

# Rothermere American Institute Annual Report 2020–21

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# Director's Foreword

Adam Smith

In my last Director's Note in summer 2020, I wrote that 'some generations objectively did deal with more turmoil than others' and suggested that maybe we are one of them. Looking back on our past academic year, it is clear that none of us have lived through times like this ever before: the two national lockdowns we have had in the UK, the rollout of the vaccination programme (with the vaccine developed at Oxford), and the disruption to and rethinking of every aspect of our lives. As well as a time of grief and isolation, it has brought out the best in many.

In Oxford, our usually bustling university buildings and college quads have been quiet. We continued to reorient our activities from in-person to virtual. Our teaching has been online for most of the year, with many of our students away from the university, learning from their homes. Navigating the constantly changing conditions of the pandemic has necessitated an enormous amount of creativity and flexibility on the part of students and staff, and I'd like to begin by sincerely thanking our RAI staff, Fellows and community for all of their efforts to keep things as normal as they can be for our students. I have been amazed at their indefatigability, good cheer and community spirit in the face of some profound challenges.

Here at the RAI, I believe that we have stepped up to those challenges. Our regular seminar series—the American History Research Seminar, the American Literature Research Seminar, and the Oxford Early American Republic Seminar (OxEARS)—all moved online and stayed online throughout the year. I'd like to thank the convenors of those seminars for the extra work this entailed: Dr Daniel Rowe, Professor Lloyd Pratt, Dr Nicholas Gaskill, Grace Mallon and Stephen Symchych. We have also brought in a new series, our RAI Fellows' Forum, enabling our visiting researchers to engage further with our community.

A further profound challenge affecting all of our activities was our response to the much-needed reckoning with race after the shocking events of last summer in the US. Our Kinder Junior Research Fellow Sonia Tycko worked with a student intern, Amelia Hart, to develop an 'America and Race' bibliography. You can read Sonia's reflections on the bibliography they created on pp. 8–9 of this report, but suffice it to say that this was a significant

contribution to rethinking how we teach issues of race in America to UK undergraduates. The roundtable Sonia organised featuring experts discussing the bibliography was well-attended and very positive about our initiative. Complementing this rethinking of our focus, one of this year's Graduate Scholars, Sage Goodwin, organised our very popular *The RAI Goes to the Movies* series around the topic of African-American filmmakers. The year-long series, where academics, filmmakers and practitioners discuss each film, has attracted large public audiences, and the event on the film *Moonlight* (2016) even attracted its Oscar-winning Director, Barry Jenkins, to tune in! You can read Sage's report on p. 17.

Aside from the pandemic and our ongoing thinking about racial politics and disparities, the political scene in the US is unrecognisable from that at the beginning of the year. Dr Mitch Robertson directed our flagship election series *America Decides* in Michaelmas Term. He brought together a stellar line-up of pollsters, journalists, academics and political strategists to analyse the presidential race, including the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Edsall, the polling analyst Dave Wasserman, the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Wesley Lowery, and the journalist Clare Malone. Following the success of *America Decides*, we organised a second series, *The Future of American Politics*. After the storming of the Capitol on 6 January, it became even clearer that this is a more important era than others in studying American democratic institutions. The inauguration of the new President has begun a new era, and we invited speakers including independent Presidential candidate Evan McMullin and the *Washington Post's* Jennifer Rubin to reflect upon it. These events attracted audiences from over 26 countries in large part because, as Mitch writes in his report on pp. 6–7, our speakers were 'able to break through the noise'. Both of these series—as well as many of our other events—are available on our YouTube channel (search for RAI Oxford).

We have also reflected on both timely and timeless questions about the idea of America and its exceptionalism in the four series of our RAI podcast *The Last Best Hope? Understanding America from the Outside In*, about which I write on pp. 10–11. Engaging with experts from around the world on America in a wide variety of fields for this





podcast has been one of the great pleasures of the last year, and I look forward to presenting a fifth series in the autumn. Our undergraduate student intern, Charlotte Moberly, produced a particularly fascinating short episode on Simone de Beauvoir's time in America and its impact on her life and work.

The third English lockdown meant that our Winant Lecture in American Government, which normally happens in February, couldn't happen until June, but we were very pleased to hold the lecture then, as our only hybrid event of the academic year. Robert Lieberman, this year's Winant Professor, gave an enormously illuminating and relevant lecture on 'The American Civil Rights State: The Role of Federal Power in the Pursuit of Racial Justice'.

This spring we also hosted our first graduate intern, Tangula Chambers, a MA student at Roehampton University, who organised this year's Congress to Campus events for schools. This year's event with former members of Congress Ann Marie Buerkle and Ben Chandler attracted over 200 attendees from across the UK, as Alice Kelly writes in her report on p. 18. Our arts and cultural programming has also attracted enormous audience participation, thanks to the work of Alice, our Communications and Events Officer. Our two RAI Book Clubs have been highlights, with the second one featuring the world-famous comics journalist Joe Sacco in conversation about his new book *Paying the Land*, about the Indigenous people and environment of the Canadian Northwest Territories. Finally, even in a year dominated by politics, the RAI has continued to host a number of high-profile literary and cultural events, including the international conference *Racialisation and the Media: From Television to Twitter*, organised by Sage Goodwin and Cindy Ma, and *Rhetorics of Reading: American Contexts and Methods in Literary Studies*, organised by Dr Nicholas Gaskill and Dr Rachel Malkin.

As you can see, supporting scholarship and public engagement activities that help us to understand the United States and its place in the world is part of the key mission of the RAI. In the past year we have sought to do this in numerous creative and reflective ways, from hiring student interns to creating podcasts to making all of our events welcome to the public. We can only continue to do this through the generosity of our donors. To my knowledge, the RAI is the only social science or humanities research institute in the UK to be funded entirely by private philanthropy. This is a huge advantage, not least for our ability to support the next generation of scholars. If you are in a position to contribute to the study of the US and its place in the world at this vital moment, please get in touch. I'm always pleased to speak to friends of the RAI around the world. You can contact me directly at [adam.smith@rai.ox.ac.uk](mailto:adam.smith@rai.ox.ac.uk). ■



# View from the Winant Chair

Robert Lieberman

This was certainly an unusual year to be the Winant Professor. I had originally planned to spend the entire academic year in Oxford, but the Covid-19 pandemic delayed my arrival plans until January. Then, on 4 January—the day I was supposed to fly to London—the prime minister announced a new national lockdown in the UK, and I postponed my travel once again. I finally arrived in Oxford in early March, as restrictions were beginning to ease, and as things loosened up here in England I was able to take advantage of the exceptional resources and collegiality of the Rothermere American Institute and wider University.

