 1776 but expanded imperially across North America and overseas. This can be disorienting in a productive way, showing students that the boundaries keep shifting – like Hawaii and Alaska becoming states in the late 1950s.

DS: I do something similar in courses on Indigenous literatures. We need historical signposts – e.g. Indian removal in the nineteenth century – to grasp references in contemporary writing. But I also stress that reading fiction effectively doesn't require them to become anthropologists. I use a lot of maps in my lectures. Students need situating – geographic context, cultural and environmental diversity within the US, and so forth. They need to understand how that diversity affects ways of life. It's essential if they're interested in the US, so they understand the shape of it, how it changes over time.

FH: At Edinburgh, we have a second-year survey that many students take before my advanced courses. But I still gauge what they know in the first session. If there's a big knowledge gap, I incorporate that into the conversation. For instance, I'll ask them, 'What do

you need to know about this author or event to fully interpret the source?' Then I'll fill in the background. I see myself as a facilitator, not just a lecturer. We do group discussions and small clarifications along the way.

RH: Exactly. Sometimes something as simple as showing multiple maps helps them grasp that Indigenous history isn't monolithic. By contrasting a modern political map of the US with maps of Indigenous language groups, or a reservation map, they see how drastically land was taken. Students often notice how many reservations are in the West, prompting discussion of forced removals from other parts of North America. Bringing in contemporary connections, like Dakota Access Pipeline protests and treaty rights, can also anchor that historical narrative. It sometimes sparks more engagement than reading a dense secondary text.

I also think about 'threshold concepts' – the building-block ideas students need to learn.[12] If they don't know who Indigenous people are at all, that's my starting point. Then we might compare the Black civil rights movement with the Red Power movement to show how Indigenous activism had distinct aims – treaty rights, sovereignty, land claims – rather than just the same goals as other racial minorities. Students often know Martin Luther King Jr but may not know Richard Oakes or the Alcatraz Proclamation. Juxtaposing those can show that Indigenous activism had different goals – so we have to understand the distinctive historical context of treaty rights and sovereignty.

GT: I try to 'flip' the classroom, posting my lecture slides or short recorded lectures online so students can absorb background before class. Then the seminar itself is more about analysing primary sources or discussing a single reading. But there's always the reality that some students won't do much preparation. It can be challenging to move the discussion to a deeper level when half the group has only cursory knowledge. Still, focusing on a narrower set of sources can help. As Fabian said, you adapt. If you sense they don't know a key historical point – like who George Kennan was – you do a quick explanation. Then move on. Over time, they usually gain enough context to engage more fully.

In terms of geography, I try to highlight treaties like the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. If students see how massive the Great

Sioux Reservation was, they realise the scale of dispossession. It can lead to exploring how many of those treaties were never invalidated by Congress, meaning they're technically still on the books. But students must grasp the basics of where these lands are and how treaties were made and broken. Similarly, for continental expansions into the West, it's valuable to show how that shaped US overseas ambitions later. So yes, geography can be revelatory if we use the right visuals and data.

We've covered a lot of ground – defining empire, students' backgrounds, primary sources, bridging knowledge gaps, and questions of spatial awareness and Indigenous perspectives. Is there anything else you want to highlight about teaching these topics in the UK?

GT: One further point is the question of gender and sexuality, which can also intersect with empire. For instance, Theodore Roosevelt's 'strenuous life' speech and the masculine justification for overseas expansion, or the sexualisation of Native American women in popular culture.[13] We can link this to the missing and murdered Indigenous women crisis in North America today.[14] There's a lot to unravel, though it can feel overwhelming for students if we try to incorporate everything. I'd also add that there's sometimes an ethical dimension around who teaches Indigenous histories – most of us are non-Indigenous Europeans. Ideally, we'd have more Indigenous scholars in UK academia, but people might not want to relocate or might have community obligations. So, we do our best to centre Indigenous voices and be clear about our positionality, but there's always more to do.

DS: Yes. When I did my PhD, there were about three permanent dedicated Indigenous literature academics in the country, and that number hasn't changed much. Another problem, already outlined, is that there are so few Indigenous scholars in the UK practising in the field. That's something that could bring real change in how these literatures are taught. But living and working so far from community can be challenging, especially if you do research that requires ongoing community engagement. Another factor is that Britain can feel

like a hostile environment – many Indigenous colleagues who came for their PhDs quit because of the emotional labour of living in a state that had such an impact on their history but so little awareness of it.

RH: Even in well-structured courses, it can be a struggle to fit in marginalised topics, so deeper explorations of sexuality or gender in Indigenous communities sometimes get overshadowed. But these are crucial directions for teaching. But yes, those ethical questions are real – allyship, appropriation, etc. There was a brief moment where UK departments seemed eager to hire Indigenous studies experts, but humanities hiring has gotten tougher across the board. Still, at least awareness is growing, and I see more courses incorporating some Indigenous dimension rather than relegating it to a single 'frontier' week. Resources like *Why You Can't Teach US History Without American Indians* help colleagues grasp how central these stories are.[15] Ultimately, we navigate limited time and student knowledge, but it's encouraging that there's more openness to discussing empire, settler colonialism and Indigenous perspectives. If we keep pushing for nuanced, historically grounded discussions, that's a good step.

Notes

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CHAPTER 14

ESSAY: The Promise and Peril of Teaching the US in the World

Bevan Sewell, Kaeten Mistry, Uta Balbier, Katharina Rietzler and Thomas Tunstall Allcock

In late 2021, the highly anticipated *Cambridge History of America and the World* (*CHAW*) was published. The vast four-volume collection, with 126 contributions spread over hundreds of pages, proclaimed 'a transformative account' of how America and Americans engaged with the world. Eschewing a conventional nation-state approach, the series starts in 1500 and brings the story up to the present. It casts a wide scholarly net that examines issues of war, diplomacy and state-building, but also Native America, the Atlantic world, slavery, borderlands, gender, sexuality, race, religion, technology, human rights and the environment, among others. In the words of general series editor Mark Bradley, this 'more capacious vision' offers 'a fundamentally new understanding of the exercise of American power in the world'.[1]

By any measure, it is a significant collection, but especially given that 'US in the World' is not a commonly known or widely understood scholarly field.[2] There are no professional organisations, dedicated journals or teaching programmes bearing the name. Students are unlikely to encounter it before university, while few academic posts are advertised under the moniker. The rise of US in the World has been rapid, rooted in broader attempts to de-provincialise US foreign relations scholarship since the early 1980s. Many of the later changes were informed by developments in American studies, cultural history, political science and world history, which all brought fresh perspectives to the practice and projection of American power at home and abroad. This helped nurture US in the World as a

wide-ranging field, albeit one whose parameters are curiously difficult to pin down.

Queries about scope and content – what is (and isn't) 'US in the World'; the forms of American power; identifying key actors and protagonists – are unresolved. Central methodological approaches – the archives to use; helpful analytical toolkits; the necessary frameworks – are harder to identify. Bradley is surely right that 'US in the World' provides a wider and 'fundamentally new' way of examining America's global role. But the dramatic expansion of the field formerly called 'the history of US foreign relations' poses as many questions as it provides answers, especially in terms of how it is taught and understood at undergraduate level. For example, have undergraduate courses followed the field's shift away from political elites and the state? Is it important for students enrolled on US in the World modules to be cognisant of the field's intricacies and intellectual evolution? Is the diversification in subject matter (no longer exclusively about the role of elite white males) helping to promote greater diversity among those who teach and study the subject? And are changes in content and shifts in students' interests reflected in teaching content and assessment patterns?

Examining the promise and peril of teaching US in the World, this chapter surveys its emergence as a scholarly field before considering the consequences for teaching in the UK. We consider the context of the modern higher education landscape, alongside issues of sustainability, equality, diversity and inclusion. We also explore how evolutions in scholarship inform teaching, confront subject and sector-wide challenges, and aid in designing effective curricula which incorporate the student voice. The chapter utilises two main examples in order to examine the ways that a more expansive framing of the field has translated into the classroom: a survey of UK-based teachers of the US in the World, and a curriculum co-creation exercise involving faculty and students at the University of Sussex. In particular, we consider the ways that US in the World intersects with teachers' priorities as well as students' concerns and interests, identifying points of commonality but also some important examples of divergence. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the intellectual questions provoked by the field's expansion pose a series of practical and pedagogical ones that defy easy solutions.

Roots and Labels

Once considered among the most high-profile areas of US history, by the early 1980s 'diplomatic history' had become a 'stepchild' left behind by more innovative approaches. The most cutting-edge historical scholarship was being informed by social and cultural history, demonstrating the vibrancy of new methodologies, challenging perceived wisdom about power and causality, and was alluring to ambitious graduate students. Diplomatic history, by contrast, seemed stale, parochial and outdated. Excessively concerned by what one diplomat said to another, and rarely undertaking research outside the US, it was, as Charles Maier put it in a scathing critique, merely 'marking time'.[3] Maier's broadside was keenly felt. For some historians, it provided a framework to examine the US role in the world through new approaches, sources and actors.[4] But for others, the explanatory power of culture, religion and gender was unpersuasive and there were calls for the field to retain its focus on more traditional indicators of power and causality.[5]

These debates took place amid a broader effort to internationalise American history and contend with the history of US empire toward the end of the twentieth century. The latter was driven by a paradigm shift in American studies scholarship that collapsed boundaries between domestic topics and international relations, cultural and diplomatic history, through a renewed focus on imperial power.[6] The former, against the backdrop of an era of multiculturalism and globalisation, responded to a growing desire to uncover the multiple strands of US national history and assess its place among a wider community of nations. Leading historians and organisations like the Organization of American Historians (OAH) embarked on collaborative projects and initiatives, supported by major foundations and institutions, to explore American history through global and transnational perspectives. Thomas Bender proposed a new framing, telling America's story from 1492, that was not bound by the strictures of the nation-state.[7] Scholars based outside the United States were also part of the internationalisation drive.[8]

The influence of the cultural and transnational turns spread across several historical subfields, but it was embraced with particular enthusiasm by scholars of foreign relations. Diplomatic history was reimagined as a richer, more inclusive and expansive field. In a confident 2010 state-of-the-field essay, Thomas Zeiler argued that

the days of doubt were 'gone' and that foreign relations historians were now 'an advance guard driving the bandwagon of internationalization' in US history. The 'United States in the World' label was increasingly common, often used in place of 'diplomatic history'. Many considered it a more accurate label that captured the subfield's burgeoning shape. At the same time, the leading organisation and its flagship journal retained their original names: the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) and *Diplomatic History*.[9]

The terms 'foreign relations', 'diplomatic history' and variants of 'US in the World' have since co-existed, albeit somewhat uncomfortably, with the latter growing in prominence. The uncertainty has provided some useful flexibility. But this relative nomenclatural settling has not papered over all fissures and cracks. Some scholars have lamented the sidelining of political history and called for a 'rebalancing'. The increasing cultural and global vistas have, they argue, excessively decentred the US state, the preponderant global power since the mid-twentieth century.[10] Diplomacy, statecraft and high politics remain a staple of politics and grand strategy in the United States, which has been less eager to embrace the cultural and international turns given that causality is harder to establish. Policy institutes and programmes have increasingly diverged from the field in recent years. Policy advocacy and preparing students for positions of power to advance American national interests are a greater concern in these institutions than publishing in *Diplomatic History* or historiographical sparring.[11]

Nevertheless, the release of the *CHAW* volumes marks a key moment in the field's evolution and an attempt to crystallise its new, inclusive incarnation. Contributors retain a keen interest in the making and implementation of US foreign relations, including a focus on those who directly made critical policy decisions. But the broader way in which foreign relations is understood – who shaped the US's role in the world, how and why they did so, how non-American actors influenced and responded to those actions – has created a highly diffuse field. This is true in a thematic sense, as demonstrated by the growth of studies looking at the intersections between US foreign relations and religion, race, gender, human rights, imperialism, international law, environmentalism, development, disease control, aid and popular culture. It is also significant in a geographic sense, as seen through the existence of local,

regional, international, global and transnational perspectives on American power.

This abundance raises questions as to what binds the multitude of voices and approaches. In theory, everyone working on topics related to America or Americans is producing US in the World scholarship. Yet if everyone has the potential to do such work, who is – or is not – a US in the World scholar? How can the field be mapped? The point is wrestled with most explicitly by the editors of *CHAW* Volume 1, which explores America before 1820, and is the most radical in terms of focus, organisation and areas covered. Referencing the 'messy, complicated, various, multidirectional early modern Atlantic-American world', the editors note the striking difficulty in making sense of what emerged from this period. 'Early America has always been more diffuse than a straightforward national narrative might like', but 'the question now is whether it is too diffuse for a cohesive national narrative to stand, or comprehensive enough to serve as a foundation on which a more perfect union can be built'.[12] It is a pertinent question, relevant for the field as a whole. But also, for the purposes of this essay, it is pertinent for university teaching of US history and foreign relations as it relates to approach as well as the subject matter itself.

We argue that students are receptive to the expansiveness of the field. Yet while keen to move beyond plodding chronology to cultural and transnational approaches, students may express scepticism toward abstract assessments of US power and inquiries ranging over long periods of time.[13] Moreover, there is rarely space within the confines of a three- or four-year degree programme for covering key moments in US history while embracing innovative approaches. For instance, is there room for a deep dive into the strategic and diplomatic causes and consequences of the Cuban Missile Crisis, as well as providing a gendered analysis of the event, bearing in mind that scholarship on women, gender and sexuality is now considered mainstream in US foreign relations history?[14]

As we wrestle with the field's intellectual transformation since the early 1980s, it is important to consider what these shifts mean for how we conceptualise and execute teaching. Does embracing new approaches always work, how receptive are students to this material, and how does its intellectual content map on to learning pathways and curriculum requirements? How do institutional pressures affect our capacity to teach in an innovative and reflective way?

Who takes the modules that we offer, and do changes in the field aid diversity in the classroom and reflect the interests of our students? And finally, what are the possibilities for reorienting and rethinking our field in the classroom, in collaboration with each other and our students?

How and Who We Teach

In assessing how our subject is taught in the UK, a full audit of every university in the country was beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, we circulated a survey amongst UK-based academics working on and teaching subjects that could be classified as US in the World. While not exhaustive, the list included UK scholars affiliated with SHAFR and various related academic networks such as Historians of the Twentieth Century United States (HOTCUS).[15] The survey gathered detailed responses from more than twenty academics related to their institutions, teaching practices and students, and while far from a perfect method, it enabled the authors to develop several broad themes and identify areas of concern.[16] As far as possible, we contextualised our own survey findings with existing data from the Higher Education Statistical Agency; *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change*, based on a survey conducted by the Royal Historical Society (RHS) in 2018; and the American History in the UK survey conducted by the British Group of Early American Historians (BGEAH), the British American Nineteenth Century Historians (BrANCH) and HOTCUS, also 2018.[17]

On a practical level, the responses suggested that how US in the World is taught would be familiar to most historians working in the UK, with variations often related to the size of cohorts at different universities. Many institutions offer broad undergraduate survey courses at first or second year, in some cases specifically focused on US foreign relations, but more often covering general American history. Class sizes on these, often team-taught, modules ranged from forty to 150 students depending on the size of the department and university. More specialist courses are taught at higher levels, particularly third year undergraduate and as part of taught Master's degrees. Unsurprisingly, the survey courses have a greater emphasis on lectures, both in person and pre-recorded, while the specialist modules are more heavily seminar and workshop based.

Participants were also asked to reflect on changes they had introduced to their teaching, and many commented on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in terms of increased digital and pre-recorded material being made available to students. Several contributors also noted changes in assessment, with the traditional in-person exams almost entirely gone, due to a combination of COVID and shifts in pedagogy that emphasise the skills gained through research, writing and presentation, rather than producing work under exam conditions. Common assessments are essays, source analyses, literature reviews, individual or group presentations, and take-home exams. Some respondents described experimenting with assessed blog posts and podcasts, but several also noted that overly bureaucratic restrictions meant that the scope for introducing non-traditional assessments in place of the exam was limited.

Beyond the practicalities of module delivery, several important themes emerged from participants' responses that chimed with the experiences of the authors. The first was the sustained popularity of US in the World topics and US history more broadly amongst students. Several noted that while interest in well-established topics such as JFK and the Vietnam War remained high, there was an increasing openness to 'new' approaches that embraced a wider variety of perspectives and methodologies, with one participant taking this as 'a sign that so many of the new developments in diplomatic history are having a major impact on the way the subfield is understood by students'. However, for others, the popularity and size of the courses they taught also proved something of a restriction, with the work required for overhauling them daunting when set against the 'sunk cost' of established approaches. This led to tinkering round the edges rather than introducing fundamental changes to course aims, content or delivery. Several also noted the challenges inherent in straying too far from traditional approaches, particularly in broader survey modules, given that many UK students lack a basic understanding of American history and expected courses to provide them with a 'standard political narrative of US historical development'.

