An interview between Pekka Hämäläinen, Rhodes Professor of American History, and Sir John Elliott, FBA, Regius Professor Emeritus of History

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Pekka Hämäläinen: Sir John, thank you for taking the time to sit down with me. This interview was occasioned and inspired by a very special event: the launching of the annual Sir John Elliott Lecture in Atlantic History, which you inaugurated in May here at the Rothermere American Institute with your wonderful talk, 'Spanning the Atlantic'. This lecture series will become a major Oxford and RAI institution; it will stimulate and sustain the study of Atlantic history and American history here in Oxford and beyond. I'm therefore delighted to have this opportunity to discuss some of the ideas you presented in your lecture. May we begin with a brief overview of your career and your development as a historian? What was the initial draw, the attraction of history for you?

Sir John Elliott, FBA: I think I always had some sort of historical sense. I would read romantic accounts of the history of the British Isles as a child, but at school I switched from classics to modern languages — French and German. When I went up to Cambridge in 1949, I thought that it would be a good idea to switch to history because of my lingering, longstanding interest in it. I did the Cambridge historical tripos — a three-year course — which introduced me to a lot of questions: European history, British constitutional and economic history, history of political ideas, and so on.

At the end of my first year as an undergraduate, I saw in the university undergraduate newspaper that a group of undergraduates had acquired an old army truck and were going to go around the Iberian Peninsula for the summer vacation. So I hopped on, and we spent six weeks going right round Spain and Portugal. I was very gripped by Spain and felt that there might be interesting prospects for research here if I ever were to become a professional historian, which I wasn't really thinking about at that time. In the end I decided that I would work on the history of Spain and I was particularly interested in the seventeenth century and the Count-Duke of Olivares, a Spanish statesman of the first half of the [seventeenth] century, a major European figure.

I went off to Spain to the archives and spent two years in the Spanish archives working on early seventeenth-century Spain, Spain between 1600 and 1640. And I got a fellowship at Trinity College and a University teaching post at Cambridge. Then I moved to the chair of history at Kings College London in 1968, and at that time I'd been asked to give the Wiles Lectures in Belfast. I thought that while a lot of people had worked on the history of the impact of Europe and particularly Spain on America, much less had been done on the impact of America on Europe and on Spain. I devoted those lectures to the Old World and the New — the interaction of Europe and America in the

sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century, and particularly the impact of the discovery of America on the European economy, European politics and European consciousness.

I had already got this interest in what you might call the Atlantic world, and indeed one of the chapters in that book, *The Old World and the New,* was called the "Atlantic World". On the whole I found, as I was working on Spain, that although a great deal had been done by Spanish historians on Spanish America, they were very compartmentalised from those working on history of Spain. Spanish and Spanish American history were separate university departments. I felt from an early stage, and especially after writing that book, that it was very important to keep the two together and look at them in tandem rather than as isolated units.

I'd already done a grand tour of Spanish America, a sort of research tour, on my first sabbatical from Cambridge in 1963-4, and been right round Spanish America, so I got a sense of the excitement and the possibilities of the history of Latin America, and particularly of colonial Spanish America. Then I went to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, where I was from 1973 to 1990, and my first priority was to complete the study I was doing of early seventeenth-century Spain and my political biography of the Count-Duke of Olivares, and everything related to the culture and the arts of Spain in the period. And when I finished that book, which came out in 1986, I was thinking about other subjects and I thought that I'd like to go back to this question of the relationship between Europe and America. Particularly as an Englishman living in North America and surrounded by the relics of British colonial society I thought it would be very interesting to compare the British and Spanish experiences of colonisation in the New World.

I decided to undertake an extremely ambitious project, a sustained comparison of British and Spanish America from the beginnings of conquest and colonisation right up to the winning of independence in the late eighteenth century for British America, and between 1810 and 1830 for Spanish America – the year when Bolívar died. Working on that, I got very excited about the possibilities. I had always been interested in comparative history and how much could be done by way of comparison to illuminate the past.