Even before I arrived, I began to participate in intellectual life in Oxford. In January, last year's Winant Professor, Margaret Weir, and I joined our colleague Professor Desmond King of Nuffield College on a Zoom panel on the priorities and challenges of the new Biden administration, part of the RAI's series on *The Future of American Politics*. Des King also invited me to co-teach a seminar for M.Phil. students on the Politics and Government of the United States. We had an excellent group of students, including students from Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey as well as the United States. Although most of our sessions took place remotely, I was delighted when Des and I were finally able to meet with our students in person in the Nuffield quad for a final revision session before their exams. (And I am happy to report that they all did well!).

Under this year's conditions, flexibility was the watchword, and that certainly applied to the arrangements for my Winant lecture. We scheduled the lecture for late in Trinity Term, in early June, in the hope that we would be able to assemble in person. But alas, the university's restrictions on large gatherings were still in place, so we had to adapt. I delivered the lecture—in full sub fusc and gown—from the podium in the RAI's seminar room, but with an entirely online audience (apart from my wife and one or two others in the room). In place of the customary dinner following the lecture, we gathered with friends and colleagues in the Balliol College Fellows' Garden for a delightful garden party (for which the famously mercurial English weather cooperated beautifully).

The lecture itself was entitled 'The American Civil Rights State: The Role of Federal Power in the Pursuit of Racial Justice'. Writing the lecture gave me an opportunity to lay out and develop a framework for a new book project on which Des King and I are embarking. The lecture drew on several strands of my previous work, including a series of papers that Des and I have written together about the nature of the American state and more recent work on the history of democratic crises in the United States (including my recently published book, co-authored with Suzanne Mettler, *Four Threats: The Recurring Crises of American Democracy*).

In the lecture, I asked why it was that, against a general background of racial oppression, the American state turned toward support for civil rights and racial democratization at two points in American history: Reconstruction after the Civil War, and what I call the 'Long 1960s', the period roughly from *Brown v. Board of Education* to the downfall of Richard Nixon. My provisional answer, which I explored in the lecture, was that these two eras were marked by the unusual convergence of four dimensions of the American state: its ability to set national standards, exert coercive force in order to enforce those standards, partner with private groups to pursue public aims, and deploy its taxing and spending authority to extend its power. Ordinarily, these four factors do not necessarily align with one another or point in the same direction, giving the American state its famous appearance of fragmentation and weakness. But when they do line up, as in the 'two Reconstructions', they can empower the state to promote transformational change in American society, including advancing toward racial equality. Even though we were not able to gather in person, I was delighted with the response to the lecture, particularly the probing comments and questions that I received from the Zoom audience, which will help Des and me as we develop this material further.

There were also other intellectual delights during the year, including regular sessions of the RAI's American History Research Seminar and Fellows' Forum, at which I was able to learn about the great research that other Rothermere colleagues are doing and hear a series of fascinating papers







President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act on 2 July 1964, with Martin Luther King and others looking on. (Cecil Stoughton, White House Press Office)

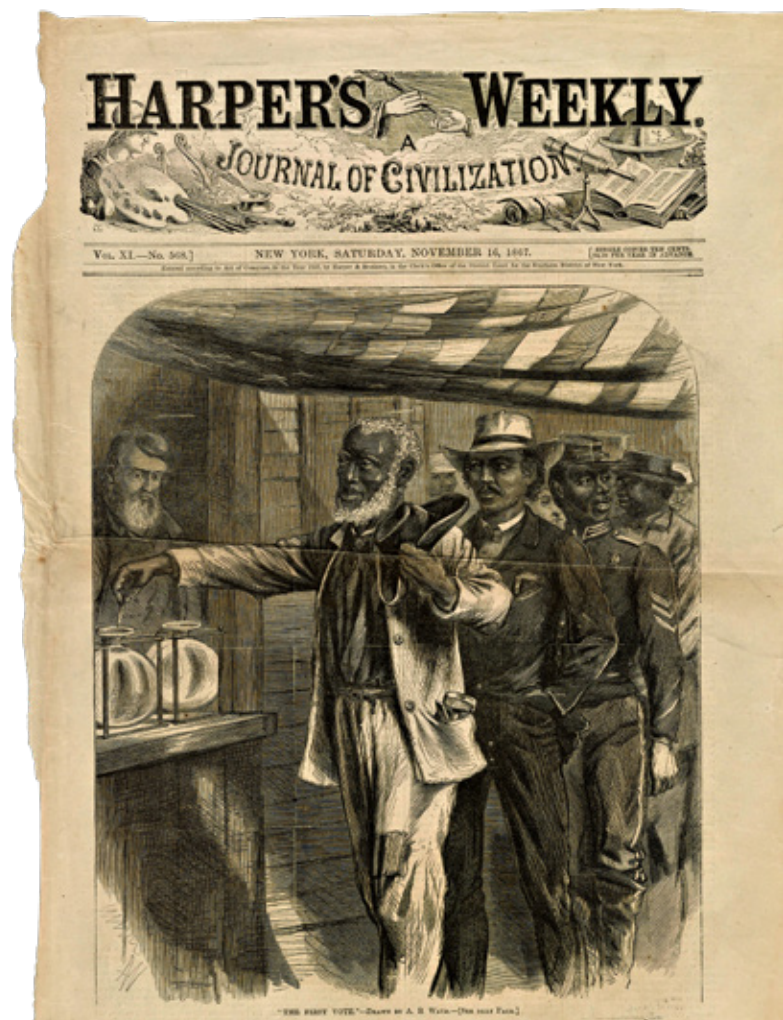
from other scholars. My Balliol colleague, Sudhir Hazareesingh, invited me to contribute a lecture on the United States (online, of course) to his course for first-year Politics undergraduates. Early 2021 was certainly an interesting time to be lecturing on American politics, in the wake of the ‘former guy’s’ turbulent presidency, Joe Biden’s historic victory in November, and the dramatic events of 6 January 2021 in Washington. My lecture focused on the convergence of historic threats to American democracy in the contemporary era—extreme political polarization, highly racialised politics, growing income inequality, and heightened executive power—that combine to make this an especially perilous moment in the history of the American republic.

