

O'ER THE RAMPARTS

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Ours seems to be an age when much political commentary is couched in terms of historical parallels. How much of the popular narrative of the Financial Crisis of 2007-08 is still understood in terms of the Great Depression of the 1930s, for example? How many of the early sketches of Donald Trump—and commentaries on sibling continental populists—rushed to drag historical antecedents from the cupboard to make sense of him, and his appeal? For UK politics after July 4, the shadows of 1997 (or, more cheerfully, 1945) will be surely run long.

Historical parallels feature in the current issue of our newsletter as a teaching tool. In our 'Notes from the Blackboard' feature, such ways of thinking about the past are offered as a way of encouraging students to recognize the resemblances across topics and periods, to see what one historian called the 'patterns and pictures' of the past. Helping students to recognize such parallels is a useful way for them to master the large volume of material covered at A-Level, and can also form the bedrock for interpretation and understanding.

The difficulties of American literature are the focus of the issue's 'Sources of Expertise' feature, which explores the challenges, and rewards, of reading William Faulkner's novels with A-Level students, and which, in Ed Sugden's

piece, suggests that 'difficulty' as experimentation has been a persistent hallmark of American literature. Continuing our newsletter's focus on the language and concepts of modern US history, this issue's 'Keywords' feature by Jonathan Bell explores some of the terms that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, deployed by popular writers and presidents, around the causes of poverty.

We round out the issue with a series of reflections, by teachers and scholars, on the forthcoming US election. What those campaigns might look like, and what the implications of particular outcomes will be—both for the US and the wider world. Do be sure to take a look at our notices section, which offers information on events throughout the autumn, including the BAAS schools conference in Newcastle.

As always, we are keen to hear how the issue is received, and are always looking to hear from teachers and educators either with ideas to contribute to future issues, or just seeking out resources and ideas on particular topics or subjects.

Enjoy the summer!

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

AMERICA'S ANIMAL HISTORY



Image: Alligators on bank of the Saint Johns River. 1870. Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida.

Do animals matter in history? Once, the consensus response among historians would have been a resounding *no* – if the question was posed at all. Post-Enlightenment Western thought drew a hard line between rational humans and all other species; between “culture” and “nature.” Even as historiography moved beyond a focus on elite white males toward greater recognition of marginalised groups – whether defined by race, class, gender, or sexuality – nonhuman animals remained overlooked. Only humans, it seemed, *made* history.

In the late twentieth century environmental historians began to question seriously this anthropocentric framework, arguing for the dynamic nature of “nature.” Climate, rivers, microbes, and a lot more became the

subject of serious historical analysis. But over the past two decades, animal (or “animal-human”) history has emerged as a diverse and fruitful field in its own right. Here is a growing body of research that would answer my opening question with a bold affirmative – even as its practitioners debate critical issues ranging from methodologies to contested concepts of nonhuman “agency.”

At the heart of this field is a profound disciplinary challenge. If a fundamental aim of historians is to give “voice” to subjects in the past, how can this be done in the case of creatures – “dumb animals” – that leave behind no authored sources? Some scholars of animal history contend that we can study only human *representations* of

animals (itself, a valuable endeavour, of course). Others – often pursuing interdisciplinary paths, drawing upon archaeology, ethology, and zoology – seek out multi-species comprehensions that squarely focus on nonhuman animals as living, breathing historical agents. These are live and lively debates, which are shaped, in some cases, by ethical and philosophical concerns.

As a historian, I am sceptical of claims that history can somehow be written from the perspective of the nonhuman animal – not because I doubt the laudable intentions behind such approaches, but because of their viability as a form of evidence-based historical methodology. But does that mean we abandon efforts to study historical animals as *more than just* “imagined” creatures? I don’t think so either. By seeking out both archival and nonarchival traces of nonhuman animals, historians can push beyond a culture-nature binary: to chart, as scholars like Emily O’Gorman argue, the ways in which environments and histories are “co-created” by humans and animals.

In the context of American/US history, scholars have applied an “animal lens” to interpret in innovative ways histories of colonisation and environmental change: the impact of livestock amid European settlement and colonist-native encounters; the ecological history of the Plains Bison and their destruction in the late 1800s; and the recurring violence perpetrated against wolves that stemmed from human fears, ancient folklore, and also the territorial behaviours of wolves themselves.

These studies reflect a mammal-centric focus within much of the new “animal history.” Yet historians are widening the focus beyond mammals and “domesticated” species to further our understanding of the importance of other human-animal interactions.

My own research into nineteenth-century Florida explores how the presence and role of reptiles (in particular, crocodilians and snakes) shaped Euro-American experiences and representations of that frontier territory in significant ways. At once feared, misunderstood, and hunted, but also capable of actions and reactions that directly impacted on humans, these reptiles repeatedly appear in the historical record, as both imaginative and physical factors in the history of Florida.

Consider, for instance, the Second Seminole War (1835–1842) – the longest and most expensive Indian War in American history – as the US Army struggled in the

swamps and heat of Florida to defeat and remove the Seminole and Miccosukee. Chiefs of those tribes – men like Alligator and Snake Warrior – bore names that suggest how Native Americans nurtured distinct beliefs about nonhuman species, including reptiles. Meanwhile, beleaguered white soldiers – prone to dehumanizing Indians – compared their “elusive” Seminole foes to the crocodilians and rattlesnakes which they associated with the forbidding waterways and forests of the peninsula: Florida, one disillusioned soldier lamented, was “a perfect paradise for Indians, alligators, serpents, frogs and every other kind of loathsome reptile.”

But reptiles left *aural* traces, too, evidence of how their material presence – even their *voices* – marked out human experiences. An officer camped at Fort Lauderdale in 1839 thus wrote of his “dismal” nights, listening to the “ceaseless croakings of frogs, and moanings of alligators.” This collective reptilian call not only kept him awake but raised doubts in his mind about whether Florida could ever be truly “won” by the soldiers and sons of Uncle Sam.

By reckoning with animals as historical subjects – and often crossing disciplinary boundaries in the process – we can develop new historical insights and understanding, at the heart of which is one critical proposition: that humans and animals have often shaped history, and the environments they co-inhabit, together.

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NOTES FROM THE BLACKBOARD

MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, AGAIN

DRAWING HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS

"So...Reagan in the 1980 election used the slogan 'Make America Great Again?'" A sudden realisation dawns on the face of the student "wait, miss wasn't that also Trump's slogan...?"

Mark Twain is often credited with the statement, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes." For A-Level History students, this must feel scarily true. Making connections to the past helps students understand complex material, giving meaning and significance to events that might otherwise seem distant and isolated.