The responses nonetheless reflected a group of scholars keen to incorporate a wider range of perspectives into their teaching, in terms of ensuring that 'the world' was given prominence alongside the United States, but also by embedding the analytical categories

of race, gender, religion and other 'cultural turn' developments into modules in a manner that was organic and intellectually coherent. The survey revealed the varied and innovative approaches to teaching US in the World that colleagues are implementing beyond regular revisions of reading lists and lecture materials. These included abandoning linear chronological structuring of survey courses for thematic approaches, incorporating a wider variety of primary materials that helped embed the US within global histories of imperialism, and extending the chronological scope of modules to integrate Indigenous and colonial-era perspectives within the context of foreign relations. At minimum, respondents utilise a variety of readings to prompt student engagement with material and perspectives beyond traditional diplomatic history approaches even if this continues to meet with mixed student reactions.

This confirms the ongoing trend, already identified in the 2018 RHS survey, that colleagues and departments increasingly recognise the need to widen the curriculum beyond a Eurocentric and Western focus, to diversify teaching by incorporating themes such as race, ethnicity and gender, and taking inspiration from the theoretical debates relating to these themes.[18] In some cases, participants reported good progress in developing modules that fulfilled these aims, but others were still grappling with how to balance inventiveness and ambition with focus and coherence. Several participants also commented on terminology, and our field's continued debates over how best to describe what we do. The shifts between diplomatic history, the history of foreign relations, and the US in (or and) the World can be difficult to explain to students and are not always helpful in terms of pitching how US history, Cold War history, global history and other major fields and approaches interrelate.

Finally, participants were also asked to reflect on any changes they had noted amongst the students taking their modules. Beyond the enduring popularity of American topics, several respondents commented on the increased interest in approaches that went beyond 'traditional' diplomatic history, and on the fact that classes were relatively well balanced in gender terms, which had not always been the case. The two may well be related: even though women constitute the majority of students in historical and philosophical studies, between 53 per cent and 55 per cent between 2019 and 2022, they are often in the minority in modules which focus on themes such as diplomacy, war and economics.[19] Crucially, this

suggests that changes in curriculum content to allow for more methodological and theoretical diversity have a significant impact on the composition of the student body we teach. After all, it was a theoretical and methodological turn that has led to 'greater demographic diversity' in the field of diplomatic history more generally, as acknowledged by the leading academic body in the field, SHAFR, in *The Status of Women in Diplomatic and International History, 2013–2017: A Follow-Up Report*.[20] The shift from 'traditional' diplomatic history to teaching US in the World has proven to be an important tool to further enhance female participation in the field of American history in the classroom and beyond.[21]

In terms of racial and ethnic diversity the impression was more mixed, with some survey respondents commenting positively on gradual improvement, while others noted that their classes reflected their departments and universities more widely in their lack of representation of non-white students. This corresponds with trends regarding the composition of our student body captured by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.[22] While in 2018, 89 per cent of students in historical and philosophical studies were white and only 11 per cent from ethnic minorities, the percentage of non-white students has slightly increased over the last years, from 13.78 per cent (2019/20) to 14.75 per cent (2021/22).[23] However, such limited improvement in representation explains why many colleagues still perceive our classrooms as predominantly white. In this context, expanding teaching offered on US in the World, which may already have played a role in the slight diversification of our classrooms, could prove to be an important tool for further progress.

Past surveys have clearly established the existing correlation between teaching content and enhanced equity, diversity and inclusion within our student body. Of the 127 respondents to the 2018 American History in the UK survey, 27.56 per cent agreed that 'minority ethnic groups (are) less attracted to American history topics than to other topics', while one respondent stated that 'BAME [ethnic minority] students in the UK (are) more attracted to British, imperial/post-colonial and global history'.[24] The RHS survey also identified 'the limited intellectual and substantive diversity of UK History curriculums—in secondary schools and at universities—as an impediment to racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion in History departments'.[25] Further teaching on US in the World, which often intersects with global and imperial history, as

well as applying a postcolonial lens, may therefore appear more attractive to under-represented student groups than 'traditional' options in US foreign relations. After all, professional bodies in the field have for some time made the case that 'a White-centred and Eurocentric curriculum is a racial problem within the discipline'.[26]

A final common theme that emerged from the survey was the ambition to include students in the design of curricula and assessments. Here, academics can turn to conceptualisations of and empirical research on the 'student voice' developed by education scholars.[27] While the benefits of research-led teaching have long been acknowledged, which would be an argument *for* the incorporation of new approaches such as US in the World into curricula, in an institutional climate that assigns great importance to the student experience in decisions on how to structure and resource teaching, listening to the student voice can help scholars decide on precisely how to connect research and teaching.[28] How then can we think strategically about co-creating US in the World curricula with our students?

Co-Creating US in the World Curricula

There are limited existing resources for academics who intend to increase US in the World content in their teaching. Professional associations such as SHAFR host online syllabi and assignment collections, but these are tailored to a US academic context. The SHAFR website features over fifty sample syllabi, grouped thematically and by period, mostly submitted by academics based at North American universities, but the most recent syllabus on the site dates back to 2014.[29] Comparable resources for a UK context are non-existent. Moreover, sample syllabi run the risk of narrowing academics' attention towards individual module creation, which neglects the potential for incorporating US in the World content in other ways.

In the last decade and a half, pedagogical research on curriculum design has become more invested in the ideal of co-creation, meaning the collaboration between faculty and students to design a course of study.[30] This can refer to course content but also teaching and assessment, and include practices such as students assessing and redesigning course content and teaching methods; students undertaking disciplinary and pedagogical research; and students

designing assessments and peer marking.[31] Co-creation can take place at different levels of the curriculum, the degree level (history, American studies, politics or other degree), the module or course level, or an individual teaching session.[32]

What does this look like in a US in the World context, specifically for modules taught within American studies? Here, co-creation may be particularly relevant as it enables academics and students to design teaching that, as has been highlighted, can incorporate a wide range of content due to the capacious nature of the field. Gathering and evaluating 'student voice' may provide academics with a better understanding of the topics that students are drawn to, even if they themselves do not define these as US in the World topics.

In the following, we discuss a concrete example of co-creation *of* as well as *in* the curriculum, based on a service evaluation and subsequent curriculum redesign of a module on American empire in the context of a UK American studies degree. This project took place at the University of Sussex over the course of two academic years, 2022/23 and 2023/24, and involved so-called 'student connectors', current students who are employed on a part-time basis by the University, and, in collaboration with a 'staff connector', devise their own projects within given parameters.[33]

Founded in the early 1960s, the University of Sussex offers one of the oldest American studies programmes in the UK. Due to changes in staff profiles and in the context of wider curriculum reform across the institution, Sussex student connectors worked on a curriculum review of the American studies degree programme, conducting a service evaluation which included systematic analysis of course documents as well as student focus groups.[34] These focus groups were entirely student-organised and student-led, thus minimising staff input, and took the form of semi-structured group discussion on the content and delivery of the degree programme. Data was gathered, analysed and presented to faculty by the students themselves, preparing the ground for further co-creation (of reading lists, module outlines, etc.).

Results that are relevant to US in the World teaching include strong student interest in Native American history, even though this was not framed as a US in the World topic by the students (despite foundational concepts in the field, such as indigeneity and sovereignty, being key concerns in Native American history). There was also a sense that students required a strong grounding in US politics

and political history before enrolling in more specialised modules in US foreign policy.[35]

This data then fed into a redesign by the staff connector of an existing finalist module, 'American Empire', offered to final-year students in the autumn of 2023. The module's core reading, Daniel Immerwahr's much-discussed *How to Hide an Empire*, was retained; however, the chronological scope of the module was expanded significantly to include two sessions on Native American history, which is only treated in a comparatively short chapter by Immerwahr.[36] These sessions were framed as inquiries into 'postcolonial empire' in the era of the American Revolution, and 'Indigenous empire', discussing US territorial expansion, Native American agency and empire-building, and the so-called Indian Wars of the nineteenth century.[37]

In addition, the influential article 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor' by education scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang was added to the core reading for the concluding session on 'end of empire', intended to further student understanding of debates on indigeneity and taking advantage of the disciplinary openness of American studies. It was juxtaposed with a more empirical article on current decolonisation strategies pursued by Pacific Islanders. While Tuck and Yang focus on the continental United States, the status of polities such as the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, American Samoa and the Federated States of Micronesia illustrates the complexities of definitions of sovereignty, hegemony and empire.[38]

As in many finalist modules, students were required to devise their own final essay questions. Some of these student-devised questions indicate that the inclusion of Native American history may have sparked deeper reflection on the chronological dimensions and very definition of 'empire', a foundational analytical category for US in the World. Other aspects of co-creation consisted in offering the students a choice of film for a session dedicated to the representation of American empire in cinema and inviting them to propose their own suggestion. It came to the instructor's surprise that the students chose Denys Arcand's *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* over blockbuster *Red Dawn*, but the ensuing discussion touched on themes such as metaphors of imperial decline, declinism as a genre, and representations of race, gender and sexuality in the context of American empire – topics that are particularly pertinent in an American studies programme.

Students were also encouraged to reflect on encountering representations of empire in their everyday lives, for instance through prompts such as 'Bring an object from your everyday life that symbolises American empire to the seminar' and 'How have you encountered manifestations of American empire during your year abroad in North America?'. Interestingly, the most common answer here related to land acknowledgements, which may well be a testament to consistent student interest in Native American politics and history, and the robustness of the data gathered during the preceding focus groups.

While this represents a specific example involving a concrete module, service evaluations, although contingent on institutional resources, offer an opportunity for genuine engagement with and listening to the student voice. They also suggest possible avenues for US in the World scholars who want to integrate their research interests with teaching and cooperate with students, especially in terms of enabling students to build on and connect different content, and in terms of the importance of understanding how students 'label' teaching content in the context of a broader curriculum.

Conclusions

Shifting the focus of who and what we understand as shaping US foreign relations has, without question, dramatically altered the way we teach and the topics and sources we ask our students to engage with. And though that process has not been wholly straightforward, there have been clear benefits. Reorienting the field away from an emphasis on white, male policy-makers, and offering a more diverse and multifaceted assessment of the drivers of US foreign relations, has helped to frame the subject in a way that makes it more attractive to a broader range of students.

Yet questions remain about the field's focus and shape within UK higher education. Though progress has been made within the field with respect to gender equality, it is less evident with regard to racial diversity. The surveys cited in the second section suggest why – ethnic minority students in the UK, for one, are interested in aspects that feel more relevant to their lived experience (i.e. British, imperial/postcolonial and global history) – and also make the case that the field's embrace of diverse topics and contexts helps to bridge that gap. Nevertheless, a further query, particularly in a UK and European

context, is whether our conception of the field could be altered. Rather than placing the emphasis on the *US* in the World and running the risk of reifying the United States, we might reorder the framing to emphasise *the World* in/and the US. Such a recalibration might tie our teaching into an expansive understanding of the United States that is more appropriate to scholars and students working in the UK and Europe. This, however, runs the risk of further muddying the waters in a field that is already loosely defined. As one of the respondents to the survey suggested, while recognising the possibility that an even broader vista might be necessary, a wider lens requires systematic engagement with multiple national and transnational historiographies. As ever, further changes must be considered carefully. As another respondent noted, 'I think we need to do more to teach methodological approaches, i.e. what "US in the World" actually means.'

Finally, the relationship between staff and students, particularly in an area such as curriculum and module design, remains uncertain in the contemporary university landscape, not least due to the bureaucratic difficulties associated with processes of curriculum design and reform. But, as detailed in this chapter, such issues do not foreclose possibilities that can emerge when academics and students engage with one another over what US in the World is, how it is taught, and what subjects and issues they are interested in wrestling with. That students might have an abiding interest in focusing on Native American history – a topic in which expertise in the UK has been allowed to dwindle – and yet not necessarily see that as part of the US in the World is hugely significant. It also raises the possibility of highly valuable engagement, particularly if a focus on Native American histories and their engagements with the United States could be linked to broader processes regarding industrial violence and colonialism. Developments in US in the World scholarship offer several opportunities for teaching. Embracing them also requires an appreciation of the limits in terms of the field's expanding boundaries and the practical realities, including political context, of the modern-day higher education landscape.

Notes

1. Mark Philip Bradley, 'General Introduction: What Is America and the World?', in *The Cambridge History of America and the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 7.

2. Debates over the field's name remain unresolved. We use 'US in the World' here to acknowledge the US focus of our teaching, but also signal that we understand the United States as embedded in global historical processes.
3. Charles S. Maier, 'Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations', in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Cornell University Press, 1981), 355–87.
4. Maier's critique had great impact, leading to a special forum featuring prominent scholars Michael Hunt, Akira Iriye, Walter LaFeber, Melvyn Leffler, Robert Schulzinger and Joan Hoff-Wilson: 'Symposium: Responses to Charles S. Maier, "Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations"', *Diplomatic History* 5, no. 4 (October 1981): 353–82. See also Mark Philip Bradley, 'The Charlie Maier Scare and the Historiography of American Foreign Relations, 1959–1980', in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, ed. Frank Costigliola and Michael Hogan, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 9–29.
5. Robert Buzzanco, 'Where's the Beef? Culture without Power in the Study of U.S. Foreign Relations', *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (October 2000): 623–32; Patricia Hill, 'Religion as a Category of Diplomatic Analysis', *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (October 2000): 633–40; Patrick Finney, 'Still Marking Time? Text, Discourse, and Truth in International History', *Reviews in International Studies* 27, no. 3 (July 2001): 291–308; Andrew Rotter, 'Chaps Having Flaps: The Historiography of U.S. Foreign Relations, 1980–1995', in Costigliola and Hogan (eds), *America in the World*, 30–57.
6. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (eds), *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Duke University Press, 1993); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2002). On the relationship between American studies and concepts of American empire, see Christopher Lee and Melani McAlister (eds), 'Generations of Empire in American Studies', special issue of *American Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (September 2022).
7. David P. Thelen, 'The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on U.S. History', *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 965–75; OAH and NYU Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History, 'The La Pietra Report: A Report to the Profession', September 2020, https://www.oah.org/insights/archive/the-lapietra-report-a-report-to-the-profession/; Thomas Bender (ed.), *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (University of California Press, 2002); Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (Hill and Wang, 2006).

8. Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Michael Cowan, Eric Sandeen and Emory Elliot, 'The Internationalization of American Studies', *ASA Newsletter* 17 (December 1994): 12–14; Janice Radway, 'What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998', *American Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1999): 1–32.
9. See Thomas Zeiler, 'The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field', *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009): 1053–71, and the responses by Kristin Hoganson, Mario Del Pero, Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Fredrik Logevall; Erez Manela, 'The United States in the World', in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Temple University Press, 2011), 201–21; Mitchell Lerner, 'Loving America but Loving Korea More: The Evolution of an Organization, a Field, and a Historian', *Diplomatic History* 49, no. 2 (April 2025): 171–200.
10. Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood, 'Why Did We Stop Teaching Political History?', *New York Times*, 29 August 2016; Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall, 'Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations', *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 38–55. On the pushback to these arguments, see 'Political History: An Exchange', *Perspectives on History* 55, no. 1 (January 2017); H-Diplo Roundtable XXI-42 (on Bessner and Logevall), 25 May 2020, https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XXI-42.pdf; Roundtable on Bessner and Logevall, *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review* 51, no. 2 (September 2020): 39–45.
11. Examples include the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy at Yale and the America in the World Consortium (Duke-Texas-Johns Hopkins, https://www.awconsortium.org/). For critiques of the programmes' relations with policy-making elites and conservative donors, see Perry Anderson, 'Consilium', *New Left Review* 83 (September/October 2013): 113–67; Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols and Andrew Preston (eds), *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (Oxford University Press, 2021); Thomas Meaney and Stephen Wertheim, 'Grand Flattery: The Yale Grand Strategy Program', *The Nation*, 28 May 2012; Jennifer Schuessler, 'Leader of Prestigious Yale Program Resigns, Citing Donor Pressure', *New York Times*, 30 September 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/30/arts/yale-grand-strategy-resignation.html; Aaron Jakes, 'A Yale Program Drew Fire over Donor Meddling. Its Real Problem Was Promoting War', *Washington Post*, 11 October 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/10/11/yale-grand-strategy-bever

ly-gage-kissinger/; Jim Sleeper, 'Yale's Grand Strategy Program Has Always Been Broken', *Foreign Policy*, 15 October 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/15/yales-grand-strategy-program-has-always-been-broken/.