‘The First Vote’, drawn by A. R. Waud, *Harper’s Weekly*, 16 November 1867 (Wikimedia Commons)

In addition to the rich intellectual environment of the RAI, my colleagues at Balliol College did a great deal to make my short stay in Oxford a pleasure. From lunches in Hall to regular Thursday night Consilium dinners followed by conviviality in the Senior Common Room, Balliol proved to be an exceptionally inviting and stimulating community and I am extremely grateful to the Master and fellows for welcoming me so warmly into the fellowship. Regrettably, under the pandemic conditions, I was unable to spend as much time in other colleges as I would have liked, but that only fuels my determination to come back to Oxford in the future.

All in all, it was a great privilege to be able to spend even a shortened, somewhat constrained year as the Winant Professor, and I eagerly await the day when I can return to find the RAI and the University once again abuzz with activity. ■

*Robert Lieberman is Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University.*





# Election Programming

## Mitchell Robertson

This academic year, one of the most turbulent in the United States' history, the Rothermere American Institute convened a series of illuminating discussions on the current state of American politics entitled *America Decides*. These events brought together a wide range of influential thinkers, journalists, political strategists, academics, pollsters, and politicians to analyse the 2020 presidential race and reflect on its consequences.

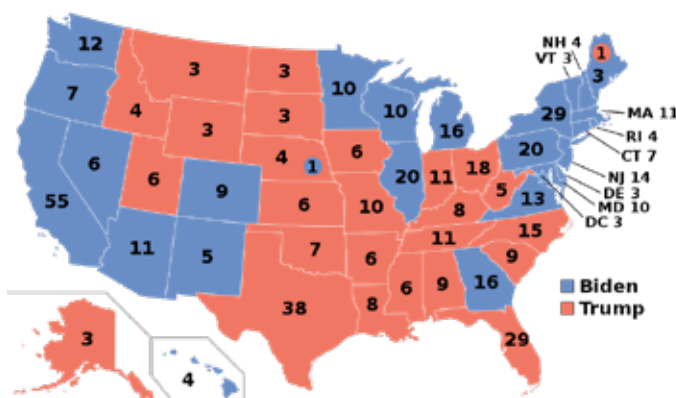
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the series was held online. This gave our events a global reach, with viewers from over 26 countries tuning in live. We were able to share recordings through our revitalised YouTube channel and our *The Last Best Hope?* podcast. The events also proved popular as a background primer on the state of the United States to journalists, and we received very positive feedback from one prominent BBC News presenter.

The series was supported by a grant from the US Embassy in London and the RAI was pleased to work with our friends at University College London's Centre on US Politics in our grant bid. The US Embassy have been generous supporters of various RAI events over the past few years, and we were glad to be able to work with them again.

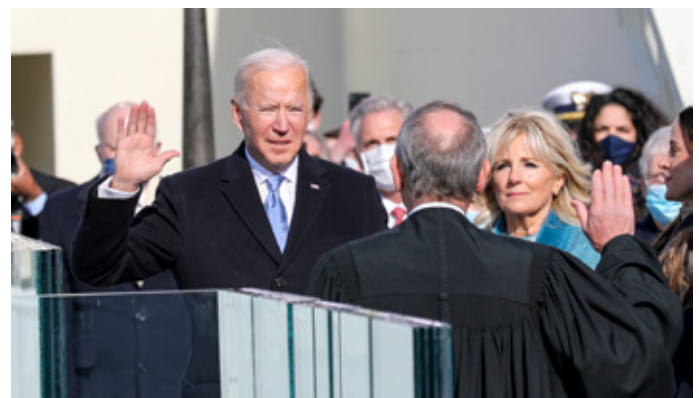
*America Decides* commenced on 12 October with our first event, entitled 'The 2020 US Election: Who's Winning?'. This event featured the legendary *New York Times* columnist Thomas Edsall, the University of Arizona's Associate Professor Samara Klar, and Dave Wasserman, one of the most respected analysts of polling and election data, from the Cook Political Report. Re-watching this event while writing this article, it becomes apparent that our speakers were remarkably prescient in their predictions!

For the second event of the series, we decided to home in on the topic of race. This was particularly timely against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement and the racial disparities of the COVID pandemic. This was the first opportunity for our community to meet Nazita Lajevardi, a political scientist from Michigan State University whom we are welcoming to the RAI in 2021–22 as the Winant Visiting Professor of American Government. We were also joined by Wesley Lowery, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of *They Can't Kill Us All*, as well as Maria Givens, a member of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe in northern Idaho who serves as Communications and Public Relations Director for the Native American Agricultural Fund. It was particularly interesting to hear Maria's insights on Native American issues, something that often goes unreported on in the media but—as she predicted at the time—proved crucial to Joe Biden's victory.

Our penultimate pre-election event was 'Who Will Win'—deliberately couched as a definitive statement rather than a question! We were pleased to be joined by *FiveThirtyEight's* Clare Malone as well as two very experienced campaign operatives: Bob Shrum, who has worked with Democratic candidates since George McGovern, and Mike Murphy, who has previously advised Mitt Romney and John McCain. Murphy has developed a cult following thanks to his successful *Hacks on Tap* podcast with David Axelrod, and his appearance generated a lot of discussion among his fans on social media. *FiveThirtyEight* has been the go-to source for polling data and analysis, so it was fantastic to be able to hear from Clare Malone. She was spot on when she predicted a "historically high turn-out", and all panellists cautioned that the final result would not be known on election night, which prepared the RAI community for the uncertainty that would follow on election day.