The AQA HIS2Q unit, which examines the concept of the American Dream from 1945-1980, is substantial, to say the least. However, our students genuinely enjoy this unit, largely because of the connections they can draw between historical events and broader narratives. As educators we want students to employ their curiosity in the subject – one of the bigger challenges is getting them to focus purely on the time period of exam questions and specifications.

AQA's A-Level History HIS2Q specification provides a comprehensive study of the US from the end of World War II through to the end of the Cold War. Within this period, students explore key themes such as the domestic impact of the Cold War, the civil rights movement, social and cultural change, and the Vietnam War.

By making historical links across periods, students deepen their understanding of core themes, and come to appreciate the broader context in which events unfolded.

One significant aspect of understanding historical connections is contextualizing key events and developments within broader historical narratives. For instance, when studying the civil rights movement, students can link it to earlier struggles for racial equality, such as those during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. By tracing the roots of segregation and discrimination from the 1870s on, students gain deeper insights into the enduring systemic barriers faced by African Americans and the persistent nature of racial injustice in US society.

Documentaries and films, including Ava DuVernay's *13th* (2016), have been helpful in engaging students on this topic and making such connections explicit. A particularly poignant moment in that documentary is when footage of Little Rock in 1957 is spliced with protests in Charlottesville in 2017 as well as political rallies from the 2016 campaign, highlighting the persistence of racial inequality and white supremacy through to the present.

The newly-released *Let the World See* (2022) documentary, about Emmett Till, also uses historical parallels across its three episodes.



Image: Courtesy National Museum of American History, Smithsonian

As the US elections approach, it is fascinating to hear students draw their own parallels between the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s, and that of the contemporary US. Frequently they notice how certain issues continue to reverberate in US politics, such as the pro-life/pro-choice debate, civil liberties, poverty, and employment. Their keen interest in this year's election and its potential impact on the political landscape is evident, demonstrating their deep engagement with contemporary political issues.

Some examples of the questions and discussion points students have raised on this theme include:

"Who will Trump pick as his vice president? For Eisenhower in 1952, balancing the ticket with Nixon showed how important it was to get it right."

"Can an impeached president win an election? Does impeachment even work if Nixon was able to get away with his actions?"

"Will Biden run? Is it too late for him to withdraw from the race? Well, Johnson in 1968 only announced he wasn't running in March of the election year."

Making historical links is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle, where each piece represents a different event, person, or development. This process challenges students to think critically as they work to see the bigger picture of how the past influences the present and develop the critical ability of linking current events to past ones. This engaging activity turns students into investigators, making history more interesting and relatable. By piecing together these connections, students not only learn more about history but also build important skills in analysis and critical thinking, which help them in school and in understanding the world around them.

For many students, the history classroom can be filled with complex events and concepts. Drawing historical links is vital for a lot of students, not only for their general understanding but, more importantly, increasing their

enjoyment of the subject. As historians we know that we need to have an awareness of the current political climate. But by training students to draw links across periods, including the present, we are producing students who are better equipped for the world in which we live, and therefore making them better citizens.

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KEYWORDS



Image: Courtesy National Museum of American History, Smithsonian

POVERTY AND AFFLUENCE IN THE POST-WORLD WAR TWO ERA

The contrast between the enormous wealth of the largest economy on earth and the shocking hardship in which so many Americans lived, had long preoccupied social commentators and political reformers in the US. But the specific context of the decades immediately following World War Two brought the divide in national life between abundance and poverty into sharp focus. Conflicting interpretations of the causes of poverty, and the most effective strategies for promoting economic security, dominated the politics of the 1950s and 1960s and set the stage for some of the most enduring conflicts in American society and culture.

Given how much of the age of affluence was built on private sector benefits – health care, union contracts ensuring high wages, and consumer spending – an important theme for students to understand is how precarious many Americans' grip on economic security was, and how quickly their fortunes could change, something that became clear during and after the 1970s. The US remains deeply divided between the haves and have nots, as well as between rival conceptions of the poverty question in American life.

THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY

The title of Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith's 1958 book neatly summarized the popular view of 1950s America. A global superpower with a giant economy driven by consumer spending, industrial manufacturing, and a giant defence and research and development budget, the US was unrecognisable from the country two decades earlier. At the same time, Galbraith warned of the dangers of unbridled economic growth without due attention to the need for public investment and economic planning to ensure everyone had access to the good life. He worried that mass consumerism and a society characterised by abundance would blind political elites to the plight of the poor. The book drew criticism from more radical writers and social critics, including Michael Harrington, who felt Galbraith downplayed the extent of inequality and the level of poverty, and from Swedish intellectual Gunnar Myrdal, who wrote a rebuttal entitled *Challenge to Affluence* in 1963. Myrdal argued that the supposed "affluence" of the post-war era masked growing inequality that was hardwired into the American economic model, and a product of it.

THE OTHER AMERICA

In his hugely influential book *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962), Michael Harrington lamented that "the American poor are one of the greatest scandals of a society that has the ability to provide a decent life for every man, woman, and child." The shadow cast by the Great Depression and the reform efforts of the New Deal and economic recovery of World War Two; the explosion of the African American civil rights movement onto the national stage; and the deepening Cold War with the communist Soviet Union that required the nation to justify the American Dream as a superior political project: all demanded a reckoning with deep inequalities in society. Harrington contended that poverty in America represented "a separate culture, another nation, with its own way of life." Harrington's study was hugely influential on the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and provided some of the blueprint for LBJ's "Great Society".

CULTURE OF POVERTY

Anthropologist Oscar Lewis adopted this term in his 1959 ethnographic study of poor families in Mexico. It

soon came to characterise much social commentary on poverty in the US during the 1960s. Lewis distinguished between not having much money (a situation that could befall anyone), and a way of living in which the daily rituals of survival created a "subculture of its own," from which those trapped were unable to escape. Michael Harrington adopted this latter idea in a 1959 essay, which he expanded into his 1962 book. But while Harrington was unequivocal in his belief that massive public investment was the key to reducing inequality, the idea that poverty was a "cultural" problem with roots within communities fell on fertile ground. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*—often referred to as the Moynihan Report—demonstrated the powerful draw of cultural explanations for inequality. That this controversial report has remained influential in framing rival depictions of the poverty question – one arguing for a wide-ranging public policy response to inequality and the other arguing that only self-improvement within communities could provide a route out – shows how engrained racialised understandings of social problems are in the United States.