12. Eliga Gould, Paul Mapp and Carla Gardina Pestana, 'Introduction: What Does America and the World "Mean" before 1825?', in *The Cambridge History of America and the World, Volume 1: 1500–1820*, ed. Gould, Mapp and Pestana (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 31–32.
13. One example from our teaching practice that has elicited confused and questioning responses relates to teaching scholarship on cattle and sheep impacting American power: Kristin Hoganson, 'Meat in the Middle: Converging Borderlands in the U.S. Midwest, 1865–1900', *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 4 (March 2012): 1025–91; Daniel Vandersommers, 'Narrating Animal History from the Crags: A Turn-of-the-Century Tale about Mountain Sheep, Resistance, and a Nation', *Journal of American Studies* 51, no. 3 (August 2017): 751–77.
14. Kristin Hoganson, 'What's Gender Got to Do with It? Gender History as Foreign Relations History', in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael Hogan and Thomas Paterson, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (Yale University Press, 1998); Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 6; David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago University Press, 2004). For recent studies see Laura Belmonte, *The International LGBT Rights Movement: A History* (Bloomsbury, 2021); 'Colloquy: Queering America and the World', *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 1 (January 2016): 19–80; Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler (eds), *Women's International Thought: A New History* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
15. In terms of relating data, in the American History in the UK survey of 2018, out of 184 colleagues teaching US history in the UK, 26.63 per cent identified as transnational historians and 22.28 per cent as diplomatic historians. See BGEAH, BrANCH, HOTCUS, *American History in the UK: 2018 Survey Results and Report*, https://hotcus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018-American-History-in-the-UK-survey-results.pdf, p. 11.
16. The most significant (identifiable) imbalance in the survey is the predominance of responses from academics working at Russell Group universities (68.2 per cent). While this most likely reflects the survey design and distribution list, it indicates which institutions are (a) large enough

to employ specialists in US in the World, and (b) employing full-time staff with the research time and funds available to be active in professional organisations like SHAFR and respond to a detailed survey.

17. Royal Historical Society, *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change* (October 2018), https://royalhistsoc.org/racereport/; BGEAH, BrANCH, HOTCUS, *American History in the UK: 2018 Survey Results and Report*.
18. '86.3% of staff respondents reported that their institution had sought to widen the History curriculum beyond Britain and Europe, while 58% reported attempts to widen the curriculum with regard to histories of race and ethnicity.' RHS, *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History*, 64.
19. 'Who's Studying in HE?', Higher Education Statistics Agency, https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he#characteristics.
20. Nicole Anslover et al., 'The Status of Women in Diplomatic and International History, 2013–2017: A Follow-Up Report', *Passport* (January 2019), 7.
21. As the American History in the UK survey confirmed: 'The field is disproportionately populated by men, compared not only to the UK population but also to the broader historical profession and undergraduate cohorts in the UK.' BGEAH, BrANCH, HOTCUS, *American History in the UK: 2018 Survey Results and Report*, 1.
22. Even though this data is only indicative as for 'students, the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) bundles History into the category "Historical and Philosophical Studies" (H&PS), a rubric encompassing History, Archaeology, Heritage Studies, Philosophy and Theology & Religious Studies; subject-specific data is often not publicly available'. RHS, *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History*, 21.
23. RHS, *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History*, 22; 'Undergraduate students of known ethnicity with a permanent address in the UK by CAH level 1 subject and ethnicity 2014/15 to 2022/23', Higher Education Statistics Agency, https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-53.
24. BGEAH, BrANCH, HOTCUS, *American History in the UK: 2018 Survey Results and Report*, 21–22.
25. RHS, *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History*, 7.
26. RHS, *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History*, 23; for recommendations on the diversification of our curricula, see 82–83.
27. Julie McLeod, 'Student Voice and the Politics of Listening in Higher Education', *Critical Studies in Education* 52, no. 2 (2011): 179–89.
28. M. Healey and A. Jenkins, *Developing Undergraduate Research and Inquiry* (Higher Education Academy, 2009).
29. SHAFR, Course Syllabi and Assignments, https://www.shafr.org/course-syllabi-assignments. The British Association for American

Studies (BAAS) has a Teaching Network but does not promote sample syllabi.

30. C. Bovill et al., 'Addressing Potential Challenges in Co-Creating Learning and Teaching: Overcoming Resistance, Navigating Institutional Norms and Ensuring Inclusivity in Student-Staff Partnerships', *Higher Education* 71, no. 2 (2016): 195–208; Elaine Doyle, Patrick Buckley and Joanne Whelan, 'Assessment Co-Creation: An Exploratory Analysis of Opportunities and Challenges Based on Student and Instructor Perspectives', *Teaching in Higher Education* 24, no. 6 (2019): 739–54.
31. Doyle et al., 'Assessment Co-Creation', 740.
32. Catherine Bovill and Cherie Woolmer, 'How Conceptualisations of Curriculum in Higher Education Influence Student-Staff Co-Creation in and of the Curriculum', *Higher Education* 78, no. 3 (2019): 407–22 (409).
33. For information on the programme, see https://student.sussex.ac.uk/experience/connectors/about.
34. For a typology of student voice evidence gathering and 'service evaluation' versus 'research', see Liz Austen, 'The Amplification of Student Voices via Institutional Research and Evaluation', in *A Handbook for Student Engagement in Higher Education*, ed. Tom Lowe and Yassein El Hakim (Routledge, 2020), 164–76 (169).
35. This data was gathered and analysed in the context of a service evaluation in February 2023.
36. Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A Short History of the Greater United States* (Random House, 2019).
37. Suggested readings for these sessions included Patrick Griffin, 'Imperial Confusion: America's Post-Colonial and Post-Revolutionary Empire', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 49, no. 3 (2021): 414–30; Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (Yale University Press, 2023); Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Harvard University Press, 2008); Pekka Hämäläinen, 'Reconstructing the Great Plains: The Long Struggle for Sovereignty and Dominance in the Heart of the Continent', *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 4 (2016): 481–509; Katharine Bjork, *Prairie Imperialists: The Indian Country Origins of American Empire* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).
38. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40; Moritz Pöllath, 'Revisiting Island Decolonization: The Pursuit of Self-Government in Pacific Island Polities under US Hegemony', *Island Studies Journal* 13, no. 1 (2018): 235–50.

CHAPTER 15

CASE STUDY: Native American History and the US in the World

Elizabeth Ingleson

What are the relationships between the United States' history of settler colonialism and the many overseas wars it has fought? How have Native Americans navigated sovereignty in the face of the expanding power of the US state? And how have US institutions been shaped by relations with Native nations? Over the course of a year, my undergraduate students and I grapple with these questions, among others, in my US in the World survey course. Together, we look at US foreign relations since 1776, and a central aspect of how I teach this course is by integrating Native American history into the larger story of the US in the World.

Many of the events that my students and I encounter would be familiar to those who teach US in the World survey courses. The Monroe Doctrine, the 1846 US-Mexico War, the 1898 war with Spain, World War I, World War II, the Cold War and the forever wars are some of the key touchstones of the course. Like Philip Deloria's notion of 'remixing' familiar narratives of American studies, in this course, I seek to illuminate new ways of seeing the past by centring Native American history in the larger canvas of the US in the World.[1]

In this chapter I will reflect on two of the key challenges raised by taking an approach like this. First is the question of how to balance historiography and content. For decades, scholars of Native America have been calling for historians to consider Native American history as an integral part of US foreign relations, but it is still not the norm to do so in an undergraduate survey course. I want to draw my students' attention to these historiographical calls, but I also want to simply implement the approaches scholars

have long been demanding. Working out a balance between how to draw attention to what it is we are doing, while also simply getting on with it and doing it, has been a conscious part of how I teach this course.

Second, I have been grappling with how to genuinely integrate these histories and ensure Native American history is not simply a token add-on to the more standard aspects of a US in the World class. There is considerable research examining how US foreign relations and US power have shaped Native American nations, particularly in relation to issues such as Indian removal or settler expansion. But there is a rich scholarship that additionally pushes us to consider how the histories of Native nations change or complicate our understandings of US power as well. Learning from the work of Maggie Blackhawk, Daniel Cobb, Philip Deloria and others, we see its importance in the weeks we turn to the twentieth century, when the centrality of Indigenous people to US history has traditionally tended to fade from view.

Throughout this process, I centre the multiplicity of Native nations and their heterogeneous interests. I want my students to come away from the year with an understanding of many different Indigenous nations and to conceive of foreign relations as being that between Native nations themselves as much as with the United States. Ultimately my goal is to encourage students to understand Native American history as central to the story of US foreign relations: not only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but also in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

In 2015, *Diplomatic History*, the flagship journal of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), featured a special issue on Native Americans and the history of US foreign relations.[2] Collectively, the articles argued that greater integration of Native nations in the histories of US foreign relations would provide a fuller understanding of US power and its relations with the world. The articles made a historiographical call, noting that their own appeal for a more expansive lens of US foreign relations was part of a much longer history in which scholars had done the same. As one participant noted, 'on several occasions in the 1980s and 1990s, essays in this journal urged readers to take Native American history seriously.'[3] Another participant cited Arthur Gilbert, who in 1975 wrote that it is precisely 'because Indian affairs are in the grey area between domestic and foreign that there are so many

significant issues *of a diplomatic nature* to examine'.[4] The articles drew attention to the vast scholarship of Native America that tackled similar questions to historians of US foreign relations or that raised issues that intersected with more traditional narratives of US engagement with the world.

In the ten years since the publication of this special issue, historians of US foreign relations have increasingly turned to Native American history to make sense of US power. The field-defining updated four-volume *Cambridge History of America and the World* includes histories of Indigenous peoples throughout each volume. This was, editor Mark Philip Bradley wrote, a 'radical' departure 'from past ways of seeing American foreign relations'.[5] In her presidential address to SHAFR members in 2020, Kristin Hoganson centred the importance of Indigenous peoples, Native land and settler colonialism to our understanding of the history of US empire.[6] Even still, this effort has much further to go. Since the special issue of 2015, *Diplomatic History* has featured only five articles integrating Native American history in their analyses, including the written text of Hoganson's speech.[7]

As mentioned, a key concern of mine is how much to draw my students' attention to historiographical changes – and their limitations – and how much I want to simply implement calls for change. I tend to highlight key historiographical points in my first lecture and come back to them periodically throughout the year. When we arrive at the twentieth century, around halfway through the year, I increase the weight I give to historiographical discussions. It is here that I emphasise that scholars are continuing to push back against the notion of the 'vanishing' Native American with the closing of the continental frontier in the late nineteenth century.

More often, I try to integrate discussion of historiographical trends with empirical content. For example, early in the course we turn to the American Revolution. It's here that I note that in 1776 it was not just white settlers who declared the birth of the United States on the continent of North America. In the Black Hills of what is today South Dakota, so too did a group of people from the Sioux establish the Lakota Nation.[8] Emphasising the creation of two nations in such a pivotal year of American history helps underscore the ways that the United States was just one of many powers on the continent at the time. But it also provides opportunity to consider the differences in how these polities organised themselves.

Central to these efforts is the need to draw students' attention to the distinctions between nations and states. While the United States became a republican empire and ultimately a nation-state, the Lakota Nation did not become a state in the Westphalian sense. Native nations were nations without states, but that did not make them any less political.

Emphasising the relationships – and distinctions – between nationhood, politics and states provides an entry point into a larger historiographical question. In considering why it is that Native nations are not the subject of greater interest amongst historians of the US and the world, many scholars have pointed to the complexities raised by the fact that Native nations were not nation-states. As Megan Black has put it, this is the 'decidedly complex and interstitial status of indigenous sovereignty'.[9] In 1831 and 1832, Chief Justice John Marshall ruled in two decisions, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), that Indians constituted 'domestic dependent nations'. The fact that Native Americans were understood as 'not quite domestic, not quite foreign', as one scholar has put it, made their place in larger histories of American power more complex for scholars traditionally predisposed towards a Westphalian model of analysis.[10] If US foreign relations has traditionally been understood as the history of relations between nation-states, then Native American polities push scholars to take a more capacious understanding of what is considered diplomatic and how sovereignty is conceived.

If one of my teaching methods is to integrate historiographical analysis with empirical discussion, then a crucial aspect underpinning this approach is to avoid making Native American history a token add-on to the 'main event' of US foreign relations history. It's here that I'm able to draw on the growing body of literature that is showing the direct and concrete ways in which US power was transformed – and expanded – because of relations with Native American people.

When we turn to the US-Mexico War in 1846, for example, my students and I learn from Brian DeLay that the outcomes of the war cannot be understood without looking at the political actions of the Comanche, Kiowa, Apache and Navajo.[11] Throughout the 1830s and into the 1840s, these Indigenous polities raided Mexican settlements on the borderlands between the United States and Mexico. In turn, Mexicans responded with their own violent raids

on Indigenous communities. These raids and counter-raids sowed greater distrust between Mexican officials and United States leaders; many within Mexican politics and media believed the United States to be encouraging the Native American raids. The raids additionally meant that when war did break out between the United States and Mexico in 1846, Mexican fighters came from a weakened position after years of borderlands fighting. 'Exhausted, impoverished, and divided by fifteen years of war, and facing ongoing and even intensifying Indian raids, northern Mexicans were singularly unprepared to resist the US Army in 1846 or to sustain a significant insurgency against occupation forces,' DeLay argues.[12] This history opens up conversations with my students about how looking at an issue from a new perspective does not just add new voices but rather changes how we understand decision-making and causation.

As the course turns to the twentieth century, we take our cues from Stefan Aune, connecting settler colonialism at home with US imperialism abroad. Aune has shown how the violence of American settler colonialism in the nineteenth century influenced the Philippine-American War, 'from the day-to-day physical struggle of combat, to the representations of the war in media and literature'.[13] Aune's article encourages students to consider how US institutions, and the ideas underpinning them, were formed through the violent relations with Native Americans and later applied to other peoples and contexts.

We revisit these ideas a few weeks later when we turn to World War II. We read Mae Ngai's work on Japanese internment alongside Maggie Blackhawk's article on former Indian boarding schools that were repurposed for Japanese incarceration.[14] Blackhawk focuses on the Leupp Isolation Center, which had once been a boarding school for Native American children but was transformed during World War II into an internment camp for Japanese Americans. The Leupp Isolation Center 'provides a particularly paradigmatic example of the central role of American colonialism in facilitating Japanese incarceration', Blackhawk argues.[15] Read alongside Ngai's research into the assimilationist aims of Japanese internment camps, these articles show the ways that internment and Indian boarding schools were not exceptions to American liberal ideals but rather formative components of American liberalism and the assimilationism underpinning it. Ngai and Blackhawk provide a way, then, for my students and me to consider the ongoing ways that institutions

and ideas in the US state were made and remade through often violent relations with Native Americans.

Each year, the cohort of students I teach will have a range of experiences in US history and American studies. Some 'study abroad' students from the United States come to the course with significant prior knowledge of many aspects of US history. Others will have never done a US history course before. I have found that 'remixing' the standard narratives of US history allows me to challenge and extend my students regardless of their previous studies. It allows students who have studied the United States before to question their assumptions while providing an introductory overview for students with less knowledge.

By considering the ways that Indigenous people engaged with, resisted and shaped US power alongside other ideas and events in the history of US relations with the wider world – by integrating Native American history with that of the US in the World – we get a fuller, more complete way of understanding both fields of history. Working out a way of telling these stories, underscoring their historiographical significance, as well as ensuring they do not become simply an 'add-on', is an ongoing process but one that has opened up conversations with my students about the ways that the struggle for Native American sovereignty, visibility and political representation continues to shape US politics and society today.

Notes

1. Philip Deloria, *American Studies: A User's Guide* (University of California Press, 2017).
2. Brian DeLay, 'Indian Politics, Empire, and the History of American Foreign Relations', *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (November 2015): 927–42; Alexandra Harmon, 'American Indians, American Law, and Modern American Foreign Relations', *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (November 2015): 943–54; Paul C. Rosier, 'Crossing New Boundaries: American Indians and Twentieth Century U.S. Foreign Policy', *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (November 2015): 955–66.
3. DeLay, 'Indian Politics', 927.
4. Arthur N. Gilbert, cited in Rosier, 'Crossing New Boundaries', 955.
5. Mark Philip Bradley, 'General Introduction: What Is America and the World?', in *The Cambridge History of America and the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 6.