When I came to Oxford in 1990, I began teaching a course on the conquest and colonisation of Peru and Mexico, a very successful and popular course that I inherited. And I kept up this interest and I wanted to relate it — and perhaps we will talk about this later — to the project that was then being formed when I arrived, for the establishment of what is now the Rothermere American Institute.

PH: You have written that a historian's development is more than a sum total of intellectual influences; personal experiences and sensibilities play an important role as well. In your case, you have talked about the allure of the unfamiliar, even the strange, especially during your first visit to Spain. That seemed to be a formative experience in your process of becoming a historian.

JE: Well, I suppose all historians are consumed by curiosity and probably it goes with the personality. I did find Spain in the early 1950s a very different and alien society from what I had been brought up in, particularly given the oppression of the Franco regime. It was a society just beginning to recover from the devastation and tragedy of the Civil War. It was something quite new to me. In

particular, as I was working in Catalonia because my research thesis was on the revolt of Catalonia against the government of Madrid in 1640, I very much identified myself with the Catalans, who were deeply oppressed by the Franco regime and there were prohibitions on the use of their language. So I found myself sympathising very much with Catalan society, and I learned Catalan. But at the same time the kind of historical research I was doing tended to subvert and undermine the very romantic nationalist tradition, which was dominant in Catalan historiography of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.

PH: Your career as a practicing historian spans six decades and counting. Which historiographical "schools" or approaches have you found most influential to your own thinking, and why? It seems to me that, while impressed and influenced by a number of historiographical schools, you have tended to adopt their approaches rather selectively? Would that be a fair assessment?

JE: I think that's fair. When I started on my historical career, the dominant school was the "Annales School". Fernand Braudel's *Mediterranean* had a great impact on me when it came out in French in 1949. The concept of "total history" was very much with me from those early years. I was even more impressed by Lucien Febvre, who wrote a history of the Franche-Comté under Philip II, which was in a rather comparable situation to that of Catalonia, and I found this an extremely useful book. At the same time, the most exciting historians in the British Isles were Marxist, or at least *Marxisant***.** Again there was this desire for total history. I was never a determinist and rejected many Marxist approaches, but at the same time I was impressed by the Marxist desire to recapture the entirety of the past, or "total history". In 1958, Eric Hobsbawm invited me to join the board of *Past and Present*, which was then not doing well in terms of circulation because it was thought to be so Marxist. Lawrence Stone, Trevor Aston, and I came in under certain conditions, including dropping the subtitle of "A Journal of Scientific History". None of us were determinists in that way. I've learnt an enormous amount from being on the editorial board of *Past and Present*, reading innumerable articles.

PH: Cultural approaches and contingency have played a central role in your thinking. You have written that you find theory less important for the writing of good history than the ability — or willingness — to enter the life of a society far removed from one's own time and place. How has this notion or conviction shaped your career and the books you have written?

JE: There is a British tradition of pretty pragmatic history, and I fell into that, no doubt. I know I raised a number of hackles in my recent book *History in the Making* when I made a number of comments about theory. But I find that a lot of theory, particularly in French historiography at the beginning of the period on which I was working, seemed to be getting in the way. It was all too thesis-directed, too theoretical. It seemed to me, that to immerse oneself in society from every point of view as I tried to do in that of seventeenth-century Spain, opened more doors in the long run than an approach that was dominated by the current trends and fashions of the moment.

PH: As you outlined earlier, gradually your focus expanded from Spain to the Atlantic and the Americas. This may seem like a natural or even organic development in hindsight: we now know that European and American histories were joined together through the Atlantic framework. But this was

not necessarily such a natural step at the time you moved towards Atlantic history. What prompted you to make that leap, to broaden your interests? And how challenging was that leap?