WAR ON POVERTY

If the notion of "culture" suggested there was something internal to communities that made poverty intractable or stubbornly resistant to political action, LBJ's declaration of a "war" on poverty in his 1964 State of the Union message indicated a belief that it could be conquered. He explicitly framed his political programme in the context of the country's vast wealth. "We do not intend to live in the midst of abundance," he later contended, "confined by blighted cities and bleak suburbs, stunted by a poverty of learning and an emptiness of leisure." In a blizzard of legislative activity over 1964 and 1965, a raft of policy initiatives aimed to combat inequality by channelling government funds directly into communities. The Office of Economic Opportunity was set up to oversee Community Action Programs all over the country. The influx of money into some of the most marginalized regions and cities nearly halved the US poverty rate during the 1960s. But the lofty ambitions of the War on Poverty could not escape the grim reality that many of the reforms of the 1960s could easily be dismantled, and the straitened economic climate of the 1970s would see the end of much of Johnson's "Great Society."

MAXIMUM FEASIBLE PARTICIPATION

We can think of this term in a couple of different ways. Most obviously, it was how Johnson's Office of Economic Opportunity described the core aim of its anti-poverty programmes: only by involving communities and allowing them to lead projects would they be empowered to take a

route out of social marginalisation. The phrase sat alongside another widely quoted aphorism from the administration's policy lexicon: "a hand up not a handout." The government's assault on poverty was not intended to offer welfare payments, but opportunities for self-help and social improvement. These terms reveal the confused logic of Johnson's Great Society: melding an understanding of the need for significant investment in public programmes with a deeply problematic attraction to a cultural explanation for inequality, one rooted in racist conceptions of societal problems. But we should also think of self-help and community ownership of campaigns to alleviate poverty as integral to the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign in 1968 drew attention to the vast gulf separating rich from poor in income and housing and sought to focus the nation's attention on the unfinished business of the rights revolutions. Many of the social programmes of Black Panther chapters adopted the concept that only by taking power into their own hands could genuine social change take place.

HEALTH CARE IS A RIGHT

This rallying cry became synonymous with the campaign of HIV activist group ACT UP in the late 1980s to secure health care for people living with HIV-AIDS. But I think it is a vital phrase for understanding the twin themes of wealth and poverty in the whole postwar era. Unlike in almost all other industrial democracies, the US did not establish a public system of health care financing in the twentieth century. After abortive efforts in the 1930s and 1940s, Americans relied almost exclusively on private health insurance through their employment to pay for medical expenses. In that sense, the story of health care can be seen as part of the story of the "affluent society" of the period. The fact that the elderly and nonworking fell outside this private system also made health care central to the anti-poverty politics of the time, as LBJ established the Medicare and Medicaid programmes for government-funded care for the over 65s, soon expanded to the disabled unable to work. Finally, major changes in the US economy since the 1970s, including deindustrialisation and the rise of less unionised, less secure service work, have led to the massive decline in the extent and generosity of private health insurance, and the worsening of health inequalities between the privileged and poor.

Jonathan Bell is Professor of US History at UCL's Institute of the Americas. He has published widely on US political history, including *The Liberal State on Trial: The Cold War and American Politics in the Truman Years* (Columbia University Press, 2004) and *California Crucible: The Forging of Modern American Liberalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). His current project explores the interconnections of rights politics with the politics of health care delivery.

PRIZE WINNERS

We are pleased to report that, once more, entries for this year's BAAS schools essay competitions were up on past years. It is pleasing to see so much interest in US studies in the secondary sector. The 2024 BAAS Schools prize was won by **Thomas Shamdasani from Harroddian School**, for an essay that considered how the popular NBC TV show, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, reflected and examined the experience of Black Americans in the '90s. Judges praised Thomas for offering "a thoughtful and compelling argument from start to finish." "The textual analysis of the show was engaging...Overall, this was a well-researched, written and referenced piece."

Karlie Yim of Brighton College won this year's BAAS BIPOC Schools essay for an essay that examined "The Objectification of and Violence towards Asian Women in American Media." The essay was found to offer "an interesting perspective on an engaging topic," and "was clear and compelling." Particularly notable was the way in which Karlie "demonstrated a clear understanding of the limits of inclusivity in American media and explored the 'categorisation' of Asian representation well."

Both essays demonstrate the strength of work evident across the sector, and are particularly notable for their common interest in contemporary US media. Short extracts from both winning essays are printed below.

THOMAS SHAMDASANI FROM HARRODDIAN SCHOOL

How does 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air' explore the Black American experience?

'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air' first aired on September 10, 1990, and quickly became a staple of '90s TV. Its combination of lovable characters, hilarious storylines, and poignant social commentary made it an overnight success, solidifying its place in American sitcom history. The show centred around Will Smith, a teenager from inner-city Philadelphia who moves to live with his wealthy aunt and uncle in Bel-Air. It follows his journey as he navigates his new life, where his upbringing and values are in a state of tension and questioning. The show explores multiple aspects of the Black American experience through different characters. This essay will analyse its depiction of these experiences.

'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air' came to TV at a time of increasing racial tensions, particularly in Los Angeles, where

the show is set. The 1992 Los Angeles riots showed the deep societal divisions and inequality that still existed at this time. The show was one of the few television sitcoms on a major network with a predominantly Black, which meant its social commentary, often surrounding race, was extremely significant.¹ Some claimed the show marked a watershed moment for Black culture'.²

One of the key themes of the show is the discussion of racial identity and stereotypes. These ideas are explored through the different characters in the show, and the clashes between their values and upbringings. Will Smith's character is intended to represent the stereotypical view of a Black teenager at the time, whereas Carlton, Will's cousin, is specifically designed to challenge Will's character and is intended to subvert these stereotypes and represent Black teenagers born into wealth.³ Their relationship is intended to mirror interactions between wealthy and poorer Black Americans, something that is commented on in episodes such as 'Blood Is Thicker Than Mud', where Carlton says 'being Black isn't what I'm trying to be, it's what I am. I'm running the same race and jumping the same hurdles you are, so why are you tripping me up?'. Here, Carlton rejects the association of Blackness with class, concepts that were closely linked in America in the 1990s...This also interacts with key societal changes, such as the emergence of a Black middle class in the US, and may have been an attempt by the writers to subvert stereotypes and shift public opinion as to what it is to be Black.

¹ Alvin Poussaint, *Why is TV so segregated?* [Accessed 18 February 2024]

² H. Andrews-Dyer, "The story behind Will Smith's iconic 'hug' scene in 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,'" *Washington Post* (2020)

³ R. Means Coleman, 'African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humour

KARLIE YIM OF BRIGHTON COLLEGE

'The Objectification of and Violence towards Asian Women in American Media'

The Asian-American community were enraged when news of the Atlanta spa shootings broke out in early 2021, but none were genuinely surprised: the targeting of Asian women for violence or sexual harassment was hardly shocking to any, and was something Asian women often bitterly laughed to each other about (Chen, 2021). There is a long and painful history behind the fetishization and sexualization of Asian women in the West, and especially in the United States. The media has played major roles in supporting these racist views, and despite attempts nowadays to deconstruct this



harmful stereotype, it still often rears its ugly head, haunting the lives of Asian Americans.