6. Kristin Hoganson, 'Inposts of Empire', *Diplomatic History* 45, no. 1 (January 2021): 1–22.
7. Megan Black, 'Empire Underground: The Stakes of U.S. Claims to Vertical Power', *Diplomatic History* 48, no. 4 (September 2024): 495–519; Caitlin Fitz, 'The Monroe Doctrine and the Indigenous Americas', *Diplomatic History* 47, no. 5 (November 2023): 802–22; Caleb Giles Hardner, 'Weaknesses of Empire: Rethinking Kaluaiko'olau's Confrontation with Hawai'i's Colonial State', *Diplomatic History* 46, no. 1 (January 2022): 97–120; Hoganson, 'Inposts of Empire'; Megan Black, 'Interior's Exterior: The State, Mining Companies, and Resource Ideologies in the Point Four Program', *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 1 (January 2016): 81–110.
8. Pekka Hämäläinen, *Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power* (Yale University Press, 2019), 93.
9. Megan Black, H-Diplo Article Review Forum 620 on 'Forum: American Indians and the History of U.S. Foreign Relations', *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (2016), https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/ar620_0.pdf.
10. Arthur N. Gilbert, 'The American Indian and United States Diplomatic History', *The History Teacher* 8 (February 1975): 231.
11. Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (Yale University Press, 2008); DeLay, 'Independent Indians and the US-Mexican War', *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (February 2007): 35–68.
12. DeLay, 'Independent Indians', 36.
13. Stefan Aune, 'Indian Fighters in the Philippines: Imperial Culture and Military Violence in the Philippine-American War', *Pacific Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (Fall 2021): 424.
14. Mae Ngai, '"An ironic testimony to the value of American democracy": Assimilationism and the World War II Internment of Japanese Americans', in *Contested Democracy: Freedom, Race, and Power in American History*, ed. Manisha Sinha and Penny von Eschen (Columbia University Press, 2007), 237–57; Maggie Blackhawk, 'The Crisis in Colonial Administration' (17 July 2024), *American Historical Review*, forthcoming. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4897905.
15. Blackhawk, 'The Crisis in Colonial Administration'.

CHAPTER 16

CASE STUDY: Teaching Transnational American Studies

Hilary Emmett

Twenty years ago, at the height of the 'transnational turn' in American studies, the late Emory Elliott framed his Presidential address to the American Studies Association with the question: 'What does it mean when American studies is transnational?'[1] Significantly, Elliott did not ask: 'What is transnational American studies?' Thus, the crux of this question is not simply what transnationalism might look like in our research and teaching practice (though I am, of course, going to explore that here) but, just as importantly, what are the implications and responsibilities of such an approach? What is generated when American studies pedagogy is transnational and how do we, as teachers, embed strategies for learning and teaching that do not reproduce the epistemic violences of US American supremacy in action?[2] Taking as a case study the transnational approach I use in teaching activist art as resistance on the MA module 'Race and Resistance', this chapter analyses the transpacific mobilisation of the discourse and iconography of African American resistance to anti-Black racism in Australia. I use this to propose that teaching transpacific American studies in a transatlantic American studies classroom not only turns a spotlight on the history and visual culture of the United States, but reminds British students of the complex interrelationships between this history and much of Britain's still unreckoned-with colonial past.

Transnational American Studies as 'Radical Hope'

The cultural and intellectual climate that Elliott described in 2006 is strikingly familiar today: 'many of our colleges and universities are

under attack from [those who] … perceive education, and higher education in particular, as threatening to current political and economic policies.'[3] As I write, the humanities face redoubled challenges on both sides of the Atlantic, from decades of underfunding and cost-cutting within individual institutions that led to increasing precarity for even those on 'permanent' contracts, to public devaluing of our disciplinary skills and methodologies by conservative politicians and commentators, to ideologically driven attacks on the content of our courses. What is galvanising and thus worth revisiting about Elliott's address is that he went on to describe the transnationalism of American studies in the early 2000s as a project of 'radical hope'. American history, he argued, had shown time and again that change could be wrought 'when courageous people have challenged the dominant ideology'. For Elliott, the question animating American studies as a discipline, then, needed to be: 'How can we, through our teaching and research, more effectively generate developments that will lead to thoughtful citizenship and a more humane future?'[4] As I explore in this chapter, transnational American studies methodologies are integral to such developments. Through a historicised and relational understanding of the United States itself, combined with a comparatist approach grounded in the pursuit of global social justice as well as the imperative to ensure our teaching and learning is connected to our immediate communities, we can nurture students into citizens with a rich sense of the past and its implications for a shared future, both local and global.[5]

I propose that what is radically hopeful about British students looking at Australia via America is not only the light this sheds on the operations of the British Empire – which is often disconnected in their minds from the history and legacies of enslavement in the United States – but, just as crucially, the focus it enables on the acts of resistance taking place in visual culture that evidence the well-established transnational conversations that have long been taking place between artist-activists on both sides of the Pacific. Triangulating Australia in American studies teaching can 'collapse the distance' between Britain and the settler colony of Australia through object-based learning and enable students to connect what they're learning in American studies to live and ongoing debates about heritage and the legacies of empire in Britain.[6]

Elliott's evocation of radical hope also chimes with Kevin M. Gannon's recent 'teaching manifesto' of the same name. Inspired

by Paolo Freire and bell hooks, Gannon's powerful account of radically hopeful pedagogy demonstrates what this kind of teaching can look like in practice. For Gannon, 'Hope is aspirational, but also depends on agency. For our students to see themselves as active, empowered learners—as people who can and should participate in the processes of knowledge creation and scholarly discourse—they need to work within learning spaces that cultivate that understanding.'[7] Gannon's commitment to inclusion, collaboration and access, and his practicable strategies for realising these aims in the classroom, have shaped my teaching on the MA module 'Race and Resistance'. Across this team-taught module, all staff involved work together to build an account of resistance to racism and of anti-racist activism in the United States, from the Haitian Revolution to the afterlives of the plantation in contemporary culture, and the movement to topple monuments to enslavers such as Edward Colston in Bristol and Confederate General Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville to the establishment of the Carlisle Federal Indian Boarding School National Monument in December 2024. The historical, comparative and place-based foundations of transnational American studies methodologies are thus built up over the course of the module through a range of approaches and sources, from the traditional 'archive', to literary fiction, to visual culture past and present. We emphasise the ongoing 'live-ness' of these questions by the selections from Alice Procter's *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in our Museums and Why We Need to Talk About It* that are woven throughout the module.[8]

Transnational Pedagogy in Motion: K'gari, Brooklyn, Norwich

The penultimate week of the module brings these approaches together through students' encounter with the work of Australian artist Fiona Foley. Foley is a Badtjala artist from K'gari, known in settler-colonial parlance as Fraser Island, which is situated on the mid-east coast of Australia. Foley sees herself first and foremost as an educator – her art is her pedagogy. She explains her motivations as an artist-educator in this way:

> I think it's all about provoking people to think at a deeper level. That's why I do the work: to provoke people to think and to try

> and have a different type of dialogue than the dominant narrative. It's always to burst people's bubbles with another truth that they may have never encountered before, so it's about intellectually engaging with people too, really, to in part educate themselves about what's taken place before and not be so reliant on your lecturer.

One way that Foley instigates a different type of dialogue is through the creation of what she terms a 'visual language', much of which is rooted in her careful excavation and revivification of a Badtjala past. While her explorations of Badtjala resistance to settler violence and Europeans' exploitation of people and land on and around K'gari are, of course, relevant to American studies' transnational project to continue to explore the implication of the Americas in global networks of such exploitation, the series of photographs arising from her residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program in Brooklyn have particular significance for students of American studies in their complex engagement with the histories of white supremacist violence and Black resistance to it.

The title of the exhibition as a whole, *Bring It On*, sets the scene for the images, which depict seven individuals dressed in robes designed in the style of the Ku Klux Klan, but which are made from fabrics that vividly evoke a multifaceted African diaspora. The HHH, or 'Hedonistic Honky Haters', as they appear in the catalogue, stare calmly at the camera, exuding an unapologetic 'visual sovereignty' (see Figure 16.1). Students have been introduced to this concept earlier in the module through their engagement with artwork by children removed from their communities to the Carlisle school. As Jacqueline Fear-Segal unpacks for our students in the previous week, these images demonstrate the children's resistance to the European ways of seeing inculcated at Carlisle in the way that, through specific choices regarding composition and placement, they place recognisably Cheyenne and Osage figures in positions of power and authority.[9] The HHH similarly assert such sovereignty by subverting the dehumanising gaze of white supremacy; the solidarity and power projected by the grouped subjects resist the Klan's performative mob-based violence, but also potentially turn the threat towards the perpetrator. Uncomfortably, the unwavering gaze of the HHH catches and holds that of the viewer and insists on their implication in the spectacle on display.



Figure 16.1 Fiona Foley, HHH #1 (2004); Ultrachrome print on paper. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Perhaps because of the confronting nature of the hood and the interpellation of the viewer via the implacably returned gaze, it can take students some time to venture a response to these images in the classroom. To facilitate their engagement, I draw on their earlier (week three) reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and week four's exploration of the afterlife of the plantation in contemporary culture, which takes as its texts artwork by Kara Walker and Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. I have written elsewhere about the way Morrison's work can open up pathways for students' understanding of Foley's public intellectualism,[10] but in this case we return very specifically to Morrison's literary representation of the generative ambivalence of the afterlife of enslavement in America. The novel's haunting final invocation that this 'was not a story to pass on'[11] plays out again in the duality of Foley's images that both celebrate Black agency and power and simultaneously remind us at every turn of the violent historical circumstances that inform her art. Our discussions of Walker and Beyoncé in previous weeks have probed similar questions of ambivalence. Can racist tropes such as the Aunt Jemima

figure satirised in Walker's *Sugar Baby*, or spaces of racialised violence such as the Destrehan plantation featured in *Lemonade*, be reclaimed as sites of artistic resistance?[12]

With this idea of duality in mind, students literally zoom in and zoom out on the photographs to analyse the way in which the composition of each photograph, the assemblage of stance, gaze, hood and robe, is a polysemous visual language. Such close reading reveals that the very cloth of each robe tells a seemingly contradictory story. One such story can be found in the spirals of golden cowrie shells adorning a red robe. Significantly, such shells were one currency of the transatlantic slave trade: Olaudah Equiano, whose narrative is now canonical in American studies pedagogy of the trade, was first enslaved in West Africa for the price of 172 'little white shells, the size of the finger nail'.[13] This fabric thus both signifies the financial capital and disposable income of these 'hedonistic' personae and gestures to the commodification of labouring bodies that underwrites modern consumer culture.

To tell another story: the fabric patterned with masks is reminiscent of Man Ray's famous image 'Noir et Blanche' (1926) that featured Kiki de Montparnasse in juxtaposition with an oval, Baule-style mask – what Henry Louis Gates has called 'the cubist mask of modernism cover[ing] the black Bantu face'.[14] From here, students may contextualise and historicise Black resistance via the artistic legacies of the Harlem Renaissance, or, as has been followed productively by one student, brought closer to home by using the image of the mask as a point of departure for an interrogation of the curatorial and collection practices of UEA's Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (SCVA). Well known for their championing of the artistic value of a huge range of cultural artefacts both contemporary to them and historical, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury built a mid-century collection that spans 5,000 years of world art. While the SCVA's most recent Collections Policy (2025) aims to 'acknowledge, discuss, consider and fully investigate claims and submissions that would require deaccession from the collection, including but not limited to issues of restitution and repatriation particularly relating to the context and circumstances of criminality, colonial practice and spoliation',[15] such a process is necessarily ongoing. Students' encounters with the Baule masks in the SCVA collection allow them to connect the extractive practices of museums with those processes of extraction that catalysed both the transatlantic

slave trade and the violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples in what is now Australia.

Thus, this series of photographs, staged in Brooklyn, by an Indigenous Australian artist, becomes the occasion for site-specific, object-based learning for American studies students in Norfolk. This experience encourages students to become agents in their own learning and to feel connected to live issues in local and national heritage and the legacies of British colonialism. The visual language of Foley's activist art offers students the opportunity to stand at the teeming intersection of aesthetics and politics, history and context (including vertiginous glimpses of alternative or speculative histories), the local and the global. A transnational American studies pedagogy centring history, border-crossing and opportunities for local social justice initiatives can facilitate the complex acts of interpretation and meaning-making required by such a multifaceted 'crossroads of culture':[16] that our students rise to this challenge is itself an occasion for radical hope.

Notes

1. Emory Elliott, 'Diversity in the United States and Abroad: What Does It Mean When American Studies Is Transnational?', *American Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2007): 1.
2. See also Grace Kyungwon Hong's response to Elliott's address: 'The Ghosts of Transnational American Studies: A Response to the Presidential Address', *American Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2007): 33–39.
3. Elliott, 'Diversity in the United States and Abroad', 2.
4. Ibid. 5–6.
5. In distilling American studies methodologies into these three aspects, I am indebted to Amy Kaplan's 'Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 17, 2003', *American Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2004): 1–18; Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 'Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004', *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57; and Karen Halttunen's 'Groundwork: American Studies in Place: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 4, 2005', *American Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2006): 1–15.
6. The notion of collapsing the distance through engagement with material culture in the space of the university is drawn from Shelley Saggar and Ananya Mishra's forthcoming work on materialising decolonisation.

7. Kevin M. Gannon, *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto* (West Virginia University Press, 2020), 151.
8. Alice Procter, *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in our Museums and Why We Need to Talk About It* (Cassell, 2020).
9. Jacqueline Fear-Segal, 'Owning the Image: Indigenous Children Claim Visual Sovereignty Far from Home', in *Art, Observation and an Anthropology of Illustration*, ed. Max Carocci and Stephanie Pratt (Bloomsbury, 2022).
10. Hilary Emmett, 'Teaching Transnational Morrison: Curation and Comparative American Studies', *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 19, no. 1 (2022): 81–96.
11. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 274.
12. Jarvis McInnis's analysis of 'Black Women's Geographies and the Afterlives of the Sugar Plantation' is crucial to students' exploration of this question as they track it through cultural texts across the module. See *American Literary History* 31, no. 4 (2019): 741–74.
13. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789). Full text is available online at https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/15399.
14. Henry Louis Gates, 'Harlem on our Minds', *Critical Inquiry* 24 (2007): 3.
15. Sainsbury Centre Collections Development Policy (2025), available at: https://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/policies.
16. This term is Shelley Fisher Fishkin's, after Gloria Anzaldúa. See Fishkin, 'Crossroads of Cultures', 17–18.

CHAPTER 17

CASE STUDY: 'Talking Race and Racism': Innovations in Learning via University-Led Outreach and the National Saturday Club

Marie S. Molloy

This case study focuses on the unique opportunity of Saturday Clubs for American studies practitioners looking to develop relationships with local schools and communities. Targeting secondary school students, Manchester Metropolitan University's (MMU) ten-week Saturday Club piloted in February 2022 under the National Saturday Club's banner entitled 'Society and Change', and continues to run on an expanded sixteen-week programme. By showcasing how those with expertise in US histories of race, racism and exclusion can be particularly useful in such environments, the case study demonstrates the power of co-production between universities, schools and external organisations, in collaboration with local writers and poets, musicians, archives and museums. It provides a practical model of how specialist university-led outreach can – and does – have a transformative impact on young people's lives and in their engagement with the histories of race and racism. It is hoped that this case might inspire others to develop similar clubs across the UK and encourage young people to elevate their voices to explore and facilitate solutions to global issues.

The National Saturday Club

The Society and Change Saturday Club forms part of the National Saturday Club (NSC) national network that supports schools, colleges, universities and cultural institutions to offer Saturday Clubs across the UK for thirteen- to sixteen-year-olds,

providing free extracurricular education on a Saturday. Founded in 2009, through the Sorrell Foundation, the NSC is based on a collaborative model that connects education providers with industry, supported by Arts Council England and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, as well as philanthropists, trusts, foundations and other national partners.[1] To date, the NSC has over 100 Saturday Clubs, supported by more than seventy UK institutions. Its aim is for every school student in the UK to have the opportunity to attend a Saturday Club.[2]

The NSC's portfolio initially began with arts-based clubs including Art and Design, Fashion and Business, and Film and Screen, but it has evolved over time to include Science and Engineering, Performance and Theatre, Writing and Talking, Society and Change, and Craft and Making clubs. The Saturday Clubs engage with teenagers through an interdisciplinary pedagogy that cultivates shared knowledge, builds a range of skills, and positively enhances young people's self-confidence and well-being.

MMU has a long history of collaborating with the NSC, and currently hosts four clubs, making it one of the largest providers of university-led Saturday Clubs nationwide. These firm foundations of an MMU/NSC partnership led to an invitation to launch a pilot Society and Change Saturday Club at MMU in 2022, one of two pilots in the humanities.[3] Incorporating history, politics, philosophy, art, films, media, literature and culture, the club explored under-represented stories, past and present, to encourage critical analysis and creative practice. MA and PhD students were trained to plan and run the sessions, with the guidance of an academic specialising in the field, while undergraduate students were recruited to co-facilitate the sessions on a voluntary basis, offering valuable work experience. Saturday Club students engaged with topics in innovative ways that surpassed the confines of the National Curriculum and built new knowledge, critical thinking and deeper awareness on sensitive issues.

