O'ER THE RAMPARTS

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We are delighted to launch the first issue of the British Association for American Studies school's newsletter, 'O'er the Ramparts'. We hope it will showcase some of the excellent work being done by those teaching about the United States in schools, colleges, and universities—and more generally that it will invigorate the exchange of ideas and resources between teachers, archivists, and university-based researchers.

Since the formation of BAAS in the mid-1950s, the Association has worked to support American Studies teachers at all levels and in all corners of the UK. The launch of this newsletter—which will now appear twice a year and be made available for download on the BAAS website—marks another phase in this history. We hope it will help to strengthen the work that goes on across sectors, and, in keeping with the interdisciplinarity of American Studies, between subject disciplines. The newsletter will complement our recently-created BAAS teaching network, details of which can be found on the BAAS website.

In this first issue there are case studies of innovative research, dynamic classroom practices, and a gallery of advice, resources, and upcoming events. The core features around which we have designed the project include our 'Keywords' section, where we invite reflections on major terms or concepts; 'Crossing Boundaries', presenting examples of how work in one subject can inform thinking in another; our 'Notes from the Blackboard' will bring new perspectives on how we teach about the US; and 'New in...', offers updates on the latest books and articles from around the field.

Written by and for all who teach about the United States, we hope 'O'er the Ramparts' helps to champion exciting and relevant content and ideas, and to foreground the interdisciplinarity and innovation of American Studies in the UK today.

BAAS BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR AMERICAN STUDIES

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND THE MEANINGS OF FREEDOM

LAWRIE BALFOUR

In her 2004 foreword to *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison retells the story of the novel's origins. While working on The Black Book (1974), she explains, Morrison was fascinated by a newspaper clipping about Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who was willing "to risk everything for what was to her the necessity of freedom." Rather than attempting to reconstruct Garner's flight from Kentucky and her decision to kill her daughter before slave-catchers could return her to bondage, Morrison transformed that initial inspiration into a narrative that explores "freedom, responsibility, and women's 'place.'"

One need not read Morrison's foreword to be struck by the centrality of freedom in *Beloved*. Like nearly all of her writing, the novel imagines what it means to get free in a world shaped by racial hierarchy. My appreciation for this dimension of Morrison's political vision emerged from the classroom. I first assigned *Beloved* in an undergraduate course more than 20 years ago. Discussing the novel with students illuminated the challenges of realizing democratic ideals in what Morrison called "a nation of people who decided that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom and mechanisms for devastating racial oppression." Since then, *Beloved* has been a cornerstone of many of my courses, including "Politics and Literature" (unsurprisingly) and the "Honors Tutorial in Political Theory" (perhaps a bit more surprisingly). It is one of the greatest texts ever written about freedom. But is not simply about freedom. *Beloved* vivifies how women, men, and children living in conditions of extreme duress have struggled to emancipate themselves and each other.

Debates about the meaning of freedom have occupied Western political philosophers since ancient times. When modern political theorists invoke "slavery," they typically enlist it as a an abstraction that serves as the opposite of liberty. Rarely do they consult the people whose entry into the modern West came by way of the Atlantic slave trade or colonial conquest. Morrison, by contrast, insists that we cannot understand freedom if we do not consider how it has been lived and, more specifically, how it has been interpreted by women and men who have been enslaved, dispossessed, and preyed upon in the name of someone else's liberty. By reinhabiting the lives of people who have been "disremembered and unaccounted for" (324), she creates space for freedom dreams that do not rely on the mastery of others.

Three features of *Beloved* illustrate what I mean. First, Morrison's examination of "what 'free' could possibly mean to women" (xvi) reorients readers from abstract (masculine) accounts of freedom toward the vantage of enslaved women for whom choosing to love or taking responsibility for oneself and one's children was outlawed. Second, the narrative's attentiveness to human beings' capacity for solidarity and betrayal in different settings (plantation, chain-gang, "free" community) counters the individualism of canonical accounts of modern freedom and discloses how personal and collective freedom are always entangled. Third, *Beloved*'s vivid portraits of enlightened enslavers, racist abolitionists, and even children who are trained in the habits of mastery from an early age caution against mistaking white freedom for freedom itself.