One of the earliest cases of Americans viewing Asian women as sexually promiscuous came in the form of the Page Act of 1875, banning East Asian women from entering the country for "lewd and immoral purposes". But this view was truly cemented during the Korean and Vietnam wars, when many American GIs were posted throughout Asia (Pham, 2021). These early beginnings of imbalanced relationships between American soldiers and Asian women—often sex workers—are forever immortalized in media such as "Madama Butterfly" and the musical it later inspired, "Miss Saigon", both of which feature US soldiers in Japan and Vietnam respectively, who marry Asian woman...and are written and performed as wholly submissive, passive and reliant on their American partners (Pollard, 2015). Both women commit suicide at the end of their stories, thus showing that, despite having their names in the title, they are also completely disposable. "Miss Saigon" is the second longest-running musical on Broadway, and put this image of the "lotus blossom" Asian woman into the minds of many Americans...

....The current image of Asian women was centuries in the making, starting from the very first recognized Chinese woman bought onto American soil, Afong Moy in 1834, who was used as a performer to promote goods by her white male managers (E. Davis, 2019). These ideas are heavily ingrained into the subconscious of the American public. It's not just men—even staunch feminists often express views of a discriminatory nature towards Asian women: comedian Amy Schumer once joked that Asian women are more liked by Caucasian white men because they "know men hate when

women speak", claiming that "every man will leave [non-Asian women] for an Asian woman" (Arons, 2023). These biases will not be changed quickly, but we must begin the process no matter how long it takes. It is not right for Asian women to be discriminated against in this way, to be put in a position where they face constant sexualization and racist comments from people who know they will not face consequences. Asian women should be treated with respect and as human beings, rather than a fragile, docile "China doll", having to live every day in the USA in constant fear for their lives.

Arons, R. (2013). *Nice Work, Amy Schumer*. [online] *The New Yorker*.

Chen, M. (2022). 'She could have been your mother': anti-Asian racism a year after Atlanta spa shootings. *The Guardian*. [online] 16 Mar.

Pham, E. (2021). Here's how pop culture has perpetuated harmful stereotypes of Asian women. *Today*. [online]

Pollard, S. (2015). Sexism and Racism in Madama Butterfly, M. Butterfly and Miss Saigon. *Pacific Undergraduate Research and Creativity Conference (PURCC)*.

E. Davis, N. (2019). *The Life of Afong Moy, the First Chinese Woman in America*. [online] Literary Hub.

The BAAS schools awards are held annually, with submissions in February and the awards announced in June. Further details can be found on the [BAAS website](#).

SOURCES OF EXPERTISE

Asked by the *Paris Review* what readers should do if they did not understand what the Yoknapatawpha was going on in his books even after reading them two, or three times, William Faulkner unveiled the wisecrack: “read it four times.” As a teacher, who sets himself the committed, perhaps obsessive task of studying Faulkner with A-Level students, I am familiar with, and a weary practitioner of, the folksy, maybe irritating advice to just read the darn thing, again and again. The search for meaning in a text where meaning is dislocated – now there’s a Faulknerian hunt fit for *Go Down, Moses*.

Why do I set myself this perennial challenge? The OCR exam board helpfully makes it easy for me. At least two Faulkner texts grace the current OCR A-Level English Literature syllabus module, *The Sound and the Fury* for the American Literature 1880–1940 paper and *Light in August* for the Gothic (Rosa Coldfield stretches a bony finger to me here and whispers: the demon’s story woulda bin better here – I wouldn’t dare to disagree with the lady, for many reasons). Speaking of which, I have unleashed *Absalom, Absalom* on Upper Sixth pupils as their novel text in the coursework task: what a teacher treat! My college has also settled on the American Literature module (although I have taught *Light in August* for one year) and so the trials and tribulations of the characters Quentin, Caddy, Benjy and the indomitable Dilsey, have been fixtures in my classrooms for several years.

English pupils in the Lower Sixth have not encountered anything like the work. As such, its literary and pedagogical value is immense. The unbridled use of the n-word, the sensitivities Benjy’s eccentricity provokes (“Sir, Benjy sounds a little bit like my brother” “Oh right, err”), the inevitable hand-to-mouth reactions to the incest theme (“so, did Quentin actually have sex with his sister, Sir?” “No.” “So why does he tell his father he has?” “Good question, now then, you see, it’s all about his conception of heaven and hell and honour and...”) imbue this text with a literary suppleness that transcends its dyed-in-the-wool Deep South Yoknapatawpha mythical Americanness. Like much of Faulkner’s work, it is a book that can open engaging conversations about literary style, Modernism, character development (or not), and just what the heck are we doing talking about novels in the first place.

You can see the nervousness among each cohort as they start the text. The discomfort with the unfamiliar language, the concepts, the loose plot. Pupils primed to sniff and follow the narcotic trail of Exam Success quiver at a novel that seems like There is Not Much Going On to Grasp. But as they feel their way through the tale, they begin to sympathise with Caddy, with Quentin, with Benjy, they sympathise with...well, they do not sympathise with Jason. Who would? And slowly they realise that the novel is a Great American Text, and that it is also a work that prompts them to interrogate the fundamental value of the novel in Faulkner’s hands as an interpretive tool for historical and social change. A world and a language alien to twenty-first century privileged English Gen Zs, somehow engages them in the eternal struggles of identity, social expectations, and the complexities of race.

It might be a cliché that young people do not read as much as they used to. There might be something in this, anecdotally. But, in my experience, and in an English Sixth Form educational scene that has seen some welcome expansion of the canon mixed with unsteady posturing and a manic bonfire of inheritances, if you give them something tricky, and you approach it with an assured and fixed passion of its inherent worth, linguistic acrobatics, and emotional force, students will follow you. And even if the houses often burn down at the end, their sense of achievement when they have grappled with the complexities of a Faulkner novel is, in my experience, unparalleled.

There is no greater feeling as a teacher when a pupil tells you they have found their new favourite novel, especially when they started from the belief, “Oh, so Quentin could be two different people? That makes no sense. And I didn’t get that the first time.”

That is why you have got to read it again. And again. Sometimes, four times over. And that is the point of studying Great Literature: no one seriously reads it just once. Resonances rise and fall with each re-reading. Just as Faulkner wanted it. It stands up to another reading, and offers something distinct each time.

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THE ‘DIFFICULTIES’ OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

To teach American literature you have to grapple with its manifold formal, aesthetic, political and historical difficulties.