Final map of Electoral College votes in the 2020 US presidential election (Kingofthedead, Wikimedia Commons)



Joe Biden takes the presidential oath of office on 20 January 2021 (Sgt Charlotte Carulli, DVIDS)



On the night before the presidential election, we held a special event to showcase the expertise of RAI graduate students and Early Career Researchers. This was one of my favourite events of the series as it really allowed for the diverse research agendas of our members to shine. Each presenter spoke briefly about their research and connected it to a theme or topic that was relevant in the presidential election. Topics covered included trade, abortion, sport, Evangelicals, African foreign policy, the transfer of power, and the influence of Wall Street. Just as it was a great pleasure to host so many guest speakers, this was a terrific opportunity to showcase the wonderful research that is going on in our own building.

The night of the 2020 election was reminiscent of the quip by Bill Clinton regarding the 2000 election that “the people have spoken, but it will take a while to determine exactly what was said”. With the ‘red wave’ looking more and more like a ‘red mirage’, many tuned in to hear commentary from our three experts. We were joined by RAI stalwart Tom Packer, 2020–21 RAI Fellow-in-Residence Thomas Gift, and Oxford D.Phil. Student Kate Guy, who was able to draw parallels from her experience working on the Hillary Clinton 2016 campaign. In what was an otherwise frenzied atmosphere, I thought our speakers were able to break through the noise, identify key early trends, and provide some markers for our community to navigate the unfolding drama surrounding the counting of the ballots.

The final event of the *America Decides* series occurred after the announcement that Joe Biden had prevailed and would become the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. This was the first opportunity for the RAI community to discuss the implications of the Biden victory for the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. We were pleased to be joined by former RAI Director Jay Sexton, now of the University of Missouri; Amy Pope, former Deputy Homeland Security Advisor to President Barack Obama; and former British Ambassador to the United States, Lord Darroch of Kew. Amy and Lord Darroch were both able to provide intimate examples of working on the frontlines of US foreign policy during the past two administrations, and their contrasting experiences were very informative. This final event drew 300 live attendees.

The response to *America Decides* was so positive that we decided to convene a second series in spring 2021, entitled *The Future of American Politics*. This series was inaugurated with an event on the ‘Priorities and Challenges’ for the Biden

Administration. This event marked the passage of the Winant baton from outgoing Winant Professor Margaret Weir (Brown University) to Professor Robert Lieberman (Johns Hopkins University) and was chaired by the RAI’s Desmond King.

Any illusion of comity within the Republican Party or conservative movement in the wake of Trump’s loss was quickly shattered in our next event, ‘The Future of the Republican Party’. For a boisterous exchange we were joined by the historian of conservatism Donald Critchlow, 2016 independent Presidential candidate and former House Republican staffer Evan McMullin, and the *Washington Post*’s Jennifer Rubin. This was an illuminating event which laid bare the fractured nature of the modern Republican Party and highlighted the challenges that any future Republican candidate will have in trying to unite the warring factions.

The final event of this series was ‘The Future of the Democratic Party’, featuring two widely respected political scientists: Seth Masket (University of Denver) and Julia Azaria (Marquette University). These speakers, both of whom have significant experience speaking and writing in public fora, spoke engagingly about the significance of Joe Biden’s victory but also the challenges that the party faces, both in down ballot races and as well as in maintaining the coalition that supported Biden in 2020. We were very pleased with the positive feedback that we received for this event, including from one viewer who thanked us for providing “a fresh academic perspective that was most informative” in contrast with the hyperbole of much media analysis.

In closing, I would like to thank the RAI and the US Embassy in London for supporting these events. I am also grateful to all our speakers for their generosity with their time. Our feedback indicates that these were some of the best discussions of the US election to take place in this country, cementing the RAI’s place as a leader in discussions on US politics in the UK. Finally, I am grateful to the members of the RAI community, including new attendees attracted by this series and our expansion into online programming, for their participation, questions, and suggestions.

Recordings of many events are available online at <https://www.youtube.com/user/RAIOxford/>. ■

*Dr Mitchell Robertson is Associate Lecturer in US History at UCL and a Fellow of the RAI.*

# 'America and Race' Bibliography

*Sonia Tycko*

In the summer of 2020, Oxford's community of Americanists considered how to help UK undergraduates understand the historical context of the ongoing public reckoning with racial injustice brought to the fore by the police murder of George Floyd. One of the projects we took on was building a bibliography of accessible, excellent scholarship on the history of racism in early America and the United States. I agreed to direct this project, and the Rothermere American Institute funded and supported a research internship position, which has been admirably filled by my colleague and recent Oxford History BA graduate, Amelia Hart.

From the beginning of the project in September, Amelia and I took seriously the criticism that 'diverse' university reading lists can be used to signal progress while papering over structural problems in academia. In the course of the project, my colleagues and students drew on decades of learning from decolonization movements and student activism to recognize five urgent changes that we need to see in universities. These are: recruiting and retaining top-flight scholars from minority-ethnic backgrounds as lecturers; fixing the leaky pipeline of students of non-European heritage into British academia with dedicated funding and mentorship; reversing the trend towards precarious academic employment which has disproportionately affected women and minority-ethnic staff; giving reparations to the nations and peoples who have historically been exploited by the British state in collusion with its universities; and reforming curricula at the school and university levels to provide UK students with access to knowledge and a critical vocabulary for thinking about how imperialism and racism shape all of our lives. The 'America and Race' project, while much more modest and indeed moderate in scope, has fed national conversations on all these issues, particularly the curriculum question.

Amelia and I began the project by trying to get a general sense of the materials that historians of America based in the UK are currently using to teach their students about racism. From there, we aimed to curate a bibliography of the best titles. Amelia first collated reading lists from current or recent US history modules taught at five universities. We found a predominance of older works by mostly white male historians limited to social and political history. The titles about race on these lists focused on anti-Black racism and Black freedom struggles, with occasional nods to Indigenous history, and

virtually nothing on other minority groups. Few lists made connections between US national and regional histories, and relevant transnational, international, or imperial histories.

We proceeded by surveying more than fifty UK-based historians, asking them: What readings are most effective for teaching UK history undergraduates about race in America? Here we asked respondents to focus on more recent scholarship, and to be mindful to include the many important but often overlooked works by historians from marginalized groups. The results were overwhelming: we now had a list of more than one thousand titles to digest.

On 12 October, the Oxford American History Graduate Seminar reviewed an early draft of the bibliography, with a comment from Kariann Yokota. Professor Yokota explained her guiding principle in course design: understanding the historical construction of racism is essential to understanding American history. The postgraduates found Yokota's comment inspiring as they began to teach their own students. This approach offers undeniable analytical benefits but is not yet the norm.