If *Beloved* is Morrison's most celebrated novel, it is just one example, from a decades-long career, of the virtuosity with which she remade American English into a language capacious enough to do justice to Black culture and history. The story of *Beloved* is a story of women and men who know freedom's price because they cannot take it for granted. In Morrison's hands, freedom is alchemized from a concept into living thing—a profound longing, a fragile achievement, an aspiration one can taste, touch, and feel, as well as know.

Lawrie Balfour is James Hart Professor of Politics at the University of Virginia, and was the James G. Winant visiting professor of American Government at the University of Oxford in 2022-23. Her book, Toni Morrison: Imagining Freedom *(2023) was just published by Oxford University Press.*

NOTES FROM THE BLACKBOARD

USING MAPS TO EXPLAIN US HISTORY AND POLITICS

TOM STRANGE

"American history must be really easy – they don't have that much of it". The number of times I have heard this from parents when they found out we were switching our History A-Level to the US Civil War! This myth, about America's truncated past, is one that's relatively easy to dispel. What's harder to overcome is getting across the sheer size of the United States. While you can highlight the fact that the entirety of the United Kingdom could fit into the state of Michigan, this doesn't help to convey the variety of identities, cultures, and attitudes within America.

The challenge, then, is to not only teach elements of US History and Politics that examine national structures and events, but to do so in a way that recognizes the country's regionalism.
Teaching the US Civil War makes the issue of regionalism relatively easy to explain. The political, economic, and social differences between the North and South are pretty clear— coupled with the fact that the divide was demarcated by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon in the 1760s.

But it is also important to illustrate to students that each southern state held distinct opinions, attitudes, and cultures, around secession from the Union, as well as around abolition, conscription, and the distribution of resources within the Confederacy.

There are similar issues surrounding regionalism when trying to teach US politics. Teaching the relationship between the federal government and state governments does help to remind students about different identities within this vast country. The issue of federalism shines through during discussions on many of the key issues dividing contemporary US society, such as abortion, gun control, and the death penalty. Yet federalism remains a subject that students often struggle with.

So, how best to highlight the issue of regionalism? For me, one strategy has been the use of maps. For the Civil War, maps can highlight the difference between slave states, border states, and free states, and also reveal areas where loyalty to the Union or Confederacy remained divided. Maps can also help in the discussion of Westward Expansion, the growth of slavery, or the rising tensions of the 1850s.

This may sound like an obvious solution—and I'm sure some teachers may see it as a case of stating the obvious—but for me mapping such multiple identities, both in history and in the present day, remains one of the biggest challenges in helping students get to grips with understanding the United States.

Thomas Strange teaches History and Humanities at Felsted School, including A-Level courses on the American Civil War, and American Government and Politics. He completed a PhD in American Studies at the University of Manchester in 2011, and specialises in nineteenth-century African American religious history.

KEYWORDS

WILDERNESS, ECOLOGISM, AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

ELSA DEVIENNE

In the final-year module I teach at Northumbria University, "States of Nature: Environments and Peoples in the Americas," one of the first things I discuss with students is terminology. There are so many terms that circulate in the media related to the environment that it is easy to get confused. What I propose with the six terms below is an overview of the history of the US nature protection movement—from Wilderness to Anthropocene (I did not alphabetise!). This will hopefully be useful for those teaching on "ecologism" as part of A-level Politics, or other aspects of US environmental history.

WILDERNESS

With that word, everything started! While early white Americans had considered their mission to tame wilderness (uninhabited, inhospitable areas of the continent), a shift occurred in the late nineteenth century with the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of the US. As the Frontier was considered settled and closed in 1890, and wilderness areas were rapidly disappearing, new voices emerged calling for the preservation of such areas.

Wilderness was not only what was presumed to have shaped the 'American character' (i.e. its presumptions of individualism, resourcefulness, and egalitarianism), but it was one factor that differentiated the nation from the Old World. Of course, the reality was that the wilderness had never been barren!