From the early twentieth century, much American literature has emphasised difficulty as *the* measure of artistic quality. To be an American writer has involved, quite often, being experimental. A loose equivalence between the political project of the United States and the work of these difficult American writers has emerged. Where the former promised to reformulate, if not to entirely revolutionise, anterior modes of governance, the latter has aimed to do the same with literary forms.

The American canon on which syllabi, particularly at school level, are based, includes awkward and challenging writers, such as: Herman Melville, Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, William Faulkner, Marianne Moore, Jean Toomer, Ralph Ellison, John Ashbery, Thomas Pynchon, and several others.

In the classroom the difficulty of American literature can be self-defeating. When the central question becomes “what on earth is going on?”, discussion is often reduced to working out content. Description replaces analysis. You can find yourself simply recapitulating the plot in a way that either belies or ignores entirely the experimental aesthetics that underpin it.

I have negotiated these textual and related pedagogical difficulties by foregrounding the effects that they might have on student readers. I ask questions such as: what might be the rationale for creating confusion in an artwork? Why might having to work for meaning be important? Is there a virtue in not knowing exactly what is happening? In a difficult text what is the relation between reader and author? That way, if students are somewhat confounded—which, inevitably they will be—they can at least attempt to conceptualise their disorientation and be reassured that they are not alone in feeling it.

This aesthetics-driven definition of difficulty offers only one facet of it. Most scholarship on American literature in some way confronts the structural systems that have underwritten its cultural production: enslavement and racialisation, indigenous genocide and displacement,

and high capitalism and its degradation of the world. These are difficult issues insofar as they involve directly confronting unsettling historical truths and reading about, often in detail, violence, exploitation, trauma, murder, and more.

Arguably, the most difficult writer in the American canon is Frederick Douglass, simply for the relentlessness of his scrutiny on the real life, material workings of slave society. This unrelenting vision is one that his many political and cultural descendants have reworked and grappled with. Moreover, if students are to read fully in the American cultural canon, they will inevitably have to deal with texts whose politics are either racist, say in an extreme case like Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman* (1905), or, at least, structured by the logics of racialisation and enslavement, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) being, here, perhaps the most (in)famous example.

Students are likely, quite justifiably, to find texts that deal directly with this form of difficulty confronting, even distressing. They expect, even if only through things like trigger warnings, some measure of protection from what they might discover.

Those texts which are either racist or racializing raise methodological questions about creating courses and making text selections for teaching: is it reasonable to expect students to read them (at least at school or undergraduate level)? Does institutionalising them in any way legitimise their meanings? Is there an historical—or contemporary—responsibility to confront them nonetheless?

In short, then, difficulty is not an incidental concern when it comes to teaching American literature. Not only do teachers need to have an apparatus for working with formal, stylistic, and other forms of aesthetic difficulty, but they need also to consider how American aesthetics intersect with this literature’s difficult history.

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THE VICE PRESIDENCY AND CAMPAIGN POLITICS: SPIRO AGNEW, 1968-1973

When Republican Richard Nixon became president in January 1969, the Democratic Party and its liberal agenda had long been dominant. Since then, the Republican Party and conservatism have been far more successful – and divisive rhetoric of the kind typified by Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew, has become commonplace. Although the constitutional duties of the vice presidency are few, Agnew achieved a higher profile than most, largely because of the duties assigned by Nixon during his first term, especially relating to voter mobilisation. Agnew's vice-presidential odyssey involved a rise-and-fall story that unfolded with unusual swiftness, but his often-overlooked legacy can still be seen today.

Agnew was little-known at the time of his selection in August 1968. Elected Governor of Maryland less than two years earlier, he initially had a reputation as a progressive Republican. But when unrest arrived in his state following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, Agnew denounced it as disruptive of established order, with a vehemence that caught Nixon's attention. At a time of rising crime and urban unrest, Nixon was eager to campaign on the issue of 'law and order' to build a 'new majority'. He saw Agnew as likely to appeal to supporters of third-party candidate George C. Wallace, a segregationist opposed to civil rights who might otherwise draw votes away from the Republicans.

From 1952 to 1961 Nixon had been Dwight D. Eisenhower's running mate and then vice president. Often acting as Eisenhower's 'attack dog,' Nixon was able to engage in partisan confrontation that might have seemed unpresidential at the time. Nixon hoped that Agnew would fulfil a similar role, but Agnew was less slick than his mentor. In his elevation from obscurity to the spotlight, Agnew became known instead for his gaffes. Where Nixon wanted to demonstrate sensitivity to ethnic diversity, Agnew persisted in his use of epithets. At a time when many Americans worried about an urban crisis, Agnew said, 'If you've seen one city slum, you've seen them all'. Such comments seemed to show that the newcomer was unprepared for taking up this national role.

Preparedness for the presidency itself is the most fundamental of the vice president's responsibilities, and many saw Agnew as unqualified. Focusing on the vice-presidential candidate in a manner that was unusual, one television commercial aired by the Democrats featured the sound of someone laughing helplessly; it was gradually revealed that an unseen viewer was watching a television on which 'Agnew for Vice-President?' was displayed. The shot then dissolved to a concluding caption: 'This would be funny if it weren't so serious...'. If usually the vice-presidential candidates are not at the centre of a campaign for the White House, Agnew's weaknesses gained attention that seemed to be damaging for the ticket. But, at least for the moment, Nixon saw the controversy that Agnew created as helpful. 'You know why they're screaming at Agnew,' Nixon told aides privately – 'Because he's hitting where it hurts'.⁴

After the narrow victory of the Nixon-Agnew ticket in November 1968, Agnew did little to revive his reputation on taking office the following January. The policy demands of the vice presidency are limited, but Agnew neglected even the few duties he was assigned. He continued to excel, though, in attack-dog politics. 'From a political-social-cultural viewpoint, the most arresting news of the past year was the advent of Spiro Agnew,' reported the *Wall Street Journal* in early 1970.⁵ Agnew was gaining attention – often notoriety – in particular because of speeches critical of student protesters, radical politicians, and – perhaps most influentially of all – those journalists he labelled 'liberal'. That autumn, Nixon assigned Agnew primary responsibility for the midterm campaign, and he told Agnew to attack the administration's opponents as 'radical liberals' – part of his plan to build a so-called 'new majority'. Agnew followed the plan, but Republican gains were few.

Sceptical now of Agnew, Nixon looked to find a new running mate for his re-election. John Connally, appointed as Treasury secretary in early 1971, was a Democrat from Texas who looked to be a promising replacement.