On 22 October, I moderated an external review panel discussion with historians Uta Balbier, Yasmin Dualeh, Rachel Herrmann, Lydia Plath, Barbara Savage, and Emily West. Amelia kickstarted the discussion with a comment on her own experience studying history as an undergraduate. Like many British students, she had specialized in the US history track because it included the history of racism in a way that the British history track did not. We were joined online by ninety scholars, mostly early career researchers, from around the UK, who contributed to a lively Q&A.

Faced with this enormous bibliography, attendees and contributors to our project felt both encouraged and incited to further critical engagement with the field. The more items we added, the more we realized what was missing in our thematic coverage, and who was missing in our author profiles. We were surprised to find the burgeoning literature from ethnic studies largely absent from the first wave of suggested titles. Similarly, despite the fact that women historians have been in the vanguard of scholarship on race for decades, the majority of titles recommended by respondents were written by men. We addressed these issues in subsequent revision, but they remain apparent in the final edition and signal a direction for future work.





Left: Native Americans at the Capitol, Washington, DC, 1936 (LOC: call no. LC-H2- B-11191); Centre: Civil rights march on Washington, DC, 1963 (LOC: call no. LC-U9- 10364-37); Right: Roy Takeno and Mayor, Manzanar Relocation Center, California, 1943 (LOC: call no. LOT 10479-4, no. 20).

The highlights edition of the bibliography as presented on Oxford LibGuides.

Throughout the process of curation, colleagues near and far gave generously of their time and expertise. The resulting bibliography is available on the RAI website (<https://www.rai.ox.ac.uk/vere-harmsworth-library/>) in a highlights edition of one hundred titles in twenty-five categories, each introduced with blurbs to help guide undergraduates in their reading, and an extended edition of more than one thousand titles, which should be useful to module designers. The Bodleian Libraries' Oxford LibGuides also feature a version of the highlights edition (<https://libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ushistory/america-and-race-biblio>). I hope the bibliography will be beneficial to students throughout the country, and that it will aid lecturers' efforts to bring curricula in line with current scholarship. ■

Dr Sonia Tycko is Kinder Junior Research Fellow in Atlantic History at the RAI and St Peter's College.

The bibliography was circulated to all the relevant Bodleian subject librarians to be checked against current holdings. The Vere Harmsworth Library added a number of titles to its collections as a result, including several purchased under the Bodleian's Changing the Narrative scheme (<https://libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/changingthenarrative/home>). It also prioritised the acquisition of the Black Thought and Culture database (see p. 20).

—Bethan Davies, Vere Harmsworth Librarian and subject librarian for US Studies

**General Topics**

- Memoirs: *How to be an Anti-Racist Historian*
- The History and Theory of Racial Ideologies
- Whiteness and the Origins of White Supremacy

The history of race and racism in America has always been a lived experience, and studying it is as much about empathy as it is about knowledge. This bibliography begins with a selection of memoirs in the hope of keeping people at the center of this story and allowing them to speak for themselves. Through autobiographical writing, people of colour have often found space to express themselves in a system that otherwise restricted this. The individual voices that come through in memoirs, diaries and autobiographies provide counter-narratives to historical monographs, where a focus on the bigger picture often risks drowning out idiosyncrasies and a sense of the vitality and variation of human existence. The breadth of these texts reminds us that people's lives were not solely defined by the regime that oppressed them. Nevertheless, the genre is governed by conventions, contains biases, and is not immune to outside pressures. As such, memoirs, like monographs, should be read critically.

- Retablos** by Octavio Solis  
ISBN: 9780872867864  
Publication Date: 2018
- Notes of a native son** by James Baldwin  
ISBN: 0241334004  
Publication Date: 1955 [2017 Reprint]
- Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells** (2nd Edition) by Ida S. Wells  
ISBN: 9780226691428  
Publication Date: 1970 [2010 Reprint]
- Foreword to Manzanar** by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston  
ISBN: 9781328742157  
Publication Date: 2018 [1973 Reprint]

**Modern American Topics I**

- Abolitionism, Emancipation & Reconstruction
- Indian Removal, Genocide & Survival
- Anti-colonialism, American Imperialism & Race
- The United Kingdom, the United States & Race
- The Jim Crow System

In the context of long abolitionist movements around the Atlantic world, the American Civil War became a war to end slavery, but failed to finally answer the question of how millions of free Black people would fit into the post-emancipation United States. The study of these subjects considers whether a nation stuck inside a racist ideology could sustain a form of modern citizenship based on equal rights.

- Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl** by Harriet Jacobs  
Call Number: E 444 .J7 A3  
ISBN: 9780987098279  
Publication Date: 1841 [2015 Reprint]  
[PRIMARY SOURCE]
- Beyond Redemption** by Conde Emberton  
Call Number: E 668 .E49  
ISBN: 9780226289993

**Early American Topics**

- Native Americans, Colonists & Conceptions of Bodily Difference
- Early Spanish America & Race
- Early French-America & Race
- Slavery & Race, with a focus on British America & the United States, pre-1840
- Resistance, Revolt & Revolution against Slavery

How did Europeans conceive of Native American bodies and articulate human difference in the first stages of colonialism in America? In this early period before 'race' came to take on its more modern connotations, white authors made observations about complexion, language, foodways, and customs such as clothing or social organization. The scholars cited here have sought to investigate cross-cultural historical encounters through the lens of the European imagination and the sociopolitical construction of racism that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but also through Native perspectives, acknowledging that the history of settler colonialism continues to affect Indigenous communities today.

- A Key into the Language of America, 1643** by Roger Williams  
Publication Date: 1643  
[PRIMARY SOURCE]

This language dictionary, compiled in the first half of the seventeenth-century by one of the founders of the Rhode Island colony, contains Algonquian words and phrases interspersed with verses about Indigenous lifeways and beliefs in a comparative, transatlantic context.