PRESERVATION

Among those who called for the preservation of wild areas was John Muir, a Scottish-born preservationist who founded the Sierra Club in San Francisco in 1892. Muir lobbied for the protection of natural environments from development, stressing their influence on American national identity. Muir was a central player in the history of what we now call the "preservation movement," which eventually led to the creation of the first national parks. Yellowstone, the first national park in the world, was created in 1872. With its geysers and hot springs, Yellowstone was described as a "wonderland." But creating the park meant removing the Native tribes that had lived and hunted there for generations.

ECOLOGY

America's national parks were preserved because of aesthetics, spirituality, and national pride. Biodiversity, which is a key value today, was not part of that history. For humans to 'see' these spaces in ecological terms required the emergence of the science of ecology. This happened in the early twentieth century. Ecology is the study of living organisms and their relationships to each other and their surroundings.

A key tenet is the idea of interconnectedness: disturbing one element can disrupt the delicate web of relationships that make up "nature." But ecology did not just remain in university classrooms. Two writers played a key role in its diffusion to the wider public. The first one was ecologist and philosopher Aldo Leopold, whose book, *A Sand County Almanac* (1948), called on humans to take their moral responsibility towards nature seriously. He called this "land ethics." The second major ecologist was Rachel Carson.

ENVIRONMENTALISM

Rachel Carson is often called the "godmother of modern environmentalism." Carson played a major role in this movement's inception through the publication of her bestseller, *Silent Spring* (1962). A lover of the sea and its creatures, Carson had already written several books on the topic. But *Silent Spring* was different. In it, Carson took on America's powerful chemical industry, exposing the harmful effects of pesticides and DDT. Birds and other species died or failed to reproduce after exposure.

Soon, Carson warned, Americans would wake up to "silent springs," without the familiar chirping of birds. Carson was not the first or only writer to denounce chemical pesticides. Social theorist Murray Bookchin's *Our Synthetic Environment* (1962), also denounced the effects of chemicals on nature and human health, though his anarchist associations meant his message did not circulate as widely.

ECOLOGISM

Rachel Carson is not the only reason why the modern US environmentalist movement emerged in the 1960s. Many other factors played a role: grassroots campaigns against pollution and chemicals; the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969 and other environmental disasters; other bestselling books that raised awareness of environmental problems created by postwar abundance. What is certain is that by the 1970s an ecological outlook had entered mainstream US politics.

When the first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970, Americans from across the political spectrum took part in marches and attended teach-ins. In the following years, the "environmental regulatory state"— a set of laws to regulate clean air and water, pollution and wilderness protection—emerged.

ANTHROPOCENE

The writings of Carson and Leopold continue to resonate among modern environmentalists, though the tone of these movements is now more urgent. We have entered a new geological era characterised by what American-born chemist Will Steffan describes as the fact "the human imprint on the global environment has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system." This is the "Anthropocene".

Current US President Joe Biden has promised his Inflation Reduction Act, passed in 2022, will tackle climate change. Whether he realised it or not, this piece of legislation owed much to the nature thinkers and writers who have pushed for the protection of nature throughout US history.

Elsa Devienne is an assistant professor in American Studies at Northumbria University. Her first book, La ruée vers le sable: une histoire environnementale des plages de Los Angeles (Sorbonne Editions, 2020), won the 2021 OAH's Willi Paul Adams Award. An updated translation will be published by Oxford University Press in 2024 as Sand Rush: The Revival of the Beach in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles.

SCHOOL ESSAY PRIZE WINNERS, 2023

The BAAS schools awards are held annually, with submissions in February and the awards announced in June. Further details can be found on our website. This year we received many excellent entries, and the judges were impressed by the overall quality of work submitted. We are delighted to print extracts below from the two winning entries, and also to celebrate the two runners-up, below.

