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Teaching U.S. History Abroad

Teaching American history outside the United States poses a special set of challenges but can also create unique thematic and pedagogic opportunities. In this section of “Textbooks and Teaching,” instructors in Europe, Asia, Australia, South America, and the Middle East share their personal experiences with teaching U.S. history abroad, illustrating some of the instructional obstacles they faced and explaining how they took advantage of often-unexpected educational moments.

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Ten Years of Teaching U.S. History at unicamp, Brazil: A Memoir

Celia M. Azevedo

Columbia University

I remember well the feeling I had on the first day teaching U.S. history at State University of Campinas (unicamp), Brazil, in August 1993. I faced a challenge as big as the one I had undergone when, as a graduate student at Columbia University, I transferred to the American history program. Back in 1989 I had been the only student from Latin America among my American colleagues and a couple of Europeans. I had had to prove to the professors who accepted me at Columbia, the sponsors of the Fulbright-Laspau program (a faculty development program involving U.S., Latin American, and Caribbean universities), as well as myself, that I could quickly overcome my ignorance in that field.

Now in 1993 I had to prove to Brazilian undergraduate students enrolled in a one-term (four hours per week for four months) required course that it was worthwhile to study the history of that big world power called the United States of America from the beginning and from inside. As I explained on the first day of class, they should open their minds to the full range of U.S. history and leave aside the more common approaches of diplomatic relations and comparative history, usually centered on “race relations” between the United States and Brazil, which they might have already experienced in other courses. (In Brazil, college education is organized according to fields of knowledge from the beginning. Thus, a high school student has already chosen a profession to pursue before applying for college. Students taking the history route go through history classes from their first year to their fourth. Graduation in history combined with a number of courses taken in unicamp’s School of Education allows one to teach high school.)

As I suspected, I faced two problems from the start. First, I had to deal with students’ varying expectations. For some, the United States was the land of affluence, movie stars, amazing inventions, and endless prosperity for its people. For others, it was the major global symbol of contemporary imperialism, racism, and the oppression of Third World countries. Most students harbored a mixture of those expectations: a complex intermingling of fascination and horror. In introducing my syllabus I reminded them that many years before the United States rose to be a great power, it was like many other countries in the world vis-à-vis other big powers of the day. To those inclined to the left, I suggested that Third World countries could never fight imperialism if their people, especially their enlightened youth, did not know the history of the dominant powers.

Second, I had to convince them that U.S. history was not the “bore” they knew from their high school studies. Anyone who had gone through the harsh written history exams, among those in many other disciplines, which have been generally required for entering public universities in Brazil—the so-called Vestibular—knew well what I meant. Basically, the Brazilian high school syllabus in U.S. history covers eight topics: the arrival of the English “pilgrims” in America and the founding of the thirteen colonies; the Declaration of Independence and the “War of Independence”; the Monroe doctrine, westward expansion, and the beginnings of American imperialism; the “secession war” and Abraham Lincoln’s abolition of slavery; the 1929 crash and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal; World War II and the Marshall Plan; the Truman doctrine and the Cold War; and the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. against racial segregation. I remembered well those required topics, except the last one, from many years ago when I first applied for college, as well as the endless hours of memorizing cold facts without really understanding them to solve multiple-choice questions in a couple of hours.

The peregrinos (pilgrims) or pioneiros (pioneers), that is to say the Puritans, was one topic that especially persisted in my memories, probably because it dwells on an old, widespread existential question in the Brazilian imagination: what went wrong in Brazilian history in comparison to the successful American history? Brazilian textbooks commonly represent Puritans as the personification of dynamism, forbearance, and progress, characteristics attributed by these texts to the history of the United States even from colonial times. Due to their labor orientation, morals, and religious creeds—in a word, their culture—Puritans supposedly cultivated the seeds of a homogeneous and united people, that is, the Americans. Even when historical comparisons are not explicit, the Puritans’ tale implies a reverse narrative of inferior Portuguese colonials forging a foundation of apathy, misery, and corruption in Brazilian lands from their very first

“feudal” steps there. Why study history, then, if common sense tells us that people’s paths and destinies are already determined from the start?

That was precisely my purpose when I invited my students to study the history of the United States from the beginnings and from inside: to deconstruct the “common sense” narrative of the history of the United States, one shared by Brazilians of diverse social backgrounds and incessantly nurtured by old American movies, tv shows, cartoons, Disney media, and, of course, U.S. propaganda. In Brazil, the novelist Vianna Moog’s *Bandeirantes e Pioneiros: Paralelo entre duas culturas* (Bandeirantes and Pioneers: A parallel between two cultures)—still a very popular book on comparative history first published in 1954 and with almost twenty editions by 1993, when I began to teach U.S. history—had especially popularized the imagined role of the Puritans in the future progress of the United States.^[1] Black American leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X had long been well known by students and the media in general, but this fact had not fractured the commonly shared tale of a thriving European stock of Puritans forging the future American nation. Black slaves were always presented as a minority of outsiders whose main role as victims did not fit well in the golden tale of the origins of a superior white people forging the American dream.

But following a historical narrative from colonial times to the present should not necessarily mean reducing history to a monolithic tale of progress, told from above by an omniscient narrator of facts whose only visible actors are the rulers. Approaching traditional history critically was certainly not new to students enrolled in unicamp’s sophisticated history program. International authors as distinct in their views as E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, Michel Foucault, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Jacques Le Goff and other *Annales* scholars, Carlo Ginzburg, Robert Darnton, Natalie Zemon Davis, and François Furet had already caught the students’ attention. Students appreciated the diversity in these scholars’ work: ideas and actions from below clashing with those from above; a myriad of disciplinary powers other than the state molding the daily lives of subaltern peoples; popular cultures and their anonymous characters seen from a microhistorical perspective; and the possibility of multiple historiographical interpretations of any single major event.

There was, indeed, a chasm between the history taught in high school and what undergraduate students began to learn at unicamp. Therefore, my task on the first day of class was considerably eased: the minds of my thirty second-year students had already been opened to new versions of history. Many of them were nevertheless surprised to find that U.S. history scholarship had recently followed a path of critique, revision, and new interpretations, much like the one Brazilian historiography had been undergoing over the previous two decades. As I told them, the old idea of American exceptionalism had been under fire from the moment that social historians began pointing to the diversity of the American people and their cultures. Some authors even added an s to the word people to denote peoples of many cultures and distinct geographical origins, and many historians also emphasized internal social divisions along lines of gender, class, and racialized identity. At first glance, my syllabus, which centers on a narrative from the colonial beginnings to the present, could be mistaken for the old one learned back in high school. But, as I explained, I did not think that one should just throw away the baby with the bathwater. I always had in mind the appalling case of a student who had recently taken a course on the many interpretations of the French Revolution but who could not situate the Jacobins in their time and context. “Who came first, Napoleon or Robespierre?” she asked at the height of her confusion. So I determined to follow a narrative, keeping in mind that events may be told from the distinct perspectives of subjects who play different roles in society and that some people’s versions go unheard until a historian approaches the past with different expectations and new questions. At the same time, since it would be impossible to teach all history, I emphasized specific themes in each historical period, ranging from the coexistence of labor regimes in colonial times (European servants, Indian servants, African slaves, free workers) to the conjoined twentieth-century struggles for civil rights in the South and against informal racism in the North.

My syllabus changed over the years, thanks to new readings and the students’ new expectations. For example, in my last two courses at unicamp in 2001 and 2003, I introduced the debate over affirmative action policies in the United States once this issue had become a major topic of political discussions in the Brazilian media and among black militants, university students, and scholars. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq, the issue of American imperialism attracted renewed attention from students seeking to understand how a nation so proud of its democracy could bomb whole cities and towns overseas. Indeed, Brazilian tv viewers were daily presented with terrible images of mutilated children, elders, and civilians dying in hospitals after being caught by American bombs. Therefore, I included a section on imperialism in my syllabus, trying to analyze the issue more consistently from its first steps in the north-hemisphere-continental West, at a time when it did not yet belong to Americans, through the war against Spain and the occupation of the Philippines, and through a number of invasions by the American military throughout

the twentieth century. We particularly explored the rise of Pan-Americanism, “dollar diplomacy,” and the “good neighbor” policy, the developments with which Brazilians are more acquainted.

Since my methodology centered on critical narrative, I sought to maintain a balance between chronology (factual coverage) and close reading of texts. At the beginning of every course, I asked students to form groups of four or five, each of which would lead one seminar during the semester, generally after three weeks of lecture classes. The syllabus included a reading list for each seminar: primary documents, memoirs, and secondary sources. The primary sources ranged from the Declaration of Independence and Constitution to texts by Thomas Paine, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain, Jack London, James Baldwin, and Cornel West; as for secondary sources, students did close readings of works by Gary Nash, Herbert Aptheker, Bernard Bailyn, John Hope Franklin, Eugene Genovese, Eric Foner, Peter L. Eisenberg, Barton J. Bernstein, and Lars Schoultz.

The lack of translations of outstanding American historians’ books and memoirs into Portuguese posed a major problem. Students had to read Frederick Douglass’s narrative in Spanish and French. They had to read Bailyn, Nash, and Bernstein in Spanish (a Portuguese translation of Bailyn appeared only in 2003). Requiring readings in Spanish was always a challenge, since this generation—born in a democracy—had never read the forbidden (Spanish-language) leftist books brought from abroad during Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985). I reminded students that in my youth those who wanted to survive intellectually had no other option but to begin patiently to read Spanish, which is quite similar to Portuguese but full of traps for beginners. One could also read leftist books in French, but not without a formal course in the language. Of course, my personal story offered no relief for those who faced the harsh task of reading in a foreign language for the first time.

Along with the lack of translations, I had to face gaps in important periods and subjects in U.S. history, worst of all the Civil War and Reconstruction. Fortunately, the late Brazilianist historian Peter L. Eisenberg, my master’s thesis sponsor at unicamp, wrote a precious small book on those topics with many important insights on capitalism, political parties, and class struggle.[\[2\]](#)

Although many students had learned some English in high school, most of them had no habit of reading in this language. Once, a seminar on the civil rights movement was saved by a student so enchanted by Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech that he translated it into Portuguese and distributed it to his colleagues. A colleague of mine generously allowed me to make copies of a David Montgomery text, which he had translated for a publisher but which unfortunately never came out for lack of “market interest.” But authors as outstanding and as dear to me as Barbara J. Fields (my former Ph.D. advisor), Elizabeth Blackmar, Edmund S. Morgan, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Richard L. Bushman, Herbert G. Gutman, David Brion Davis, C. Vann Woodward, among many others could be quoted only in my lectures. Luckily, I found a good selection of translated primary sources in Harold C. Syrett and Richard B. Morris; as for factual coverage, students could rely on a translated textbook by Charles Sellers and other authors. This situation has improved recently with the expansion of the Internet. But one still needs to be extremely careful with the translations circulating in this new virtual world. Further, the easy and not-always-reliable information offered by numerous sites may present a new source of problems for U.S. history courses.

As for the reception of the course by students, I can recall one revealing anecdote. After a lecture on the Industrial Workers of the World, union strikes, and socialist turmoil in various parts of the country, a student came to my desk with a straightforward question: “do you really mean that there are leftists in the United States?” As he explained, he had always thought the right was all that could be possibly found in that history. Now he was learning that that country could also have very interesting people.

Unfortunately, all my work throughout the years to persuade some students that they should leave aside their antipathies toward U.S. history seemed dismissed once American troops began their massacres in Iraq. But, fortunately, Michael Moore’s movies and his quickly translated books began to help those who, like me, think that the people of any country (like the Germans during the Nazi regime, for example) should not be held totally responsible for their government’s crimes.

In looking back at my experience teaching American history as well as other undergraduate and graduate courses at unicamp in which I presented topics related to the United States, such as racism, antiracism, and multiculturalism in a comparative perspective, I believe that no other historical field faces so intensely the threat of presentism interfering in its narrative. The histories of imperial countries of the past such as Great Britain and France do not seem to raise as many questions associated with their old colonial power in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world. One can peacefully study these histories in the medieval and modern age without constantly confronting discussions of the evils they are doing now around the world and questions regarding the extent to which those evils were inherent to those countries from the beginning.

One may certainly conclude, as many critics of U.S. imperialism have done, that each American bomb dropped on other countries carries the ever-growing seeds of anti-Americanism throughout the world.

[1] Vianna Moog, *Bandeirantes e Pioneiros: Paralelo entre duas culturas* (Bandeirantes and Pioneers: A parallel between two cultures) (Rio de Janeiro, 1954).

[2] Peter Louis Eisenberg, *Guerra Civil Americana* (American Civil War) (São Paulo, 1982).

Celia M. Azevedo obtained her M.A. in Brazilian history from the State University of Campinas in 1985. She obtained her M.Phil. in 1991, followed by a Ph.D. in 1993 in U.S. history from Columbia University. She has a book in English: *Abolitionism in the United States and Brazil: A Comparative Perspective* (1995). She retired from the university in 2003 and works now as an independent historian.

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Teaching U.S. History Abroad

Scott E. Casper

University of Nevada, Reno

For students outside the United States, “American history is not ‘just academic,’” in the words of a historian born and educated in Michigan who taught in Canada for thirty-five years. Students around the world know—or think they know—the United States from their immersion in American popular culture, their encounters with American political and economic power, or, more likely, both. Many of them bring divided views to their collegiate study of American history: “a complex intermingling of fascination and horror,” as Celia M. Azevedo, a Brazilian historian of the United States, puts it in her essay in this issue. These students’ instructors grapple not only with the worldwide influence and consequences of American power but also with the manifestations of that reach in a particular classroom, university, locale, and nation. To teach U.S. history abroad, or to teach abroad as an American, is “to engage with the dialectic between the global and the local on a daily basis.”^[1]

The ten articles in this section explore the challenges and opportunities of teaching American history outside the United States. Selected from twenty-three pieces submitted in response to an international call for papers, these essays describe individual practice as well as institutional and national contexts in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Germany, Ireland, Lebanon, Russia, Scotland, and Turkey.^[2] Several authors focus on their own experiences teaching a particular course or set of courses; others survey the state of the discipline at a national level. All describe in some fashion what Patrick McGreevy saw in Beirut: “For the students in my class, America was not simply a faraway land; it was a palpable, and sometimes shocking, presence in their lives.” At the same time, many of the essays suggest a countervailing opportunity: studying U.S. history offers students elsewhere a new vantage point from which to view their own cultures, perhaps even a safe place where they can discuss issues generally ignored or evaded at home. Most if not all of the authors in this section would agree with Sabine N. Meyer’s observation that exploring U.S. history aids not merely students’ *Fremdverstehen* (understanding of the other) but also their *Selbstverstehen* (understanding of themselves), particularly when problems of race and ethnicity are at stake, as described in essays by Tim Roberts (regarding Turkey) and Timothy J. Minchin (Australia).^[3]

In other ways, each author here offers a distinctive perspective on the practice of teaching American history abroad. Several essays describe pedagogical initiatives that emerged from teaching experiences outside the United States but that could equally inform practitioners at American universities: notably, JoAnne Mancini’s experiment in making students in Ireland into cultural producers and Patrick Mason’s forays into team teaching via videoconference between the American University of Cairo and Illinois State University. Sometimes, as Frank Towers concludes, teaching a topic such as the Civil War in a non-U.S. setting “is more like teaching it in the United States than it is different.” Paul Quigley tells a similar story of teaching the Civil War in Scotland, even if his students brought (in the words of one of them) “a different set of misconceptions to the topic.”^[4]

Another set of obstacles confronts scholars in universities and countries where English is not the primary language of instruction. Where students do not read and speak English, comprehending primary sources becomes more difficult—a problem surely familiar to teachers of European, Latin American, Russian, and Asian history in the United States. Of greater concern is access to such sources as well as to American historical scholarship in translation. Ivan I. Kurilla and Victoria I. Zhuravleva describe the historical contexts in which Russian translations of American sources and scholarship have become available, a process contoured by the Cold War and its aftermath. Although the Internet has enhanced global access to American sources, language barriers persist.

Taken together, these essays offer a rich, diverse portrait of the practice and state of American history in university classrooms around the world.

^[1]Scott E. Casper is a professor of history at the University of Nevada, Reno.

Readers may contact Casper at casper@unr.edu.

James Tagg, “‘And, We Burned Down the White House, Too’: American History, Canadian Undergraduates, and Nationalism,” *History Teacher*, 37 (May 2004), 310. Celia M. Azevedo, “Ten Years of Teaching U.S.

History at unicamp, Brazil: A Memoir,” *Journal of American History*, 96 (March 2010), p. 1133. Sharon L. Mazer, “Documenting the Other Others in Bicultural New Zealand,” *Pedagogy*, 2 (Fall 2002), 382–83.

[2] For this “Textbooks and Teaching” section, the call for papers was disseminated in early 2009 to international contributing editors of the *Journal of American History*, many of whom circulated it to scholars in their countries, as well as to various listserves and to organizers and presenters of recent conference panels on this theme. For similar, though less geographically expansive collections on teaching American history abroad, see the special section “Reflections on Teaching America Abroad,” *Pedagogy*, 2 (Fall 2002), 375–408; and the special issue “Teaching the gape Internationally,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 1 (Oct. 2002), 293–363. The *Pedagogy* essays discuss teaching experiences in Australia, New Zealand, and Francophone West Africa; the essays in the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* discuss teaching experiences in Canada, Mexico, Turkey, and Egypt.

[3] Patrick McGreevy, “Living against America: Classroom Encounters in Beirut,” *Journal of American History*, 96 (March 2010), 1088. Sabine N. Meyer, “Transcending Intellectual Nationalism: Teaching U.S. History in German Universities,” *ibid.*, 1094–99.

[4] Frank Towers, “Balancing the Local and the Global: The American Civil War in Western Canadian Classrooms,” *ibid.*, 1100–1103. Paul Quigley, “Teaching Secession and the Civil War in Scotland,” *ibid.*, 1123–26.

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Teaching U.S. History in Russia: Issues, Challenges, and Prospects

Ivan I. Kurilla

Volgograd State University

Victoria I. Zhuravleva

Russian State University for the Humanities

Alexander N. Fursenko and Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, two patriarchs of Russian American studies, died in 2008.^[1] Their achievements were probably the highest points of Soviet studies of history of the United States, and their deaths have become a watershed in modern Russian scholarship. A new generation of scholars is now taking the lead in studying and teaching U.S. history in Russia. The approaches and favorite topics of this new group of scholars differ from those of the older Americanists, as do their environment and their students.