Building on Past Experience

The pilot club was rooted in my research expertise in American history and the work I had done over a five-year period as the School and College Outreach and Widening Participation Lead for my department (History, Politics and Philosophy). In this role,

I gained experience in designing a suite of subject masterclasses, lectures, workshops and events for eleven- to eighteen-year-olds across Greater Manchester that built on the histories of race and racism in the USA. In 2021, I launched an A level Saturday Club aimed at sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds that explored the theme of human rights via a multifaceted approach developed by academics from across the History, Politics and Philosophy Department.

The sessions were an opportunity to use an American studies background as a wider prism to 'understand the contemporary political climate'.[4] One effective method used Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality to better understand how human rights violations were informed by a range of intersecting oppressions including race, gender, class, sexuality and disability. Students researched topics that explored interconnected themes between human rights movements around the world, and they developed research skills and critical analysis from a comparative perspective.

Teenagers learnt valuable skills, including how to write blogs and 'black out' poems, and they prepared meaningful presentations on topics of their choice that were frequently marginalised in the school and college curriculum, such as forced marriage, slavery, racism and colourism. These conscious decisions tie in with Lydia Plath's observation that 'the expansion and diversification of the curriculum are a political act', central to the discipline of American studies.[5] This decolonising, activist framework, nurtured in the original club, was later translated into the pilot Society and Change Saturday Club. Lucy Kennedy, the Chief Executive for NSC, hoped that the new clubs would 'develop an outward and global mindset' amongst attendees, and encourage them 'to feel a greater sense of agency and awareness of global trends'.[6]

Establishing a Club and Co-Designing the Curriculum on 'Race and Racism'

Launched in the context of a global pandemic, and in the rising tide of racial unrest that followed the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota in 2020, the pilot club theme of 'Race, Racism and Well-Being' in 2022 captured the contemporary moment and highlighted the 'big issues' that connected Britain, America and the rest of the world. In the UK context, protestors in Bristol toppled the

statue of Edward Colston, a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century slave trader memorialised in the city. In the US, debates over the continued memorialisation of the former Confederacy intensified, spotlighting connections between the racial histories and present of Britain and America, particularly the realities of racial inequality in Britain that students seldom studied in school. For many UK school students, American history provides an entry point to learn about race, predominantly through the transatlantic slave trade and the civil rights movement, although it is worth noting that neither is mandated as part of the school curriculum.[7] Even when they are covered, as Megan Hunt et al. argue, 'UK and US schools tend to ignore the transatlantic and global coordinates of the civil rights movement, conveniently consigning histories of racial prejudice and discrimination … to another time and place.'[8] A Saturday Club, therefore, represented an excellent opportunity to engage with these topics more fully.

There is no doubt that the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests it evoked globally were a key driver for curriculum design for MMU's fledgling Society and Change club. This shocking example of police brutality was an obvious starting point, as students were confronted with Floyd's murder through both traditional and social media, as well as the local, national and international reaction that reverberated in response. Civil rights protests in Manchester saw thousands of people gather in solidarity and protest racial injustice.[9] Within this context, Saturday Club provided students with a safe space to process these global events and to consider how race and racism related to their own lived experience. A core part of our curriculum planning was to engage underrepresented students with subjects that they often hadn't studied in the conventional classroom environment. This rationale reflects a longer history of American studies practitioners responding to what Annette Joseph-Gabriel refers to as 'the need, voiced by students, to counter the erasure of the contributions of people of African descent to a variety of fields of study, including history, literature, religion, and the sciences'.[10] In this context, the club presented an exciting opportunity to engage diverse groups of school students with the histories of race in multifarious ways, underpinned by my research as a historian of race and slavery.

Target Groups

A significant number of our club members were of Black, brown or mixed-race heritage, and it was essential that the topics discussed in club reflected their experiences and interests. The club typically targets school students from under-represented and widening participation groups, between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. We work closely with the NSC and MMU's schools' outreach team to identify a list of key feeder schools, and utilise an existing MMU monthly newsletter sent to all schools in the Greater Manchester region. We advertise the clubs in all our outreach sessions, and in future we also plan to run taster sessions in local youth clubs and schools within a three-mile radius of the university campus. The NSC advertise the club widely on their platforms, and this is where young people can find out more about the clubs and sign up for them. The NSC provide promotional material for schools, including postcards and pamphlets advertising the clubs, and links for students, schools and parents to access further information. Typically, the club attracts around twenty-five club members per year, and to date we have connected with around a hundred young people in the Greater Manchester area per club.

Integrating Feedback into the Pilot Club

Based on feedback and evaluation collected from previous outreach events, it was clear that students and teachers valued a diversity of topics, especially those that addressed the 'gaps' in the History National Curriculum or that supplemented topics that had been covered only briefly in school. The Runnymede Trust, a leading think tank on race and equality in education, reported in 2020 that the History curriculum in UK schools was 'too narrow', 'too white' and 'lacking in diversity'. In particular, it noted that 'the National Curriculum does not mandate for engagement with the colonial legacies – or racist underpinnings – of contemporary Britain'.[11] The design of MMU's Saturday Club curriculum was therefore constructively aligned with leading thinkers on race in Britain, as well as students' and teachers' valuable feedback.

The design of the club's curriculum was a collaborative process between the academic lead for the club (myself) and the PhD and MA students who were employed as club tutors. The club collaborated

with several external partners including charities, organisations, museums and independent practitioners, including the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Centre and Education Trust at Manchester Central Library, 'Stand Up to Racism', local poets and musicians, the People's History Museum, the National Football Museum and the Mines Advisory Group. These valuable partnerships also enabled me to include a range of disciplines that supplemented an American studies pedagogy: history, politics, literature, films, media studies, art and storytelling. We also built in some space for club members to choose content that they wanted to learn about, in a process of co-production.

MMU club tutors engage in a bespoke training programme designed by the university's co-curricular programme, RISE, which is designed for students to 'earn certifications, take part in projects and placements, join workshops and guest talks, volunteer and pick up new skills'.[12] Club tutors learn about creative pedagogies and cover essential training, such as safeguarding, compliance, GDPR, behaviour management and creating an inclusive classroom.[13] Undergraduate volunteers, known as co-facilitators, complete a self-led online training course and a short in-person training programme before commencing their role. This ensures that club tutors, co-facilitators and external partners are fully integrated in the curriculum design process.

Session: 'Race and Racism in the Headlines: Stand Up to Racism'

The pilot club included sessions on a range of topics, including historical well-being, forgotten figures, the Pan-African Congress and Pan-Africanism, and race and racism in the archive. One session highlighted recent news stories connected to the theme 'Race and Racism in the Headlines', which was designed and led in partnership with Ameen Hadi, an anti-racist activist in North West England and a prominent organiser for 'Stand Up to Racism' in Manchester. This included the Black Lives Matter campaigns, the moral panic over immigration and the refugee crisis, Islamophobia, and racism in schools. Ameen's presentation drew on the histories of racism and highlighted parallels between civil rights activism in the UK and USA, encouraging students to 'challenge things they believe are wrong'.

Ameen's personal testimony demonstrated how racism must be combated by individual and collective activism, and he highlighted how the Black Lives Matter protests in Manchester, the US and across the world were a global act of resistance. This activist stance is grounded in a 'vibrant tradition' within American studies pedagogy, where 'intellectual work is often generated by community members [in] co-production with academic scholars'.[14]

In the 'Stand Up to Racism' club session, students learnt about specific examples of racism in UK schools, including the use of racial stereotypes that led some schools to ban certain hairstyles, teeth-kissing and even fist bumps. As Joseph-Salisbury argues, 'Seemingly neutral school policies – like uniform and hair policies – should be reviewed from an anti-racist perspective to ensure that BME students are not systematically disadvantaged.'[15] Ameen used the example of Child Q, a fifteen-year-old Black girl who was strip-searched by police officers while she was menstruating after a teacher falsely accused her of carrying cannabis. This led to a wider debate on the 'stop and search' methods used by police in the UK and USA that especially target Black men. Guided by an intersectional framework, students considered the local, international and global 'solutions' to eradicate racism, and were empowered as activists. They discussed Black Lives Matter protests in local high schools and demands for more anti-racism education. Students contemplated how they could effect change in their own lives, and they each considered specific solutions to social injustices.

Christopher Martell identifies the importance of using a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in US high schools which is based on collaboration and forming social connections to students.[16] The 'Stand Up to Racism' session incorporated all three models of CRP: the exchange of ideas, discovering new facts, and challenging old belief systems. In the creative workshop that followed Ameen's talk, attendees were supported to develop social protest banners on issues that were important to them. Julie Sze refers to this as a 'radical pedagogy' where students respond to community issues based on their personal experiences, in this case, racism in Manchester. The session provided an excellent example of the 'craft of interdisciplinarity' that is central to the discipline of American studies and challenges young people (and their tutors) to explore different methodological approaches when exploring race and racism.[17] Inclusion of all students was central to curriculum design, and it

provided a safe space to discuss 'difficult' topics. When asked what Saturday Club meant to her, one member noted that it was a place 'where everyone's voice is heard, and how we can make change in our society, all gathering together … Things like the Saturday Club helps us in the future but also in the present. We learn things that we don't really learn in school.'[18] The club member's testimony resonates with Lucy Kennedy's original aspiration for the club to help young people 'feel a greater sense of agency and awareness of global trends'.[19] This is best achieved in partnership with local community members who bring their powerful testimony and activism to the club.

In summary, MMU's Society and Change pilot Saturday Club provides an excellent model of how expertise and confidence in teaching racial histories and realities in the American context can prove especially useful and transferable in helping students to address wider themes of race and racism, including in their own communities. Closely informed by the creative interdisciplinarity of American studies, ventures such as the Saturday Club can prompt exchange and discovery, and challenge entrenched beliefs. This model of co-production between the university, the NSC, schools, university students and external partners had a positive impact on every individual involved, and by sharing this case study, it is hoped that other institutions will see the promise of establishing a Saturday Club, so that every child can access an extracurricular club for free on a Saturday.

Notes

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2. Ibid. 7.
3. A short promotional film featuring MMU's pilot Society and Change Saturday Club is available via Facebook, 14 June 2022, https://www.facebook.com/natsatclub/videos/national-saturday-club-societychange/1721533518185509/.
4. Lydia Plath in Kate Dossett et al., 'Teaching African American Studies in the US and the UK', *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018): 529.
5. Dossett et al., 'Teaching African American Studies', 546.

6. Lucy Kennedy, 'Launch of the Society & Change Saturday Club in Partnership with Chatham House', 10 February 2022, https://saturday-club.org/launch-of-society-and-change-saturday-club/.
7. Anna Leach et al., 'Black British History: The Row over the School Curriculum in England', *The Guardian*, 13 July 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jul/13/black-british-history-school-curriculum-england.
8. Megan Hunt et al., '"He Was Shot Because America Will Not Give Up on Racism": Martin Luther King Jr. and the African American Civil Rights Movement in British Schools', *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 391.
9. Thalia Carr, 'Thousands Turn Out in Manchester for Weekend of Black Lives Matter Protests', *aAh! magazine*, 8 June 2020, https://aah-magazine.co.uk/2020/thousands-turn-out-in-manchester-for-weekend-of-black-lives-matter-protests/.
10. Annette Joseph-Gabriel in Dossett et al., 'Teaching African American Studies', 545.
11. Remi Joseph-Salisbury, *Race and Racism in English Secondary Schools* (Runneymede Perspectives, 2020), 2, https://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/race-and-racism-in-secondary-schools.
12. 'RISE at Manchester Met', https://rise.mmu.ac.uk/.
13. To read more on the process of collaboration and curriculum design in subsequent Society and Change Saturday Clubs, see 'Society & Change at Manchester Metropolitan University, "it's solutions-driven, and that's so powerful"', National Saturday Club, 3 April 2024, https://saturday-club.org/societychange-at-manchester-metropolitan-university-its-solutions-driven-and-thats-so-powerful/.
14. Julie Sze, 'Introduction: Engaging Contradictions: Teaching and Pedagogy in American Studies', *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 342.
15. Joseph-Salisbury, *Race and Racism in English Secondary Schools*, 2.
16. Christopher C. Martell, 'Teaching Race in U.S. History: Examining Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in a Multicultural High School', *Journal of Education* 198, no. 1 (2018): 64.
17. Rebecca Hill, 'What Is This Thing Called Interdisciplinarity? Teaching Interdisciplinary Methods Courses in American Studies', *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 363.
18. 'Club Member Interview: Harm, Society & Change', National Saturday Club, 19 February 2024, https://saturday-club.org/2024/02/19/club-member-interview-harm-societychange/.
19. Kennedy, 'Launch of the Society & Change Saturday Club'.

CHAPTER 18

CASE STUDY: Going Back to School: Applying Secondary-Level Pedagogies to Support American Studies

Lauren Mottle

After a long day of archival research, I sat in my father's kitchen for dinner. Noting my fatigue, my father asked, 'You seem tired, but haven't you just sat in a library all day?' Though he meant no offence, I distinctly remember bristling at the question. Strictly yes, I'd spent most of the day in the same chair, at the same microfilm scanner, but it wasn't that simple. As will be familiar to most readers, it wasn't a physical exhaustion but instead a mental fatigue as my brain did the work of a historian, digesting as much archival material as is practicable and reflecting on its possible meanings and implications for my research. How could I explain all that I'd done that day? I can't remember my exact reply, but the question had a transformative impact on my own teaching.

So much of what we do as disciplinary experts is internal, and thus effectively invisible to those around us. Yet, too often, undergraduates are expected to hit the ground running in their first year. This expectation means students may need to identify and implement disciplinary ways of thinking without scaffolded, explicit support to develop the cognitive tools necessary to make sense of entangled ideas central to the discipline.[1] This begs the question: How can we make those processes visible to American studies students and other non-specialists? And can the act of doing so help students from all backgrounds engage with complex disciplinary questions?

To answer those questions, I encourage us to go 'back to school', which takes me back to North Carolina, where I became a qualified

secondary school teacher. In my higher education (HE) teaching, I have consistently and significantly drawn on the pedagogies from my teacher training. However, despite the richness of research and actionable practices that underpin teacher education, there remains an invisible wall that positions these two learning spaces as entirely separate spheres, creating barriers in identifying where effective approaches used daily in secondary schools can inform HE teaching practices, and vice versa. There is not enough space here to explore the 'why' of this reality; however, I argue that the richness of thinking around effective secondary-level teaching practices means we shouldn't, and indeed don't have to, start from scratch when considering our own teaching and learning approaches.

Secondary school pedagogies afford us an opportunity to identify how and where we can move to seeing skill development as part and parcel of conveying vital subject knowledge, as Peter O'Connor and Rebecca Stone reflect in their essay in this volume. Because the rationale of non-selective schools is, in part, to educate all children with a range of circumstances, secondary teaching and learning approaches must explicitly develop vital skills like written communication, critical thinking and collaboration, for students with a huge range of entry points into their learning. In short, secondary teaching pedagogies, with their emphasis on skills development alongside knowledge, need to create a curriculum that is visible and inclusive, providing a firm foundation to adapt to HE contexts.

Applying the Stanford History Education Group Approach in First-Year Seminars

As Lydia Plath reflected in a roundtable discussion on American studies signature pedagogy, our work is not 'merely about teaching students "about" American history and culture – the what happened and why of it all – but rather giving them both the tools – practical skills like communication, developing arguments, analysing sources – and the critical imagination to see and create a better future'.[2] These are skills that we as American studies professionals have honed through years of practice and rigorous study. However, because this is so central to our own scholarly work, it is easy to forget how new, and often invisible, these internalised activities are to our students. Through our disciplines, we encourage students to unpick narratives and construct nuanced meaning,

but we can't expect them to do so without also explicitly extracting, signposting and developing the skill sets that facilitate this work. We must surface these skills, making a conscious effort to design teaching and learning experiences that help students identify, practise, articulate and reflect on the skills they are developing.[3] Vitally, as Kate Daubney reflects, 'these skills are not forced or parachuted in through extra- or co-curricular content or learning outcomes which do not belong. They are the skills that already exist in the academically rigorous curriculum and are innate to the subject.'[4]

So how can we do this in our own contexts? I found an answer in the Stanford History Education Group's (SHEG) 'Reading Like a Historian' curriculum, which was designed to teach middle and high school students in the US 'how to critically read primary sources and how to critique and construct historical narratives'.[5] While this methodology specifically centres historical thinking, it more broadly develops students' intellectual independence, requiring them to bring together multiple, often competing, perspectives to interrogate the notion of America, engage with dynamics of power and lived experiences, and deconstruct established narratives. It provides an avenue to surface disciplinary cognitive skills, communicate what they practically mean and look like to students, and craft an experience that reveals the hidden curriculum. It also invites students to unpick what critical thinking, close reading and analysis look like in their specific discipline through a wide variety of source materials including literary, photographic and other ephemera. By providing a scaffolded pathway to open up the big questions at the centre of our disciplines, we can invite students to do the scholarly thinking alongside us and enable access to the possibilities of American studies. Specifically, this approach supports students, as Hunt and Plath put it in the introduction to this volume, to 'identify the questions that *they* need to answer, and furnishes them with methodologies that enable *them* to follow *their* questions wherever they may lead'.[6] In this case study, I demonstrate how I applied this methodology to a history module.