BIPOC SCHOOL ESSAY AWARD

Thomas Sharma of Queen Mary's Grammar School won our BIPOC School Essay Award with a piece that explored 'How the Supreme Court has been affected by growing polarisation in American politics'. The judges praised Thomas's essay for being "well researched, written and referenced" and for offering "a clear and compelling argument [that showed] how present Supreme Court function is a departure from previous eras".

US politics has become more divided in recent years. Since 1994, research by the Pew Research Center shows that the average Democrat and Republican have moved away from the centre in a fashion that has made bipartisanship now rare and poisoned almost every hall of government. It is not just in electoral politics where this division is being felt.

The US Supreme Court, set up as a bulwark against the excesses of Congress and the White House has, increasingly, been hijacked by partisans. In the Federalist Papers, the framers discuss the purposes of the court: to ensure that the Constitution, the manifestation of the people's will and their protection against tyranny, remains supreme to the wills of the politicians. Yet this growing partisan divide has instead meant that the bench is being used to set radical policy. The effects of this are stark and troubling.

Public faith in the court is now lower than ever, as the people no longer trust it to dispense justice; confirmation hearings have become an embarrassing spectacle; and rulings are now motivated not by any desire to see the Constitution made relevant for the current climate or protected, but by sheer politics...

The growing partisan divide has eroded the court's integrity. By allowing it to become another tool of those in power, its stated aim of preventing tyranny from either of the other two branches has become secondary to acting as an extension to one of them. Of course, the ideology of a president will always have at least some bearing on the appointment of justices... However, the changing perception of the Court, as...one more mechanism for a President to use as a way to implement wide-reaching policy reform, have meant that appointments have become far more tied to ideology...and has also meant that the appointment process has become both more acrimonious and more theatrical...
....
The Supreme Court ruling on political questions is not new. It has always done so, from whether segregation is permissible to whether a woman should be able to have an abortion. What is different now is the context and character of these decisions.

Genuine debate on originalist or pragmatist readings has instead been replaced, and politicians, the media and, indeed, the people whose rights the court was intended to protect, have each contributed to an environment hostile to legal discourse. It has lost respect, support, and integrity in the process; what was once an institution held in the highest regard has instead become another victim of infighting and acrimony.

As James Madison cautioned, the deadlock in Congress that has allowed for de facto Senate control of the court, allowing them to decide when a President can nominate, who gets on, and how best to show them up in a hearing has led to "the very definition of tyranny"; a court handing down decisions based on the philosophies of past presidents that appointed them with no aim but to ensure that their legacy, their part in fighting the culture war, does not go forgotten or wasted.

The 2023 BAAS School Essay prize was awarded to Max Hitchkin of Eton College for a piece that considered the impact of the New Deal on the lives of African Americans. The judges described Max's piece as "a confident and well written essay that engages critically with key historiography on the long civil rights movement."

The New Deal, starting in March 1933 after the election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was a sweeping programme of legislation with multiple intentions and no one cohesive thesis... Improvements in civil rights, or the conditions of African Americans specifically, was not a stated or essential aim. Nonetheless, [while]...radical reform and progress on legal and political rights was limited in the New Deal, it nonetheless substantially improved the lives of African Americans overall, albeit indirectly. Overall, the New Deal should be characterised dualistically with regards to African Americans. On the one hand of civil and legal rights, the New Deal was, overall, inert. On the other hand, the economic benefits of the New Deal, for all Americans and especially the poor, are great, and so indirectly also greatly, and disproportionately, benefitted African Americans.

In weighing their relative importance, I would argue that, as much as the New Deal could be described as racist in its passivity to racial injustice, this was no departure from past federal governments post-Reconstruction. While Harvard Sitkoff's "symbolic aid" was only that, it was a genuine paradigm shift, in that the New Deal's leaders purported to, and did aim to, improve African American lives, even if its action was insufficient. Its economic programmes were equally radical and positive, with relief for the poor and economic reform to redistribute wealth and income from the top to the bottom, which disproportionately benefitted African Americans, if indirectly.