At the start of the new millennium, U.S. history courses in Russian universities are an integral part of the curricula at the B.A., M.A., and Specialist levels.^[2] The contexts of teaching American history in Russia have changed markedly over the past fifty years. During the Cold War, Soviet universities loaded their curricula with an ideologically defined image of the Soviet Union's "main adversary" in a bipolar standoff. In the 1990s a romanticized image of the United States began to prevail, when the end of the Cold War helped scuttle old priorities linked to the search for social and class conflicts. More recently, the foreign policies of the George W. Bush administration and another American crusade to reform Russia have aroused a new wave of demonization in official and popular discourses. Nevertheless, students' pragmatic interest in the United States as a place of work and travel and as a source of education for those planning international careers has encouraged the introduction of additional courses on American history. Since the end of the Cold War, the students have changed, too. Those who apply to American studies programs and take American history classes differ from their predecessors in many respects. Often, they have personal experience traveling to the United States (for instance, participating in the popular Work and Travel usa program). These students speak fluent English and frequently seek opportunities to participate in exchange programs with American universities or to continue their education there. They choose courses on U.S. history because the United States inspires them with its opportunities; they also readily participate in student panels at academic conferences.^[3] This new level of student familiarity with America poses a challenge for their professors, who no longer hold a monopoly on knowledge of the United States; a student's personal experience may exceed that of his or her teacher.

Although curricula vary across different Russian universities, U.S. history is generally taught within several courses of study. Students majoring in fields other than those in the arts and humanities take a mandatory course on world civilization (usually two semesters for all of world history), which as a rule reduces the American past to two or three themes. Students with history majors must take an eight-semester sequence of universal history from ancient Egypt to the contemporary world. Within these courses, U.S. history is taught in the context of world history, usually in the third and fourth years of study. Main themes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries include British colonial policy in North America and the American War for Independence. Then a universal history course turns to the United States to discuss the Civil War and Reconstruction, industrialization, and sometimes the Progressive Era (often in the context of the Spanish-American War). Starting with World War I, the United States appears more frequently as it becomes an international power and the bipolar relationship develops between the Soviet Union and the United States. Students with majors in area studies (who choose North America as their field of specialization), history (who choose U.S. history), and international relations or philology (who choose U.S. themes for their specialization) are taught U.S. history as a special course lasting from one to three semesters. In such programs the history of the United States is taught systematically and with interdisciplinary approaches that include those from American literature, culture, linguistics, and politics.

Opportunities for studying U.S. history have grown since the end of the Cold War because of several beneficial changes. American studies centers have cropped up rapidly in Russian regions outside Moscow and St. Petersburg, formerly the only places to study U.S. history in Russia. Moscow State University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and St. Petersburg State University, which launched American studies majors in the Soviet period, still offer those majors. However, new competing centers have emerged. Russian State University for the Humanities (Moscow) is acquiring a reputation as an active center for training Americanists. Undergraduate courses on the United States are also taught in Moscow at the State University of Humanities, created within the Russian Academy of Sciences (previously a purely scholarly institution with just a few graduate students); in St. Petersburg, the Institute of History also offers U.S. history courses. More striking, U.S. studies has developed rapidly elsewhere, too. Reputable centers for studying and teaching American history, politics, and culture now exist in Volgograd, Nizhnii Novgorod, and Tomsk, while courses in U.S. history are also offered in regional universities including those in Samara, Izhevsk, Saratov, Tambov, and Kursk.

An expanding list of periodicals devoted to American studies has also promoted the teaching of American history in Russia. *Amerikanskii Ezhegodnik* ("American yearbook," published by the Center of North American Studies at the Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Sciences) and the journal *SShA & Kanada: Ekonomika. Politika. Kultura* ("usa and Canada: Economics. Politics. Culture," published by the Institute for usa and Canada Studies) have been joined by such annual collections as *Americana* ("Americana," published in Volgograd), *Aktualnye problemy amerikanistiki* ("Actual problems in American studies," Nizhnii Novgorod), and *Amerikanskii issledovaniya v Sibiri* ("American studies in Siberia," Tomsk). A special section on the United States appears in *Vestnik Rossiiskogo Gosudarstvennogo Gumanitarnogo Universiteta* ("Journal of the Russian State University for the Humanities"). Unfortunately, the oldest series, *Problemy amerikanistiki* ("Problems in American studies"), published at Moscow State University for several decades, has not produced a new title for approximately five years due to the virtual disintegration of the Russian Association for the Study of U.S. History (which existed for about ten years beginning in the mid-1990s; it was financed mostly by grants from the U.S. embassy in Russia and played an important role in supporting U.S. studies in Russian universities in the worst period of economic crisis).

Russia's increased openness has also enhanced the teaching of American history. Russian universities today can integrate American experiences into their curricula. This integration can take traditional forms, such as hosting U.S. professors participating in the Fulbright program. In 1974, during the *détente* period, Professor Nikolai V. Sivachev introduced an annual Fulbright lecture program in the Department of Modern History at Moscow State University. After the Cold War, Fulbright professors began to teach in other Russian universities, including centers for American studies in Russian regions outside of Moscow. Russian professors, in turn, visit U.S. universities not only to make new connections but also to acquire new skills and approaches to teaching American history. The numerous joint programs developed by Russian and U.S. universities have had similar benefits, and Internet technologies have provided opportunities to create joint online courses. For example, Volgograd State University and Ramapo College in New Jersey organized such a course on World War II for two semesters. Professors Alexander Kubyshev in Russia and Tom Heed in the United States presented Russian and U.S. views on the major events of the war, and their students in Russia and America asked questions and commented in a virtual classroom. Participation in such international courses helps students and professors accept methodological innovations (including videoconferencing as well as a wide range of multimedia presentations, documentaries, and movies in the classrooms), as well as become acquainted with the latest works by historians and with current research and teaching practices in both countries.

Access to American primary sources has also increased, thanks to the Internet and translation projects. The surge in the number of online digitized document collections has significantly enhanced the teaching and studying of American history in Russia. The Library of Congress and American universities provide free access to digitized collections of state papers, periodicals, and old books, which allows Russian students to tackle a broadened thematic range of topics in courses and in their diploma papers (essay assignments that students must produce annually to fulfill diploma requirements), and help widen the scope of theses written by

more advanced Russian students. Further, many basic documents of U.S. history have been translated and published in Russia. In the 1990s two editions of the Federalist Papers and a volume of Thomas Jefferson's works appeared in Russia, and several translations of the U.S. Constitution were offered in the book market. The well-known Russian historian Eduard A. Ivanyan prepared the first reader on U.S. history and published in Russian all of the inaugural speeches by American presidents. In the same decade, as Russia attempted to develop a market economy, memoirs and other works by John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford, and Andrew Carnegie were translated into Russian. All of these sources and electronic databases, along with new reference books, have been integrated into the teaching and studying of U.S. history in Russian universities.^[4] American historiography in Russian is now represented by a wider range of positions than in the Soviet era, when radical critics of the United States predominated in Russian courses. During 1992–1993, the United States Information Agency sponsored the translation into Russian of classic works by Max Lerner (*America as Civilization*, 1957), Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (*Cycles of American History*, 1986), Daniel J. Boorstin (*The Americans*, 3 vols., 1958, 1965, 1973), and Louis Hartz (*The Liberal Tradition in America*, 1955). Schlesinger's *Cycles of American History* was officially "recommended by the Committee on Higher Education of the Russian Federation for use in teaching." Those works were published in huge runs of twenty-five thousand copies each, were acquired by university libraries and incorporated into curricula, and corrected the picture presented by the Progressive historian Vernon L. Parrington's three-volume *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927), which had been translated into Russian in 1962–1963. The 1992–1993 translations appeared at the peak of a new pro-American attitude in Russian society and, in turn, promoted a positive image of the United States in Russia. They shifted the focus of the historical representation of the American past from conflict to continuity and success, and they highlighted those traditions and features of the American character that allowed the United States to emerge as a country of liberty, democracy, economic leadership, and advanced technologies. Although this was a new angle for Russian students, it represented American history in terms laid out by consensus historians half a century ago.^[5]

By the early 2000s, however, the general attitude toward the United States had changed. Anti-American feelings skyrocketed as a result of disappointment in Russia's 1990s domestic policies; government efforts to build a new national identity, using the United States as the Other; and reaction to U.S. foreign policy decisions during the last years of Bill Clinton's presidency and the whole George W. Bush administration (including the bombing of Yugoslavia, policies in Georgia and Ukraine, the war in Iraq, and the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The number of students specializing in American studies fell during those years. Probably to acquaint Russian readers with U.S. critics of the American experience, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the American Embassy sponsored the 2006 Russian-language publication of the radical historian Howard Zinn's now-classic *A People's History of the United States* (1980).^[6] Zinn's book provided Russian students and general readers with an alternative history of the United States through the eyes of disadvantaged Americans, including women and representatives of racial and ethnic minorities.

All of these translated books were integrated into the list of mandatory reading for American history students, as well as for other students in the arts and humanities, and they present students with a very different image of the American past. The appearance of translated works has made it easier to organize historiographical colloquia in which students discuss the variety of American historical thought. Such study has become even more widespread with the publication of the first Russian textbook on the history of historical knowledge, which contains two chapters devoted to U.S. historiography.^[7]

At the same time, the United States, friendly or hostile, still plays the role of the Other, helping Russians (whether critical or admiring of America's historical experience and often making no distinction between presidential administrations and the society) shape their own national identities. Teaching U.S. history in Russia is predominantly a comparative enterprise: events, trends, and characters of American history enjoy more attention when they can be compared to the Russian experience. Russian students routinely select a comparative analysis of "Russian" and "American" historical paths as the framework for their papers and theses.

The teaching methods as well as the thematic and conceptual content in U.S. history courses in Russia depend

on two interconnected conditions: the general state of American studies and the quality and variety of available textbooks and readers. Since the mid-1990s, freedom of the press has led to a flood of low-quality translations and other publications. At the same time, some fields that were traditionally strong in U.S. studies during the Soviet era (such as social-economic history) were abandoned. Analysis of current trends in the U.S. historical profession has become an extremely rare topic in the major Russian journals, and representatives from other disciplines—sociology, literature, or linguistics—with no background in American studies, have begun to enter the field. Thus, despite the broadened scope of available scholarship and sources, one could say that some twenty years ago U.S. studies in Russia as a professional field was hit by a crisis it has still not overcome, even with the many encouraging recent initiatives. The high level of ideologically charged content that was inherent to Soviet history of the United States proved fatal for some historians' careers when that ideology collapsed. The economic hardships of the 1990s forced many scholars out of their professions and, in some cases, out of their country. However, some of the patterns that survived into the new millennium demand a larger professional community than exists now.

Russian historical scholarship traditionally strove to be all-inclusive: from Soviet times, Russian historians needed to shape their own (Marxist, in that epoch) opinion on every "important" event of world history. That tradition survives (despite the abandonment of Marxism), and the absence of Russian works on such issues as U.S. gender history, intellectual history, local history, or business history is a shortcoming of the field.^[8] However, university education requires Russian-language books on a wide range of events and approaches, especially general summaries that may be used as the basis for textbooks (or serve as substitutes for them). There remains a shortage of general books on many important periods and issues in American history, including the antebellum era, the Cold War, everyday life, and immigration. Russian students pay much attention to such themes and ask professors to suggest readings. The most recent general history of the United States, a four-volume work published in the 1980s, has become obsolete both in methodology and in subject; it discussed, almost exclusively, the development of a "deepening general crisis of capitalism" in the United States and paid more attention to American imperialism and working-class movements than to either state policies or activities of other underrepresented groups, with very selective analysis of the contemporary recent U.S. scholarship.^[9] As a result, Russian students of American history will miss the opportunity to understand broadly the social and cultural contexts of the American past, including the pursuit of national identity. Reading translations of American works helps to some extent, but that level of engagement requires an acquaintance with a range of American historiographical schools. Without that training, some students, depending on their reading, will perceive U.S. history à la Howard Zinn, some à la Daniel Boorstin. Declarations of the need for interdisciplinary research, repeatedly issued by historians, philologists, and specialists in cultural studies, have fallen on deaf ears. The majority of new Russian-language publications on U.S. history are still traditional neo-positivist narratives distant from contemporary research practices.^[10] Russian professors of U.S. history acutely feel the shortage of textbooks. The textbooks of Alexei V. Efimov, Lev I. Zubok, Nikolai V. Sivachev, Nikolai N. Yakovlev, and Evgenii F. Yaz'kov, and the collection of essays on U.S. history edited by Grigorii N. Sevostianov, published from the 1950s to the 1970s, have become obsolete. During the last two decades, three general books on U.S. history have been published, by the prominent Russian historians Boris D. Kozenko and Grigorii N. Sevostianov (1994), Vladimir V. Sogrin (2003), and Eduard A. Ivanyan (2004). Ivanyan's text, now in its third edition, tries to fill the place of a standard textbook; it is also supported by his reader on U.S. history. Although these books make a good start, classroom experience demonstrates that students need a textbook that is less a narrative of events and more analytical, human-oriented, and problem-posing.^[11] The current generation of professors has noted in the existing textbooks a lack of discussion of national traditions and national character, the role of religious history, interethnic relations, and the structures of everyday life. The new generation of students also needs more elaborate media content. Preparation of such a textbook is therefore the most immediate task for those historians of the United States who base their research on the best traditions of Soviet U.S. studies, with its detailed attention to primary sources, but whose methodological skills were developed in the post-Soviet environment.

Last but not least of the challenges faced by Russian Americanists is their lack of an institutional center for

their professional community. Today only one such organization exists: the Society for the Study of U.S. Culture, dominated by philologists and specialists on culture. No organization in Russia, professional or academic, coordinates scholars and teachers of American history and studies, and none of the periodicals mentioned earlier can fulfill that role. The first step toward such an organization was made in late November 2009, when the Russian Association of Historians of the USA was created.

Russians studying the United States need to solve these problems to break from the Cold War past. This goal is especially important given the anti-American feelings among students and in the society at large—a society in which authorities brandish the image of the American “other” as a tool for constructing national identity and American history is explained in the Russian media not by specialists but by amateurs and propagandists ignorant of the scholarship. Professionals must raise their voices to university audiences and in the media, in Internet forums and in tv political discussions to prevent both romanticizing and demonizing the image of the United States and to promote a reshaping of Russian-U.S. relations in a fruitful and mutually beneficial way.

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American readers know their works from numerous translations. See, for example, Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations, 1775–1815*, trans. Elena Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1975); Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *Russian-American Relations and the Sale of Alaska, 1834–1867*, ed. and trans. Richard A. Pierce (Kingston, Canada, 1996); Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964* (New York, 1997); and Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York, 2006).

[2] The Russian higher education system is gradually shifting from the old Soviet degree of Specialist (5 years of postsecondary education) to the more universally understood B.A. and M.A. degrees; both options exist simultaneously, but Specialist programs will be closed after 2010.

[3] A recent example of this type of student participation was in the organization of an international conference devoted to the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln at the Russian State University for the Humanities in February 2009. Three groups of students majoring in history, philology, and international relations presented their collective projects on “Inaugural Address as Social and Cultural Text: Comparative Study of Inaugurals of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Barack Obama.”

[4] N. N. Yakovlev, ed. and trans., *Federalist. Politicheskie esse Aleksandra Gamiltona, Dzheyma Medisona, i Dzhona Dzheya* (The Federalist. Political essays by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay) (Moscow, 1994); Thomas Jefferson, *Avtobiografiya. Zametki o shtate Virginiya* (Autobiography. Notes on the state of Virginia), trans. V. M. Bolshakov (Leningrad, 1990). E. A. Ivanyan, comp., *Istoriya SShA. Khrestomatiya* (History of the USA. Reader) (Moscow, 2005); E. A. Ivanyan, comp., *Inauguratsionnye rechi prezidentov SShA* (Inaugural addresses of the presidents of the USA) (Moscow, 2001). John D. Rockefeller, *Iskusstvo razbogatet: Memuary amerikanskogo milliardera* (The art to growing rich: Memoirs of an American billionaire) (Moscow, 1992); John D. Rockefeller, *Bankir v XX veke: Memuary* (Banker in the 20th century: Memoirs), trans. G. G. Gauze (Moscow, 2003); Henry Ford, *Moya zhizn, moi dostizheniya* (My life and work) (Moscow, 1992); Andrew Carnegie, *Istoriya moyey zhizni* (History of my life) (Moscow, 1994). An important novelty was Alexander A. Fursenko, ed., *Slovar amerikanskoi istorii* (“Thesaurus of American history”) (St. Petersburg, 1997). Eduard A. Ivanyan prepared *Encyclopaedia of Russian-American relations* and regularly updates its Internet version. Eduard A. Ivanyan, *Entsiclopediya rossiysko-amerikanskikh otnoshenii XVIII–*

XX veka (Encyclopaedia of Russian-American relations) (Moscow, 2001). The Center for North American Studies, under the leadership of Vladimir V. Sogrin, is preparing a statistical reference book on U.S. history. [5] Max Lerner, *Razvitie tsivilizatsii v Amerike: Obraz zhizni i myslei v Soedinennykh Shtatah segodnya* (America as civilization: Life and thought in the United States today), trans. V. Borisov et al. (2 vols., Moscow, 1992); Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *Tsikly amerikanskoy istorii* (Cycles of American history), trans. P. A. Razvin and E. I. Buharova (Moscow, 1992); Daniel J. Boorstin, *Amerikantsy: Kolonial'nyi opyt* (The Americans: The colonial experience), trans. V. T. Oleinika (Moscow, 1993); Daniel J. Boorstin, *Amerikantsy: Natsional'nyi opyt* (The Americans: The national experience), trans. Y. A. Zarahovich and V. S. Nesterov (Moscow, 1993); Daniel J. Boorstin, *Amerikantsy: Demokraticeskii opyt* (The Americans: The democratic experience), trans. V. T. Oleinik (Moscow, 1993); Louis Hartz, *Liberal'naia traditsiia v Amerike* (The liberal tradition in America), trans. G. P. Blyablin et al. (Moscow, 1993). Vernon L. Parrington, *Osnovnye techeniia amerikanskoi mysli* (Main currents in American thought: An interpretation of American literature from the beginnings to 1920), trans. V. Voronin and V. Tarhov (3 vols., Moscow, 1962).

[6] Howard Zinn, *Narodnaya istoriya SShA: s 1492 goda do nashikh dnei* (A people's history of the United States, 1492–present), trans. G. P. Blyablin et al. (Moscow, 2006).