To surface the skills of historical thinking, SHEG identifies four skills: sourcing, close reading, contextualising and corroboration, each accompanied by a list of questions that students can ask of a primary source. By making the critical thinking strategies of historical study visible, it supports students to *create* meaning and interrogate disciplinary questions and sources. While SHEG doesn't

use the term, this structure mirrors what Mary Jacob refers to as 'active cognitive tasks', inviting students to take ownership of the learning process and 'create mental schemas by reinforcing connections between ideas'.[7] It also draws on the pedagogies of the 'think aloud method', an approach that makes hidden thinking visible to learners or researchers where a person speaks aloud what they are thinking as they complete a task.[8]

I adapted the 'Reading Like a Historian' framework for a first-year undergraduate module entitled 'Primary Sources for the Historian: An Introduction to Documentary Study'. As noted in the module handbook, it aims 'to introduce students to the skills and critical awareness involved in interpreting and evaluating primary historical evidence'. My strand focused on 'The Sixties' as a historical moment of activism (rather than as a firmly bounded decade), providing a brief taster of social movements across the decade. Reflecting my own academic research, a thread of inquiry that ran through each week focused on how activists used, reshaped and repurposed familiar American national symbols, mythologies and tropes in their activist critiques. In the first seminar meeting, I introduced students to SHEG's four historical skills, and guided them to explore these through a light-hearted, low-stakes activity interrogating the use of technology in the 1990s. Each subsequent seminar centred around analysing primary sources to propose interpretations of a historical question – referred to as the week's 'guiding question'.

In the initial weeks of the module, these 'questions to consider' were relatively closed and pointed students to specific answers (i.e. who wrote this piece? Who is the intended audience?). As the module went on, these prompts decreased in number and became increasingly open-ended as students developed their confidence and, crucially, began to internalise these key historical skills (i.e. why does the author feel like they must speak up publicly? How did the author utilise the language of rights and citizenship to articulate their activism?).

By week seven in an eleven-week module, students were well practised in the four historical skills. They employed these skills to explore the anti-war activism of active-duty soldiers and veterans during the Vietnam War, utilising secondary and primary sources to explore the week's 'guiding question': How do GIs and veterans reshape ideas around citizenship and patriotism? This question

echoes current historiographical discourse in this area of study, providing students with the opportunity to contribute to the continued construction of knowledge in this area.[9]

Prior to the seminar, students conducted pre-reading of a selection of historiographical interpretations to gain familiarity with key historical arguments. These readings tackled the enshrined popular narrative of the American citizen-soldier, its role in keeping the story of this activism outside of mainstream historical memory, and an introduction to new interpretations of this historical moment that centred on the patriotism of soldier and veteran protest. The seminar opened with a combination of a discussion of the pre-reading and a ten-minute presentation highlighting key facts, figures and moments of activism, providing only the most essential factual information necessary to engage with the primary source materials and the 'guiding question'. The majority of the time was utilised to engage with a selection of primary sources: articles from underground GI newspapers, an article with various images covering the GI and Vets March for Peace in October 1968, and an excerpt of John Kerry's testimony to Congress as a leader of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.[10] Each of these sources was introduced by three or four sentences of contextualising information to highlight factual details required to engage with the source. Engagement with primary sources was guided by a series of 'questions to consider', which acted as tangible prompts designed to surface how students could apply sourcing, contextualising, corroborating or close-reading skills.

For example, students were asked to consider how the GI and Vets March for Peace reconfigured the role of the soldier and why the imagery of soldiers in uniform protesting a war is particularly significant – inviting students to make connections between their pre-reading around the American citizen-soldier and other elements of American national mythologies. Similarly, after reading the excerpts of Kerry's testimony, students were invited to identify what gaps Kerry highlighted between American ideals and American practice in Vietnam and to consider what Kerry defined as 'the soldier's last mission'.[11] Vitally, students were not expected to offer direct replies to these questions. Instead, these provided scaffolding to highlight key elements of the primary source and guide students to employ their historical thinking skills and create historical meaning. At the conclusion of the seminar, students drew their reflections

together through a whole group discussion of the 'guiding question' and were encouraged to use direct quotes from the primary source materials to underpin their interpretations.

This was followed by individual practice in composing one paragraph to answer the guiding question, as they might do in an essay. Here, the emphasis was not on practising polished writing, but instead on providing a formative opportunity for students to practise crafting their own analysis of why specific evidence allowed them to create meaning around the guiding question. If time allowed, these were anonymously shared with peers, who provided brief feedback on how effectively the draft paragraph used direct evidence and analysis to create meaning around the guiding question. In this way, students did the work of an American studies scholar, using source materials to answer disciplinary questions while developing the skill set to pursue their own intellectual interests across the discipline.

Reflections on the Methodology

This module was taught three times and students' comments, via informal and formal module feedback, explicitly highlighted how they felt the module had increased their confidence in working with historical materials, with one student commenting that what they learnt proved useful across their modules. As seminar leader, I also saw students' growing confidence by the increasingly critical points they brought to group and pairs discussion.

Of course, there are challenges inherent to this approach. While some students valued the predictability of the structure, others reflected that the method felt repetitive. Additionally, including multiple rich, complex primary source materials into seminars sometimes limited the depth and breadth of student analysis. Perhaps most importantly, the swift movement through separate yet connected topics meant that by necessity these explorations could be criticised for remaining too surface-level and thereby risking replicating known problems in historiographies – for example the centring of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and other national (male) leaders in considerations of the Black freedom movement at the expense of essential grassroots activism, often led by women.[12] To mitigate this, I was transparent in sharing these issues with the class and, where possible, explicitly prompted students to consider what voices are absent from curated primary source materials. Moreover,

the module equipped students with the skills to dig deeper into the literature of these movements in pursuit of their own understanding of the world around them.

Some may see this level of scaffolding as a form of 'hand holding' more suited to secondary education spaces. However, the progressive scaffolding employed here allowed all students to engage with material from a position of strength.[13] I was teaching on a degree programme which did not require students to have completed History A level (though many had), so it was important not to assume that students had already been taught to think in this way, nor to hold back students that may have already developed this skill set. Instead, all students could utilise the guiding questions as a scaffold to create meaning around the session materials, while more confident students had explicit opportunities to enhance their skill set. It also provided an opportunity for us as educators to consider all the internalised skills of our disciplines and invited us to consider what knowledge and skills we needed to make more visible to students to create the most inclusive learning spaces.

Moreover, the focus on critical skills provided students with the resources to question how knowledge is produced, whose voices and perspectives are present and absent from scholarly interpretations, and how this both reflects and shapes past and contemporary narratives. In this way, students developed a transferable toolkit to interrogate the US, and the world, from a range of perspectives and problematise the idea that there is ever some knowable, singular narrative to identify.

Conclusion

By adapting the structure of the SHEG curriculum, I created an opportunity to use approaches with demonstrated effectiveness in surfacing skills central to our discipline.[14] This creates rigour in our modules and gives students space to engage in the richness of disciplinary questions, which for me is the 'fun part' of our work. It is also an important reminder of the essential work conducted at the school level and the extent to which we in HE could benefit from this, rather than reinforcing an invisible wall.

Thinking back to my seat in my father's kitchen, what I spent my day doing was sourcing, contextualising, corroborating and close reading – the rigorous intellectual work of our discipline. It is a skill

that I developed through my schooling and the support of academics, mentors and peers along the way. I am deeply conscious that my privileged upbringing meant I didn't have to look very far to find this knowledge. However, by adapting a structure like SHEG's 'Reading Like a Historian' curriculum to our teaching within American studies, we can design learning spaces that allow all students to access the richest of thinking in our respective areas of study, developing their own skills and adding to the knowledge of our fields, becoming co-creators of knowledge across American studies.

Notes

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2. Plath et al., 'A Signature Pedagogy', 127.
3. Sarah Wenham and Karen Burland, 'Surfacing Skills at the University of Leeds: An Institutional Approach', accessed 4 June 2025, https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_978710_smxx.pdf.
4. Kate Daubney, '"Employability is not inimical to good learning": Rearticulating School Academic Curricula to Surface their Employability Value', *Journal of Work-Applied Management* 13, no. 1 (2021): 107.
5. Since I designed my module, SHEG has become the Digital Inquiry Group (DIG): https://inquirygroup.org/. Initially, the curriculum was designed as part of a programme entitled 'Historical Thinking Matters', https://historicalthinkingmatters.org/.
6. Hunt and Plath, in their introduction to this volume, 14.
7. Mary Jacob, 'Active Cognitive Tasks – Synthesising Frameworks for Active Learning Online', in *Active Learning in Higher Education: Theoretical Considerations and Perspectives*, ed. Wendy Graham and I. Gowers (Routledge, 2023), 47–48.
8. David W. Eccles and Güler Arsal, 'The Think Aloud Method: What Is It and How Do I Use It?', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 9, no. 4 (2017): 514; Maarten W. van Somren, Yvonne F. Barnard and Jacobijn A. C. Sandberg, *The Think Aloud Method: A Practical Guide to Modelling Cognitive Processes* (Academic Press, 1994), 29–37.
9. See, for example, Lauren Mottle, 'The Patriotism of Protest: The

Reconfiguration of the Citizen-Soldier Ideal during the Vietnam War Era' (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2018), 13–16, 21–24; Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (Rutgers University Press, 1996), 4–5; Richard Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent during the Vietnam Era* (Rutgers University Press, 1996), 7; Eliot Cohen, 'Twilight of the Citizen-Soldier', *Parameters* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 23; Penny Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Cornell University Press, 2013), 4–5, 116–37; Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 6; Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (Hill and Wang, 2012), 48.

10. At the time this module was delivered, students were given the primary sources during the class meeting and were given time to read them in class. However, if this approach is adopted in current and future modules, I recommend taking a more inclusive approach by sharing primary source excerpts in advance, and in accessible formats, while still allowing time in class for reading and discussion.
11. 'Transcript: Kerry Testifies Before Senate Panel, 1971', *NPR*, https://www.npr.org/2006/04/25/3875422/transcript-kerry-testifies-before-senate-panel-1971.
12. Anthony J. Badger, 'Different Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement', The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2006, https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/essays/different-perspectives-civil-rights-movement; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and Political Uses of the Past', *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233–35; Robyn Spencer, 'Inside the Panther Revolution: The Black Freedom Movement and the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California', in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York University Press, 2005), 300–1; Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse and Barbara Woods (eds), *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941–1965* (Indiana University Press, 1993), xvii–xviii; Peniel Joseph, 'Rethinking the Black Power Era', *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (August 2009): 707–16.
13. Elaine Walsh and John Knight, 'Four Cs of Assessment Communication: Scaffolding Not Spoon Feeding' (workshop, University of Leeds, 25 March 2024).
14. SHEG (now called Digital Inquiry Group) has conducted a range of

research on the methodologies that underpin this curriculum. This research refers to this type of thinking in a number of ways, such as 'civic online reasoning, lateral thinking skills and cognitive apprenticeship'. For more information, see DIG's website: https://inquirygroup.org/about.

CHAPTER 19

ESSAY: Mickey Mouse Degrees? Understanding Employability in American Studies

Peter O'Connor and Rebecca Stone

Terms such as 'Mickey Mouse degrees' have been deployed strategically to suggest to parents, secondary school educators and students themselves that some topics are not worth their time or, more crucially, money. First used in 2003 by then Minister for Higher Education Margaret Hodge MP, the phrase was coined to refer to degrees in which the content was not 'rigorous' and 'may not have huge relevance to the labour market'.[1] In recent years, the debate has been reframed and renamed, culminating in Prime Minister Rishi Sunak criticising 'rip-off degrees' in 2023.[2] For those teaching on American studies programmes, the moniker might seem particularly barbed as some of our students may actually be studying the titular rodent. Educators are rightly wary of such commentary, with most believing that degree quality cannot be measured by the salary reward of graduates.[3] We must be aware of the post-graduation realities for our students, but this does not mean compromising the discipline's core values. An American studies degree offers a wide range of skills and competencies that are as relevant to the modern world as they were when the degree was founded after the Second World War.[4] There is a great deal of overlap between what employers purport to be looking for in today's graduates, and the particular skills gained through American studies pedagogies. However, it is vital that our own students understand the employable nature of the degree they are studying as they are the best ambassadors for their programme beyond the academy.

There is a persistent lack of understanding among parents, students and even academics about what the term 'employability' means in practice. Jim Hillage and Emma Pollard, in the most widely accepted definition of the term within higher education, define employability as 'the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment'.[5] In other words, an 'employable' degree programme should provide students with the necessary skills to navigate the vagaries of the job market and enable them to succeed within it. Yet there is often a perceived tension between academic and discipline-specific skills and more generic 'employability' skills. This tension is especially evident in the arts compared to more explicitly vocational subjects, with 'employability' often perceived to be a dirty word among those teaching the former.[6] As Sarah Speight et al. note, many academics fear 'the potential dilution of their discipline if curriculum development to embed or integrate employability [is] imposed'.[7] Speight noted that this concern was far more evident among arts academics than those in engineering.[8]

In this essay, we argue that American studies creates highly employable graduates who authentically represent the specific values of the subject, and that no compromise of discipline-specific teaching is necessary to ensure that our students are employable after graduation. To do so, we draw on the work of educational theorists and interviews conducted with teaching staff in American studies and related disciplines, alongside the pedagogical practice of the authors. Through this process we provide unique insights into both attitudes towards skills acquisition and current practices. Firstly, we explore what we call 'the politics of skills', as we explain the fraught question of how different stakeholders understand the relationship between academic and discipline-specific skills, and generic 'employability' skills. We then explain how Kate Daubney's concept of 'extracted employability', which demonstrates how skills can be embedded and communicated without compromising disciplinary knowledge, skills or values, can be utilised in an American studies context.[9] Finally, we highlight the need to ensure that graduates can confidently communicate their degree learning beyond the confines of the classroom. We conclude by arguing that American studies scholars must work to both understand and communicate the unique and wide-ranging benefits of studying this degree programme. Ultimately, greater understanding and promotion of

American studies' employability will enable it to be perceived as a more sustainable and engaging programme moving forward.

The Politics of Skills

Viewed in general terms, the idea of teaching skills is an appealing one. We are all conscious that students entering university need to adjust to undergraduate study and that doing so requires the development of what we might characterise as higher-level skills. Providing these skills also serves a much larger purpose of allowing what Henry D. Mason characterises as 'epistemological access' to the content we deliver. This is a vital mechanism by which involvement in higher education among marginalised groups can be facilitated since the older model of treating academic skills as an emergent property of effective teaching is no longer viable for a changing student body.[10] The interdisciplinary nature of American studies makes the challenge of access particularly acute. Even if students possess some of the necessary skills before arrival, they will need to acquire others. For example, a student might be confident in their ability to write a history essay based on their A level experience of that subject while feeling out of their depth when asked to analyse a film; equally, a student with experience of literary studies may not be able to draw immediate conclusions if confronted with a page of election returns data.

One of the major challenges of thinking about skills from the perspective of American studies scholars relates to a perceived disconnect between institutionally driven demands for generic and employability skills, and those skills we teach as part of our discipline. It is worth acknowledging that while the interdisciplinary nature and current vulnerability of American studies may make these issues particularly pertinent, they are not unique. All academics must consider the relationship between generic attributes and the specific skills inculcated by their discipline – something many seem unsure about. The lack of confidence around this topic should not be surprising since a review of the broader literature reveals a similar lack of clarity among pedagogues, policy-makers and even employers themselves.[11] The result, therefore, is an awareness of the need to develop skills, which is particularly acute for our discipline, but a lack of clarity about what this means in real terms. Interviews conducted for this project, which involved thirteen staff

from seven UK higher education institutions including those in both Russell Group and post-1992 settings, demonstrated that there was near unanimity in identifying tensions between those working in a discipline-specific setting and those formulating skills at the national or institutional level. For some, the issue seems to be one of institutional or managerial motivations in a general sense, while one interviewee noted 'a failure to recognise the value of skills that don't have an immediate use value, like literary or art history close reading'.[12]

Those of us working in non-traditional fields such as American studies have keenly felt the effect of a decades-long political focus on the 'employability' of university graduates. The attack on arts degrees is not new, but rooted in the post-war shift to science and technology, perceived by successive governments as both more 'useful' and more economically rewarding.[13] In recent years this discussion has developed into a delineation between 'high' and 'low' quality degrees, with quality defined by graduate salary and employability benefits. The Department for Education's Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) survey and the Higher Education Statistics Agency's historic Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, more recently replaced by the Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey, all gather data on graduate salaries linked to their degree programme.[14]

In response to this political context, institutions keen to highlight the successful graduate outcomes of their students have created lists of key employability skills which enrolled students are assured they will develop by the time they graduate.[15] Nowhere is the implied distinction between categories of skills clearer than in generic teaching documentation, such as that required as part of course and module approval processes. While seemingly benign, such documents have considerable institutional power. Indeed, the apparent desire for generic documentation within the sector as a whole was a topic of comment for most interview subjects. To some the emphasis appeared to be on condensing skills down into vague (often pseudo-employability-related) categories which could easily be characterised and 'packaged' to recruit undergraduates.[16] Kendall Richards and Nick Pilcher suggest that this process of standardisation is intended to deskill staff members by undermining the value of specific knowledge in favour of a model emphasising transferability.[17] Given this, it should come as no surprise that

interview subjects from across the country expressed disquiet about the existence of a centralised understanding of skills whose relationship to the subject was not clearly articulated.[18] Considering the specific challenges to the status of American studies, such concerns seem particularly understandable.