One should not ignore the cases in which black people were greatly damaged by New Deal policies – especially redlining and the AAA – and so the New Deal was no unmitigated success for all black people in the USA. However, for the average African American, their life was substantially, though perhaps insufficiently, improved by the policies of the Roosevelt Administration.

Eva Speight of Yarm School was named as runner-up for the BAAS School Essay for an essay on 'The Land of the Free': how has voter suppression impacted POC's in America and how will it affect them in the future? Judges: "a politically engaged essay that crosses disciplinary boundaries" and "makes a compelling argument". Rohan Noble, Queen Mary's Grammar School, was the runner-up for this year's BIPOC School Essay, with an essay on: How far has the African American fight for equality really come since the 13th amendment? Judges: noted "good research," and " some good analysis...focused on economic issues"

THE BARRINGER-MONTICELLO TEACHING FELLOWSHIP AWARD

RORY REYNOLDS

The Barringer-Monticello Teaching Fellowship Award, given out annually by BAAS, is a great opportunity to engage in inclusive teaching with fellow educators from across the US and wider world. This week-long immersive professional development programme at the home of Thomas Jefferson, in Charlottesville, Virginia, brings together teachers, scholars, and local historians to explore how we can make our teaching more inclusive, and to examine the legacy of slavery in the US.

One question I hope to explore during my time at Monticello this summer is how do we tackle teaching difficult history? Difficult history can be both emotive and controversial, especially given that you may be challenging an established narrative. What does culturally responsive teaching look like? What challenges and rewards are there in it? I'm interested to see what is being done around the consequences of slavery, the impact of which we can still of course see today.

Only 60-70 years ago the US was still an apartheid country when rights of some citizens were denied on racial lines. In British history, too, how should the beneficiaries of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, such as Edward Colston, be remembered? How should the historic relationship between Britain and Ireland be addressed? For these difficult and sensitive topics denial is not an option. Recognizing the realities of controversial history and engaging with it is a sure way of not repeating the same mistakes and including everyone. It is everyone's history.

The Thomas Jefferson Foundation will provide me with some wonderful opportunities. Set in beautiful Monticello and Charlottesville, local history will also be explored with hands on experience of some archaeological artefacts that should also offer physical connection to the past life, as we approach the 250th year of Jefferson's life what journey is American on and how can we as educators help in this journey?

Many thanks to BAAS, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation (TJF), and the International Center for Jefferson Studies (ICJS), for awarding me this fellowship, and to the volunteers without whom all this great work would not happen.

Rory Reynolds is Head of History at Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall with over 15 years classroom experience. Rory has embedded US History into the department's curriculum at every Key Stage, allowing a sustained study of modern America. Students at Queen Mary's have won two previous BAAS essay awards plus a third honourable mention in the last two years.

NEW IN AMERICAN STUDIES

In this section, authors and editors of recent additions to the field of American Studies share their thoughts on overlooked or understudied aspects of US history, politics, and culture. We hope their insights and recommendations might help stretch and challenge students looking to broaden their understanding of all things American.

J. MICHELLE COGHLAN

In the US, where I grew up, each summer was marked by our local library having a summer reading challenge. All year, I'd look forward to the summer reading booklet I'd get to take home, and dutifully tick off the various books I read over its many weeks. At summer's end, there would be a certificate to celebrate meeting our summer reading goal, and a voucher for Pizza Hut to accompany it. I remember how proudly I'd trot off each September to claim my prize —despite secretly suspecting I was receiving it for reading a stack of books I would have wanted to read anyway!

Perhaps this is partly how I ended up becoming a university lecturer in American literature. At any rate, the memory has stayed with me. And though the summer breaks are shorter in the UK—the summers of my youth stretched from June to August!—the pull towards Blackwell's 3 for 2 books becomes, for me, irresistible at this time of year, and I try to sneak in pleasure reading at lunchtime or before bed in ways I don't manage to do as consistently at any other time in the year.