- Red Brethren** by David J. Silverman  
Call Number: E 99 .J87 S56  
ISBN: 9780801444777  
Publication Date: 2010  
[SCHOLARLY LITERATURE]
- After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America** by James Aronson  
Call Number: E 93 .A954  
ISBN: 9780895053760  
Publication Date: 1998  
[SCHOLARLY LITERATURE]
- Native Appropriations** by Adrienne Keene  
[MULTIMEDIA RESOURCE: BLOG]

**Modern American Topics II**

- Fighting White Supremacy: The Civil Rights Movement & beyond
- Black Power, Pan-Africanism & Black Radicalism
- Conservative Backlash and the New Right
- Modern Capitalism, Urbanisation, Inaccession & Race

The fight against white supremacy in the United States has a long history, from resistance to slavery to the present day. Historical literature has, however, focused overwhelmingly on the 1940s, often putting forward a deconstructionist narrative that sees a peaceful, effective 'Civil Rights Movement' followed by a violent, ineffective Black Power movement. In fact, the Black freedom struggle was long and varied, and ultimately a combination of pressures forced the US federal government to outlaw segregation and disenfranchisement in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, though this was by no means the end of the fight. Moreover, Black protests against racism were accompanied by and allied with, protests by many other groups against many different forms of oppression. Both within and without the United States.

# The Last Best Hope? Podcast

## Adam Smith

In the nineteenth century, presidents sent written annual messages to Congress rather than delivering grand ‘State of the Union’ addresses in person. This suited Abraham Lincoln just fine: although he could hardly have achieved political success without being an effective stump speaker, his real talent was with the pen. He was, as we know, quite simply one of the greatest ever prose writers in the English language.

In November 1862, when the President worked with his secretaries to compile his annual report to Congress from the executive branch, the political circumstances could barely have been darker. New Orleans was now in Union hands, and the Confederate army commanded by Robert E. Lee had been turned back at the battle of Antietam in Maryland in September, but the rebellion remained stubbornly alive. In September, the President had issued a preliminary proclamation of emancipation, giving the Confederate leaders fair warning that unless they abandoned their rebellion by 1 January 1863, the United States government would treat enslaved people behind rebel lines as free. No one expected this ultimatum to have any effect, but nor did anyone know what a final emancipation proclamation, if it came, would actually mean, either for enslaved people or for the course of the war. The President’s apparent embrace of military emancipation divided the North, and his political

opponents—arguing that the emancipation policy would prolong the war—made significant advances in the mid-term elections.

And so, alongside many pages of data on the military and economic situation, Lincoln needed his Message to Congress to justify his emancipation policy in a way that would resonate. His case was simple: attacking the system of human enslavement in the South was not a distraction from the business of winning the war; it was essential to it. ‘In *giving* freedom to the *slave*’, Lincoln wrote, ‘we *assure* freedom to the *free*—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail.’ Ending slavery was of strategic value in defeating the rebellion, but it was also necessary to ensure the survival of liberty among those already free. By freeing enslaved people, the United States would remain the final beacon of freedom when the rest of the world had turned to darkness and despotism.

This is a classic statement of the idea that the United States stands apart because of its supposedly unique and providential mission. It is this idea that we have been probing in the RAI’s podcast, *The Last Best Hope?* The question mark at the end is crucial: we don’t take Lincoln’s exceptionalist assumptions for granted, but we’re fascinated by them. Why



Donald Trump as imagined in  
‘The Elected King Episode’  
(Richard Purkiss)



Thomas Jefferson as imagined in  
‘The American Dilemma Episode’  
(Richard Purkiss)

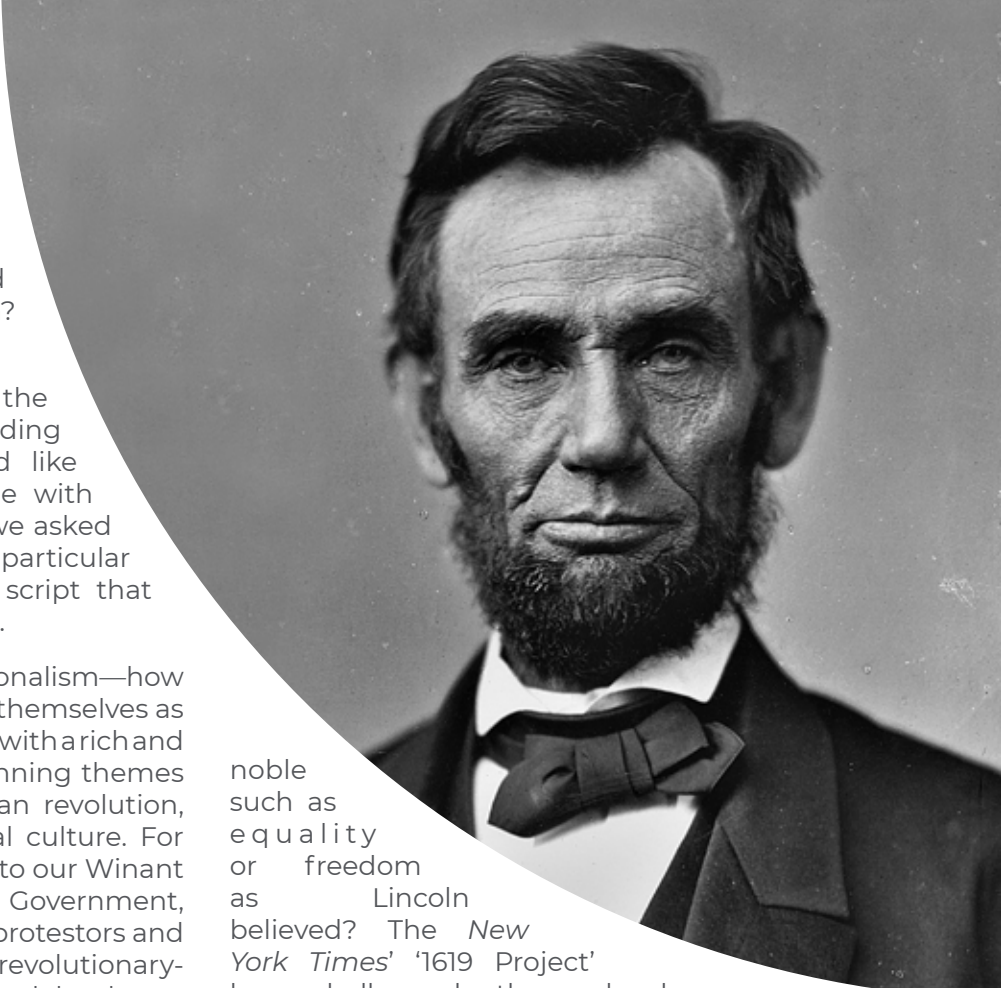


have so many people across the centuries—and not just in America—wanted to believe that the United States was the last best hope of earth? And how has this belief mattered?