JH: My first interest was the Iberian Atlantic, and of course you've got this marvellous archive in Seville, the Archive of the Indies. It was a natural progression away from studying state papers about European politics in the 1620s or 30s to looking at the state papers dealing with the defence of America or the supply of silver and so on. So it was perfectly natural in a way. But I was very struck when I began to look into writing on North American history and on British history by how separate they were and how they had been kept separate. Just as Spanish and Spanish American history had been kept separate.

This wasn't true entirely with imperial history. Imperial and administrative history was the one area where the links were being constantly made in the first half of the twentieth century. I felt there were wider possibilities than that, and that perhaps a whole rethinking of imperial structure and the nature of colonisation was also called for. I've always been dead against very narrow administrative and institutional history. I felt that wasn't a way forward, but it's got to be taken into account. What I've always tried to do therefore is to combine various approaches in the light of where the documents lead me and the sort of things that interested me.

PH: Do you think such field-straddling nimbleness is still possible today? Or has the profession become too specialised? Today, historians tend to remain specialists of one society, one region and one period.

JE: I was very lucky in the sense that in the 1940s and 50s there were so many opportunities, especially in the history of Spain and the Hispanic world. The field was absolutely wide open and there were very few Spanish historians with the capacity, the time and the resources to work in the archives. I was enormously lucky and privileged from that point of view.

Obviously since then, many more universities have been established and many more resources became available for research in the "golden age" of the 1960, 70s, and 80s. There has been a proliferation of professional historians, a proliferation of theses and books. It has become much more difficult, I think, for young historians to carve out a niche for themselves. I think that's led to some unfortunate results — to premature publication in many cases. It's led to a rash of historians proclaiming their virtues from the housetops, trying to emphasise the importance of what they have done. I think all historians should be modest. We're doing relatively small things and one should be humble in approaching the evidence, one's colleagues and so on.

But it is much harder for a historian beginning today, from the point of view of finding space in this extremely overcrowded world — in terms of both historians and historical literature and research. That's much more of a challenge than it would have been to my generation. But that said, there are endless possibilities and opportunities still. After all, history is a constant process of rethinking the past and aspects of the past. There is always scope for reassessment, but it does need imagination and above all, as I suggested earlier on, it does need this sense of long-term immersion in a particular society so that you begin to attempt to feel as they feel, and react as they react, and to know what

their preoccupations were, as opposed to what our preoccupations are in terms of finding certain aspects of the past and working on them.

PH: Patience.

JE: Patience.

PH: Your Atlantic history has been very much comparative history. What drew you to comparative history initially? What was the intellectual or personal impulse?

JE: The pure fact of being a historian of Spain, writing for an Anglo-American audience, which had no interest in the history of Spain basically. One of the ways of doing it, a technique, is to try to relate the unfamiliar to the familiar where possible. And I think that led instinctively to making comparisons and making connections — and I think they are equally important. That's what I tried to do throughout my life — show that Spain was not as different as many generations of Spanish historians thought. Rather it was related to other parts of Europe. This has been a sort of leitmotif of my work: for instance, when I was writing my biography of Olivares and I was asked to give the Trevelyan Lectures in Cambridge, I decided a good thing to do, which would both help the writing of that biography and would illuminate certain aspects of Olivares' career, was to compare him with his immediate rival, Cardinal Richelieu. I wrote my book, *Richelieu and Olivares*, trying to see what was similar about their approaches, what was different, how far each influenced the other.

At the Institute for Advanced Study, as I began to think about my next project, this idea of a comparison between British and Spanish America, and different types of colonisation and conquest, struck me as an extremely interesting thing to attempt. I was extremely aware of how absurdly ambitious the enterprise was. I knew very little about the history of British colonisation of the New World when I started reading. It was very much a long-term project, which was only possible to complete after I'd retired from the Regius Chair here in 1997.

PH: This brings me to *Empires of the Atlantic World*. It's a monumental book — in ambition, scope, and sheer size. Could you tell us a little about the writing process? How did you research, conceptualise, organise and finally write the book?