My pleasure reads so far this summer have been Nora Ephron's *Heartburn* (1983), a hilarious, quasi-autobiographical novel about her marriage and divorce from journalist Carl Bernstein; Ocean Vuoung's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), a harrowing novel about growing up gay and Asian-American in the US South; and Nell Stevens' *Mrs. Gaskell and Me* (2018), which I savoured mainly for its fascinating account of Mrs. Gaskell's time in Rome with American expatriates and her friendship with the American author and Harvard Professor of art history, Charles Eliot Norton (there's also a quasi-autobiographical account of Stevens' ill-starred love affair and the difficulties she faced in writing a PhD thesis on Gaskell!).

If, though, you're considering what resources you might have a look at or listen to this summer, to get a jump start on preparations for next year, the following are a few suggestions.

For those planning to teach Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs*—just added to some A-Level Literature specs—I would recommend Imani Perry's masterful biography, *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry* (2018). The work was awarded a PEN America/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award, and is so well-written it easily could have appeared in the pleasure reading category of this post. (I'm currently listening to the audiobook version through my local library—having two small children in my household has belatedly turned me into an ardent audio-bookphile.)

A 2021 New Books Network podcast episode on Xine Yao's *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth Century America* (Duke 2021) is also a great introduction to new scholarship on sentimentalism and the ways US writers of colour have worked to short-circuit those structures of feeling—a must-listen for anyone considering teaching James Baldwin or Toni Morrison next year.

And because Gatsby remains a perennial favourite among students, I would recommend this 2021 BBC Radio" In Our Time" episode, along with Maureen Corrigan's wonderful, *And So We Read On: How Gatsby Came to Be and Why it Endures* (2015). The latter work charts how the novel went from being a critical flop when it was published in 1925 to being claimed as one of the great American novels of the twentieth century, and the role that the US Army book editions issued to GIs during WWII, unexpectedly played in that process...I can't guarantee free pizza for those who work their way through these excellent books, but the rewards will come in other ways!

J. Michelle Coghlan is Senior Lecturer in American Literature at the University of Manchester. Her first book Sensational Internationalism: The Paris Commune and the Remapping of American Memory in the Long Nineteenth Century *(2016) won the Arthur Miller First Book prize.*

SPORTS AND THE PRESIDENCY

RIVERS GAMBRELL

During the 1920 presidential campaign, Republican candidate Warren G. Harding attended a special Chicago Cubs exhibition baseball game in Ohio, where he delivered an address riddled with clichéd analogies. "Hail to the team play of America!" the soon-to-be president declared in a speech reported in the *New York Times*. The speech was hardly a home run. *The Times* chastised Harding's excessive use of sports rhetoric, which it considered unbecoming of a man seeking the nation's highest office. Yet the golf enthusiast and former newspaperman was clearly ahead of his time. Not only do contemporary presidential candidates imitate the type of sports-saturated speech that Harding deployed, but their attendance at popular athletic events is now considered mandatory for national political success.