The podcast began in May 2020 in the early days of pandemic. With our building closed, making a podcast seemed like a good way to continue to engage with people. The idea was a simple one: we asked interesting scholars to talk about a particular issue and I wrote and recorded a script that provided a bit of background context.

The question of American exceptionalism—how and why Americans have thought of themselves as different and special—has provided us with a rich and varied subject matter. One of the running themes has been the legacy of the American revolution, and the ways it has shaped political culture. For example, in an early episode, I talked to our Winant Visiting Professor of American Government, Margaret Weir, about anti-lockdown protestors and why they so often displayed a yellow revolutionary-era flag showing a coiled rattlesnake and the slogan 'don't tread on me'. One of the paradoxes of the revolutionary legacy is that the same Americans who describe themselves as 'conservative' are often those most willing to sanction violent resistance against 'tyrannical' government. The 'spirit of 1776' offers, for those who want it, a way of legitimising armed resistance by white men. In a later episode, I picked up the theme of the legitimacy or otherwise of violence as a mode of politics in America in a fascinating discussion with Grace Mallon—a brilliant research student here—and Bruce Baker, an eminent historian of the postbellum South. We talked about the insurrectionary politics of the early republic and the violent imposition of white supremacy in the South as way of contextualising the violent storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021.

In the summer 2021 series, I explored the politics of race and American exceptionalism with Pulitzer-prize winning historian (and former Harmsworth Professor at Oxford) Annette Gordon-Reed. Among Professor Gordon-Reed's most impressive scholarly achievements has been to reconstruct the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman. Jefferson's commitment to the ringing declaration that 'all men are created equal' was equalled by his acceptance of the fact (even if not the moral legitimacy) of slavery, and in this, of course, he exemplified the tension at the heart of the revolutionary era—the 'promise' of equality and the reality of racial inequality. This is a notoriously difficult subject to talk about, and it gets to the heart of the 'last best hope' question: was America founded on a 'promise' of something



noble such as equality or freedom as Lincoln believed? The *New York Times*' '1619 Project' has challenged these hard-baked assumptions with its claim that America's true 'foundation' dates to the arrival, in Virginia in 1619, of unfree Africans. In other words, that its origins lie not in the 'promise' of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence but in the harsh reality of racial exploitation. Yet what is interesting to me about the 1619 Project is that it substitutes one foundation 'moment' for another. Both those who would condemn the United States as having white supremacy in its DNA and those who think it a virtuous city on a hill have one thing in common: the idea that 'America' has some kind of unified story, a natal moment and an overarching meaning. This is not usually how the histories of other countries are discussed: it is, in other words, yet another way of reinscribing a narrative of American exceptionalism.

Not all of our podcasts, by any means, have focused on these 'big' questions. We've also made episodes about issues as varied as the sensational visit to the US in 1850 of the Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind, the boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980 and the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But all, in some way or other, have engaged with the core question of what makes America seem so different and special, not least to Americans.

I think of these podcasts as combining the intellectual engagement of a seminar or tutorial with the production values of a good radio programme. As an academic historian with a background in broadcasting, this is a medium to which I am particularly drawn, and responses from listeners have been very positive. You can subscribe by searching 'Last Best Hope' on any podcast platform or find more details on our website. ■

# In Memoriam: Godfrey Hodgson

Gareth Davies

In January 2021, the RAI was greatly saddened to learn of the death of Godfrey Hodgson, a Distinguished Fellow of the Institute and an important friend, ally, and source of wise counsel throughout its first decade-and-a-half.

Godfrey was part of a distinguished cohort of British reporters who covered the United States with unparalleled insight and depth of understanding during the 1960s and 1970s. Where he really stood out in this distinguished company was in the way that his immersion in American life provided the springboard for a whole series of perceptive books that went well beyond ably recording the dramatic events of the Sixties, and which delved more deeply into the history and fundamental character of the United States, a nation to whose people and promise he retained a deep (if not uncritical) attachment.

It is not remotely to disparage any of his other fifteen or so books to observe that by far the most influential among them has been Godfrey's 1976 masterpiece, *America in Our Time*, a vibrant and intellectually scintillating portrait of American political history during the time of his decade-long sojourn as Washington correspondent for David Astor's *Observer*. A half-century on, this remains one of the two or three indispensable starting-points for anyone seeking to master the dramatic events of the Kennedy-Johnson year. At a recent retrospective, Gary Gerstle (Mellon Professor of American History at Cambridge, and a former Harmsworth Professor at Oxford) aptly described *America In Our Time* as "one of the great works of American political and social history written in the past half century".

Part of the power of this book comes from Hodgson's reportorial skill—from the facility with which he reconstructs the principals in his drama, and the stage upon which they are performing. Yet what he felt to be most responsible for the success of the book was his good fortune in having been a young reporter in a Washington that was populated by other talented and ambitious young men and women (David Halberstam coined the phrase 'the best and the brightest'), some of whom became close friends. They gave him an exceptional level of access to national politics and (especially for an overseas reporter) a rare depth of understanding. Among his closest friends were Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an Anglophile Labor Department official who would go on to be arguably the nation's greatest ever intellectual in politics, and Harry McPherson, a liberal Texan and senior aide to Lyndon Johnson.



Godfrey Hodgson (1934–2021)  
(Facebook: 'Remembering Godfrey Hodgson')

Godfrey's ability to win the friendship, trust and admiration of such luminaries was unsurprising, for he was a deeply sociable man, a bon vivant, a superb raconteur and—as all of that indicates—great fun to be around. To the RAI's great good fortune, on returning from Washington in the 1970s he and his wife Hilary chose to make their home in west Oxfordshire. For many years, he would commute into London on the Cotswold Line, but then he became director of Oxford's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, on Norham Gardens. When the RAI opened—just across the Parks from the Reuters Institute—Godfrey became a regular and greatly valued friend. During these early years, the History Faculty ran a Special Subject on the 'Great Society' era, and its classes at the RAI would conclude each December with a guest appearance by Godfrey, who would reminisce about his two interviews with Martin Luther King, about covering Freedom Summer in Mississippi, and about what it was like to have Robert Kennedy as a drinking buddy.