[7] I. P. Dement'ev and A. I. Patrushev, eds., *Istoriografiia istorii novogo vremeni stran Evropei i Ameriki* (Historiography of the modern history of European and American countries) (Moscow, 2000).

[8] There are, in fact, examples of new scholarship that deal with business history. There is still a shortage of such books, however. For the most substantial example of this scholarship, see B. M. Shpotov, *Genry Ford: Zhizn i biznes* (Henry Ford: Life and business) (Moscow, 2003).

[9] G. N. Sevostianov, ed., *Istoriia SShA* (History of the usa) (4 vols., Moscow, 1983–1987), IV, 4.

[10] On American studies in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, see Victoria I. Zhuravleva and Ivan I. Kurilla, “Problemy razvitiia amerikanistiki v postsovetskoy Rossii” (U.S. studies in post-Soviet Russia), in *Amerikanskiy ezhegodnik 2005* (American yearbook 2005), ed. N. N. Bolkhovitinov (Moscow, 2007), 80–93; and Alexander I. Kubyshkin and Ivan A. Tsvetkov, “Universitetskie uchebniki po istorii SShA kak indikator sostoianiia rossiiskoi amerikanistiki” (University textbooks on U.S. history as an indicator of the state of Russian U.S. studies), in *Russia and the United States: Mutual Representations in Textbooks/Rossiia i SShA na stranitsakh uchebnikov: Opyt vzaimnykh reprezentatsii*, ed. Victoria I. Zhuravleva and Ivan I. Kurilla (Volgograd, 2009), 181–206. The last work is a bilingual collection with parallel titles.

[11] B. D. Kozenko and G. N. Sevostianov, *Istoriia SShA* (History of the usa) (Samara, 1994); V. V. Sogrin, *Istoriia SShA* (History of the usa) (St. Petersburg, 2003); E. A. Ivanyan, *Istoriia SShA* (History of the usa) (Moscow, 2004). The textbook by Vladimir Sogrin, while less detailed on specific events, is more theoretically interesting, as is his book on U.S. political history, V. V. Sogrin, *Politicheskaya istoriya SShA* (Political history of the usa) (Moscow, 2001).

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“Because It Is My Culture”: Technology and Agency in the Overseas U.S. Cultural History Classroom

JoAnne Marie Mancini

National University of Ireland Maynooth

In a 2002 essay in the *Journal of American History*, Kathryn Kish Sklar made a powerful case, based upon the experience of her own undergraduate seminar in U.S. women’s history, for the capacity of the Internet to help address a particular pedagogical concern. Accusing historians of doing “a relatively poor job of explaining their work process to others” and lamenting the fact that most students had little occasion to do more than passively consume secondary literature, Sklar proposed that the Internet—with its capacity to “democratize the availability and analysis of documents”—could lay bare the normally opaque process that historians use to analyze and interpret their sources and thereby assist teachers of history in transforming students into “producers of new historical knowledge.”^[1] In her own case, Sklar turned her seminar into a laboratory for creating and posting to the Internet “pedagogic units that pose central interpretive questions and provide about twenty primary documents . . . annotations of the primary documents, a bibliography, and a list of related Web links.” In this way, her students gained a firsthand understanding of historical methods, produced new historical knowledge that other students could use, and disseminated primary sources that were previously available on microfilm in a new and more accessible format.^[2]

Like Sklar and many other historians of the United States, I am preoccupied with agency and see it as important to both the writing and the teaching of history. As a cultural historian, my expression of this preoccupation has taken a particular form: the imperative to understand not only works of culture (be they “high” or “low,” mass-produced or unique, ephemeral or canonical, or produced by women or men) but also the processes by which people engage and become engaged in the making of such works and the worlds in which those works are made. I wish to understand, in other words, how the particular institutional arrangements within those worlds have facilitated—or discouraged—people’s participation in the creation of images and objects. This imperative has also caused me to reconsider the limits of my responsibilities as a researcher. While I began with the assumption that the job of the historian was only to foster historical understanding, my belief that a “good art world is one that foregrounds human capabilities”—a belief developed in response to my historical research—has also led me to make normative claims about the “worlds” I study and even to adopt a position of advocacy on behalf of programs that foster artistic creation by nonprofessionals.^[3]

This emphasis on agency and process in cultural history is pursued relatively straightforwardly in the context of research and writing. In the cultural history classroom, however, the pursuit presents immediate and difficult challenges. There, students are frequently cast as the inert recipients of secondary literature or as the more or less submissive consumers of cultural works from the American past. This is the case even as many of us have emphasized the analysis of the institutions and processes that underpin cultural production, and even as we have defined the works and the pasts that belong to “American cultural history” in ever-broadening terms (in my case, to include sources on precontact Cahokia, Chaco Canyon, and Hawaii; colonial New Spain, “the middle ground,” and the African Atlantic; and material culture, popular music, and digital media). Such redefinitions of the content of cultural history are important; students in courses with broadened content leave with a wider sense of the temporal and geographic boundaries of the American past and of the disciplinary borders of American historiography. However, such redefinitions do not represent a fundamental pedagogical change toward the creation of more active learners in the cultural history classroom. For that to happen, it is necessary to implement strategies that cast students in active roles: as the creators of historical knowledge or—even more radically—as the makers and performers of other cultural forms beyond the historiographical. While the main purpose of teaching cultural history may be the analysis of the cultures of

the past, the creation and performance of culture in the present can also play a significant and beneficial role within the teaching of cultural history.

My experience of living and teaching American cultural history outside of the United States has had a direct bearing on my adoption of this perspective. Over the course of more than a decade spent primarily in Ireland (at the National University of Ireland Maynooth and in the Department of History at University College Cork) but also in the Department of American Studies at the University of Sussex, I have wrestled repeatedly with the dynamics of the complex and interesting relationships that the people around me—both students and nonstudents—have with American history and culture. I choose the word “relationships” deliberately, not least because many Irish people’s palpable enthusiasm for American culture is subject to the kinds of ebbs and flows that characterize human relationships; indeed, it would not be misleading to suggest that the giddy upsurge of media and individual interest in all things American after the Barack Obama presidential campaign and election is like the rediscovery of an old love after a period of bitter estrangement.[\[4\]](#)

But the word “relationships” is also appropriate insofar as the interest of many people in Ireland in American culture has been forged through direct, personal, and complex encounters with the United States, Americans, and the objects, artifacts, practices, and forms of American culture. Even after many years of residence in Ireland, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers still present to me—often with great flourish—tales that interweave human migration and cultural exchange in unpredictable ways. An avid fan of the television series *The Wire*, for example, told me that the very first book he remembers reading was a paperback copy of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962) that an emigrant aunt had “borrowed” from a Veterans Administration hospital in Queens, New York. Meanwhile, an admirer of old-time music recounted with some amusement how, in the cold and damp of his Limerick youth, he had been forced to wear lurid short-sleeved Hawaiian shirts because a relative in California persistently shipped them home to Ireland.

While these two examples fall loosely under the category of the consumption of American culture, other stories indicate the participation of Irish people in the performance and production of American culture as well. This might be summed up by the response that one of my recent students—who is both Irish and French—gave to my usual query to students about why they were taking my course. He said, “because it is my culture.” I assumed, in the first instance, that he was referring to the fact that he, as a European, was surrounded by American images, music, and words, or that he personally had a particular fondness for certain American authors or artists. To a certain extent, this assumption was correct: his tastes in novels run to Cormac McCarthy and Don DeLillo. But, as he told me, his response also meant that he was an avid player of the blues guitar. As such, his claim upon American culture and American cultural history derived from his participation as a willing link in the ongoing creation of a global American culture.[\[5\]](#)

This is not the only example, even from my most recent group of students in HY383 (a final-year elective in American cultural history in which students write a research essay and complete a project). Another student has devoted several decades to organizing amateur musical theater productions with adult and youth groups. She observed that many, if not most, of these musicals—and even the genre itself—are American; the practices and institutions involved in staging them as amateur productions also have strong historical and current American links. Moreover, as she notes, the adaptation and transplantation of these “American” works into mid-twentieth-century Ireland—a context very different from that of their original staging and subject to different kinds of censorship and pressure—involved the explicit choice of adopting “American” attitudes toward what was culturally and socially permissible on the public stage.

My students’ prior experience with and interest in culture making and their attraction to the study of American cultural history presented me with a tremendous opportunity but also posed a daunting challenge. How could we harness these qualities in the classroom, to aid historical analysis and to encourage active citizenship in the republic of culture? A previous experiment I had undertaken at the University of Sussex to transform classroom consumers into producers and performers had not turned out well. Departing from normal classroom procedures, I had required students in a seminar on the American dream (a course whose title and theme I had unwillingly inherited) to script, rehearse, direct, perform, and review a stage version of Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900). This experience did have some positive results: students developed a deeper understanding of the text, of the complexity of the theatrical world, and of the Gilded Age. Nonetheless, this came at the cost

of nearly causing a riot in a class that was extremely resistant to doing anything but sitting around talking. At the National University of Ireland Maynooth, I decided to try something different, inspired by the fact that I —like Sklar and so many others—had become enchanted by the Internet’s many cultural possibilities within and outside of the classroom. Perhaps not surprisingly, I have been drawn to Web sites that promote active engagement in the making, performance, transmission, and transformation of culture (present and past). One of the most interesting of such Web sites, from the vantage point of access to sources and from the perspective of cultural history, is LibriVox (<http://librivox.org>). Established in August 2005 by the Montreal-based writer and Web developer Hugh McGuire, LibriVox aims to publish downloadable digital audio files of every book in the public domain. More important, the Web site is entirely noncommercial: it accepts no advertising and is run entirely by volunteers who manage the site (including the index and boards) and choose, record, and disseminate its ever-growing list of books to anyone with computer access. In short, LibriVox is a new kind of cultural phenomenon: a giant, global, virtual meeting place for people who love books, who are interested in making performances of the books they love, and who are willing to use new technologies to turn those performances into permanent recordings that will allow others to share that love of books. As such, it is itself historically important and undoubtedly will present to future historians all sorts of analytical questions about production, consumption, and agency, about how the Internet presents opportunities for institutional innovation in the realm of culture, and about the boundaries between oral and literary cultures in a digital age. LibriVox (along with slightly different sites such as YouTube) has become a subject for analysis by my cultural history students, who have already considered earlier revolutions in media and culture, such as the emergence of photography, moving pictures, radio, and recorded sound. But it has also become the inspiration for an important feature of my course: an assignment in which students create digital audio recordings of sources relevant to the study of American cultural history and present a contextual analysis of those recordings to the class.

Because it was my original intention that students would post their recordings on LibriVox, I initially required students to choose sources that conformed to the Web site’s public domain requirements and that would be technically manageable in terms of length: short texts published before 1923, such as speeches, poems, letters, short stories, critical commentaries, and essays; monologues or dialogues from the theatre; or songs from sheet music. I was conscious that such parameters would limit my students’ choices, but many of them were able to find sources of interest to them even within the artificial boundaries I had set. Some students appeared to have chosen their sources completely at random, but others had clear analytical or personal motivations for the choices they had made. One student selected an excerpt from the novel *Tom Sawyer* (1876) that reminded him of having heard Mark Twain’s work read to him as a child. Another student with an interest in civil religion chose to speak the words of George Washington—in female, French-accented tones. And a student with acting aspirations performed both sides of a comic minstrel routine with a combination of embarrassment and flair.

Nonetheless, other students immediately pushed against the boundaries I had set, seeking to exercise a greater degree of autonomy as performers and producers. One student wanted to “be” Colonel Kurtz from the film *Apocalypse Now* (1979). One wanted to perform a T. S. Eliot poem that was still covered by copyright—and to add sound effects. One wanted to appeal to the “silent majority” in the words of Richard M. Nixon. Perhaps not surprisingly, given what I have said above, one wanted to direct scenes from the play *Fiddler on the Roof* and another wanted to abandon texts altogether and play the blues guitar. Although I could not let such recordings go live into cyberspace, how—for the purposes of the assignment—could I say no?

From the very beginning, the implementation of this project required technical assistance and equipment that is not normally available to history faculty. Indeed, even before discovering LibriVox, I had considered trying to pilot an audio project in my course, but had run up against a lack of equipment. Luckily, on a second attempt I was able to collaborate with the university’s learning technology officer, Lisa O’Regan. She has admirably trained my students to download and use Audacity (a free software program) so that they can make and edit recordings to an appropriate standard. She has facilitated access to scarce equipment (microphones, digital audio recorders, and computers) and recording space, and she has provided ongoing technical and logistical support.

Unlike my earlier experiment at the University of Sussex, this experience has been almost entirely successful. The quality of the final essays in the course improved after the introduction of the audio project. The students learned to use a new technology that they may use in other areas of their lives. And they have been confirmed in their roles as cultural performers, creators, critics, and historians. Indeed, since completing the first round of the project I have seen one of my students on television and heard another on the radio—an entirely new and unexpected development. The only hitch is that in loosening the requirements for sources to accommodate student interests, it became necessary to drop the requirement that students post their recordings on LibriVox. While I have made this a voluntary aspect of the assignment, students have thus far been disinclined to post their recordings even when their sources have fallen within the Web site's rules. But this issue can be addressed as the project evolves.

Like Kathryn Kish Sklar, I have found that a key strategy for addressing the pedagogical and ideological issue of transforming students from consumers into producers is to join that pursuit to the employment of a new technology. Students are interested in new technologies and desire mastery over them. Thus in part because they were gaining a measurable skill that they would not normally have obtained in their history studies—competence in the use of digital audio software—my students in Maynooth have been much less resistant than my earlier students to the idea of creating performances. Of course, other factors also explain the willingness and enthusiasm that many of them showed. The general university culture in Maynooth encourages ongoing participation in creative activities; whether one is teaching U.S. cultural history or some other subject, one is likely to have a few playwrights, filmmakers, set designers, or musicians in class. Maynooth also has a large number of “mature” students, who have not entered the university directly from secondary school and who in many cases have begun their higher education significantly later in life. Such students tend to be engaged and ambitious, and—while they sometimes require more assistance with technical matters—are also sometimes less reluctant to take on unusual tasks than the youngest students. Moreover, in Irish universities virtually all students take “joint honours” (a double major). Thus in Maynooth one is likely to have at least a few students who are also taking media studies, music, or other subjects in which creative or studio work is expected. To this mix are added large numbers of international students from as close as England and as far away as the French Indian Ocean département of Réunion—with well over one hundred of them taking courses in the history department last year. A number of them from the more overburdened European universities have told me that their home institutions offer virtually no opportunity for personal attention and training or for expression outside the normal boundaries of the academic examination or essay.

Thus it has been possible, with my university's support, to provide my students with a pedagogical experience that is empowering, innovative, and practical. I would like to think that all of these things are imperatives of “my culture”—and should be goals in the teaching of U.S. cultural history. I hope to keep this and other experiments running for years to come.

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Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Teaching Students to Become Producers of New Historical Knowledge on the Web,” *Journal of American History*, 88 (March 2002), 1471–76. Emphasis added.

[2]*Ibid.*, 1474.

[3] J. M. Mancini, “Worlds,” *American Art*, 23 (Spring 2009), 18–19. Examples of advocacy include submissions to Ireland's Arts Council and its National Economic and Social Forum.

[4] A good example is Irish television personality Kathryn Thomas's interview on the *Tubridy Show*. “Kathryn Thomas Interview,” prod. Yvonne Judge, Deirdre Ní Fhlóinn, and Aonghus McAnally (episode of *The Tubridy Show*), RTÉ Radio 1 (Jan. 16, 2009).

[5] There are even more complex layers to such a process, owing to the rise of immigration in Ireland and the growth of immigrant professional, social, and cultural associations. Filipinos in Ireland, for example, have developed many such organizations, including the Filipino Sports Club (a Dublin basketball league). In this case, one can see immigrants transplanting a cultural practice that is Filipino, but whose origins can be traced to U.S. occupation.

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JoAnne Marie Mancini, “‘Because It Is My Culture’: Technology and Agency in the Overseas U.S. Cultural History Classroom” *Journal of American History* 96 (March 2010),

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What's So Bad about Polygamy? Teaching American Religious History in the Muslim Middle East

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From 2007 to 2009, I taught at the American University in Cairo (auc), a private university with a mostly Arab and Muslim undergraduate population. The university features an American liberal arts-style curriculum and all instruction is conducted in English. The nearly five thousand full-time undergraduates come primarily from Egypt (over 80 percent), with others hailing from around the Arab world (primarily Jordan, Palestine, and the Arabian Peninsula) and a few from sub-Saharan Africa, the United States, western Europe, and elsewhere. auc is prestigious and expensive, particularly in the context of a nation with overwhelming poverty, and thus attracts students mostly from Egypt's elite political, military, and business classes. Given the similar national and socioeconomic background of most auc attendees, however, the student body is remarkably diverse in terms of ideological orientation and religious commitment, ranging from the (more or less) secular Left to affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood. This is reflected in the dress on campus, where you will find, on the one hand, many students sporting the latest Western fashions, and, on the other hand, many male students with untrimmed beards (usually indicating a conservative or traditional religious orientation) and female students wearing modest dresses and the hijab (veil). A significant number of students seem to bridge both worlds, or to be caught in between, such as women who simultaneously wear tight designer clothing and the hijab. All of the students are fully modern, with the latest cellular telephones and iPods, though most have a conflicted relationship with the West (and especially with the United States). Typically, they embrace America's consumer products and technology but express reservations with (and sometimes strong opposition to) its political and economic policies, particularly as they impact the Middle East.

As the lone historian of the United States on the faculty at auc, I taught the usual U.S. history survey courses and any electives I chose. In teaching electives and preparing my survey courses, I gravitated toward my own research interests, which include American religious history. Happily, my interests and those of many of the students at auc—most of whom had never before taken a U.S. history course—seemed to coincide. Here, I will share a few of my experiences teaching American religious history to my mostly Muslim students in the Middle East. Teaching U.S. history in such a unique setting forced me to reflect on the comparative and global aspects of the field. I learned, even more profoundly than I had in an American classroom, how diverse national, cultural, and religious backgrounds condition the perspective of students as they approach the historical and historiographical issues that we, as teachers, present to them. This provides a powerful lesson about how history, though deeply concerned with fidelity to facts and sources, is ultimately an interpretive experience rooted more in our own individual and group subjectivities than many students might expect.^[1] I also witnessed part of the value of studying other times, places, and cultures—how pulling students out of their own cultural context, particularly by using interactive or immersive techniques—provided them with distance and a kind of intellectual safe place from which they could critically reflect on issues that are relevant to their own experiences. At its best, a global or comparative approach to history gives teachers and students a deeper appreciation of both the universalities and particularities of not only history but also contemporary humanity.