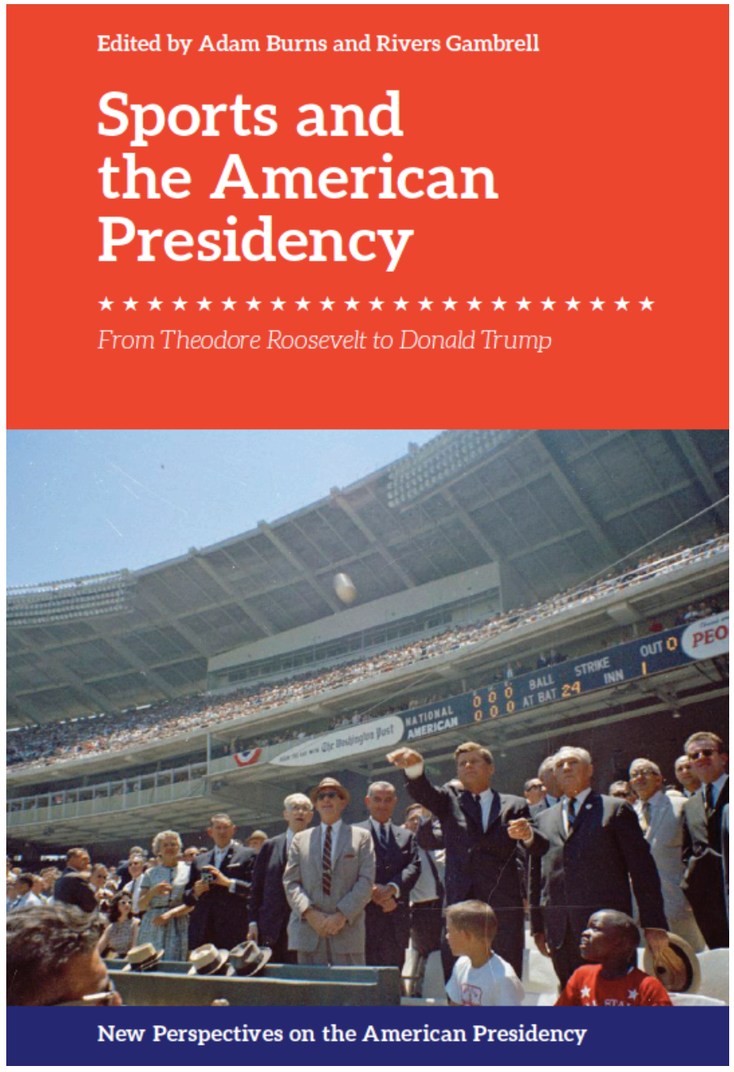
This shift towards a sportier presidency can be traced to a man whose name—rather unfairly—is often lumped alongside those of Harding, James Buchanan, and Andrew Johnson. For better and worse, Richard Nixon was the most sports-minded occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. His superior knowledge of football and baseball allowed the otherwise socially-awkward Californian to better connect with the public.

The Nixon Administration's image-conscious aides, many of whom were former advertising executives, used the president's avid sports spectatorship to sell his personal image and policies to the American public. In 1970, for example, White House Communications Director Herb Klein pushed for Nixon to attend more football games, insisting, "The President's association with athletics is a major asset in relating to sports fans not only as a strong leader but a regular guy."

Nixon inaugurated several traditions that have since become mainstays: phoning players and coaches after big wins, providing commentary on notable matchups, and relying on popular athletes to serve as surrogates during campaign season.

While athletes had been invited to the White House as special guests long before the 1970s (Andrew Johnson hosted two amateur baseball teams in 1865) it was only during the Nixon era that these events evolved into public relations spectacles to be used for maximum political advantage. As Joseph C. Spear notes in his analysis of presidents and the press, post-Nixon presidents "are all graduates of the Richard Nixon School of Media Manipulation." As such figures well know, a key aspect of this manipulation involves the careful exploitation of the nation's favourite pastimes—a risky business that can produce mixed results.

Those hoping to read more on this subject will find themselves in luck. Former president Donald J. Trump's involvement in various athletic controversies from 2017–2021 produced an unprecedented wave of public interest in the role that sport plays in the political arena. The literature that has emerged as a result ranges from serious academic journal articles to not-so-serious books decrying the 45th president's personal golf habits.



Works such as *The Games Presidents Play: Sports and the Presidency* by John Sayle Watterson, Curt Smith's *The President and the Pastime: The History of Baseball and the White House*, and Jesse Berrett's *Pigskin Nation: How the NFL Remade American Politics* all provide strong arguments for the importance of sport to our understanding of the modern US presidency. *Sports and the American Presidency: From Theodore Roosevelt to Donald Trump*, which I edited with Adam Burns, and is made brilliant by an incredible group of contributors from across academia, also offers a fresh overview of this topic. You do not have to take my word that it is an excellent volume—renowned sports historian Gerald Gems recently described the book as a "timely, engaging, and up to date discussion" that "points the way for future research on an international scale."

It was perhaps Democratic Senator Eugene McCarthy who put it best when he quipped in November 1967 that "being in politics is like being a football coach. You have to be smart enough to understand the game, and dumb enough to think it's important."