As that state's governor, Connally had been wounded while travelling in the presidential limousine when John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in November 1963. As a potential replacement for Agnew, Connally might help to consolidate a 'new majority' through the mobilisation of southern whites, Nixon thought, as well as having

more promise as a successor to the presidency. But it is not so easy to displace a sitting vice president – not least because Agnew had earned enthusiastic support among grassroots conservatives, and his private criticisms of Nixon's rapprochement with communist China helped bolster this dynamic within the party (while annoying the president). Although it was increasingly clear that Nixon no longer saw his VP as central to his project to revitalise the Republican Party, it was equally clear that Nixon was stuck with Agnew.

Seeking re-election in 1972, Nixon hoped to achieve a landslide, winning the votes of many who had never previously supported the Republican Party, and bringing about a new era of dominance for the party. Agnew, he now thought, could add little to this effort. Whereas Connally was the figurehead of a 'Democrats for Nixon' organisation at the heart of Nixon's electoral project, Agnew was relegated to a more marginal role. Nixon's VP was instead assigned to respond to the Democrats' presidential candidate, South Dakota Senator George McGovern. The juxtaposition of the politician seeking to retain the vice presidency for the Republicans with the presidential candidate of the Democrats was a clever way to indicate that McGovern was less worthy of the White House than Nixon. Yet Agnew's rhetorical style, once incendiary, was now restrained. His style, reported one journalist, was no longer that of 'hatchet man' but rather 'a benign schoolmaster', who commented upon McGovern 'as if turning in an end-of-year report on an unruly pupil'.⁶

On election day the Nixon-Agnew ticket secured 60.7 percent of the popular vote – still the largest ever share of the popular vote for the Republicans. Nixon, though, was eager that Agnew would not succeed him in the White House when his second term came to an end, even if working out how to diminish the vice president's prospects was complex. H. R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, noted in his diary, 'We don't want him to have the appearance of being the heir apparent; but we also don't want to appear to push him down'.⁷ However, the arrival of the Watergate scandal boosted Agnew's prospects, raising the real possibility that he would replace Nixon before the next election. In early 1973, journalists were starting to discover deep connections between the White House and a break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic Party (housed at the Watergate complex in Washington, DC) the previous June. Eventually it would emerge that Nixon was part of a cover-up effort concerning those connections, leading to his resignation in August 1974. Because Agnew was such a marginal figure around the White House by this time, he was not implicated in the Watergate scandal, as so many aides to Nixon (including Haldeman) were.

However, before Agnew had the chance to edge towards the presidency, he was embroiled in a scandal of his own. An investigation into political corruption in Maryland discovered that not only had Agnew taken money from state government contractors while governor, he had continued to do so as vice president. In October 1973 Agnew became the first, and only, vice president to resign. Gerald R. Ford, the leader of the Republicans in the House of Representatives, was his successor, and in August 1974 became president after Nixon's resignation.

In recent years popular writers and scholars have drawn parallels between Agnew and Donald Trump. The comparison has particularly focused on the controversial and divisive rhetoric that Agnew employed in Nixon's first term, and on how a politician who spoke so much of order proved to have broken the law.⁸ Perhaps Agnew – in attacking the media as 'liberal', for example – was a pioneer of the sort of political appeals of which Trump would later become a master. Yet even when his rhetoric was shrill, Agnew's attacks on political opponents were characterised by a degree of responsibility – perhaps something which is less readily comparable to Donald Trump as his third campaign for the presidency progresses.

Robert Mason is Professor of Twentieth-Century US History at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), among others, and is currently working on a book about Spiro Agnew.

⁴ William Safire, diary entry, 18 September 1968, folder 4, box 12, William Safire Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁵ "Assaulting the Aristocracy," *Wall Street Journal*, 12 January 1970, 12.

⁶ William Millinship, "Spiro for '76?" *South China Morning Post*, 18 October 1972, 2.

⁷ H. R. Haldeman, diary entry, 14 November 1972, Haldeman Diaries, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/virtuallibrary/documents/haldeman-diaries/37-hrhd-audiocassette-ac26b-19721114-pa.pdf>, accessed 10 June 2024.

⁸ Charles J. Holden, Zach Messitte, and Jerald E. Podair, *Republican Populist: Spiro Agnew and the Origins of Donald Trump's America* (2019); Rachel Maddow and Michael Yarvitz, *Bag Man: The Wild Crimes, Audacious Cover-up, and Spectacular Downfall of a Brazen Crook in the White House* (2020).

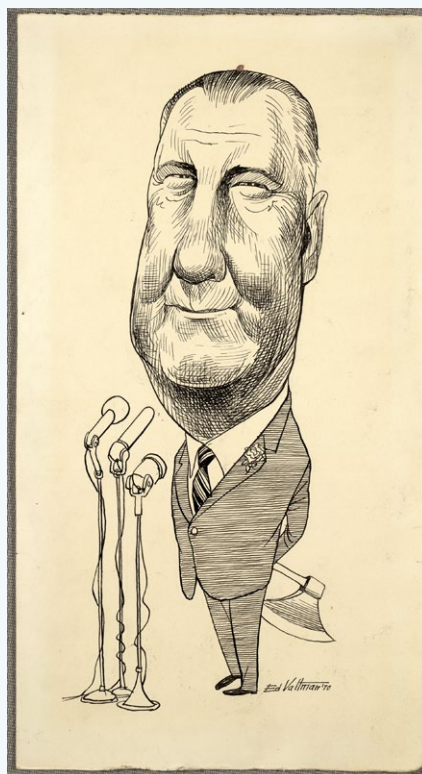


Image: Edmund Valtman, Agnew, 1970. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICS

In this issue, teachers and scholars of US politics reflect on the 2024 elections. They offer perspectives on the likely shape of the campaigns, and venture what we might expect from the possible outcomes. All of the pieces were written before the first presidential debate took place on June 27, 2024.

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID! – BUT IS IT?



Iwan Morgan (Emeritus Professor of US Studies, UCL)

'It's the economy, stupid!' was the iconic slogan that guided Democrat Bill Clinton's successful strategy in the '92 presidential election to blame incumbent Republican, George H. W. Bush, for the recession that happened on his watch. It helped Clinton make Bush a one-term president and was a carbon-copy of Republican Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign attacks on stagflation (the combination of runaway inflation and high unemployment) that had made Democrat Jimmy Carter a one-termer. In 2024, the soon-to-be crowned Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump, is making the economy a key element in his claims that voters should deny Democratic incumbent Joe Biden a second term. In contrast to 1980 and 1992, however, the US economy is currently doing well, but Trump's attacks still appear to be hitting home.

In May the Gallup poll found just 39 percent of respondents had confidence in Biden's management of the economy. Only one modern president has hitherto had a lower rating – in late 2008 George W. Bush scored a lowly 34 percent on account of a Wall Street Crash and ensuing recession, but he was not on that year's ballot.