In two different classes at auc dealing with religion in American history, I gave my students an exercise in which they were to divide into groups of approximately nine members and then discuss famous Supreme Court cases dealing with the religious freedom and establishment clauses of the First Amendment to the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." I provided them with the bare facts of eight to ten landmark cases, dealing with issues ranging from proselytism to public funding of buses for parochial schools to school prayer to the ritual use of

peyote. Based on nothing more than the words of the First Amendment and the brief background I provided them for each case, I charged them to consider the various facets of the issue, argue both sides, and then vote and issue a ruling.^[2] The first case on my list—indeed, the first major Supreme Court decision fixing the meaning of the First Amendment’s religious freedom clause—was *Reynolds v. United States* (1879). In this case, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) were testing and protesting the provisions of recently passed federal antipolygamy statutes on the grounds that such laws violated their freedom to practice a fundamental aspect of their religion: plural marriage. The Supreme Court in 1879 unanimously upheld antipolygamy legislation and created the distinction between belief and action that has essentially governed religious freedom law in the United States ever since. In short, the Court ruled that the First Amendment provides blanket protection for citizens to believe, but not necessarily practice, what they want, especially when certain religious practices are deemed to threaten public order or safety.^[3]

In both of my classes at auc, however, when given nothing more than the facts of the case and not informed of the Court’s decision before they made their deliberations, my students voted unanimously in favor of Mormon polygamist George Reynolds. Their reasoning was quite straightforward: polygamy was an essential part of mid-nineteenth-century Mormon theology and practice; therefore, to prohibit it—especially when consenting adults entered into those plural marriages voluntarily—was a clear violation of the Mormons’ constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom. When I revealed the Court’s historical decision, and even after extensive discussion and explanation of the justices’ rationale behind their opinion, my students collectively shook their heads in dismay and disbelief. They argued that it was hypocritical for America to claim to protect religious liberty while restricting some of its citizens from practicing a central aspect of their religion. Some cited contemporary examples, such as airport security officers forcing Muslim women to remove their veils, as proof of a seeming American double standard of religious freedom that made Reynolds seem poignantly relevant to them, sitting an ocean away and more than a century removed.

I was genuinely surprised the first time I conducted this exercise and had such univocal outrage from my students at the Reynolds decision. When I conducted the same experiment at the University of Notre Dame, my American students did exactly the opposite, voting unanimously with the 1879 Court in upholding antipolygamy legislation. When I tried to engage my American students on some of the problematic logic in the Reynolds opinion or to explain what plural marriage meant for nineteenth-century Mormons, the discussion of polygamy elicited a relatively narrow range of reactions, from tittering (mostly from the males) to disgust (mostly from the females). In contrast, my Muslim students at auc viewed polygamy as an entirely acceptable—if not always attractive—marriage practice stemming from genuine and legitimate religious revelation. None of my students expressed a particular desire to practice polygamy personally, but their religious and cultural backgrounds dictated an entirely different approach to the subject than I found among my predominantly Catholic, Protestant, and secular students in the United States.

Of course, cross-cultural exchanges offer not only exciting moments of discovery and exploration but also real pitfalls and opportunities to offend. While my discussion of polygamy and American jurisprudence was an example of the former, in my first semester at auc I stumbled into the latter—escaping thanks only to the graciousness of my students. Wanting to expose them to Native American religious beliefs and practices, I assigned *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), the narrated autobiography of an Oglala Sioux medicine man who was present at both the battle of Little Bighorn in 1876 and the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre.^[4] Throughout the book, Black Elk recounts his many visions and dreams, which more often than not came after he had been ritually smoking peyote, an integral aspect of Native American spirituality. As we read one such passage together in class, many of my students—for whom this was their first exposure to Native American culture—started snickering. When I asked them what was so funny, they said of course he had “visions” once he got high. Trying to defend the integrity of Black Elk’s experience, I countered (without forethought), “So when Moses saw God in the burning bush, was he smoking something?” I was on shaky ground, but mindlessly plowed ahead: “And when Muhammad saw the angel Gabriel and received the words of the Qur’an, was he smoking something?” Oops. Visions of certain Danish cartoons, and the violent riots that ensued across the Muslim world in response to them flashed before my eyes. The looks on my students’ faces said the rest. I backpedaled hard and fast, profusely apologizing if I had offended anyone. Fortunately my students were

quick to forgive and chalked it up to a rookie mistake. Even so, the incident made me profoundly aware that even in a university setting that embraces and seeks to train its students in the liberal arts tradition of critical thinking and analysis, certain cultural sensitivities dictate that some things not be said, or be said very circumspectly, with the greatest of caution, and in a climate of trust, respect, and understanding.^[5] While I could have predicted, had I thought before opening my mouth, that slandering the prophet Muhammad's revelatory experience would be an ineffective pedagogical technique in Cairo, Egypt, I was pleasantly surprised when certain aspects of American history fascinated my Egyptian students in ways I could not have guessed. For instance, in my short experience, there seems to be no better way to put American students to sleep than to utter the word "Puritans." It is almost magical, the way that virtually any discussion of Puritanism can completely devastate the mood of an American classroom. I suspected it would be even worse in the Middle East, where most Arab students' interest in U.S. history is focused on America as a modern global hegemon and most decidedly not on what seem to them to be the more arcane elements of America's colonial past. I was shocked, then, when my students not only stayed awake but were genuinely interested and engaged as I lectured on Puritanism and as we read a handful of sermons and other writings—including John Winthrop's famous 1630 oration, "A Modell of Christian Charity."

Encouraged by this success, in my early American history survey course I decided to incorporate an extended historical role-playing process centered on the trial of Anne Hutchinson, whose challenge to Boston's religious establishment in 1637 earned her banishment from the colony and eventually an ignominious death at the hands of Indians. Her case raises compelling issues of religion, liberty, law, tolerance, and gender that are still relevant today, though one has to weed through esoteric theological debates and Elizabethan language to access the ideas at the heart of the debate. I employed the materials developed by Barnard College's "Reacting to the Past" instructional series, which guides students through the process of taking on historical roles and immersing themselves in colonial Boston through intense reading of primary sources.^[6] My Cairo classroom transformed into Boston Church and the Massachusetts General Court; my students, in their roles as Puritans, argued over the relative merits of new immigrants' conversion narratives or debated whether Hutchinson had in fact taught heterodox doctrine and thus undermined the authority of the ministers, and by extension the foundation of the colony itself. Listening to twenty-first century Arab Muslims denounce their friends for teaching a covenant of works, debate the relationship of individual conscience and the community good, and argue about the role that the state should play in enforcing religious orthodoxy was a jarring but intellectually thrilling experience.

Perhaps I could have anticipated this if I had thought more about it, but many of my Middle Eastern Muslim students had far more in common with seventeenth-century New England Puritans than did most of my twenty-first century American students. The way that Puritanism offered a totalizing, undifferentiated world view, in which the sacred presses upon every aspect of life, resonates in many (though not all) corners of contemporary Islam in a way that most expressions of American Christianity no longer do. In addition, the lines between religion and state are often blurry in many areas of the Arab world, even in a putatively secular republic like Egypt. So my Egyptian students could grapple with the intricate relationship of church and state in Puritan New England in a far more informed way than most American students, who, even if they are personally religious, casually dismiss religious establishments as unenlightened and even barbaric antiquities. While for the average American college student Puritanism is practically as remote, mysterious, and irrelevant as ancient Zoroastrianism, my predominantly Muslim students in the Middle East comprehended it. They recognized the core concepts—if not the precise language and terminology—of Puritanism and understood that the questions raised by the Puritan experience in America still speak to the modern world. In short, it spoke to them, and raised pressing and relevant questions that are largely lost in modern, liberal, secular America. This does not mean that my students were all Puritans or theocrats at heart—far from it—but the experience was instructive regarding how the history we offer in our classrooms can, and I would argue should, speak to the present concerns and circumstances of our students, even if we avoid being explicitly presentist in our historical pedagogy.

One way instructors can connect with their students is by assigning readings that can speak to some part of their collective and individual identity. In every possible class at auc, I introduced my students to Malcolm X,

sometimes through selected speeches but usually via his classic autobiography.^[7] Malcolm provided an ideal bridge between the world my students inhabited and the world they were studying. Both shaped by and a shaper of twentieth-century America, Malcolm was a truly global figure, particularly in his conceptions of black nationalism as taught by the Nation of Islam and then in his travels through Africa and the Middle East (including Cairo), climaxing in his hajj to Mecca. My students were fascinated with the story of this American convert to Islam; their initial interest then led them to delve into the classic account of race and race relations in America. Reading about the Nation of Islam's highly racialized theology inspired lengthy and passionate discussions about what constitutes a "real" Muslim and who can authoritatively speak for a religion. Reading Malcolm (and Martin Luther King Jr., whose work I usually provided as a counterpoint), my students grappled with America's chronic inability to live up to its founding ideals of equality, and they questioned whether democracy was an achievable ideal or only a hypocritical mask for inequality and power. The book helped my classes explore the complex roles that identity markers such as religion and race play in shaping individual and communal purpose. In short, in Malcolm X my Egyptian students found both a sympathetic and controversial character whose life opened up lines of inquiry and debate that are just as relevant and important today in the Middle East as in the United States.

Teaching American history abroad also allowed me to experiment with the boundaries of the international classroom. In the spring semesters of 2008 and 2009 I partnered with Professor Stewart Winger at Illinois State University (isu) to team teach two courses: Twentieth-century American Religious History and Comparative Global Fundamentalisms. The classes in each location (auc and isu) enrolled about fifteen students each, and we ran the courses like typical university seminars. Students were assigned common readings, then we came to class and discussed them together, half a world apart but in real time. It was often a logistical nightmare—beginning with the time difference, the discrepancy in when the two countries go on and off daylight savings time, and the inevitable technical glitches (such as when the underwater cable carrying internet to all of Egypt was cut for several days). Just as in typical classes, Professor Winger and I were sometimes frustrated when the students did not do the reading or showed less intellectual energy than we wished on writing assignments (which were mostly given as small group projects that included members from each side of the ocean). But the payoff was significant, and the effort made was worth it, when the students in Illinois engaged my class about the meaning of the veil and my female students responded that it was a form of liberation and agency rather than oppression; or when my students pressed the other side about Christians' support for American foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly the 2003 invasion of Iraq and America's unblinking support of Israel's occupation of Palestine; or when my students cited verses in the Qur'an and the hadith condemning radical Islamic terrorism and the stoning of adulterers in tribal areas in Pakistan; or when the students wrestled with the proper relationship of religion and politics or religion and science. The exchange so energized a handful of students that they have kept in touch after the course ended and put together an informal intercontinental, interreligious reading group to continue the conversations we began in class.

Videoconferencing was an exciting and innovative way to open up my classroom and make it truly international in scope and content. While the initial hurdles seem daunting, I would encourage any teacher of American history in the United States or abroad to identify a colleague across the ocean and try at least one or two class sessions, if not an entire course, of cross-cultural dialogue via videoconference. Students on both sides of the Atlantic (or Pacific) Ocean will be richly rewarded and will gain lasting insights into the other culture—and the topic at hand—that could not be conveyed through standard readings or lectures.

Teaching American religious history in a predominantly Arab Muslim classroom offered many of the same opportunities and challenges as one would find in any other educational setting, but with its own wrinkles. As in any class, my students will soon forget most of the details they learned about American history. However, by using historical examples from another time and place, I was able to encourage my students to drop their natural defenses and to think critically about the pressing issues that we discussed in our treatment of American history, but which are relevant in contemporary Islam and the Middle East: religion and science, the treatment of religious minorities, the relationship of religion and gender norms, and the appropriate role of religion in the public sphere and politics. These inherently thorny issues can be difficult to discuss directly, especially in a tense political and cultural environment, but approaching them obliquely through American

history allowed students to scrutinize themselves, their previously unexamined assumptions, and their culture from the relatively safe distance of another nation's history.

The benefits of a globalized U.S. history classroom and curriculum are not just limited to the students. For my part, being at auc provided the most enjoyable and stimulating teaching experiences of my young career. Teaching American history to non-Americans, whether in specialized topical courses or the survey course, forced me to interrogate my own assumptions about American history and the ways we present it in the classroom. I constantly reevaluated and readjusted my curriculum and pedagogy as I learned more about Egyptian and Middle Eastern culture and about what my students did and did not know. My circumstances obliged me to think beyond America's shores when teaching everything from Puritanism to polygamy to race relations. This globalizing turn has helped me look at American history—which too rarely engages the world beyond U.S. borders—with a new set of lenses. In an increasingly globalized world, the internationalization of even our national history courses can only better prepare our students to be thoughtful and engaged citizens. Globalizing the U.S. history classroom transforms the way we think about ourselves, our past, and our common future.

[1] See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York, 1988); and Thomas L. Haskell, *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore, 2000).

[2] Thanks to James Bennett of Santa Clara University, whose online syllabus for his Religion in America course gave me the idea for the exercise. See <http://www.iupui.edu/~raac/downloads/0405SYL/Bennett.pdf>.

[3] *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145 (1879). For an excellent treatment of the case and the surrounding cultural and political debates, see Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

[4] Black Elk as told to John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (New York, 1932).

[5] I would argue that this phenomenon is not unique to the Middle East and also holds true in the American academy, as illustrated by the flap over Harvard University president Larry Summers's January 2005 comments about innate differences between men and women. See Piper Fogg, "Harvard's President Wonders Aloud about Women in Science and Math," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jan. 28, 2005, p. A12.

[6] Mark C. Carnes and Michael P. Winship, *The Trial of Anne Hutchinson: Liberty, Law, and Intolerance in Puritan New England* (Boston, 2005).

[7] Malcolm X with the assistance of Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, 1965).

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Living against America: Classroom Encounters in Beirut

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Walking into the classroom on the first day of spring semester 2009, I announced that the course, Introduction to American Studies, would examine the different ways that people have understood “America” and would compare those understandings to the historical evidence. Then I asked each student to write a brief answer to this question: What is the most important way that America enters your awareness? This was the fifth year I had taught this course at the American University of Beirut (aub), and, having tried a number of such exercises, I had come to expect surprises.

Previously, I had posed an even more open-ended question: What word do you most closely associate with America? The responses to that question formed an extraordinary spectrum that ranged from the deeply critical to the fawning: violent, racist, greedy, arrogant, ignorant, superficial, young, multicultural, powerful, modern, successful, innovative, rich, hip, transparent, free, and happy.

My new question elicited less overtly judgmental responses. Many of the ways students noticed an American presence might be characterized as cultural: television, film, music, sports (basketball, introduced to Lebanon over one hundred years ago at the aub, has become an absolute obsession).^[1] A related U.S. presence is commercial; here students identified fast-food chains (which are very successful, especially in Beirut) and products such as computers, iPods, and jeans. Students were often unaware that some of the influences and enterprises they identified were not, strictly speaking, American—particularly fashion trends, supermarkets, and malls, where Europe is the more important source. The United States sometimes functions as a stand-in for the West, the modern, and the processes of globalization. Other students identified institutions such as the World Trade Organization (wto), with which Lebanon is now in negotiation; they see the wto as a U.S.-dominated organization that is forcing Lebanon to liberalize its economy and crack down on violations of intellectual property rights. Still others pointed to the aub itself, a U.S.-chartered school that has always had an American president and has had a significant influence not only on its own students but on Lebanon and the entire Arab world. Some students were particularly aware of U.S. State Department efforts at public diplomacy, such as the Arabic-language Hi magazine, Radio Sawa, and the Al Hurrah television network (although they uniformly mocked these as ineffective attempts to win hearts and minds at a time when U.S. foreign policies and actions seemed at odds with Arab concerns). Many students spoke of America as part of their day-to-day environment, as if it were a kind of medium in which they were embedded, but one that simultaneously connected them to a wider world. Indeed, my students are all fluent in English and speak it with a decided American accent. This is reinforced not only by their education and the American media and entertainment industries but also—crucially—by the Internet.

Although aub students tend to embrace much of what they identify as American and associate it with their individual chances for success, their embrace is complicated by other encounters with America that are immediate and sinister. The U.S. invasion of Iraq spewed millions of refugees into nearby countries, including more than fifty thousand to Lebanon. Many members of the Salafist resistance that arose in response to the invasion eventually infiltrated into Lebanon where they engaged in a long and deadly battle with Lebanese Armed Forces in the summer of 2007. The “global war on terror” seemed to be breeding terrorists who presented a much more existential threat to Lebanon than any terrorists ever posed to the United States. Perhaps the most troubling recent encounter with America was during the summer war of 2006. As U.S.-made bombs rained down on Lebanon, President George W. Bush rushed more munitions to Israel and repeatedly insisted that it was premature to demand an end to the killing. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called the suffering “the birth pangs of a new Middle East.”^[2] Lebanon’s share of these pangs included more than a thousand dead, a million displaced, infrastructure destroyed, beaches and harbors polluted with oil, and

millions of cluster bombs scattered over its landscape. For the students in my class, America was not simply a faraway land; it was a palpable, and sometimes shocking, presence in their lives. Although my course is intended to teach them about America, they already know America—in fact they know it in ways that might help U.S. Americans gain a more complete picture. These students find themselves living against America—for some in the oppositional sense of that word, but for all in its sense of proximity.

Introduction to American Studies is a key offering of the Center for American Studies and Research (casar) at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal of Saudi Arabia endowed the center a few weeks after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, in response to what he referred to as a growing “gap” between the United States and the Arab world. Following the literary critic Edward Said’s repeated urgings, the center aims to promote academic discourse that can counter mutual demonization, but it also seeks to make the United States itself an object of Arab knowledge. casar is one of at least seven new American studies initiatives in the Middle East established since 2001. Some of these are supported by State Department funds and risk being perceived as soft power initiatives. Others, such as the University of Tehran’s program, are attempts to understand a threatening adversary. We have tried to position casar as an independent academic center that is open to a range of perspectives. Clearly, it is the presence of American military, political, economic, and cultural power that forces people throughout the Middle East (and indeed throughout the world) to ask what that presence means for them. Elsewhere, I have proposed to call this concern the American question. That question is at once casar’s *raison d’être* and a constant presence in my classroom.[\[3\]](#)

In the pursuit of its mission, casar sponsors a high-profile lecture series each year and hosts a biennial international conference that brings together American studies scholars from North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. While stressing the academic nature of our program, we have not shied away from controversy: we have invited a diverse group of speakers including Noam Chomsky, Norman Finkelstein, Richard Rorty, and Senator John E. Sununu; we have offered a course in comparative sexualities and another on the Holocaust in American literature and culture. I have traveled to Tehran twice to teach courses in the new program there and have invited its students to Beirut for a special seminar. Yet, of all the center’s activities, it is in the classroom that I feel I am pursuing its mission most intensely because the classroom allows a sustained encounter that offers the greatest possibility for the mutual reshaping of ideas and perspectives.