Rivers Gambrell is a research fellow at the Rothermere American Institute at the University of Oxford. She is currently writing a book entitled Pigskin Politics: How Richard Nixon Reinvented the Presidency.

RETHINKING THE FIRST LADY

ANNE-MARIE EVANS AND SARAH TROTT

First Ladies are rarely out of the news having long been figures of intense US media scrutiny. Their fashion, hairstyle, manners, and interest in various socio-political causes all garner wider press attention. Although she has no official role in government, the First Lady is responsible for a huge amount of work in terms of cultivating appearances and projecting an image during a president's term of office.

In recent years, the First Lady has grown into a brand of its own. The current First Lady, Dr Jill Biden, has over 4.3 million followers on the official FLOTUS Instagram account. Her two most recent predecessors, Melania Trump and Michelle Obama have 1.8 million and 54.6 million followers respectively. But, you may ask, why should teachers care about any of this?

The FLOTUS role is certainly a complex and often problematic one—with status and position stemming largely from marriage. Historically, although the role is a part of the Executive branch, the office of the First Lady has held a rather ambiguous position in US government. Unmentioned in the US Constitution, the First Lady is recognised largely for her proximity to power. Yet the First Lady's office budget and staff are often larger than that of many presidential advisers, and she assumes a role more intimate and possibly more vital to a president's success than some official aides. Far more than decorative window dressing, the First Lady plays a highly strategic role in developing and supporting her husband's time in office.

This level of power and influence has largely been ignored or underrated by academia – though things are starting to change. A key example of that shift is the increasing attention to former First Ladies at presidential libraries and museums, such as the recent inclusion of Mamie Eisenhower, Jackie Kennedy, and Rosalynn Carter. Similarly, in 1998, in consultation with the then First Lady, Hilary Clinton, the home of Ida McKinley (the First Lady a century earlier) became the location for the National First Ladies' Library. These developments mark an important turning point in the way that First Ladies are recognised, celebrated and commemorated.

In our upcoming edited collection, *Beyond the White House: First Ladies in Fiction, Film, and Culture*, we have worked with a range of brilliant scholars to bring further attention to the figure of the First Lady. The collection focuses on the representation of First Ladies across a range of media. As well as examining films that portray the life of, for example, Jackie Kennedy, the work also considers "imaginary" First Ladies in the novels of Philip K. Dick and James Patterson, and television shows such as *Scandal*.

Of course there are other works already out on this topic, and for those interested you might want to look at works by authors such as MaryAnne Borrelli, Myra Gutin and Lewis Gould. However, for excellent (and perhaps more affordable) overviews of the First Lady's role we would suggest Robert Watson's *President's Wives* (2014), Betty Boyd Caroli's *First Ladies* (1987), and Kate Andersen Brower's *First Women* (2016).

A fresh assessment of the role of First Ladies is certainly worthy of consideration by anyone teaching US history or politics, and might well help to make your students' work stand out from the sort of textbook-based analysis of the presidency that often ignores these vital players in US political history.

Anne-Marie Evans is Senior Lecturer in American Literature and the interim Head of School of Humanities at York St. John University. Sarah Trott is Senior Lecturer in American Studies and History at York St. John University.

NOTICES & FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The British Association of American Studies is delighted to announce its schools conference aimed at students studying US politics or modern US History as part of an A-Level or equivalent course. The theme will be 'US Politics and Modern American History'. The event will take place on Friday October 13th, at Manchester's Central Methodist Hall from 11am-4pm. Further details and registration information is here.

The British Library's Eccles Centre for American Studies' annual conference, US Politics Today will take place at the British Library, NW1, on November 6-7 2023. It is aimed at Key Stage 5 students or equivalent. The event will include talks by former members of the US Congress, both Democrat and Republican.

Covering A-level themes such as US elections, the office of the President and the Supreme Court, US Politics Today offers invaluable insights from the members of Congress's direct experience of US political life and expert analysis of the latest developments in this fast-moving field.

Booking opens in early September. If you would like to receive a notification when booking opens, please email eccles-centre@bl.uk. Digital sessions will also be available through the Politics Project.