This negativity seems at odds with the economic good news during Biden's tenure. Unemployment has been at historically low levels of less than 4 percent (the *de facto* full-employment rate), wages have risen faster than inflation since the end of 2022 (the highest growth has been for the lowest earners), inflation is projected to fall to the Federal Reserve's target level of 2 percent by the end of the year (down from 8 percent in 2022), and annual economic growth for 2024 is expected to hit 2.2 percent (the highest for any G-7 nation and vastly greater than the 0.4 percent growth anticipated for the UK).

Moreover the Biden administration, in cooperation with the Democratic majorities that controlled both houses of Congress in 2021-22, enacted major legislation in support of its industrial policy strategy. This agenda amounted in *The Economist's* estimate to the biggest overhaul of the US economy by the national government in more than a generation. The key measures were: the American Rescue Plan to boost recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic shutdowns; the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act to rebuild roads and bridges and improve broadband access; the CHIPS and Science Act to promote semiconductor manufacturing; and the Inflation Reduction Act to invest in climate-change mitigation and permit the government to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies over drug prices.

So why aren't Biden's poll numbers riding high on the back of a buoyant economy?

One reason is present-day political polarization – Republican identifiers give Biden no credit for economic improvement and think things were better under Trump. Secondly, the aggregate economic data look good but many people are experiencing economic difficulties: Americans' pay-checks may be bigger than ever but their purchasing power has hardly budged in the last 40 years. Finally, a majority of Americans believe the country is on the wrong track – as high as 70 percent, according to some polls, remarkable for a nation of supposed optimists!

Biden is not responsible for many of these economic shortcomings that have long roots. But disaffected

voters tend to punish incumbents for not putting things right on their watch. Despite everything Biden has done, his economic record is in reality unlikely to re-elect him. In that case, the best way – perhaps the only way – he can win is through a negative campaign, which successful incumbents generally eschew.

With Americans unlikely to change their minds on the economy in the remaining pre-election months, Biden's best bet is to make Trump's threat to democracy, if re-elected, the main issue of his own re-election campaign. Unusually for modern challengers, Trump has a record to attack while a presidential incumbent himself. Biden has to convince undecided voters that his Republican opponent, a convicted felon, believes himself above the law and represents a threat to democracy, as evidenced by his encouragement of a mob to attack the Capitol on 6 January 2021, to deny certification of the 2020 presidential election result. In today's unusual times, it is time for the sitting president to recognize that a successful record as economic manager is not going to get him a second term in office.

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH FLORIDA?



Nick Gallop (Head Master, Brighton College Bangkok & Editor of *Politics Review*)

The US president's inauguration next year marks twenty years since the publication of Thomas Frank's ground-breaking *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2004). By focusing on the political quirks and machinations in a single state, Frank sought to grasp why so many Americans apparently vote against their economic and social interests. In November 2024, the outcome of the presidential election could well be determined by a single state. Known for its diverse population and third highest number of electoral votes (30 in 2024), Florida's political landscape often mirrors national trends, making it a microcosm of the broader electorate. The state's early

voting and absentee ballot systems also mean that effective and sustained campaign efforts can win not just the state, but the presidency.

Florida's demographics include a mix of urban and rural areas, a significant Hispanic population (particularly Cuban Americans in southern Florida), and a large number of retirees. This diversity means that candidates must appeal to a broad spectrum of voters, crafting messages that resonate across various groups.

Florida is the truest of swing states: along with Nevada, it has been won by less than three percentage points in five of the last eight elections. Donald Trump's 1.2% winning margin over Hilary Clinton in 2016 developed into a 3.4% winning margin in 2020 – a result which defied the pre-election polls in favour of Joe Biden.

Florida's electoral significance, diverse electorate, and competitive nature make it a crucial focus for any presidential candidate aiming to secure victory in 2024.

ABORTION RIGHTS COULD PROVE DECISIVE



Callum Robertson (Head of Sixth Form, Astrea Multi-Academy Trust, Cambridgeshire)

Trump managed to achieve something substantial in his term as President of the US. He filled a number of US Supreme Court vacancies and forged the most conservative-leaning court in modern times. In doing so, he created the circumstances which later gave the green light for the repeal of *Roe v Wade* (1973), with the ruling in *Dobbs v Jackson* (2022). The immediate impacts were – with the obvious caveat that not all Democrats and Republicans think alike on the issue – from the perspective of many Democrats, a dilution of women's rights, and from a broadly Republican perspective, the protection of unborn lives.

However, there is a shorter-term impact, which I don't believe the Trump administration priced into its decision making. State-by-state polling by the Pew Research Centre shows that only 17 states support abortion bans and they are overwhelmingly already voting Republican. Perhaps more saliently, of the other states, a large number—including Florida, Iowa and Ohio—are broadly pro-choice but voted for Trump in the last election. This situation might well cost Republicans dearly.

With a majority of states being pro-choice (to varying extents), we may see a backlash in elections to Congress against more conservative legislators, who do not back abortion rights. Potentially, we might therefore expect to see a Democratic House of Representatives and/or US Senate, alongside a Trump presidency. With this in mind, the outcome after November looks far from easy for a second Trump administration, which may struggle to get its nominees confirmed, let alone pass any meaningful legislation.

TURNOUT WILL BE KEY



Rebecca Stone (Associate Professor of US History at the University of Warwick)

Donald Trump is marginally ahead in the polls, but his campaign style will nonetheless be desperate. Campaigning is time-consuming and expensive; Joe Biden is old, but he is a seasoned campaigner, and he has a large war chest. Trump's attention and time is currently split between the election and the multiple court cases he is embroiled in, and, at the time of writing, his campaign has around half the funds of the Biden campaign. Thus, on the campaign trail Trump will rely on tried and tested methods that come easily to him and are popular with his base: outrageous claims and well-known dog whistles. He'll run a headline-grabbing media circus that will inspire right-wing parties across Europe. If he is then re-elected based on that campaign, it will certainly be devastating for democracy, in the US and elsewhere.

Yet the 2024 election will be won on turnout, not rhetoric or campaign promises. It is true that the former President is far more popular with his base than the current President is with his. Trump will win by large margins in most red states. Joe Biden will not win by as much in the blue states, but this won't change the dial. After all, it is "winner takes all" in the electoral college system (except in Maine and Nebraska, but they will cancel each other out). Neither candidate has broad appeal in the way that Barack Obama had in 2008, or perhaps even George W. Bush did in 2004. Rather than trying to convince people to vote for them, the candidates should be trying to convince voters in swing states to vote at all.