Introduction to American Studies is a discussion-based course that requires a great deal of writing. In addition to a term paper and essay exams, I ask students to produce a written response to each weekly reading. The typical class consists of about twenty-five students, three-quarters of whom are Lebanese—representing a diverse array of religious and political perspectives—with perhaps one wearing a hijab (veil).

When initiating the course in 2004, I had several broad goals in mind: to present America as a human creation rather than something given by nature or destiny; to examine nationalist narratives as stories created in a dynamic context by those with the power to define the national community; to contrast these stories to the complex historical reality of encounters among Europeans, Native Americans, Africans—and later Latinos, Asians, and others—and to consider the perspectives and counternarratives of those traditionally excluded; and finally, to emphasize the transnational dynamics of America in a way that might shed light on the students’ own encounters with America in their everyday lives.

The students’ reactions to these ideas and to the related readings I assigned surprised me in several ways. Perhaps what I least expected was their response to the idea of the American dream. I assigned works by a semicritical outsider (Jean Baudrillard’s *America*, 1986) and a semicritical insider (James M. Jasper’s *Restless Nation*, 2000) who had two beliefs in common: that the essence of America was specifiable and that they could specify it. While I was hoping that my students would appreciate the role of powerful American narratives—or cultural fictions, as Stephen John Hartnett calls them—in orienting and enabling historical actors, I was also hoping that they would see that these were stories created and shared by certain people rather than complete pictures of North American realities. Instead, the majority of the class members seemed to accept the idea that America represents a pure new beginning, a place where one can start fresh and where anyone who works hard can achieve success. This dream of individual self-transformation calls out even to students with the most anti-American proclivities. Frustrated by this reaction, I asked them to examine Jasper’s

“recipe” for the United States:

Take an enormous territory, rich with deep forests, the blackest soil, every manner of animal, vegetable, and mineral, and endless navigable rivers and coasts. Exterminate most of its native people. Then, over four hundred years, repopulate it with immensely diverse folk, from all around the globe, whose only common feature is their restlessness.

My students found this a compelling picture of the United States, but if restlessness is at the center of the national culture (and Jasper does believe there is one American culture), there is no place in the national community for those who migrated because of desperation, those who came involuntarily in slave ships, and those who were already there. Clearly, I had to find a way to help students think critically not just about U.S. foreign policy but also about American culture.[\[4\]](#)

I was also unprepared for the extent to which the students wanted to practice comparison. When we read Daniel K. Richter’s *Facing East from Indian Country* (2001) they immediately compared the Indians’ experience to that of the Palestinians. When we discussed the Mexican-American War in conjunction with Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), or early twentieth-century U.S. imperialism in conjunction with Gretchen Murphy’s *Hemispheric Imaginings* (2005), they quickly jumped to a discussion of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Continental destiny, hemispheric destiny, and global destiny were “just the same.” I wondered whether I should allow these constant comparisons, or prevent them from possibly undermining learning by exploding the boundaries of the course.[\[5\]](#)

A number of other things surprised me. Although my students were generally trilingual and many had lived in more than one country, most expressed an aversion to concepts of cultural hybridity such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s conscious embrace of her own existence in the borderland region where Anglo and Latino cultures overlap. Most of my students showed an immediate interest in the experience of black Americans in spite of the fact that the Arab world has its own deep variety of racial oppression; they found it easy to identify with another group that found itself defiantly struggling with the center of American power. Finally, about 10 percent of the students strongly supported George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq—their reasons were generally local or regional. My discussion of how I changed *Introduction to American Studies* in response to student reactions will focus on the first two reactions: the students’ embrace of the myths of America and their urge to be constantly comparative.

To counter the seduction of American myths, I developed two strategies. The first was to emphasize an important part of American history that has largely been excluded from nationalist narratives. In contrast to the quasi-religious idealization of the voyages of the *Mayflower* and the *Arbella*, the story of a people escaping a corrupt Old World to establish a “city upon a hill” in a free New World—the story commemorated at Thanksgiving and repeated endlessly in political rhetoric—I reminded my students of the first successful British settlements in Virginia that eventually produced remarkable profits through a system of remarkable human exploitation. To foreground this aspect of American history, I added a unit on the oil industry. We explore its origins in Pennsylvania, John D. Rockefeller’s maneuverings to monopolize it, and Ida B. Tarbell’s campaign to expose its real costs. We follow this with selections from Robert Vitalis’s *America’s Kingdom* (2007), which examines the social and political ramifications of U.S. corporate control of Saudi Arabian petroleum development. This brings up questions about the complexity of U.S. interests in the Middle East, which—some of my students are convinced—are primarily connected to Israel. The discussion is often enlivened by the presence of students who are Saudi or who have lived in a foreigners’ compound in the kingdom. The concentration of economic power is one of the things that has undermined the dreams of many, inside and outside of the United States, for a decent life. The way that concentrated power has helped shape social systems is particularly pernicious. As Vitalis shows, the Jim Crow system of segregating workers and providing them with differential wages and conditions increased profits so much that U.S. corporations brought that system with them to the Middle East.[\[6\]](#)

After reading about the struggles of an Indian (William Apess), an African American (W. E. B. Du Bois), and a Latina (Gloria Anzaldúa), my students still believed that anyone who worked hard would eventually make it into the American mainstream. My second strategy to counter this notion was to introduce the perspectives of working-class Arab Americans. Moustafa Bayoumi’s *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* (2008) was a perfect

vehicle for this purpose. Bayoumi narrates the struggles of young, working-class Arab Americans living in Brooklyn, New York, before, during, and after September 11, 2001. He shows the difficult economic realities they face and how the added weight of social demonization in the wake of 9/11 affected them. Bayoumi's informants struggled against these conditions, in some cases succeeding and in some cases only surviving. Some dreamed of escaping their situation by moving to a faraway land of promise, a Dubai dream. The aspiration for individual self-transformation was not exclusively American. My students found these stories very compelling. Their gritty specificity—at once foreign and familiar—seemed finally to pierce the students' idealization of America. They began to notice things that surprised them. They were appalled at the demonization of Arabs and Muslims, but noted that the U.S. system of laws provided a way to fight back and sometimes achieve justice. They told me that living in the United States made these immigrants more Arab and more Islamic than people living in the Middle East. "We always watch American tv shows," one female student pointed out, "while they are obsessed with Arabic channels."[\[7\]](#)

To teach a course called Introduction to American Studies successfully, I became convinced that one must begin where the students are—not simply their location, but their ideas, beliefs, and interests. I decided, therefore, to embrace my students' penchant for comparison by shifting the course to include a greater emphasis on American-Arab encounters. One of my goals had always been to reveal the transnational dynamics of America, so why not do this in a way my students were most likely to grasp? Vitalis's book accomplished this in one way, and Bayoumi's stories did it in another. American-Arab interactions are not symmetrical, but neither are they unidirectional. My students' observation—that Arabs in the United States are more Arab than they are—was the sort of comparison worth provoking because it leads to further questions. I initiated this shift toward more course content on American-Arab encounters by adding a reading from Burke O. Long's *Imagining the Holy Land* (2003) that examines the elaborate re-creation of Jerusalem at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. Although relatively few Americans had direct experience with the eastern Mediterranean at the time of the fair, many were obsessed with the region for religious, and—as Long points out—nationalistic reasons. I also added a component on the history of the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, an institution founded by American Protestant missionaries in 1866. The aub has been lauded as one of the most successful examples of American influence in the region, but its success owes a great deal to the ways that Arabs have helped reshape it into an increasingly more cosmopolitan institution.[\[8\]](#)

Next, I added a course section that compares the growth of evangelical Protestantism in the United States with that of political Islam in the Middle East. Many of my students are critical of the way U.S. leaders and the mainstream media demonize groups such as Hizbollah. They point out that Hizbollah is a complex group that not only resisted Israel during the long occupation of Lebanon and the 2006 invasion but also provides health care and education to some of Lebanon's poorest people and has evolved into a responsible political party willing to compromise and live with Lebanon's other political and religious groups. I asked the students to examine American evangelicals using the same open-minded perspective in which they wished others would regard Hizbollah and to notice that evangelicals also comprise a politically and socially diverse group that is showing signs of significant change.

Finally, I decided to conclude the course with Melani McAlister's account of how the U.S. policy evolved from 9/11 to the invasion of Iraq—an analysis that focuses on the cultural work done by certain iconic images that circulated publicly. My students were familiar with these images but often saw meanings in them completely at odds with the meanings through which the images had accomplished their important cultural work in the United States. After these changes, about one-third of the course content focused on American-Arab encounters. Obviously, these specific alterations would be inappropriate in most other places, but they have helped me capture my students' interest, engage their critical faculties, and increase their appreciation of transnational processes.[\[9\]](#)

My experience of struggling to teach Introduction to American Studies in Beirut has altered my view of American history and how to teach it, not only outside of the United States but anywhere. I do not mean to suggest a template; indeed, paying attention to the specific perspectives of my students was the key to improving the course. Lebanon is a politically mobilized country. On two successive weekends in March 2005, public demonstrations drawing eight hundred thousand and one million people, respectively, took place in the

center of Beirut.^[10] In such an atmosphere, I insist that classroom discussions respect everyone's perspective, but I cannot demand that we avoid questions of value and justice. No matter where our classrooms are located, historians stress academic values—a respect for careful argument and evidence—but history is about human concerns. We cannot bracket questions of value and justice if we expect to fully engage the humans who enter those classrooms.

This experience has also convinced me that when teaching a course in the twenty-first century about the history of the United States we must constantly be attentive to the world beyond the U.S. borders. The closer that history approaches our own time, the less we can separate America from global questions, such as: What kind of world do we have? Is another kind possible?

Finally, there is the question of viewpoint. Daniel K. Richter attempts to complicate the white European, or Euro-American, perspective by asking us to consider how the story of America might look to those facing east from Indian country. The New World that those looking toward the West imagined was an old one. In a similar way, we might tell the story of America facing it from Beirut, Lebanon; Hanoi, Vietnam; or Baghdad, Iraq. From multiple vantage points, America might come into focus in a way that would reveal more of its actual dimensions. Yet, for many of my students, the process of gazing off toward America threatens to evolve into something very much like the dreamy westward gaze that Richter describes. We can counter this slippage by recognizing that America is not simply there. We face it directly no matter where we are. We are all living right against America.

[1] Patrick McGreevy is dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and former director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for American Studies and Research at the American University of Beirut.

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An example is William McClenahan, "Lebanese Sport from a Basketball Perspective" (M.A. thesis, American University of Beirut, 2007).

[2] Condoleezza Rice, "Special Briefing on Travel to the Middle East and Europe," U.S. Department of State, July 21, 2006, merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/syria/State/69331.pdf.

[3] Shortly after the World Trade Center attacks, Prince Alwaleed had offered New York City \$10 million in aid, but when the Prince suggested that the United States should have a more balanced policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani turned down the offer. "Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Endows a New Center for American Studies and Research," *Main Gate* (Summer/Fall 2003); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1994), 356. The new American studies programs include Al-Quds University (Jerusalem, Palestine), Queen Arwa University (Yemen), University of Jordan (Amman), American University in Cairo (Egypt), American University of Beirut (Lebanon), University of Tehran (Iran), and Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Doha (Qatar). In addition, the center at the University of Bahrain began in 1998; Patrick McGreevy, "The American Question," *Journal of American Studies in Turkey*, 24 (Fall 2007), 15–27.

[4] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (Paris, 1986); Stephen John Hartnett, *Democratic Dissent and the Cultural Fictions of Antebellum America* (Urbana, 2002); James M. Jasper, *Restless Nation: Starting Over in America* (Chicago, 2000), esp. 4.

[5] Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, 1987); Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham, 2005).

[6] For a discussion of the idealization of the Puritan tradition, see David W. Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis, 2002), 215–49. For an analysis of John D. Rockefeller and the early oil industry, see Brian Black, *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom* (Baltimore, 2000). Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford, 2007).

[7] William Apress is discussed in Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 237–53. W. E. B. Du Bois's perspective is outlined in Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 171–212. Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (New York, 2008), esp. 144–45.

[8] Burke O. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels* (Bloomington, 2003); John M. Munro, *A Mutual Concern: The Story of the American University of Beirut* (Delmar, 1977); A. L. Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria, 1800–1901: A Study of Educational, Literary, and Religious Work* (Oxford, 1966); Ussama Makdisi, “‘Anti-Americanism’ in the Arab World: An Interpretation of a Brief History,” *Journal of American History*, 89 (Sept. 2002), 538–57.

[9] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley, 2005), 266–307.

[10] This, in a country with a total population of 4 million.

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Transcending Intellectual Nationalism: Teaching U.S. History in German Universities

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Pioneers live in isolated places, have to make do with scarce local resources, have to assert and defend their existence against various man-made and natural obstacles, and, in order to secure more than their bare subsistence, depend on a network of exchange whose operators are far away and beyond their control. While local conditions shape their daily lives and provide a living, they know they need to communicate and exchange goods with the more densely populated centers of production and consumption. In that sense, I think of myself as a pioneer writing and teaching American history under frontier conditions.

—Willi Paul Adams, “On the Significance of Frontiers in Writing American History in Germany,” *Journal of American History*, Sept. 1992.

With those words, Willi Paul Adams described his position as a German historian researching and teaching U.S. history in German universities. Regarding the discipline of U.S. history, he likened Germany to the American frontier settlements of the nineteenth century, focusing on the lack of resources, the “man-made and natural obstacles” scholars face in the course of their work, and the dearth of intranational networks. The real “centers of production and consumption,” he argued, are in the United States and therefore difficult to access.^[1]

While his description holds some truth, I would like to shed a more positive light on the work of German scholars active in the field of U.S. history in Germany. In the last two decades, their mobility has greatly increased, allowing closer collaboration with U.S. history scholars all over the world. The Internet has facilitated these interdisciplinary, intercultural, and multilingual networks and has enabled these German scholars to tap into the treasures of American libraries and access research literature and source material. Despite obstacles, such as some students’ lack of historians’ tools and occasional language difficulties, teaching U.S. history in German universities offers a singular chance to help students negotiate their self-understanding and their understanding of others and thus to enhance their intercultural competence.

Teaching U.S. history in Germany is not restricted to history or political science departments; it also takes place in English and American studies departments, the latter being amalgams of language, literature, history, and culture. Some of the scholars in those departments are “purist” historians, while others, like myself, have degrees in history and American studies. One result of this structural interdisciplinarity in the German university system is that one often teaches U.S. history to language and literature specialists rather than to trained historians. It is certainly challenging to introduce efficiently the tools of historical analysis to these students and make them understand the worth of analyzing source material. After some initial skepticism, however, they learn to appreciate the benefits they can reap from analyzing historical documents. If the instructor simultaneously introduces literary renderings of the topic at hand, such as Walt Whitman’s poem “A Passage to India” in the context of expansionism, the students begin to acknowledge the true worth of interdisciplinary work.^[2]

Language difficulties present another challenge of teaching U.S. history to German students, especially in a history department, where students mostly do not study English per se. Instructors need to set aside time for questions on vocabulary and grammar because linguistic issues, such as difficult vocabulary or grammatical structures, can lead to a lack of understanding or misunderstandings of sources and thus hamper discussions. Despite the higher language proficiency of students from English or American studies departments, where English is the main language of communication, teachers of U.S. history have to make particular efforts to encourage students into stimulating discussions in English. Afraid to embarrass themselves and conscious of their felt lack of language skills, many students hide behind their texts or within the mass of students, particularly in large classes. Instructors therefore must choose material that will inspire discussions and involve

students in projects geared toward reducing their linguistic inhibitions. A good example of this type of project is a “talk show,” a format I regularly employ in my undergraduate classes when talking about controversial issues such as women’s rights in the nineteenth century. Each student receives one source embodying a position on the “woman question” and is required to represent this position in a talk show in class. In one case, I staged a discussion among Anne Bradstreet, William Blackstone, Judith Sargent Murray, Margaret Fuller, Catherine Beecher, and the Grimké sisters, Sarah and Angelina. Students usually find this exercise very funny, engage in verbal skirmishes and heated debates, and try to imitate certain accents, thereby overcoming their English-language inhibitions. Simultaneously, they learn the intricacies of the historical issue at stake. Notwithstanding such challenges, teaching U.S. history to German students opens up a plethora of opportunities in the realms of intercultural competence and identity construction. Since Karl-Ernst Jeismann introduced the idea of a *Geschichtsbewusstsein* (historical consciousness) in 1977, scholars in the field of historical pedagogy have increasingly considered history the result of a process of reconstruction by each generation. They have also viewed *Geschichtsbewusstsein* as an important factor in understanding the present and thus oneself, linking it to concepts of *Selbstverstehen* (self-understanding) and *Fremdverstehen* (understanding of others) in the context of intercultural learning. Such *Selbstverstehen* and *Fremdverstehen* promote processes of identity formation, especially in children and young adults.[\[3\]](#)

Learning about U.S. history can help students understand the American other (*Fremdverstehen*) and thus deconstruct the wide array of clichés and stereotypes about the United States prevalent in German society. Over the last few decades the disciplines of American studies and history have undergone tremendous transformations regarding the content and methods of research and teaching, which have led to a negotiation of long-standing “truths” in university circles, but these new perspectives have not reached German high school curricula and teaching styles to the same degree. Many German students still enter university with a set of stereotypes and clichés that were taught in school and/or fostered through popular culture, the media, and the current political and intellectual discourses. Consequently, they see the United States as a chauvinistic and imperialist country, lacking “real” culture, due to its rampant materialism, and uncaring about the environment. Germans often perceive Americans as superficial, self-centered, ignorant, and therefore not interested in other countries. Such anti-Americanism has a long tradition, going back as far as the first contacts of European travelers with the New World and most recently fueled by the neoconservative foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration. Other German students, by contrast, are overly enthusiastic about the United States, buying into what is commonly referred to as American exceptionalism. Such pro-Americans point to the beneficial political system of the United States and wholeheartedly believe the tenets of the American dream: equal opportunities for everyone and the pursuit of happiness. They praise American popular culture, especially tv shows and music, and higher education.[\[4\]](#)

The majority of German students of American history, language, and culture, however, can be found outside the extremely anti-Americanist and the overly positive camps. If they were openly hostile to the United States, they probably would not have chosen the subject, and their constant exposure to the harsh criticism of the Bush administration, on both American and German soil, has made an uncritical belief in American exceptionalism impossible. In fact, most students feel ambivalent about the United States, having constantly to negotiate their enthusiasm and criticism. This “dynamic love-hate cultural relationship” seems to be the situation in which most Europeans find themselves.[\[5\]](#)

Teachers of U.S. history at German universities must address this love-hate relationship, for it influences their teaching methods. Two stories from my own classroom experience illustrate how difficult it can be for a teacher to walk the fine line between being overly critical of and overly enthusiastic about the United States. If one is overly critical, students see their worst fears about the United States confirmed and thus do not question their stereotypes. If one is overly positive, they suspect one is an “American in disguise,” which also leads them to hold onto their stereotypes. Teachers of U.S. history in Germany must constantly monitor themselves and renegotiate their own feelings of enthusiasm and criticism about the United States.