JE: Goodness me. It is very difficult to reconstruct that. I wanted to keep a narrative going and to move forward through time because I think the difference between history and social science or political science is this sense of movement through time. That was a critical piece of my thinking at the very start of the project — I was going to begin in the fifteenth century and go up to the nineteenth and follow the stories through. Then I decided to divide the book into sections: I deal with conquest and colonisation, the period of the consolidation of those societies, and finally with what I called, and some people criticised me for this, "Emancipation" — emancipation particularly of the creole societies.

I was very much thinking of the settler elites and the creoles in Spanish America. At that time, one of the great breakthroughs in the history of the non-European world and the world conquered and

colonised by Europeans was the recovery of the voices of the vanquished. That I think has been very exciting, but it was in danger of swamping everything else. I felt the creoles and their considerations, and what the settlers were trying to do and the kind of societies they were trying to forge and create, were getting to some extent underrated in the story. That gave a particular direction to the book, and I don't know that I would have written it in quite the same way if I hadn't been somewhat preoccupied by what I thought was in danger of becoming an excessive emphasis on the underprivileged — on the indigenous peoples and slavery. And enormous strides were being made in the recovery of those narratives. But I wanted the settlers to continue to have their voices heard as well.

PH: It seems the historical field has shifted along those lines. What we are seeing more and more I think is how cyclical, even contingent, historiographical shifts can be. After the microhistorical turn, larger frameworks are coming back. And after the cultural turn, political history and political economy are in vogue once again. Would you say that this, the cyclical nature of scholarship, is the case in Atlantic history as well?

JE: I think it probably is. I suppose having been an historian for 60-odd years I have seen it all, you might say. As you say, things come and go and they go in cycles. I've learned to be very sceptical about fashion and trends.

PH: Not running after the newest thing.

JE: Not running after the newest. The solidity of the work is much more important than its fashionability. I've never wanted particularly to be in fashion. If we turn more generally to the history of America and the Americas, I think what's been more apparent is that there are various possible approaches. One is the sort of approach I took. There are problems that I've tried to explain in my lecture about where Atlantic history stops and whether it shouldn't be put into a wider, global context. There are other possible approaches — hemispheric histories, for example, which Felipe Fernández-Armesto attempted and are extremely difficult. But it goes back to the plea of Herbert Eugene Bolton in 1930-31, that we should have a history of all the Americas, an epic of America. There is the possibility, which you've been exploring so successfully, of continental and indigenous history, and I was struck both in your book and Paul Mapp's *The Elusive West*, by the large amount of the continent that was not dominated by the Europeans. Ultimately, there is the wider context of global history. If you look at these British settlers, colonists and merchants, they are going all over the world, just as the Spanish and Portuguese merchants are. To isolate geographically, even the New World, into an Atlantic context, or even that wider continental context, is still leaving out part of the story.

PH: Atlantic history is one of the great success stories of the late 20th-century historical profession, and you are at the centre of that story. How do you see the future of Atlantic history? How will or should the field evolve? What are some of its major challenges?

JE: The point I was trying to make in my lecture was that in many ways Atlantic history has been treated as the history of movement. I think I defined it in the collection of essays published by David

Armitage, *The British Atlantic World*, as a movement of people, commodities, cultural practices and ideas, around the Atlantic basin. I think that's not a bad definition. Looking at what's been published in recent years, it has very much emphasised movement, which is a fascinating subject. We do see a world on the move. There was an enormous amount of physical movement and movement of commodities.

But at the same time, this approach may be underplaying the role of the imperial centre and the role of coercion. Particularly for historians of Spain and Spanish empire, enormous structures and bureaucratic processes weigh heavily on these societies. The king might not get his orders obeyed, but at least there is a presence there, and the royal authority counts for something. Different groups in society are using that royal presence to fortify their own position vis-à-vis other parts of the society. The king is a constant point of reference — and I believe this occurs in the other European American empires. What I wanted to do, and was suggesting as a possible way forward in that lecture, was having another look at how ideas from the metropolis are either imposed or impose themselves on the colonial worlds. I do think there are real possibilities there.