However, there is more at stake in this discussion than our professional status; the standardisation of skills learning can undermine rather than enhance the quality of provision. Standardised documentation does not map neatly on to the disciplinary practice from which skills (to be used both within and outside of the classroom) emerge. As Simon C. Barrie notes, there is patchy evidence at best for the efficacy of learning outcome documents in skills development.[19] If discipline-specific learning outcomes are replaced by generic institutionally mandated categories, as Trevor Hussey and Patrick Smith note, such documents will be unable to capture the wide range of learning that takes place in a classroom environment.[20] As such, we risk not only failing to enable students to identify and enhance the skills already being taught, but also failing to identify any possible gaps.[21]

While descriptors such as 'transferable', 'employability' or 'generic' often preface skills in institutional documentation, there is scant evidence to suggest that such competencies can be developed outside of a disciplinary setting.[22] This emphasis on the disciplinary was a priority concern for interviewees who described a desire to both control and measure skills at the local level.[23] Interviewees conceptualised skills in the discipline-specific terms which educational theorists have noted as being most appropriate, yet believed that such an approach was not necessarily supported by institutions.[24]

The consensus within educational scholarship suggests that skills only exist in any meaningful way within disciplinary bounds. As such, most educational theorists favour embedding skills within the subject curriculum, rather than through additional 'bolt-on' generic courses or services.[25] This is because in our classrooms, the distinctions between academic skills and employability skills are, for all practical purposes, arbitrary. Moreover, the precise relationships between the generic skills included in institutional lists (such as 'communication' or 'digital literacy') and the academic skills which make up a programme are rarely spelled out. Skills can only be learned by students when their application is modelled by subject specialists.[26] Ultimately, we can conclude that the best way to teach

the skills connected with an American studies degree is to teach students an American studies curriculum.

The Skills of American Studies

One way of asserting the importance of the discipline comes through Daubney's concept of extracted employability, which holds that relevant academic skills exist within the curriculum as it is defined, meaning it is not necessary to augment teaching to upskill students. Daubney notes that 'The concept [of extracted employability] is entirely bespokable to context and offers a nuanced approach for every academic to identify the innate employability value of their curriculum'.[27] This is clearly applicable to the discipline of American studies. In assessing the skills which employers currently want but struggle to recruit, the higher education website *Prospects* identifies the following categories: creativity and originality; critical thinking and analysis; reasoning and problem solving; resilience and adaptability; reliability and self-discipline.[28] All these skills are provided by an American studies degree, albeit not always expressed using these exact terms. For example, the American studies programme at University College London (UCL) states on its website: 'Our students will develop skills in research, analysis and criticism, argumentation, formal writing, communication and presentation.'[29] The department at the University of Manchester highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the degree.[30] The American studies programme at Sussex informs students that 'you gain skills in critical thinking across disciplines, attention to detail, flexibility of thought, self-confidence, teamwork, research and written communication'.[31] The extracted employability approach provides the flexibility to operate within different institutional contexts. Crucially, however, the emphasis remains on the discipline itself. The theory of extracted employability holds at its core the understanding that if teaching has been deemed to meet the learning outcomes of the module and programme, then it will impart employability-specific skills as well. To illustrate this, two case studies that show the theory in practice are provided below.

Case Study 1: The Election of 1948

This activity is drawn from a single seminar on a second-year module entitled 'Accidental President: Harry S. Truman and Mid-Century

America'. The topic – the 1948 US presidential election – falls in the second half of the course, by which point enrolled students have a clear understanding of President Truman as both a person and a politician. This seminar serves to support the development of students' knowledge of and engagement with the broad themes of the module: the early Cold War, presidents-as-people, governmental process in the USA. It also develops deeper understanding of the topic at hand: Truman's campaign strategies, how US elections work, 1948 as a turning point (or not …).

This seminar was carefully designed to build the development of a number of relevant 'academic' skills, as defined by the departmental mark scheme against which students on the module are assessed. Several of these skills align precisely with those identified by *Prospects* as desirable to employers: 'critical thinking and analysis', 'reasoning and problem solving' and 'creativity and originality'. Moreover, due to the nature of the activity, this seminar also supports the development of the remaining skill sets noted: 'resilience and adaptability' and 'reliability and self-discipline'.

The seminar, nominally termed the 'Seminar in a Box', is intended to mimic the act of visiting an archive. Such an activity is often out of reach to American studies students, and certainly a trip to the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Missouri, is beyond the budget of this module. Instead, students are invited to pretend that they and three of their peers are visiting the library and have been presented with the box file that they have 'requested' from the archivist. This is the only help that they will receive from the facilitator throughout the session; all remaining instructions and information are included in the box. Any further learning or achievement in this seminar must be done under their own steam. In this way, students are scaffolded in developing reliability and self-discipline alongside discipline-specific archival skills.

Students are asked to write a letter from Truman to First Lady Bess Wallace Truman, informing her of the outcome of the election. This output requires students to assess the wide variety of primary sources provided in the box file, thus further honing their critical thinking and analytical skills to interpret this complicated election and the reasons for its unexpected outcome. The box includes 'red herring' sources, forcing students to consider the information holistically, again sharpening their reasoning and problem-solving skills. They must work with their peers to create one team-produced letter

for submission, allowing them to showcase their adaptability and practise resilience, whilst also allowing them to gain insight into originality and the role that personal perspective plays in critical analysis. Finally, the letter must be written in the voice of Truman himself. A prolific letter-writer throughout his lifetime, Truman's epistles are a rich source of information to historians; at this point in the course the students have read many of Truman's own letters and are familiar with his personal lexicon. This element brings levity to the task but also enables students to flex their creative muscles.

Students who undertook this task responded positively and capably. Every group was able to produce a one-page letter by the end of the task, and it was clear from the uniform praise in student feedback that they had enjoyed the experience. The work submitted demonstrated knowledge of the topic, a clear argument outlining the group's opinion on the question, and a strong understanding of the possible alternatives. Sources had been analysed critically, problem solving – such as dating the individual pieces to create a timeline, reading handwritten sources, and overcoming 'missing' pages of documents – had been carried out, and the students had relied on themselves and each other rather than the facilitator when completing the task. The letters, handwritten on the White House headed paper provided, were exceptionally creative and well presented. They mimicked Truman's voice and included contemporary words outside of students' vernaculars that had been lifted from Truman's own correspondence ('muttonhead', for example). Somewhat unexpectedly, all of the letters also included a touching personal note to Truman's daughter Margaret, demonstrating students' synoptic understanding of the course as well. The scaffolding that occurs at the beginning and end of the seminar is crucial to students' understanding of the skills development that occurs in this task. The skills that students can develop throughout the session are explicitly identified for them before the activity begins. It is important that the language used to define these skills is in line with both the learning outcomes of the module and the terms and phrases commonly used by employers and careers advisors. At the seminar's conclusion, students are encouraged to reflect on their own personal experience of the seminar: did they, individually, develop each of the skills identified? To what extent? How will they maintain this progress and plug any gaps? Without this bridge, students fall into a liminal space whereby they have developed a skill set but may not

have noticed. This final moment ensures that they can connect their disciplinary learning to their future endeavours and communicate their hard-earned strengths to a potential employer.

Case Study 2: US History in Context

In this instance, we are looking at a mandatory module for first-year undergraduate history students. Those on the unit are split into small groups who learn about degree-level scholarship through a case study, in this instance slavery and abolition in the United States. The final session involves asking students to use their knowledge to critically engage with the ongoing public discussion over *The 1619 Project*. This research project, spearheaded by Nikole Hannah-Jones at the *New York Times*, was initially published in the *New York Times Magazine* in August 2019 and has been subsequently expanded into educational resources, a monograph and a series of podcasts.[32] Students are tasked with examining materials from the project along with the responses of several journalists. In addition, they are required to watch Sean Wilentz's 2019 Philip Roth Lecture on the place of slavery in the history of the United States. The students are then tasked with working in groups to explore how these materials might be used in different settings or presented to certain audiences.

To do this effectively they must consider both the methodological and historiographical discussions of the previous ten weeks, in addition to the materials for the session. They must understand how engaging with Wilentz in a historical debate might look different from developing school-level educational materials or writing a press release. While students are not asked to write out each of these exercises, they do plan each of them. Through these exercises they evidence the required research and writing abilities which underpin the unit, but the activity also allows for the development of the *Prospects*-defined skills. Students engage in critical thinking about different outputs from *The 1619 Project* to identify the scholarly debates that it is engaging with, and are then required to solve the problem of synthesising this material coherently. This involves considering how the material might be presented in distinctive ways for different audiences.

This activity is particularly valuable as there is no need to bolt anything on to the content, rather allowing for the 'extracted

employability' to do the heavy lifting. Students themselves can identify how completing such a task challenges them to reflect on important academic skills relating to research and critical thinking while simultaneously seeing the potential for later applications in professional fields including education, journalism or communication. All that is required from the facilitator is a minimal level of signposting to emphasise how something like collaborating to synthesise material requires problem solving and creative thinking. While the unit sits within a history department, the material and interdisciplinary focus have been developed with a 'studies' approach in mind. It is developing the session with such a focus that naturally channels it into areas including employability with only minimal signposting for the facilitator.

Meeting the Skills 'Gap'

Identifying the most effective means by which American studies students can develop skills may be vital, but it is only one part of a larger equation. American studies graduates cannot rely on a broad public understanding that their degree is highly employable. As Jon Ward noted in 2022, 'From starting as an undergraduate doing an American studies degree right up to the present, I have found myself having to explain what American studies is, whether because people haven't heard of the subject, or they doubt the legitimacy of it.' This is a situation that will surely be familiar to Americanists across the UK. As Ward continues, however, 'although this is at times annoying, I actually think this is a good position to be in – having to constantly think about how others might view your subject and how you can demonstrate its usefulness means that there is a constant reflexiveness to my engagement with American studies.'[33] This is, in itself, a skill. It can and should be taught to our students.

Even if we accept that skills do not exist in discrete categories like employability, scholarly, disciplinary or generic, but instead transcend such boundaries and are best taught through a subject-specific lens, it is still necessary to think about how such skills can be communicated, particularly within the context of careers. The framework of extracted employability relies on the principle that programmes 'articulate the wider employability value of those elements to students through programme documentation and teaching and learning interactions'.[34] It helps here to think about the nature of employability in

a practical sense. A student's employability profile is a combination of the individual's skills, knowledge and attitudes.[35] These factors can be classified as *individual aspects* – the skills and talents the student has to offer their employer; *individual circumstances* – the student's personal situation, including family background and geographical factors; *enabling support factors* – who can offer students support, for example ensuring students understand their own profiles; and finally *the labour market* – which fields and locations are hiring and what skills are currently in demand?[36]

Not all of the elements that contribute to a student's employability can be created through an undergraduate degree programme. *Individual circumstances* and *the labour market* are beyond the purview of our classrooms (they can of course be mitigated and addressed, but not altered in the main). Yet students' *individual aspects* are already well catered for by American studies degrees, and improving students' *enabling support factors* can be a simple endeavour. Growing confidence and awareness is a significant factor of this final aspect and can be supported and promoted by a student's programme of study. Students need to understand the 'rules of engagement' when approaching the labour market. It is not enough for them to have the necessary skills; students must also be aware that they have these skills, and have the requisite confidence and language needed to properly promote themselves. As shown in both case studies above, this can be achieved simply, by building in reflective moments at the beginning and end of seminars. In this way students are supported both in recognising the skills learning that happens organically through studying for their degree, and in breaking down the language barriers that can hinder students upon graduation. There is no doubt that American studies programmes, regardless of focus, form or fragility, provide students with the opportunity to develop all of the skills that employers note they are looking for and cannot currently find. Providing students with the tools both to understand their own skills development and to express their profiles clearly to potential employers is a key element of the employable nature of an American studies degree.

Conclusion

The skills discourse is at once both transient and enduring. The idea that education can be better, more efficient, more profitable is

perpetual, but the ways in which these goals are best met are peripatetic. Changing our programmes to better suit each political whim is something we are all familiar with, but it is both an exhausting and an inefficient model through which to approach education. Staff across the country are wary of 'employability' or 'skills' initiatives which, viewed sympathetically, appear to lack disciplinary knowledge, or, viewed cynically, seem designed to disempower academic staff. From the broader point of view, resistance to the neo-liberal skills agenda – often imposed upon departments from above – has also spilled over into academic perceptions of employability more generally, which has prevented us from embracing fully the employability benefits of an American studies degree.

While the term 'extracted employability' may not be common parlance among American studies academics, many of us have reflected on its meaning as part of our general practice.[37] Academics, when asked, have noted many elements of life which they felt studying American studies could and should impact. This included general personal aims like happiness or active citizenship but also encompassed employability.[38] The oft-implied distinction between academic and employability skills simply does not reflect lived experiences. Yet a clear understanding of these skills themselves serves to enable educators to focus on delivery and communication rather than justification; as Melina De Dijn et al. have demonstrated, 'Humanities students' employability can be improved by a focus on the intrinsic value of Humanities programmes and, more specifically, on Humanities skills.'[39] The emphasis on the humanities here is significant. While not necessarily using the term 'humanities' themselves, employers express a consistent demand for graduates with attributes such as critical thinking and effective communication.[40] The evidence suggests that students enrolled on interdisciplinary American studies degrees (or indeed who experience American studies teaching in other contexts) are provided with learning opportunities to develop a wide range of attributes that can be put to use after graduation.[41] It is only by rooting skills within disciplinary practices that they can be manifested in employability. This provides an important opportunity for American studies academics to confidently assert the importance of our disciplinary skills and equip students to communicate this fact.[42]

Embedding and extracting employability skills as part of the academic curriculum enables students to better translate their

academic learning into professional careers. This process must not be seen as synonymous with the marketisation of higher education. The strategy should not 'funnel' students into particular careers, nor can it alter the structure of American studies degree courses or the content of American studies teaching to better meet the needs of employers. This is not desirable, but crucially, it is also not necessary. Providing students with the ability to recognise and communicate the skills they develop through studying for their degree, and empowering them to make diverse and fulfilling employment choices throughout their career, will meet this brief.

American studies suffers from a serious lack of 'brand' recognition within both the scholarly and employer landscape. This creates the imperative to communicate to students what they take from their course while arming them with the ability to explain this to others. What matters is that we clearly communicate to stakeholders, and most of all to our students – both current and prospective – that American studies is a unique, enjoyable and *sensible* choice for study. It is not a 'Mickey Mouse degree', even though it might be a degree in Mickey Mouse.

Notes

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4. University of Manchester, *Department of American Studies Archive, 1973–1976*, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 DAS, https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/f3abea13-164a-35a1-b2b4-7bdb4fa9515e.