In a class on American expansionism with a focus on the annexation of Texas, we discussed John O’Sullivan’s “Annexation” (1845). After we talked about the idea of Manifest Destiny and its inherent chauvinism, the student responsible for preparing a report on the historical context gave her presentation. Obviously, I had

expressed my criticism of the text too overtly and had thus unwillingly confirmed the student's worst beliefs about imperial America; the student commented on the annexation of Texas with the following triumphant statement: "And sure enough, Americans—arrogant as they are—finally annexed Texas." This was a pivotal point in the seminar, the sort of unexpected crisis that one needs to be prepared to handle. The immediate reaction of the other participants ranged from giggling in amazement to expressions of support, and all of the students immediately turned their heads to look at me, eagerly awaiting my response. I pointed out the degree to which such a subjective expression of opinion was problematic, especially for those aiming to become teachers and thus the future multipliers of knowledge on the United States. I then explained their duty as academics to engage themselves in the theoretical discussions of their disciplines and to reflect carefully on and negotiate prevalent clichés and stereotypes about the United States. Most importantly, I tried to dismantle their stereotypes by talking about imperialism in nineteenth-century Europe, with a particular focus on Germany. Wishing for a *Platz an der Sonne* (a place in the sun—a phrase coined by the German secretary of state in 1897), I made sure to point out, was certainly not an exceptionally American phenomenon.^[6] The second episode took place in another seminar, also dealing with U.S. expansionism. After discussing Whitman's "A Passage to India" as a literary rendering of American expansionism and after my comment that this poem seems to represent a more inclusive, less chauvinistic version of Manifest Destiny, a student pointed out that she felt Whitman had neglected to emphasize the pitfalls of expansionism, such as the treatment of Native Americans. To her taste, this poem was too optimistic, expressing far too much national pride. This remark was foreseeable in a German classroom. Due to our ongoing struggle to come to terms with our past, specifically the Third Reich and the Holocaust, we tend to be overly sensitive to and skeptical of expressions of national pride and patriotism. In contrast to the United States, Germany has what the German Jewish American Hannah Arendt called a "fundamentally negative founding myth." Besides this historical background, however, my supposedly overly positive interpretation of the poem may have engendered the student's remark.^[7]

Selbstverstehen is at least as important as Fremdverstehen, and studying U.S. history and culture can significantly enhance Germans' understanding of themselves, as American racial and ethnic history illustrates. Topics such as slavery and nativism interest German students, not only because their consequences are still visible today but also because German students, and indeed Germans in general, tend to perceive these issues as distinctly American and hardly ever connect them with the current situation in Germany.

Many Germans insist, despite all signs to the contrary, that "Germany is not a classic country of immigration, and because of its history, geography, and economic conditions, it cannot be one." Judgments such as this have several roots. First, largely due to Germany's lack of territorial and political unity in the nineteenth century, the German "concept of nation was based not on a political vision . . . but on a predominantly ethnic concept of nation." Second, "until the 1960s Germany was first and foremost a country of emigration." Third, as scholars have only recently begun to argue, this insistence on ethnic homogeneity has to do with perceptions of race in Germany. After 1945, questions of race became taboo in German public discourse and were mostly associated with the United States or other Western European countries. This failure to reflect on how notions of racial difference have shaped post-1945 German society has deprived German minorities of the verbal and analytical tools needed to handle experiences of social exclusion. Therefore, claiming race as a category could be "politically enabling and historically illuminating."^[8]

These insights must be on the mind of every scholar teaching U.S. history to German students and must influence the selection of topics and materials. My classroom experience has shown that comparative approaches, which have become popular in the context of the transnational turn in American studies and history, are the best way of making students aware of the need to discuss race as a category and to reevaluate race relations in Germany. Such comparative approaches are not meant to promote universalist arguments, which could be used to legitimize phenomena such as imperialism, colonialism, and racism. To avoid such universalism, teachers must emphasize the specifics of time and place.

When I talked with my students about immigration to the United States in the summer of 2009, I spent much time on the issue of nativism. To sensitize them to anti-immigration sentiments in nineteenth-century America, I gave them excerpts from platforms of the American party and Josiah Strong's "Perils—Immigration"

(1885).^[9] I entered into a detailed analysis of the rhetoric of these sources and their authors' view of immigrants as immoral, corruptible, lazy, and narrow-minded—in short, as a danger to national health and wealth. The students were shocked at the xenophobia and feelings of cultural and national superiority displayed in the texts, quickly found fault with their authors, and fell back on long-cherished anti-American stereotypes, classifying the sources as typically American. With the students thus worked up, I distributed an excerpt of the 2002 program of the Republican party of Germany, to show that the rhetoric and arguments of this twenty-first-century German document are alarmingly similar to those of the nineteenth-century American sources. Upon realizing this, the students were at first uncomfortably quiet but then started engaging in fervent debates. One group of students argued that the Republican party program was just a minority view and thus not representative of German public discourse. Others argued that the situation of immigrants in Germany was completely different from that in the United States, that immigrants were pampered by the welfare state, and that a comparison was therefore not possible. A third group advocated a more open and tolerant attitude toward immigration to Germany and a change of public discourse. I let them debate without commenting much. Shortly before concluding the lesson, however, I encouraged them to apply the academic expertise they displayed in the analysis of American sources to the German debate on immigration and to pay attention to the discursive continuities. I also warned them against letting themselves be carried away by simplistic “bar talk.” Through such comparative analyses, German students reevaluate their perception that issues of race and immigration are particularly American phenomena and that their own country is neither an immigration country nor does it witness the same kind of racism as the United States. Such insights can lead them to detect inconsistencies between their judgments of American racism and xenophobia and their opinions on similar questions in Germany and help them better understand themselves and their surroundings. Such Selbstverstehen, an integral part of intercultural learning, promotes processes of identity formation and thus contributes to the emergence of a new present with a new Geschichtsbewusstsein.

In an article on teaching U.S. history in Italy, Maurizio Vaudagna argues that a non-English-speaking American historian abroad is not simply another Americanist who happens to live overseas and possibly takes advantage of his or her different intellectual traditions and historical methodologies in his or her research. The difference is much deeper; it involves research themes, institutional positions, scholarly standards, and the pressure to act . . . as a molder of public opinion. . . . The American historian abroad, speaking a language other than English, is a significantly different type of intellectual from her or his American counterpart.

Vaudagna's statement also holds true for German historians of the United States, for their specific working environment shapes them as well as their work. Teaching U.S. history in German universities poses challenges, such as teaching the subject in a philological faculty environment to nonnative speakers. Its multiple opportunities make it a fascinating endeavor, however. On the one hand, our students are the politicians, journalists, writers, teachers, and filmmakers of tomorrow and will thus influence the future Geschichtsbewusstsein. The teacher of U.S. history thus becomes, as Vaudagna says, “a molder of public opinion,” inspiring greater Fremdverstehen and Selbstverstehen. On the other hand, the work of German U.S. historians is also of great relevance to the American practitioners of the discipline. Just because they are not mirror images of their American colleagues does not mean that German U.S. historians are pioneers, barely making ends meet in a sparsely populated frontier settlement, peeking longingly across the Atlantic. On the contrary, our “different intellectual traditions and historical methodologies,” our status as nonnative speakers, and our different cultural background and Geschichtsbewusstsein lead to fresh readings of American sources. Such new insights and a fruitful cooperation between German U.S. historians and other scholars of American history all over the world can transcend what Willi Paul Adams called “intellectual nationalism.”^[10]

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Exploring the “American Obsession” Down Under: Teaching Civil Rights History in Australia

Timothy J. Minchin

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Race may be, as Studs Terkel claimed, the “American obsession,” but it is an obsession that many foreigners clearly share.^[1] In recent years, scholars based outside the United States have published much of the best scholarship on civil rights and race relations, and the subject plays a central role in the teaching of U.S. history abroad, particularly in Great Britain.^[2] Much of this topic’s appeal for both undergraduates and teachers may reflect how it exposes the gap between America’s profession of democratic ideals and their realization. The subject also has particular relevance for Australia, a country confronting its own long history of white domination of its indigenous people, although some students are more comfortable critiquing America’s record rather than examining their own society. Nevertheless, the interest in learning about civil rights history remains, and the concept of race provides a defining theme that can be used to focus broad courses on American history. When teaching American history from afar, breadth of coverage is particularly important, as students are unlikely to have the background knowledge that allows U.S. universities to run more specialized courses.

The teacher of American history in Australia has a number of advantages, and the discipline has been a core part of the humanities curriculum for most of the post–World War II period. Like many students around the globe, those in Australia are interested in learning about the most powerful country on earth, but Australians have a particularly close bond with the citizens of the nation that has acted as the guarantor of their security since World War II. Despite the geographic distance between the two countries, they share much in common, including a similar territorial size and a history of settlement by migrants. Today, they are open and culturally tolerant societies, and are characterized by informality—features that many visitors, particularly from Europe, find refreshing. In addition, although both the American dream and the Australian dream are nebulous concepts, they ultimately articulate a similar vision of upward mobility and property ownership. In both countries, moreover, white settlers have been more able to achieve this mobility than nonwhites, although in recent years Asian migrants to both countries have achieved success.^[3]

The cultural influence of the United States on Australia is hard to exaggerate. American content dominates commercial television networks, and the popularity of Hollywood movies dwarfs that of the small domestic film industry. Australians generally regard Americans favorably because of the close relationship that the two allies forged during the Pacific campaign of World War II. Since then, a secure bond has endured. Most European countries balked at joining America’s military ventures in Vietnam and Iraq, but the Australian government participated as keenly as its American counterpart. As was the case in the United States, the Vietnam War caused acute divisions in Australian society; many young people resisted conscription and supported the antiwar movement. Still, the fundamental bond between the two countries was largely unaffected, and many disaffected Americans relocated to Australia and New Zealand during those years. While American travellers often complain that Europeans treat them with disdain or even hostility, in Australia they are likely to be welcomed with genuine affection.^[4]

Given these advantages, it is not surprising that American history courses across Australia enroll very well. Although the Australian and New Zealand community of Americanists is relatively small, the discipline has a well-established professional organization (the Australian and New Zealand American Studies Association) and a peer-reviewed journal (the Australasian Journal of American Studies) that has been published for almost thirty years. While Australia-based scholars still confront a fourteen-hour flight just to reach the American West Coast, the development of the Internet has facilitated access to vital research material and has kept scholars abreast of contemporary politics. In addition, the willingness of the Australian Research Council (arc) to generously fund research in American history has allowed internationally recognized historians to be based

“down under.” Using arc money, scholars such as Shane White, Rhys Isaac, Graham White, Ian Tyrrell, and John Salmond have produced pathbreaking work in American history—much of it focused on exploring the long black struggle against racial subjugation. In 1983 Isaac became the first Australian to win the Pulitzer Prize for history for *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790*.^[5]

My own courses draw on a long tradition of American history at La Trobe University, which was built in Melbourne’s northern suburbs in the late 1960s. Appointed shortly after the university’s founding, Salmond, Isaac, and William Breen together ensured that American history was one of the first subjects taught at the new campus.^[6] Salmond immediately offered a course on the civil rights movement; at that time the movement was very recent history. At an institution that had acquired a reputation for student radicalism, the course had considerable appeal. The subject also resonated with students from migrant backgrounds, especially because many had relatives across the Pacific Ocean. A masterly storyteller, Salmond used his personal experiences to great effect. As a graduate student at Duke University in the early 1960s, he had taken part in several civil rights demonstrations and had heard Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” oration at the 1963 March on Washington. Such personal experiences are a powerful tool for the Australian classroom; even today it is rare for La Trobe undergraduates—most of whom work long hours to fund their educations—to have visited the United States. My own experience of living in the southern states for extended periods has proved surprisingly valuable in an Australian context, where students have an extensive knowledge of American culture from films and books but remain hungry for details of everyday life. They are especially anxious to question whether media representations of the United States are accurate.^[7]

For many years, Salmond focused his civil rights course on the major protests of the 1950s and 1960s, but I have since expanded the subject to cover a much broader time frame. This reflects a recent shift in historical writing as scholars have increasingly traced the movement’s roots back in time. In two courses, *Civil War to Civil Rights* and *U.S. Civil Rights*, my students cover what Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has termed “the long civil rights movement” and explore deeply how African Americans mounted important challenges to racial inequality well before the 1950s—efforts that deserve to be ranked alongside the more familiar mass protests of the Montgomery to Selma years. My teaching highlights the idea that black protest before 1955 was, as Adam Fairclough has observed, “more than a mere prelude to the drama proper: it was the first act of a two-act play.” Although he has retired from his university position, Salmond has collaborated with me on a forthcoming book that explores the ongoing civil rights struggle after 1965, and as more literature on the contemporary period becomes available I intend to offer a new course that explores recent developments and shows students why race in America still matters. With the election of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency, perhaps a third act in the movement’s history—one defined by increasing black political participation—has come to its logical conclusion.^[8]

Based on my class discussions, many students are drawn to civil rights history because it exposes the underside of American life. Familiar with claims that the United States is the most democratic country on earth, they are fascinated to learn that many American citizens were denied the most basic rights until comparatively recently and that a great deal of inequality remains to this day. In a country dominated culturally and politically by the United States, perhaps these courses allow students to vent an innate, subdued anti-Americanism that is certainly present in Australian culture. To some extent, students’ reactions validate the fears of many American policy makers during the 1940s and 1950s who worried that domestic racial discrimination would undermine their position of international moral leadership during the Cold War.^[9]

While many students are critical of the length of time it took politicians to take decisive action on the civil rights issue, others use the American example to highlight Australia’s own history of white domination. In class discussions, many undergraduates observe that Australians can hardly criticize Americans in this regard. To give one example, it was only a referendum in 1967 that allowed indigenous Australians to be included in the federal census and gave the Australian Commonwealth the right to legislate on Australian Aborigines. In the United States, however, black Americans’ equal citizenship rights were—at least on paper—protected by the Fourteenth Amendment of 1868. In addition, the American civil rights movement did much to inspire Aboriginal Australians to demand equality; at the time of the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal people still faced some restrictions on their ability to vote, move freely, and control their own children. The U.S. movement had

a particular influence on young Australians: in 1965, an interracial student group conducted their own “freedom ride” through rural New South Wales, doing much to highlight the everyday discrimination faced by Aboriginal people.[\[10\]](#) Although I often point out that indigenous Australians should be more accurately compared to Native Americans (who did not receive full citizenship rights until 1924), there are some valid comparisons. The recent effort to memorialize key aspects of the civil rights struggle and to atone for past wrongs has strong parallels in Australia, where Kevin Rudd, the Australian prime minister, formally apologized to indigenous Australians in February 2008. My courses also encourage students to raise broader questions about race and to explore the arguments that whites used to justify the subjugation of nonwhites, many of which have considerable resonance in an Australian context.[\[11\]](#)

To allow students to gain an insight into white people’s thinking, I use primary documents from whites and blacks, contrasting the two viewpoints to stimulate discussion. In looking at the Little Rock, Arkansas, school crisis, for example, class members read the account by the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (naacp) leader Daisy Bates alongside the Southern Manifesto, the statement of defiance signed by most southern U.S. congressmen in 1956. Despite my efforts, I find it difficult to get students to take white views seriously and to explore their nuance and complexity, as recent works by Jason Sokol, Matthew Lassiter, Joseph Crespino, and others have urged us to do. Instead, most identify strongly with the protesters’ point of view and dismiss as a ruse the arguments used by whites. These reactions show how compelling the stereotype of the southern racist is—an especially powerful image when viewed from a distance.[\[12\]](#)

Australian students are particularly skeptical of whites’ appeals to states’ rights, largely because Australian states do not have the same degree of autonomy as their American counterparts. For example, American states have more extensive taxation powers than those in Australia. In addition, Australians do not think of states as independent or semi-independent entities in the same way that Americans do, and there is an ongoing popular debate about whether separate state governments are necessary in a country of 21 million people. There is no comparable discourse in the United States.[\[13\]](#)

There are more specific reasons for the popularity of civil rights history in Australia. The excellent pbs television series *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years* is used with written texts, and students respond quite favorably. The teacher covering the topic of civil rights is spoiled in having access to a resource that can vividly illustrate many of the key themes and events. This is especially important when teaching overseas because students lack familiarity with the places and protests that American undergraduates are more likely to know. As one La Trobe student wrote on the feedback form, “visual stuff in lectures were great. One thing to tell someone a story, another to actually see it.” Given that many of those interviewed by pbs have recently died, the series has become especially valuable in preserving the recollections of key movement participants and their opponents.[\[14\]](#)

Despite the group’s decline in recent years, the Ku Klux Klan also fascinates many students, as does the broader role of violence in establishing and maintaining segregation. In *From Civil War to Civil Rights*, for example, many students choose to write an essay on the Klan’s role in thwarting Reconstruction, while others select lynching as their topic. Like many foreigners, Australians are interested in understanding why the United States is a more violent society than their own and why it has much higher levels of gun ownership and capital crime. In tutorials, students frequently ask if the Klan still exists and how widely supported it is, and I often refer them to the Southern Poverty Law Center’s informative Web site, which closely monitors the Klan and other hate groups. There are, of course, some Klan chapters in Australia, as many students learn for the first time.[\[15\]](#) With the election of President Obama, interest in these groups has been renewed, and many students want to discuss the possibility of an attack on Obama. Perhaps this curiosity stems from the fact that the security presence around top Australian politicians is restrained by American standards. At a recent local launch of a colleague’s book, I was surprised to see that there was no visible security around former Australian prime minister Malcolm Fraser; this was quite a contrast to the situation in the United States, where even retired politicians are much better protected. In Australia, such a level of protection is not necessary.[\[16\]](#)