A particular theme I was exploring in that lecture, as I thought of the need to illustrate it in some way, related to a conference held and organised by the Omohundro Institute a year or so ago in the University of Maryland. The theme of that conference was 'Political Arithmetic'. As I was preparing a paper for that lecture, my thought was that this could be terribly interesting, the way in which the economy and economic considerations began to dominate and influence the policy of European states, especially from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. This was partly under the impact of the Dutch, partly under the impact of theoretical work about mercantilism and mercantilist societies, and so on. Political economy and political arithmetic really moved to the forefront of imperial considerations in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as you get this rivalry of the great European empires in the New World. That was a theme I was trying to follow through in this particular lecture and I think there is a lot more that could actually be done on it. I was just scratching the surface.

PH: Centres, policy, silver — they mattered enormously. And not everything was in motion; people lived very local lives. This is sometimes forgotten in the recent scholarship. You have discussed the risk of losing precision that may come with the adoption of wider frameworks. And you have stressed the importance of grounding broadly conceived histories in local and regional dynamics.

JE: It is terribly difficult to do, but I think unless you have got a footing there, you are doing a sort of stratospheric history. This bird's eye view is one thing, but you also have to have your feet on the ground. How you combine them, I think, is the question everybody is trying to discover at this moment. We have come back, oddly enough, to publishing very large books: my former pupil Geoffrey Parker has just published this monumental book on the seventeenth century crisis as a global crisis — a remarkable achievement. He tries to link at every point the local and the regional with wider considerations, particularly climatic considerations, showing how the Little Ice Age had such an impact on so many seventeenth century societies from Ming China to Mexico and Peru. So here is somebody who is trying to do it; whether people will find it just too overwhelming remains

to be seen, because it is a massive amount of work — one of the largest bibliographies I've ever seen in any historical work. It's an extraordinary achievement in terms of erudition. Whether it's manageable for other themes and subjects, I don't know. At least climate has a global character.

PH: So the broad historiographical terrain in which Atlantic history exists is shifting. The marketplace for history — the demand and supply of different kinds of histories — is changing rapidly. Inspired by and building on Atlantic history, transnational history and global history are becoming increasingly popular. How do you see Atlantic history's place and position in this changing intellectual environment where we seem to have multiple, perhaps not competing but at least overlapping broad frameworks at play all at once?

JE: Well it's a broad framework within an even broader framework. As I suggested, I do think that these people were thinking globally: merchants might be trading in Asia but they might also be trading with Brazil. One has to bear that in mind. From the mid-sixteenth century onwards this was on their minds. When Cardinal Borja's son wrote to thank his father for the gift of a sphere, he said that he had not realized how small the world is. These people knew they were operating in a world in which the continents were being united as never before.

There was this awareness of a wider world, and of peoples who might be different from oneself and who had quite different approaches to what was regarded by Europeans as civilised behaviour and civilised attitudes. Then of course you get the whole question of relativism and its impact on religion. One needs to think in the broadest terms.

Even if you are working, say on religion, in the seventeenth century, you've got to bear in mind the missionary efforts and so on, and the way in which these may have had an impact on societies nearer home. If you sent your missionaries off in the sixteenth century to Mexico or Peru, what happens to the Moorish population in the Iberian Peninsula? The evangelising often became neglected, and this had an enormous impact on the failure to assimilate those Morisco communities. This is just an example of the way in which we must think globally, as they thought globally, from at least the mid-sixteenth century onwards.

PH: The arrows of influence cut both ways across the Atlantic — it is not only the Old World influencing and changing the New, but vice versa as well. This is perhaps becoming obscured.