Whichever candidate is more successful at turning out their own party will probably be the next US president. Trump isn't great at appealing to voters who don't respond to his particular brand of politics. Moreover, part of this conversation as we get closer to November will be focused on how the world sees US politics. The Biden campaign have already released a video mocking Trump's image overseas. This will not matter to Trump's base, but Trump's base alone isn't enough to win him the election. Five months is a long time in a US election cycle; neither candidate has really started campaigning yet, Trump hasn't picked a running mate and Robert F. Kennedy Jr could spoil either campaign with his third-party candidacy. A lot could happen between now and November, but if Trump couldn't beat Biden in 2020 then I am not convinced that he can in 2024, and the majority of the world will breathe a sigh of relief.

APATHY ALL ROUND?



Sarra Jenkins (Director of Future Pathways and Politics Teacher, Loughborough Grammar School; Author of Edexcel's Politics A Level Specification & Hodder US Politics A Level textbook author)

The US 2024 election has the potential, at least in the eyes of the general public, to create further apathy about the place and role of the US as a world power. Regardless of your political outlook, the fact that the frontrunners

are Trump and Biden could create a malaise in the political centre, and a hyper-partisan ideal on the political margins—neither of which bodes well for sincere and productive political debate. As in the UK, the US electoral system effectively precludes a third party having substantial impact, which gives the main parties scope to act as they please, and there is scarcely anything done to appeal across the aisle.

While US campaigns may often be devoid of succinct and dynamic policy, the headlines drawn from the 2024 campaign have been driven more than ever by attacks on personal circumstances rather than political substance. The usual lack of distinct policy, driven by the need to appeal across fifty states, means that personal attacks are used to galvanise the base and create headlines. This is even more notable in an era when nearly [39% of people 'avoid the news'](#) and [super-PACs are paying for TikTok adverts](#). The potentially positive outcome in this discontented federal landscape is that voters place more focus [on local and state politics](#) than national politics. US Supreme Court judgements, such as *Dobbs v Jackson* (2022) have been seen to 'return power' to the states. However, this could risk further hyper-partisanship in the form of fragmentation of US politics by state, which has created [equally negative headlines on the world stage](#).

Ultimately, there is just a feeling of 'is this the best there is to offer?' on the US presidential election ticket.

PREDICTING UNPREDICTABILITY



David Tuck (Head of History and Politics, Harrow International School Hong Kong & Hodder US Politics A Level textbook author)

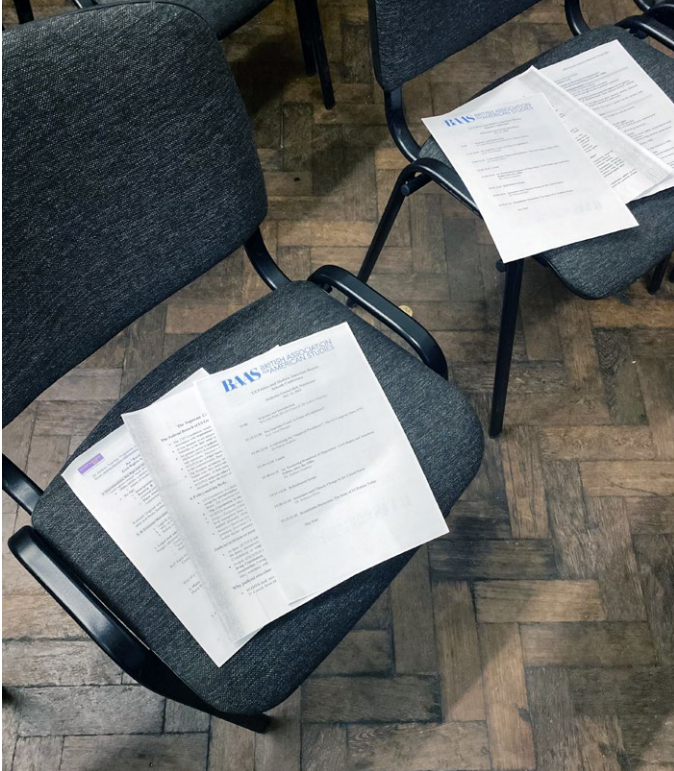
The campaigning strategies and style of US presidential elections has set the tone for modern elections all over the world, with heavily stage-managed events in front of adoring supporters.

Serious discussion of policy has been deliberately under emphasised by both candidates and the most significant part of the campaign will probably be the presidential debates. It is a high-risk arena for both candidates but Biden is considerably disadvantaged given his well-documented issues with mental acuity in recent months. Biden will need to come through unscathed if he is to win the election and the debates will test his ability to speak lucidly for a sustained period.

No matter who wins, the US remains the most influential country in the world, economically dominant, as well as being the most important voice in international relations. The successful candidate will have to deal with the reality that the US deficit is now \$34.5 trillion, which is approximately \$11 trillion higher than it was in March 2020. The US economy is already slowing down and given its importance to the global economy, the rest of the world will be hoping for a soft landing, not a recession.

In international relations, Trump is far more unpredictable than the Biden administration, which has a clear foreign policy laid out. Trump's unorthodoxy and vagueness makes it difficult to predict how he would respond to the crises in Ukraine and Gaza. Trump has been far more explicit on relations with NATO and I would expect, should he be successful in the November election, to repeat his threat of refusing US support for NATO, if other members do not increase their defence spending.

NOTICES & EVENTS



25 October: BAAS Schools Conference, City Library, Newcastle upon Tyne

18 November: US Politics Today Conference, British Library, London

20 November: US Politics Today Conference, University of East Anglia, Norwich

21 November: US Politics Today Conference, De Montfort University, Leicester

22 November: US Politics Today Conference, British Library, London

The 2024 BAAS Schools Conference will take place on **Friday, October 25** in Newcastle at the City Library (33 New Bridge St W, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8AX). The title of the conference will be "We the People: Rights and Citizenship in Modern America," and will include papers relevant to those studying A-Level History, or Government and Politics modules, and more general reflections on contemporary US politics. Further details, including a full programme and ticket information, will be made available on the [BAAS website](#) and on the Association's Twitter/X feed @OfficialBAAS.

The British Library's Eccles Centre, London, will host the annual US Politics Today Conference on **Monday 18 November** and **Friday 22 November**. This exciting annual event sees academics give brief introductions to key topics that feature in A-Level Politics, alongside responses from two former members of the US Congress. It is an event not to be missed, so keep an eye out for emails about sign-up, or follow the Eccles Institute for the Americas & Oceania at the British Library's Twitter/X feed @BL_EcclesInst.

There will also be opportunities for in-person conferences for schools in the East of England at the University of East Anglia on **Wednesday 20 November**, and in the Midlands at De Montfort University on **Thursday 21 November**.



Photographs from the 2023 US Politics Today Conference, featuring Loretta Sanchez (D-CA, 1997-2017) and Greg Walden (R-OR, 1999-2021)