A number of peculiar issues emerge from teaching American civil rights history in Australia. In a country where voting has been compulsory in all federal elections since 1924, students express astonishment both at the low level of voter participation in the United States and at policy makers’ ability to disenfranchise large

sections of the black population. Coming from a culture where citizens' responsibility to vote is heavily stressed and where voting is mandatory for even local government elections, students are amazed to learn that most African Americans in the Deep South secured open access to the ballot only after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Some react by insisting that the United States, like Australia, should have adopted a centralized system where all adults are automatically required to register and to vote, thus preventing local officials from using the registration process to keep blacks from participating. Many are also critical of the low level of voter participation in the contemporary United States, although others point out that under the Australian system many citizens give little thought to how they should vote or can provide a legitimate reason for not casting a ballot. Commenting on the persistent popularity of compulsory voting in Australia, the historian John Hirst has observed that "the Australian people want to be compelled to vote. . . . The existence of government is taken for granted and people can be forced to be citizens."[\[17\]](#)

The civil rights movement was based in the black churches, yet many Australian students struggle to appreciate the strength of religion in the United States. Australia is basically a secular society, and the proportion of citizens who go to church or profess a belief in God is very low. In 2001 the National Church Life Survey found that less than 10 percent of Australians attended church regularly—and even that figure is declining.[\[18\]](#) This is in marked contrast to the United States (especially its southern states), where regular church attendance is the norm. As the historian James T. Patterson has observed, the modern day United States is "the most religious nation in the Western world." In the late 1970s, 50 percent of Americans told pollsters that they prayed every day, and 80 percent declared that they believed in an afterlife; in 2000 around 44 percent of Americans attended church on a weekly basis.[\[19\]](#) As a result, the United States is home to a huge number of Christian conservatives, whereas in Australia the cultural and political influence of evangelicals is much more limited. Australian students find it difficult to identify with a country whose official motto is "In God We Trust," and many view professions of divine backing—which both sides claimed in the civil rights struggle—as arrogant and off-putting. In Australia, only sport plays such a defining cultural role, and in Melbourne residents are expected to follow an Australian football team in much the same way that southerners often take religious affiliation for granted.[\[20\]](#)

As they learn of the civil rights struggle, Australians also remark on the constant literary references to the U.S. Constitution and constitutional rights. In the United States, African Americans and their white supporters battled for almost a century to secure effective enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, and there was an ongoing debate about the exact meaning of those constitutional rights. Australians rarely refer to their federal constitution of 1900 in public discourse. Unlike the American Constitution, the Australian Constitution fails to include a bill of rights, largely because most delegates to the 1898 constitutional convention believed that subjects' rights and freedoms were sufficiently guaranteed by the federal parliamentary system and the independent judiciary that the Australian Constitution would create. Reflecting these differences, Australian audiences sometimes comment on the strident rhetoric of individual rights in the United States. Students also find American patriotism more demonstrative, and many are surprised that even civil rights protesters frequently carried American flags at marches. Again, displays of bellicose patriotism in Australia are generally restricted to sporting events.[\[21\]](#)

Although most students have a good knowledge of the contemporary United States, some of the events that we cover generate considerable confusion. A few examples will suffice: in *From Civil War to Civil Rights*, the fact that a Republican president abolished slavery while the Democratic party consistently defended both slavery and segregation causes significant bewilderment, given that the Democrats became the party that eventually sponsored equal rights legislation. In modern politics, the American designation "liberal" has the opposite meaning in Australia, where the Liberal party occupies roughly the same ideological ground as the British Conservative party. A Republican in Australia is often a left-wing moniker for those who advocate constitutional change (although this issue does cross party lines). All of the Australian political parties, unlike a significant section of the American electorate, accept big government, and students consequently find it hard to understand the potency of antigovernment sentiment in the United States. Even after my warnings to avoid the use of the dated term "colored" in their writing, many students still legitimately question why the NAACP still uses the term—although this question can facilitate a discussion of the organization's staying power and

long-term contribution to the civil rights struggle.

Even though students immerse themselves in American publications, cultural differences nevertheless come through in their writing. There are some variations in terminology: racial beatings become “bashings” and Ida B. Wells-Barnett and W. E. B. Du Bois become “black journos.” There are many moments of humor. In some cases, such as the student whose rushed exam answer repeatedly mentioned that the sheriff of Selma, Alabama, was Jim Crow (rather than Jim Clark), the wit is unintentional; but in other cases it is more calculated. On one feedback form, for example, a student responded to the question “How could this unit be improved?” by writing “A lecture by Martin Luther King Jr. himself.” Even on faded black and white films, King’s speaking ability continues to impress today’s media-savvy students.^[22] Despite cultural differences, many students quickly acquire a sophisticated understanding of the civil rights struggle and a close familiarity with key issues.

By studying U.S. civil rights history, many of my students are pushed to reassess their preconceptions. Prior to enrolling in *From Civil War to Civil Rights*, most tend to identify the black freedom struggle with King and the well-known protests of the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore, the emphasis on the “long civil rights movement” is especially crucial in Australia, where important pioneers such as Wells-Barnett, Du Bois, and A. Philip Randolph are almost unknown. In contrast, these figures have a much higher profile in the United States, where college students are more likely to have studied American history in high school. Exploring the contribution of early leaders allows Australian students to appreciate the long duration of the black freedom struggle and helps them understand how King and other post-1945 activists built on the vital work of their predecessors. It is a lesson with particular resonance in Australia, where indigenous people have also had to fight long and hard for basic rights. Even today, they are much more likely than their white counterparts to live in poverty, and they do not have equal access to quality health care—both complex problems that also confront African Americans. In both countries, the struggle for racial justice is a continuing one.^[23]

^[1]Timothy J. Minchin is an associate professor and deputy head of the School of Historical and European Studies at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. I thank the countless students at La Trobe University whose classroom insights I have drawn on here. I would also like to thank my colleagues John Salmond and John Hirst for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

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Studs Terkel, *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel about the American Obsession* (New York, 1992), esp. 3–5.

^[2]Before moving to Australia in 2004, I received my Ph.D. at Cambridge University in 1995 and taught American history at Cambridge University (1995–1998) and St. Andrews University (1998–2004). My comments about the strength of civil rights history in Britain are based on my personal experiences there. For examples of civil rights scholarship published by British scholars, see Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King Jr.* (Athens, Ga., 1987); Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940–1980* (Athens, Ga., 2001); Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley, 1998); and Brian Ward and Tony Badger, eds., *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (Basingstoke, 1996).

^[3]Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York, 2003), 7–10; *The Great Aussie Dream*, dir. Ben Ulm (Film Australia, Australian Film Commission, the National Film and Sound Archive, and Nine Network Australia, 1999); Wendy McCarthy, *A Fair Go: Portraits of the Australian Dream* (Edgecliff, 1999); Godfrey Hodgson, *More Equal Than Others: America from Nixon to the New Century* (Princeton, 2004), 119.

^[4]Norman Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend: A Study of Australian American Relations between 1900 and 1975* (St. Lucia, 1987), ix–x, 312–37; Stuart MacIntyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge, Eng., 2004), 230–31.

^[5]Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill, 1982). For other works on American history produced by Australian-based scholars, see Shane White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering American*

History through Songs, Sermons, and Speech (Boston, 2005); John A. Salmond, "My Mind Set on Freedom": A History of the Civil Rights Movement (Chicago, 1997); Timothy J. Minchin, From Rights to Economics: The Ongoing Struggle for Black Equality in the U.S. South (Gainesville, 2007); and Clare Corbould, Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919–1939 (Cambridge, Mass., 2009). I have selected works here with a racial theme, but Australian scholars have published many others; John A. Salmond alone has produced thirteen books on various aspects of U.S. history. The work of Ian Tyrrell should also be noted, especially Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill, 1991).

[6] Along with Warren Ellem, these four staff members taught American history at La Trobe University for many years, but all have now retired. Along with Claudia Haake, who specializes in Native American history, I am now primarily responsible for teaching the subject. Haake's courses also engage racial issues.

[7] Peter Bastian, "anzasa Forty Years On," *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 23 (July 2004), 3–4.

[8] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, 91 (March 2005), 1233–63; Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972* (Athens, Ga., 1995), xii. Timothy J. Minchin and John A. Salmond, "Moving to the Land of Freedom: Federal Policy and Black and White Southerners in an Era of Change, 1965–2007" (Lexington, Ky., forthcoming).

[9] For example, see Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1964), 1015–18; and Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2000).

[10] For an informative study of the 1967 referendum, see Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power, and the Australian Constitution* (Canberra, 2007), esp. vi–viii, 54–64. For an engaging account of the Australian freedom ride from one of its participants, see Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (Crows Nest, 2002).

[11] For a series of excellent essays on reconciliation efforts in the United States, see Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, eds., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens, Ga., 2006). For Kevin Rudd's apology, see *Saying Sorry: The Day the Nation Cried*, prod. Richard Frankland, Sky News (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, May 25, 2008). For text of the apology, see "The Apology," Feb. 12, 2008, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/events/apology/text.htm>.

[12] According to Joseph Crespino, the traditional emphasis on white resistance to black rights "reduces history to a morality tale. . . ignores ongoing struggles for racial justice, and . . . oversimplifies white reaction to the civil rights struggle." Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, 2007), 4. For other recent works that focus on whites, see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2006); and Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945–1975* (New York, 2006).

[13] For some of the differences between the powers of the states in Australia and America, see Geoffrey Sawer, *The Australian Constitution* (Canberra, 1988), 103–6.

[14] Anonymous student feedback form, U.S. Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968, semester 2, 2005 (copy in Timothy J. Minchin's possession). *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years*, prod. Harry Hampton (Backside Productions, 2006, digital video disc, 7 discs; pbs Video).

[15] See the Southern Poverty Law Center Web site, <http://www.splcenter.org>.

[16] The book that I refer to is Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Cambridge, Eng., 2008). In June 2008, I also attended the launch of Ernest F. "Fritz" Hollings and Kirk Victor's *Making Government Work* (Columbia, S.C. 2008). Ernest Hollings retired from the U.S. Senate in 2005, but his visit to a university library attracted an obvious security presence.

[17] Voting in Australia is compulsory in all federal, state, and local elections, although compulsion at the state and municipal levels occurred later than at the federal level. In state elections, for example, Victoria adopted compulsory voting in 1926, followed by New South Wales and Tasmania in 1928, Western Australia in 1936, and South Australia in 1942. For a full discussion of compulsory voting in Australia, including its

history, see John Hirst, *Australia's Democracy: A Short History* (Crows Nest, 2002), 321–27 (statistics on p. 325, quotation on p. 327).

[18] “ncls Releases Latest Estimate of Church Attendance,” Feb. 28, 2004, ncls Research, <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2106>. For verification of this figure, see also “Couch Life,” *Melbourne Age*, April 4, 2009, sec. A2, p. 48.

[19] James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York, 2005), 143–44, esp. 144.

[20] First appearing on U.S. coinage in 1864, “In God We Trust” was made the official national motto in 1956. For an overview of the history of the term, see “History of ‘In God We Trust,’” U.S. Department of the Treasury, <http://www.ustreas.gov/education/fact-sheets/currency/in-god-we-trust.shtml>.

[21] Sawer, *Australian Constitution*, 138–40; George Williams, *A Bill of Rights for Australia* (Sydney, 2000), 7–14.

[22] Anonymous student feedback form.

[23] For an excellent history of indigenous Australians that brings their long struggle for equality up to date, see Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Domination, 1788–2001* (Crows Nest, 2002).

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Paul Quigley

University of Edinburgh

When I moved from North Carolina to Scotland two years ago, I was not especially worried about culture shock. I had grown up in northern England, only a couple of hundred miles away from Edinburgh, where I was to take up a position teaching U.S. history. But I did anticipate—with mixed feelings—a sort of pedagogical culture shock. Having completed my Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (unc) and having taught my first few courses in its vicinity, I was used to seeing American history through American eyes, or at least presenting it to American audiences. But what about teaching the subject in an Edinburgh classroom? With only hazy recollections of how American history had looked from my perspective as a British undergraduate years earlier, I worried. Would I pitch my lectures and discussions to the wrong level? Would I make the mistake of assuming too much prior knowledge? Or too little?

My main areas of expertise, secession and the Civil War, presented special concerns. In North Carolina there had been no need to think about the basics. Students knew what the Civil War was, when it had happened, who had won. They knew there was a North and a South, that the two had fought, that the Union had been preserved and slavery abolished, that the legacies of the conflict continued to influence American identity, politics, and culture. But British students might need to be led through much of this from scratch.

But as I prepared for my move, the results of the 2007 elections in the United Kingdom awakened me to the potential benefits of teaching the Civil War in Scotland. That year, the Scottish National party (snp) won a plurality of seats in the Scottish parliament and snp leader Alex Salmond became first minister. I would be teaching about secession and its consequences in a country whose own secession movement had just received a major boost. Think of the possibilities for cross-fertilization! My students and I would be continuing an old tradition of drawing connections between Scotland and the Confederacy. Mark Twain went a little far in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) when he blamed the Civil War on Sir Walter Scott, but the link was not completely groundless. Some white southerners had been captivated by Scott's romances of noble Scots fighting against oppression. Confederates took further inspiration from Scotland in their battle flag—a more colorful, star-studded version of the blue-and-white St. Andrew's cross. More recently, their neo-Confederate descendants have claimed a Scottish connection too. Encouraged by Grady McWhiney's thesis of a neat cultural continuity from Britain's Celtic periphery to the American South, neo-Confederates have claimed a Scottish heritage that in their eyes bolsters their political agenda. They even persuaded the Scottish Tartans Authority to authorize a Confederate memorial tartan. And it was Mississippi senator Trent Lott who spearheaded the creation of an annual "Tartan Day" in the United States.^[1] Tenuous as they were, the historic links between Scotland and the American South could work to my advantage in the classroom. Imagine the insightful, animated, even effervescent discussions we would have about Southern secession—surrounded ourselves by a secession movement in full swing.

Unfortunately, imagining such classroom exchanges was as far as my plans went. On numerous occasions I have encouraged my students to compare Scotland's separatism with the South's—to little avail. It is not that they are uninterested in Southern secession; it is more that they are uninterested in the snp's crusade, viewing it as a pipe dream. (Many of my students are English; the city of Edinburgh, and especially its university, is a type of genteel colony for the well-heeled citizens of southern England.) In any case, my hopes for stimulating classroom discussions were dashed. I realized that instructors can assume too much about the influence of contemporary contexts on their students' engagement with the past.

One can also assume too little. The underlying premise of teaching U.S. history abroad is that there are consequential differences in the ways that students from various backgrounds approach a given historical subject, and it is worth taking those differences into account.^[2] In a crude and unscientific way, I survey such

differences at the beginning of each course. I divide the students into small groups and ask them to define, in one sentence, the major significance of the American Civil War.

American students' responses tend to fall into one of two categories: either the Civil War was fought over slavery—end of story—or the war was fought over states' rights (and definitely not over slavery). These categories tend to be mutually exclusive, and sometimes, but not always, they are determined by students' regional backgrounds. Because popular U.S. interpretations of the Civil War focus on the question of whether the war was fought over slavery, it can be difficult to teach about the subtleties of a war that clearly was about slavery, but not about slavery for all participants and not in the same way at different points in time. "Slavery: yes or no?" is a question phrased in a way that hides all the answers. One of my most disheartening student evaluations came from a UNC undergraduate who had enjoyed the course and was especially grateful for the wisdom that the Civil War, contrary to her preconceptions, had not been about slavery after all. She had merely jumped from one category to its binary opposite, and, in doing so, had missed the real complexities of the story.

At the University of Edinburgh my "significance of the Civil War" exercise has elicited a different set of responses. Surprisingly, slavery and emancipation are rarely mentioned. Instead, at the outset of their study of the Civil War, British students tend to see its significance either in terms of global military history—as a precursor to the "total" wars of the twentieth century—or as a stage in the emergence of a unified American nationalism and a powerful central government. Their interest in the international perspective is a natural result of their location outside the United States. I suspect that British students emphasize the importance of the consolidation of the Union because this theme reminds them of their own history. Britain's history of separatism and national consolidation shapes, to some degree, my students' approach to the American Civil War. Present-day Scottish secessionism may not mean very much to them, but the narrative of convergence around a unifying nationalism—a narrative they instinctively apply to the United States as well as the United Kingdom—does.

At the University of Edinburgh the single-sentence definitions tend to be rather vague; British students enter the classroom with less knowledge about the subject than their American counterparts. But this does not necessarily make them inferior. When I asked my current students for their thoughts on teaching American history outside the United States, one of them said, "We bring a different set of misconceptions to the topic." Though I might be a little more charitable and replace "misconceptions" with "preconceptions," he is fundamentally correct. British preconceptions are different, not inferior. For one thing, that Edinburgh students represent a relatively blank slate on the "slavery: yes or no?" question has made the development of a more complex understanding of the relationship between slavery and the Civil War easier. And even as they differ in significant ways, American and British students' preconceptions can actually be quite similar in other, also significant ways. *Gone with the Wind* (novel, 1936; film, 1939) is almost as well known in Scotland as it is in the United States, as are more recent productions such as *Glory* (1989) and *Cold Mountain* (novel, 1997; film, 2003).^[3]

Indeed, although cultural preconceptions can make a difference, I have found practical circumstances to be more important. Here I am thinking of issues such as the availability of resources, methods of assessment, and what the experts would call the teaching and learning cultures of different institutions. At UNC, for example, I assigned specific readings for each syllabus topic, drawn primarily from books that students are expected to purchase. But at the University of Edinburgh, required book purchases are uncommon. Instead, instructors provide a list of optional readings and each student picks those that are most interesting. Each system has its advantages and drawbacks. The American way leads to focused, in-depth discussions of one or two readings, whereas the British method, when it works properly, produces broad exchanges of ideas drawn from an extensive range of readings. Different cultures of instruction and learning have influenced my teaching at least as much as the differing cultural preconceptions that might, at first glance, seem more significant.