JE: I tried to do it with my book, and there were various conferences on America in European consciousness. I think this theme has interesting possibilities and a lot of interesting work is being done: the recovery of Spanish science, for instance, in terms of their botanical expeditions. A lot more work is now being done on cartography, which again is a global subject with local implications.

PH: This may be a good time to talk a bit about post-graduate students and the training of future historians. How does one become an Atlantic historian or a comparative historian? You have said that writing sustained comparative history is a daunting task, and that it is not necessarily for the young.

JE: Yes, and I think I'd hold to that on the whole. But it seems to me that this is in no way a prohibition on thinking comparatively from the beginning. I think it's absolutely critical to get a sense of balance about their own work, that they should be comparing in their own minds. The German historian Jürgen Kocka has talked about "asymmetrical comparison": when you have a great deal of information about the society you are working on and very little about other societies, or almost none. This kind of asymmetrical comparison should encourage historians to think in comparative terms and ask: "how far does my society resemble or differ from another society and what light can the experiences of the other society throw on my own society?" I would encourage every graduate student to try to train himself or herself to think comparatively from the beginning, while knowing they've got to anchor themselves in that more local or regional context.

It is possible to do comparative work even at that stage. You could, for instance, compare two port cities. A very interesting book by Camilla Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities,* compares Baltimore and Guayaquil in the 1820's and 30's, examining why they go different ways and why Guayaquil doesn't take off in the way that Baltimore does. That sort of comparison, though it looks narrow, can open wider vistas. I am in favour of that, but I think again, because of the nature of the linguistic and other problems, it is tricky for a beginning graduate student.

PH: What kind of training or personality do Atlantic and comparative histories require? I'm asking because you have often talked about the practical and technical challenges of writing Atlantic and comparative history. Literatures are growing exponentially, and Atlantic and comparative histories demand the mastery of multiple literatures. Do you think we can train comparative historians? And what do you think the modern training of an Atlantic historian might look like?

JE: I think in place of Tony Blair's "education, education, education", I would say "language, language, language". They have got to learn other languages and that's one of the great defects at present of our training. And unfortunately, this has not been recognised in research grants. I did manage to get all my graduate students through in three years, but I absolutely forced them into Spanish archives at the earliest possible stage. It was a great strain for them, but they came out on the right side and managed those demands in three years. But it is now very difficult because there is more literature to be dominated, quite apart from the language. Learning foreign languages is absolutely critical — obviously there's a need to master the literature in so far as one can, and as we've said that is a much harder process than it was when I began. On the other hand, the new generation has the advantage, which my generation did not have, of online publications and digitalisation of archives. You have much more material accessible without travelling to foreign parts. It is an advantage in some ways but a disadvantage in others because you don't get that surrounding sense of a society you can only get from living in a country for some time, getting to know its people, its ways of thinking, its archives.

PH: It may result in abstract interpretations and approaches to Atlantic history. It might be time to pull back from that.

JE: I greatly admire American historians working on European history and they have done marvellous work. But you can see in some of their work that the lack of the opportunity to visit

Europe or spend more than a few weeks there has greatly devalued their contributions because they are having to put theory in place of what should be hard facts which they could have turned up in the archives. There is a constant danger there.

PH: You talked about the importance of space in your lecture, the vast spaces the early Spanish colonists and English colonists had to face in the New World. Can one write a history of the Spanish empire in the New World without actually travelling through those lands and experiencing tangibly its massiveness?

JE: The great Pierre Chaunu, I gather, never went to Latin America and did these monumental books on the history of Latin America. But I felt for myself that seeing the enormous spaces, trying to travel though the Andes by whatever method, you get a totally different sense of time, and of the variety of landscapes and variety of populations. Those nine months I had in Mexico and Peru, travelling around major Latin American countries, absolutely opened my eyes to this wider world.

PH: And you probably started to ask new kinds of questions.

JE: I think I did, yes. How do you control this space? Why did people still obey the king in this outlandish town, which was so difficult to get to? And yet the king's command was there.