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6. Ronald G. Sultana, 'Four "Dirty Words" in Career Guidance: From Common Sense to Good Sense', *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance* 24 (2024): 1–19 (4).
7. Sarah Speight, Natasa Lackovic and Lucy Cooker, 'The Contested Curriculum: Academic Learning and Employability in Higher Education', *Tertiary Education and Management* 19 (2013): 112–26 (120).
8. Ibid. 119.
9. Kate Daubney, 'Teaching Employability Is Not My Job! Redefining Embedded Employability from within the Higher Education Curriculum', *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning* 12, no. 1 (2022): 98.
10. Henry D. Mason, 'Evaluation of a Study Skills Intervention Programme: A Mixed Methods Study', *Africa Education Review* 16, no. 1 (2019): 88–105 (89). See also Mark Groves et al., 'Encouraging the Development of Higher-Education Study Skills: An Experiential Learning Framework', *Teaching in Higher Education* 18, no. 5 (2013): 545–56 (545); Ursula Wingate, 'Doing Away with "Study Skills"', *Teaching in Higher Education* 11, no. 4 (2006): 457–69 (463); Wingate, 'A Framework for Transition: Supporting "Learning to Learn" in Higher Education', *Higher Education Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (July 2007): 391–405 (395). For skills and the changing student body, see Richard Bailey, 'The Role and Efficacy of Generic Learning and Teaching Support: What Is the Role of Experience and Perspective of Academic Teaching Staff?', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* 2 (February 2010): 6; Paul B. T. Badcock, Philippa E. Pattison and Kerri-Lee Harris, 'Developing Generic Skills through University Study: A Study of Arts, Science and Engineering in Australia', *Higher Education* 60 (2011): 441–58 (454); Anne Virtanen and Paivi Tynjala, 'Factors Explaining the Learning of Generic Skills: A Study of University Students' Experiences', *Teaching in Higher Education* 24, no. 7 (2019): 880–94 (880); Jo Allan and Karen Clarke, 'Nurturing Supportive Learning Environments in Higher Education through the Teaching of Study Skills: To Embed or Not to Embed', *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 19, no. 1 (2007): 64–76 (64).
11. The absence of a strong definition is noted in almost all research on skills in higher education. See Kerri-Lee Krause, 'Challenging Perspectives on Learning and Teaching in the Disciplines: The Academic Voice', *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no. 1 (2014): 2–19

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12. Interview subjects have been anonymised, with their identity indicated via an alphabetical denomination between A and M. Topic discussed at length during interviews conducted with A on 25 June 2024, and with B on 20 August 2024.
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15. For example, see University of Warwick, '12 Core Skills', https://warwick.ac.uk/services/skills/warwickaward/coreskills/.
16. Interview with C, 14 June 2024; Interview with A, 25 June 2024; Interview with D, 12 June 2024; Interview with E, 15 July 2024; Interview with B, 20 August 2024; Interview with F, 28 August 2024.
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18. Interview with F, 28 August 2024; Interview with E, 15 July 2024; Interview with A, 25 June 2024; Interview with D, 12 June 2024.
19. Barrie, 'Understanding What We Mean', 235.
20. Hussey and Smith quoted in Anna Jones, 'Generic Attributes as Espoused Theory: The Importance of Context', *Higher Education* 58 (2009): 175–91 (187).
21. One of the authors was involved in a skills review at their institution which resulted in revised module learning outcome requirements which needed to conform to a standardised (and therefore problematic) format. As Jennifer Sumison and Joy Goodfellow explain,

curriculum mapping exercises in themselves have the potential to 'foster superficial and ineffective approaches to the development of graduate attributes'. See Sumison and Goodfellow quoted in Green et al., 'Facing Up to the Challenge', 18.

22. Attempts to differentiate the generic from the disciplinary in a coherent way tend to be discussed in relation to specific case studies, such as Pat Hill, Amanda Tinker and Stephen Catterall, 'From Deficiency to Development: The Evolution of Academic Skills Provision at One UK University', *Journal of Development in Higher Education* 2 (February 2010): 1–19, or implied as potential models, for example Badcock, Pattison and Harris, 'Developing Generic Skills', 442.
23. Interview with L, 8 August 2024; Interview with M, 8 August 2024.
24. Interview with C, 14 June 2024; Interview with E, 15 August 2024; Interview with A, 25 June 2024; Interview with K, 16 July 2024; Interview with J, 2 July 2024. Anna Jones, 'There Is Nothing Generic about Graduate Attributes: Unpacking the Scope of Context', *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 37, no. 5 (2013): 591–605; Green et al., 'Facing Up to the Challenge', 19; Barrie, 'Understanding What We Mean', 223; Tarja Tuononen et al., 'Generic Skills in Higher Education: Teachers' Conceptions, Pedagogical Practices and Pedagogical Training', *Teaching in Higher Education* 30, no. 1 (2025): 207–24; Bailey, 'The Role and Efficacy', 1; Badcock et al., 'Developing Generic Skills', 442; Wingate, 'A Framework', 394–97; Krause, 'Challenging Perspectives', 4; Jones, 'Generic Attributes as Espoused Theory', 176–79.
25. Wingate, 'Doing Away', 457–58; Mason, 'Evaluation of a Study Skills Intervention Programme', 91; Green et al., 'Facing Up to the Challenge', 25; Bailey, 'The Role and Efficacy', 6; David Kember and Doris L. P. Leung, 'Characterizing Learning Environments Capable of Nurturing Generic Capabilities in Higher Education', *Research in Higher Education* 48, no. 5 (August 2007): 609–32.
26. Hanni Muukkonen et al., 'Juxtaposing Generic Skills Development in Collaborative Knowledge Work Competencies and Related Pedagogical Practices in Higher Education', *Frontiers in Education* 7 (July 2022): 1–17 (13); Allan and Clarke, 'Nurturing Supportive Learning Environments', 66; Wingate, 'A Framework', 398.
27. Daubney, 'Teaching Employability Is Not My Job!', 98–99.
28. Rachel Swain, 'What Skills Do Employers Want?', *Prospects*, June 2025, https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/applying-for-jobs/what-skills-do-employers-want.
29. University College London, 'History and Politics of the Americas with a Year Abroad BA', https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/undergraduate/degrees/history-and-politics-americas-year-abroad-ba.

30. University of Manchester, 'Why Study Here – American Studies', https://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/american-studies/study/why-study-here/.
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32. *The 1619 Project*, ed. Nikole Hannah-Jones, *New York Times Magazine*, 14 August 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html.
33. Lydia Plath et al., 'Exchange: A Signature Pedagogy for American Studies in the UK', *Journal of American Studies* 57, no. 1 (February 2023): 137.
34. Daubney, 'Teaching Employability Is Not My Job!', 98.
35. Hillage and Pollard, *Employability*, 2.
36. Ronald McQuaid and Colin Lindsay, 'The Concept of Employability', *Urban Studies* 42, no. 2 (February 2005): 197–219 (207).
37. Interview with E, 15 July 2024; Interview with A, 25 June 2024; Interview with D, 12 June 2024.
38. Interview with C, 14 June 2024; Interview with G, 22 July 2024; Interview with H, 5 August 2024; Interview with K, 16 July 2024.
39. Melina De Dijn et al., 'Skills as Stepping Stones for Employability: Perception Research into the Skills of Humanities Students', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 22, no. 2 (April 2024): 194–210 (195).
40. Tuononen et al., 'Systematic Review', 3; David Kember, 'Nurturing Generic Capabilities through a Teaching and Learning Environment Which Provides Practise in their Use', *Higher Education* 53 (2009): 37–55 (38, 43).
41. Julie Thompson Klein, *Humanities, Culture and Interdisciplinarity: The Changing American Academy* (State University of New York Press, 2005), 173.
42. Kember, 'Nurturing Generic Capabilities', 48; Green et al., 'Facing Up to the Challenge', 24; Jones, 'Generic Attributes as Espoused Theory', 180. The emphasis on the generic speaks to the desire for simple metrics as a form of measurement on the part of many in the highest echelons of university management, as discussed in Jones, 'There Is Nothing Generic', 600.

DIALOGUE: Conclusion: What It Means to Teach American Studies in Britain

Megan Hunt and Lydia Plath

'I would say that American studies requires thinking beyond boundaries. The narrative surrounding the United States is largely negative, and even making it known that you study the nation requires a kind of reasoning and justification. I have not experienced this with anything else I have studied, and don't know anyone else who is sometimes made to feel like they have to "justify" the worth, positives and potential joy in studying a particular country.'

'The United States has always fascinated me as its reputation is that of a developed, leading and incredible nation – "The American Dream" encapsulates this – but there is a dark underbelly of the States that I wanted to learn more about. For such a seemingly progressive country, it is founded on exploitation, racism and white supremacy – all themes and topics which I find so important to learn about and incredibly interesting.'

'I definitely have more critical analysis and understanding but also more emotional sensitivity in history which is something that I previously rarely considered. It has been a very eye-opening experience and one I would definitely recommend to other Brits.'

'Studying from Britain has offered a valuable perspective. The geographical distance has allowed a more objective viewpoint.'

> 'I think we have the privilege of understanding it without being stuck within it.'
>
> 'Ultimately, interdisciplinary studies are always going to lead to a deeper and more thoughtful understanding of something – it encourages having an open mind.'
>
> – Students taught by the contributors to this collection

In this concluding dialogue, recorded in July 2025, we reflect on the intellectual purpose of American studies in Britain and its impact on our students. We believe that this collection demonstrates the wide range of innovative and impactful work that makes up American studies pedagogies, and we hope that it empowers American studies academics to be able to express their pedagogical practice both as part of their own career development and in response to others (whether students, schoolteachers, colleagues or institutions) who wonder what American studies is, and why we teach it the way that we do.

Lydia Plath (LP): One of the things that we want this collection to do is to articulate the impact of American studies on our students. And I think we really see that impact in the comments that students shared with us. What particularly struck you from what they told us?

Megan Hunt (MH): One thing that struck me is that our students seem to see their location in Britain – their distance from the US – as a positive, and there's not really any sense that such geographic distance could ever be considered a negative. As we noted in the introduction, when we think of ourselves as researchers, we are often positioning ourselves in a field dominated by Americans. American studies scholars in Britain have thought a lot about our relationship to American scholars: the question of whether we can be taken 'seriously' or on equal terms with our peers in the US has been a long-standing one. But our students aren't affected by those debates. This is because in our classrooms, we are always thinking about what it means to study these things in a British context, because that's how we make them relevant and useful to our students.

LP: This point about location is something I have been thinking about quite a lot over the past few years, as editing this book has

overlapped with my tenure as Chair of the British Association for American Studies (BAAS). What is American studies in Britain? How do we engage with our students, but also with each other, about our positionality as scholars working in Britain? I find myself increasingly disagreeing with Tony Badger's argument that we should focus 'on becoming just a good [scholar] of the United States who happens to work in Britain' because I think we have something unique to offer.[1] I wouldn't go as far as some of the students and call this 'objectivity', but distance can be an advantage. As one of the students put it, 'we have the privilege of understanding it without being stuck in it.' While we have our own challenges in British academia, we simply aren't having to contend in the same way with the current political moment in the US. For me, while I'm teaching students about histories of racism, and using critical race theory and critical whiteness studies (CWS) to do so, this is particularly resonant.

MH: Being an Americanist also equips us to have conversations with students about difficult issues, for example about race. This is a theme of several of the contributions to this collection. Some of the student comments consciously reflected that learning about the US helped them to think about race in an expansive way. They are not only able to recognise the experiences of people of colour in the United States, but also to reflect on their own experiences. As many of our contributors have pointed out, the student body in many of our classrooms is predominantly white. So, the fact that these students are reflecting on the structures of whiteness is important, because in Britain CWS is really quite underdeveloped in comparison to in the US. American studies pedagogies are providing students with the tools to consider their positionality, so that they're not only grappling with academic content, but they are able to think critically about what they're absorbing in the media, and how these things are impacting their everyday lives.

LP: I was struck by how many of our contributors, and our students, commented on the classroom as an emotional space. I think American studies pedagogies really encourage an emotional engagement with the source material. One of the students mentioned the relationship between critical analysis and emotional sensitivity, and I think that these are not separate from each other but innately linked. We're giving students all sorts of skills, and that's wonder-

ful, but for me it's the emotional awareness that is key. I encourage my students to be aware of their own emotions, but also those of other people, both their peers in the classroom and the people in the past who they are studying. I get the sense that this is a different approach than they are getting elsewhere.

MH: The students seemed to be quite confident in talking about the fact that American studies courses encourage more emotional involvement, as well as being inherently more political, than other topics they are studying. In this context, it's interesting that one of them also mentioned the need to 'justify' studying the US. In an era where many of us are quite frightened by what's happening in the US – evidenced by the decreasing appeal of the year abroad, for example – perhaps for our students there's a need to justify their interest in, and enthusiasm for, American culture.

LP: I think there's a real tension here, which we see in our classrooms, as many students are drawn to American studies because of their love of American culture, but at the same time they're really drawn to what one student called the 'dark underbelly' of the US. But I think we can hold these two things together at the same time, in the same way that you might hold critical analysis and sensitivity together; you can have love and fear, and joy, too. For example, I teach a module on the history of whiteness, and we talk about racism, we talk about racial violence, we cover all the worst elements of American history. But we spend so much time in the classroom laughing. There's a way to get students really talking to each other, and finding joy in understanding, in shared experiences, and in making those connections. The American studies classroom, for me, is always one of joy. I'm sure that's not unique to American studies, but it is important.

MH: Definitely. When students feel confident in analysing the structures that underpin the elements of the US that they might find jarring, or frightening, I think that is where the possibilities open up. If we're thinking about how to justify studying America, it is reminding people that yes, the reason a lot of these structures (such as wealth inequities, mass incarceration, voting restrictions) exist in the United States is because of racism, but the cultural forms that our students love are those that have developed and endured in these historical and political realities. There's a synchronicity between the

darkness and the joy. And it's that cultural material that is so often a way in for students who are unfamiliar with the subject matter.

LP: I think that comes through in the pieces in this collection. Reading them I got a real sense of the love that our colleagues have for what they do, and the innovative and vivacious nature of American studies pedagogies. This was a complicated collection to pull together, but what we saw as editors was the real commitment to pedagogy that American studies scholars in Britain have. It is something that we spend a lot of time thinking about and talking about with each other. I'm really proud that through the Teaching American Studies Network we've built a community of practice where we've normalised having discussions about pedagogy in our scholarly organisations.

MH: It's a really broad conversation that goes far beyond the contributors to this collection. I wonder if this links back to the points we raised earlier about our positionality as Americanists in Britain. Perhaps we are inherently a bit more reflexive because American studies in Britain has always been a question of how we teach it, and why. The discipline was formed, at least in part, by a post-war project to make the world sympathetic to American interests. As we discussed in the introduction, British academics responded to that in quite specific ways, but this means that we have always had to critically reflect on how much we are shaped by our relationship to the US.

LP: Yes, because American studies in Britain didn't evolve naturally. Centres of American studies teaching were created at British universities as part of cultural diplomacy, and if that hadn't happened, I think we would be much more influenced by American studies as it developed in the US. But because it was this very specific political project, it makes us ask questions: Who are we teaching? Why are we teaching them? How are we doing it? Obviously now we're in a moment where the US government isn't at all interested in cultural diplomacy, so what will American studies teaching and research look and feel like in the future is an interesting question.

MH: Regardless of what happens in the future, this history of the development of the discipline is not common knowledge amongst

our students. It's certainly not something I was ever taught as an American studies student at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. American studies was very much pitched as an opportunity to study a very important and powerful country through the lens of interdisciplinary study. So, in order to write this book, both we and some of our contributors have had to reflect on the history of American studies in Britain. And this is not an uncontested history: there are scholarly debates about whether this was a purely ideological project by the US State Department, or whether, despite the context of pressure from American money and American politics, British academics were able to shape American studies in their own ways.[2] This is a debate I'm interested in introducing my students to because it's really important, especially in our current moment, when the idea that the US government would want to positively shape how other countries see it now feels quite alien.

We're in a very different moment as a discipline to where we started, but we're also in a very different moment in terms of British higher education. Almost all of the American studies departments established in the 1950s and 1960s as part of that post-war project have been dismantled, and American studies pedagogy now takes place in history departments, or English departments, or other areas of the university. That has been a consistent thread as we've been putting this collection together. Three years ago, when we first started discussing this book with colleagues, the shift was already well under way, and we asked ourselves: how do you write a book about a discipline that might not exist, at least in terms of undergraduate programmes with an institutional presence in Britain, by the time the book comes out?

LP: In 1992, Richard King wrote that American studies was 'a movement as well as a course of study'.[3] I would say that right now, even if as a course of study it is declining, American studies as a movement is alive and well. This collection shows that in pedagogical terms, American studies is incredibly strong and incredibly vibrant. If nothing else, I now have a long list of things I want to try in my own classroom!

MH: I agree – every contribution to this volume is testament to the work that is happening regardless of wider contexts. The interest is there from students, who love our courses; the innovation is there

from colleagues, who do all these incredible things in their classrooms; and we have a community that is clearly helping to foster and to sustain the work.

LP: Several of the students said that we encourage them to think both about their own positionality, and also from other perspectives. Seeing things from different perspectives gives them what one student called a 'deeper and more thoughtful understanding', and that's the kind of understanding that students are going to need – we're all going to need – as we move into whatever uncertain futures lie before us. Even though we might often feel hemmed in by multiple different crises, reading this collection brings me hope, joy and a resounding sense of possibility for the future.

Notes

1. Tony Badger, 'Confessions of a British Americanist', *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (1992): 523.
2. See the introduction to this volume, pp. 3–4.
3. Richard H. King, 'Review: Present at the Creation: Marcus Cunliffe and American Studies', *Journal of American Studies* 26, no. 2 (1992): 265.

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