Whether measured by the number of books in the library, the number of courses offered, or the quantity of lectures and conferences available, students of U.S. history in the United States have access to more resources and opportunities than do students in Britain. Of course, the Internet is making available a wide range of secondary literature and primary documents that students all over the world can access in precisely the same

way. Even so, inequity remains. One of my best teaching experiences in North Carolina was a small undergraduate seminar on the Civil War era at Duke University. The opportunities for special activities outside the classroom were astounding. One of the assigned books was the edited diary of a female slaveholder. The special collections section of Duke's library happened to own the original, and the class was able to view the manuscript and, with expert staff guidance, compare it to the edited version. Several students went back to special collections—presumably walking there from their dorm rooms—to read other original manuscripts for their research papers. One day, I cancelled class so that my students and I could attend a Civil War conference, replete with famous historians, on the Duke campus. It is difficult to imagine a richer environment in which to teach the American Civil War. Edinburgh cannot, understandably, offer these kinds of extras. Even so, teaching this subject is not a poorer experience, for myself or for my students, because of the relative lack of resources. Although Edinburgh might lack the special collections and the conferences, it does boast its own statue of Abraham Lincoln, erected in the 1890s in honor of Scottish soldiers who had fought for the Union. I visited the statue with my most recent crop of Civil War students and, at Lincoln's feet, we had a memorable conversation about the Great Emancipator, including discussion of his international reputation. The grim Edinburgh drizzle, such a stark contrast to the storied "Carolina blue" skies of Chapel Hill and Durham, somehow made the experience even more rewarding—perhaps by evoking the tragedy of the Civil War and the unfulfilled promise of emancipation.

Inside and outside the classroom, I use whatever resources I can to help my students grapple with the past. Whether in Edinburgh or North Carolina, this process involves my attempt to impart what small wisdom I have managed to accumulate, students reading on their own and listening in the classroom, and all of us talking together to try to better understand this momentous event. Students' backgrounds and cultural contexts do influence the way they approach historical topics, especially controversial ones such as the American Civil War. Practical issues such as resources and teaching methods make a difference, too. But my day-to-day teaching concentrates on nineteenth-century events, not on twenty-first-century contexts. When all is said and done, students are still students, the Civil War is still the Civil War, and the two come together in broadly similar ways whether the classroom window looks out onto Carolina blue or Edinburgh grey.

[1] Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa, 1988); Euan Hague, "The Scottish Diaspora: Tartan Day and the Appropriation of Scottish Identities in the United States," in *Celtic Geographies: Old Cultures, New Times*, ed. David C. Harvey, et al. (London, 2002), 139–56, esp. 149–51; Diane Roberts, "Your Clan or Ours?" *Oxford American*, 29 (Sept.–Oct. 1999), 24–30, [http://templeofdemocracy.com/YourClanOrOurs .htm](http://templeofdemocracy.com/YourClanOrOurs.htm). A sample of the Confederate memorial tartan can be viewed at "Tartan Details: Confederate Memorial," *The Scottish Register of Tartans*, <http://www.tartanregister.gov.uk/tartanDetails.aspx?ref=732>.

[2] For a helpful discussion—albeit one that does not cover the issue of national backgrounds—see Peter Filene, *The Joy of Teaching: A Practical Guide for New College Instructors* (Chapel Hill, 2005), 13–22.

[3] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York, 1936); *Gone with the Wind*, dir. Victor Fleming (Selznick International Pictures, 1939); *Glory*, dir. Edward Zwick (TriStar Pictures, 1989); Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (New York, 1997); *Cold Mountain*, dir. Anthony Minghella (Miramax Films, 2003).

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Learning about Civil War, Separatism, and Nation Building through Teaching in the Turkish Republic

Tim Roberts

Western Illinois University

Like many college students around the world, students in Turkey are familiar with American popular culture, whether they like it or not, but have little sense of American history, particularly history before the Cold War. They may have heard anecdotes of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Woodrow Wilson, but the first president whose policies mean much to them is Harry S. Truman, whose anticommunism influenced Turkey through the Marshall Plan and the dispatch of the massive USS Missouri to Istanbul in 1946, partly as a sign of support in the early Cold War. In the words spoken to me by a Turkish colleague at Bilkent University, a secular private university in a suburb of the nation's capital, Ankara, "it seemed the first time anyone had ever stood up for us." An observer today can still find Turkish memorabilia with the name "Mizuri." Unusual outside North America and Western Europe, Bilkent's history department offers several courses in American history at the graduate level. From 2002 through 2008 I was responsible for its components in the colonial period, the early republic, and the Civil War.

While they are on foreign ground regarding the pre-1945 American past, Turkish students are all too aware of important issues with which Americans in the Civil War era grappled—the problems of unifying a republic and of recognizing the existence and rights of minorities. These are "common anxieties of rule" in postcolonial societies. At the cost of sectional destruction, the Civil War basically solved Americans' anxiety about national unification and at least partly solved the question of race and citizenship. Similar, or perhaps analogous, issues in present-day Turkey enlivened my teaching there of the American national crisis, providing "fresh perspective on what was at stake in similar American conflicts in the past."^[1]

Three developments in Turkey in particular influenced my teaching about the Civil War. First, the country has changed rapidly in the last few decades, with cable television and the Internet enabling Turks to learn more about world events and to deliberate about their country's direction. Many Turks have rethought the wisdom or at least the legacy of their country's strong support of the United States during the Cold War. A punctuating moment in this debate came in March 2003, when the Turkish parliament voted to reject the U.S. request to use Turkey as a base for intervention in Iraq. Second, the Justice and Development party, or AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), first elected in 2002, has advocated Turkey's joining the European Union, the privatization of industries, and restraint of the political power of the Turkish military. Critics of the AKP allege that the party has an Islamic agenda because it has encouraged temperance, awarded contracts to businesses professing Islamic practices, and ensured that female students may wear headscarves at universities, as a form of religious expression. Third has been the chronic conflict between the Turkish military and militants of the Kurdistan Workers' party, or PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan), whose goal since the 1980s has been to create autonomy along the Turkish borders with Iraq, Syria, and Iran, where the 12 million Kurds in Turkey are the majority. Regional separatism outside the United States is hardly a matter merely for historians. The Turkish government considers the PKK a terrorist organization. These developments complicate the legacy of the establishment by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk of Turkey as a culturally Islamic yet officially secular republic in 1923. On four occasions the Turkish military has intervened in civilian government to maintain Kemalist principles, and it threatened to do so again in 2008. The AKP's ascension and the rumbling struggle among Islamic, ethnic separatist, and hypersecular military forces once prodded a Turkish colleague to mutter to me, "Perhaps we need a civil war."^[2]

At the risk of assuming too much about the influence of contemporary contexts, I adopted a strategy of teaching about the American past often through crossnational analogies. I asked Turkish students to reflect on how recent debates over foreign relations, the public role of religion, and the rights of minority groups could help them understand the Civil War, as well as offer perspective about the development of their own country.

Turkish students, like their American counterparts, come to American history in terms of their own culture.^[3] Not surprisingly, I found students interested in the transnational aspects of the conflict. Both the North and the South were part of a global cotton economy, although in different ways, a circumstance that helped generate classroom discussion about what Northerners and Southerners desired from their relations with European powers. Partly because of their ambivalence about U.S. imperialism today, students were interested in the Confederacy's attempts to ally with Britain—withstanding similarities between Britain's status in the nineteenth century and the American position today.

Students were more reluctant to consider the efforts of northern reformers to limit or abolish slavery as a moral evil. My (admittedly provocative) characterization of abolitionism as a religious crusade, not only in the United States but also in the broad Atlantic world, generated little enthusiasm in the classroom, an apathy revealing of students' skepticism about crusades, even though radical abolitionism normally was pacifist. Reflecting secular students' opposition to the alleged Islamic agenda of the AKP government, one student wrote, "Religion has always been a good tool for the people who want to lead masses. . . . [the] Catholic Church used religion, Ottomans used religion, Iran uses religion, [the] AKP uses religion, and [President George W.] Bush uses religion."

I was also struck, however, by students' lack of interest in slavery, either the internal history of the slaves themselves or the story of why white Americans would oppose or defend slavery for reasons other than purely economic ones. The Ottoman Empire practiced slavery until the late nineteenth century, when Western pressure against the international slave trade and the Ottomans' traditional practice of manumitting slaves after a period of service, somewhat similar to the Western system of indentured labor, gradually and nonviolently abolished slavery in the Ottoman Empire. The topics of Ottoman slavery and antislavery have not received the interest in Turkey that their American counterparts have received in the last generation. Only recently have African Turks formed associations and begun to create identity networks and scholarship on their hidden history. Few scholars can read Ottoman Turkish to research archives about slavery. And "race" is a complicated concept in Turkey, not often discussed in the public sphere. Thus I struggled to impress on students the centrality of racial slavery as a cause of violent national upheaval in America.^[4]

Instead, students tended to interpret the outbreak of the Civil War as a reflection of competing sectional economic interests. In an online discussion one student wrote, "There was a huge structural gap between [the] North and South. . . . New England and the Middle Atlantic states engaged in trade, banking, and industry. . . . However, [the] primary production of the South was cotton . . . sugar production in Louisiana; and tobacco in [the] Border States. . . . [the] North was like a boss, South [the] employee. This was increasing hostility." In a debate about the war's origins another student stated, "We aren't arguing about the morality of slavery, just the causes of the war." And in a history department graduate seminar, a student argued that Charles Beard's view of the war as the triumph of industrial capitalism, without any focus on race and slavery, still provided the best explanation of the Civil War.

Even less likely to receive sympathetic understanding among Bilkent students were the Civil War topics of "states' rights" and Southern secession, sentiments that transparently revealed students' sensitivity to contemporary political events. Fighting between PKK insurgents and Turkish military forces has killed more than 40,000 people. The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society party, or DTP (Demokratik Toplum Partisi) has been banned from Parliament, and it is illegal to display a flag that Kurdish separatists deem their national flag. (I do not believe that the Confederate flag, occasionally visible among protest groups in Europe, is present in southeastern Turkey, the area of most violence in this ongoing conflict.) However, mainstream Turks regularly unfurl large Turkish flags. After a particularly violent month in the spring of 2008, Bilkent students, normally apolitical compared to students at Turkish state universities, were moved to perform this action at an on-campus antiterrorism rally.^[5]

Students' conflicted attitudes about central governments' use of force to compel national security complicated their understanding of the Union's military invasion of the Confederacy to prevent Southern independence. Opposition to the U.S. occupation of Iraq as well as the Israeli militarization of Palestinian territory emerged in discussions about President Lincoln's determination to reunify the country. But students sympathized with a chief executive committed to preventing people in one part of the country from acting on their claim of

irreconcilable difference from the majority.

Lincoln's apparent reluctance to punish the South at the time of his death, moreover, resonated with students and legitimized his use of force. On this point, comparisons between him and Atatürk proved useful. At Gettysburg, Lincoln offered a bipartisan eulogy for "the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here," and his famous words in his second inaugural address called for blind charity to create a "just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." Atatürk's speech in 1934 commemorating the World War I Çanakkale Savaşları between Turks and Anzacs, known in the West as the battle of Gallipoli, echoed Lincoln: "Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives. You are now living in the soil of a friendly country. . . . There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side, here in this country of ours. You, the mothers, who sent their sons from faraway countries, wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land, they have become our sons as well." Lincoln and Atatürk wielded dictatorial authority during national wars of survival, but both encouraged reconciliation to secure unity at home and peace abroad.^[6]

Students' civic familiarity with the Turkish hero helps them understand the challenges and achievements of his American counterpart, and study of Lincoln's disconcerting racial and religious attitudes as well as his measured use of force encourages a more analytical understanding of Atatürk. Such resort to comparative "great man" history helped me connect with students unaccustomed to looking critically at the past and unfamiliar with slavery and its legacies, but more knowledgeable than many American students about the unromantic problems of building a pluralistic democracy.

[1] Tim Roberts is an assistant professor of history at Western Illinois University. The author thanks Ufuk Özdağ for her comments on this essay and Paul Quigley for organizing the panel at the American Historical Association's 2009 meeting at which it was first presented.

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Balancing the Local and the Global: The American Civil War in Western Canadian Classrooms

Frank Towers

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Before arriving at the University of Calgary in the western Canadian province of Alberta in 2004, I taught Civil War history in the United States and in Turkey. My earlier experience cautions me against making too much of the national educational setting at the expense of issues that transcend a particular country. The local and national context that students bring to the classroom influences teaching and educates the instructor as much as the students. At the same time, teaching in Canada has made me more aware of how deeply some Civil War narratives have been embedded in global culture and how the war serves popular understanding of modernity.

Teaching the history of the Civil War outside the United States requires that instructors balance global themes with connections to the local world of their students. This claim should seem like a reasonable proposition about teaching American history internationally. It runs up against a popular emphasis, however, on adapting course content to the particular culture(s) of students, an emphasis that is itself a reaction against an older tradition of nationalist teaching that marked the beginnings of international U.S. history instruction. Early in the twentieth century, most international instruction in U.S. history occurred under the auspices of American religious and government agencies geared toward “spreading American political and cultural values.” After World War II, “cultural exchange” replaced cultural conversion as the guiding principle for teaching American history abroad. Factors influencing this change included an understanding of cultural difference as something to be respected rather than erased; an anticolonial theme in U.S. Cold War rhetoric aimed at countering suspicion of U.S. world hegemony; and scholarship that emphasized conflict and inequalities of power rather than consensus and contentment. Meanwhile, the growth of American studies internationally increased U.S. history offerings at non-American universities and employment opportunities for teachers unaffiliated with missionaries and Washington, D.C.[1]

Today, making U.S. history engaging for non-American students presents a greater challenge to teachers than does overthrowing the jingoism of an earlier time. To combat students’ perception of American history as irrelevant to their own experience, teachers working outside the United States advise that colleagues first recognize the cultural context that students bring to the classroom and then look for connections between the local setting and issues in the American past.[2]

In western Canada, this approach offers some thought-provoking parallels between the American Civil War and Canadian history. Foremost among them is the question of regional separatism. The Bloc Québécois, a self-described “sovereigntist” party that advocates “the full development of the Quebec nation,” is currently the third largest party in the Canadian parliament. To accommodate Quebec sovereigntists, in 1982 the federal parliament passed the “notwithstanding clause,” which, reminiscent of South Carolina’s nullification doctrine, allows a provincial veto on federal legislation.[3]

I teach in Alberta, not Quebec. That context matters as well. Calgary is the home base of the federal parliament’s current Conservative minority government. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has an economics degree from the University of Calgary, and some of his advisers are affiliated with the university (full disclosure: I am not one of them). Quebec separatists get little sympathy from students raised in the Anglophone West, which is ironic given the self-perception of some western Canadians as an aggrieved minority oppressed by the powerful central province of Ontario and the federal political establishment in Ottawa.[4] This grievance—and a political economy of commodity exports—are common threads between nineteenth-century southern fire-eaters and contemporary Albertans. Instead of cotton, tobacco, and sugar, Albertans sell oil, natural gas, and wheat. In both cases riches have accrued through free-trade policies in a world economy hungry for raw materials. Albertans can connect the politics of oil to the Confederacy’s hope

that its cotton embargo would bring diplomatic recognition from cotton-hungry Britain and France. And then there is slavery. Canada's status as the ultimate destination of runaway slaves and Great Britain's as an antislavery world power in the mid-1800s are points of national pride.^[5] This perspective feeds into a larger interest in the United States as a negative reference point for Canadian self-definition and makes Canadians more receptive than some U.S. students to considering northern nonslaveholders' complicity in slavery.

While these comparisons to the United States can generate discussion, students' familiarity with American mass culture sometimes makes the past seem more transparent than it really is. The proximity of Canada to the United States and the interdependence of the two economies—each is the other's largest trading partner—immerse Canadian students in American cultural as well as material exports. Shared media, language, and markets can lead Canadian students to assume greater knowledge of the U.S. past than they actually possess. U.S. history teachers in Canada share the task that an Americanist teaching in France described as “countering the cultural myths generated by consumerism and images from American films and television series.”^[6] The pitfalls of assumed knowledge manifested themselves in a class discussion of the long-term implications of African American military service for the Confederacy, a theme of Bruce Levine's *Confederate Emancipation*, which I had assigned.^[7] The students were largely unaware of political controversies over displaying the Confederate flag or of connections between states' rights rhetoric and twentieth-century segregation, and therefore had little feel for the present-day significance of neo-Confederate historiography. It took an American transfer student to make the connection between representations of slavery's past and the politics of the present.

Yet while the contemporary political implications of the Civil War are not always obvious in the Canadian classroom, the vestiges of Lost Cause and neo-abolitionist narratives are still there. Canadian students, like so many consumers of Civil War history, are interested in what that era says about modernity as embodied by the contemporary United States. Modern nationalism often celebrates a folk traditionalism to counterbalance progress toward a universal bourgeois norm.^[8] For Americans, the Old South has occasionally served that role. In treating the Confederacy as both a carrier of tradition and roadblock to progress, students pick and choose from Confederate Lost Cause and neo-abolitionist historiography. They recognize the evils of slavery but mourn the passing of agrarian life and are critical of the rise of industrial, urban society, which they regard as the legacy of Union victory.

To teach against the grain of this popular story means engaging students with economic historians' work on the value of slaves to the U.S. economy and slavery's compatibility with industrial capitalism; and intellectual historians' scholarship on the cosmopolitan, modernist outlook of secessionists and the defensive nationalism of northern Unionists. It also means considering the agrarian, rather than the industrial, roots of free-soil politics in the North, investigating Confederate industrialization, and exploring the moral conduct of the war. All of these themes disrupt the narrative of the Civil War as a noble blood sacrifice in which 600,000 lives and rural innocence were given up so that equal rights and industrial progress could come to pass. That impression of the Civil War pervades American culture as much as it does global culture, and most new scholarship that takes on this received wisdom has yet to appear on course syllabi in the United States or outside of it.^[9]

In challenging this conventional wisdom, teaching the American Civil War in Canada is more similar to teaching it in the United States than it is different. Students live simultaneously in the globalizing contemporary world and in their own local and national cultures. Making connections between narratives pertinent to the 1860s in the United States and the students' national past teaches a great deal, just as understanding the implications of the Civil War era helps answer broader questions of how the world of today emerged out of the nineteenth century.

^[1]Frank Towers is an associate professor of history at the University of Calgary. The author thanks Paul Quigley for organizing the round table that generated this essay. Paul also provided valuable comments on earlier drafts, as did Scott Casper, Tim Roberts, Jewel Spangler, and the JAH staff.

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