PH: Finally, we might move from more intellectual to institutional issues. Atlantic history, along with its sister fields such as transnational history, doesn't always fit easily into conventional departmental structures, which are based on national or continental blocs and categories. What kind of institutional or departmental structure does Atlantic history need? In what kind of institutional setting can it thrive?

JE: It depends on if we are talking about undergraduate level or graduate level. At the undergraduate level, I just think it takes a willingness to break down the traditional disciplinary boundaries and the boundaries between departments which got fossilised at a certain moment. And that depends on the individual character of a number of the faculty who are willing to relate to other departments and make contact. And that will feed into your teaching.

I think graduate level is more difficult and I think there is a case here for an institute like the Rothermere Institute. I've always been worried about institutes because they very easily turn in on themselves and get enclosed. And then get fossilised. I've seen it happen in the States, I've seen it happen in this country. One needs a constant renovation of thought. When I came here the idea for the current Rothermere Institute was in existence and people were thinking about it. I was very anxious that it shouldn't just be an institute for the study of the United States or the colonial period of the United States, but should be a wider Atlantic one. I thought that the presence of Latin Americanists, or historians of Canada and so on, would prevent that sort of fossilisation and isolation which is one of the great dangers of such institutes.

For that reason, I'm delighted to see that under Nigel Bowles's direction this institute has been moving in that direction. I'm thrilled about the founding of these lectures because it will bring in that

wider Atlantic concept into an institute, which is always in danger of focusing excessively or exclusively on the United States. This sort of enlightened foundation for a lectureship or visiting fellowship, can be a way forward for keeping institutes, and this institute among them, alive. That's one way of doing it. Let's hope that twenty years from now we shall all be celebrating the enormous successes of the Rothermere over the decades.

PH: My final question has to do with the RAI and its future but also with Oxford as an intellectual space. Since your appointment as the Regius Professor of Modern History in 1990, Oxford has been a leading institution in Atlantic history. How do you think an institution like Oxford can best contribute to the field? What might be some of the specific strengths it should nurture? And I'm really thinking in terms of these new developments at the RAI with the increasing focus on the Atlantic world and the Americas in plural.

JE: The problem as we all know about Oxford is that everyone is so overworked. To leave your college teaching, or even your standard faculty lectures to come to seminars is time-consuming, but it is absolutely essential if Oxford history is to remain alive. I'm delighted to see these seminars on transnational and global history because they are drawing people from different faculties and different disciplines. But somehow space and time have got to be found. We all know it is extremely difficult in this university because of its collegiate structure. The collegiate structure has many strengths but it also is terribly time-consuming. There are also questions of loyalties and priorities, and everyone has to prioritise themselves.

PH: Graduate students' time is limited as well, especially with the relatively small financial packages we have had and the pressure to finish the DPhil in three years. You simply don't have the time to explore.

JE: That's tragic. But that is happening not just at Oxford but everywhere in the university world. And publications are going to suffer as a result. There are too many half-baked books coming out, too many articles that are just rediscovering the wheel. I think that wise research supervisors and tutors will warn their pupils against rushing into print. I know it's very difficult to get jobs now, but it is terribly important that they should be producing work of quality rather than quantity.

PH: This comes back to one of the themes we started with, which was patience and time.

JE: The history faculty has managed to keep itself abreast of the times and renovate itself. My great emphasis when I was in the chair was making the faculty slightly less British oriented or English oriented as it was then. The European dimension got more space and time. I was thinking ahead to the history of art and the ways in which that could be incorporated more into the faculty's life. And, indeed the history of the Americas. Progress has been made on all those fronts I think, so I remain optimistic.

PH: We do have many components in place. We have the Rothermere American Institute flourishing here. We have the Global History Centre. I guess what we need most is full coverage, all the continents.

JE: And not leave out Latin America. The Latin American chair should be filled, and soon!

PH: Sir John, Thank you so much.