If conviviality was one of Godfrey Hodgson's defining traits, then it was nowhere more evident than in the delight that he took in being surrounded by young people such as these Special Subject finalists—not just because they felt awed to be in his presence (although that was probably part of it!) but because he relished the privilege of exchanging ideas as well as memories with undergraduate and postgraduate students. It was partly in recognition of the value of these associations, not just to students but to the RAI as an institution, that the Institute in 2009



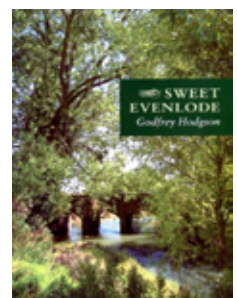
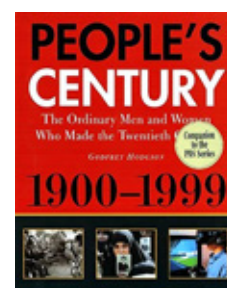
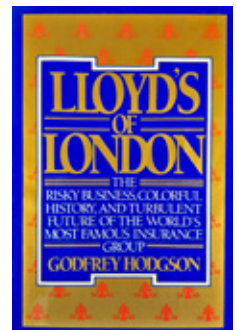
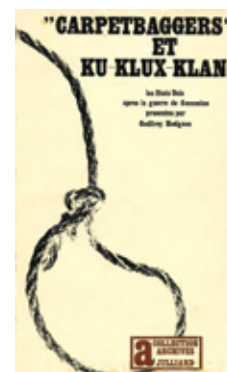
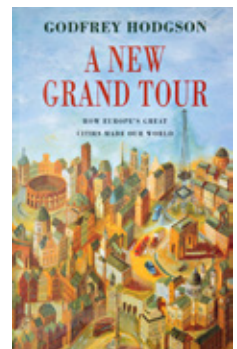
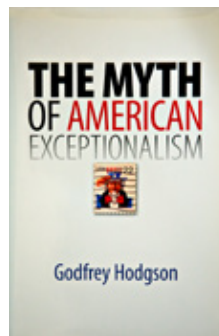
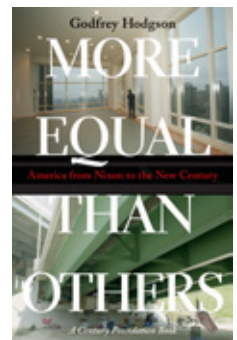
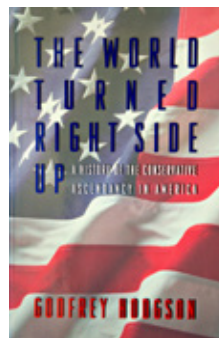
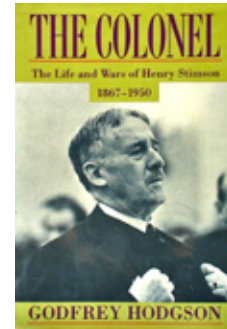
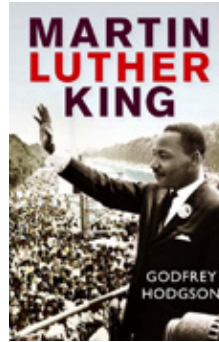
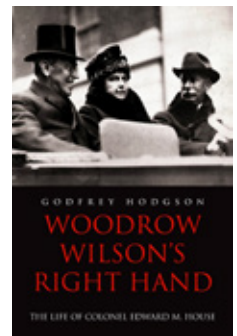
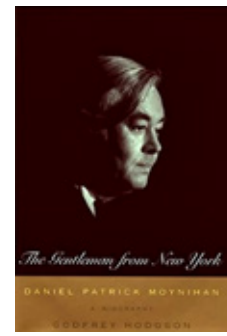
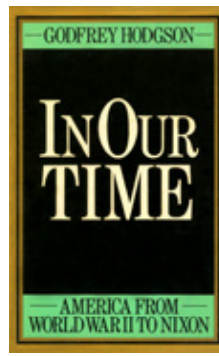
elected Godfrey to be a Distinguished Fellow, and named one of its teaching rooms in his honour.

Additionally, and particularly during the directorship of Nigel Bowles, Godfrey's distinguished and erudite presence enhanced all manner of RAI seminars and conferences, while the appreciative reaction of visitors such as Dan Rather and James T. Patterson reinforced one's already clear sense that he was our most eminent and widely known Americanist. During the past few years, ill-health increasingly limited his appearances, but his refusal to yield to it—his indomitability—was impressive. Holed up in the John Radcliffe Hospital for several months, he and the publisher Jon Carpenter (a friend and neighbour) hatched the idea of a short book that he could write without extensive research—a lyrical tribute to the River Evenlode, near which he had lived (in Chastleton, Chilson, Finstock, and finally Charlbury) for some four decades.

Appropriately enough, Godfrey Hodgson's final appearance at the RAI as a speaker came in 2016, when he keynoted a graduate conference about the career of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, attended by 'Pat's' daughter, Maura. (It was appropriate not only because of Godfrey's long association with Moynihan but because the ex-Senator's final endeavour before going into hospital for his final illness in 2003 had been to embark on a retirement tribute to Godfrey.) A sparkling event all round, the graduate organisers found it most notable for a bibulous and protracted lunch with Godfrey at Brown's. Failing to persuade them to partake of a cocktail, he considered it a minor triumph when his abstemious confreres at least agreed to take some wine. Dan, Louisa, and Paddy were rewarded with one of the great privileges of their graduate careers—two hours of reminiscences and witticisms from a master raconteur—one who had had the great good fortune to observe American history and politics at close quarters for six decades, and who—more than merely wishing to share his good fortune—greatly relished any opportunity to learn from academic colleagues who in different ways had been ploughing the same furrow.

Godfrey Hodgson will be enormously missed by his legions of friends and admirers. The RAI will never cease to be grateful for his many acts of generosity towards it, which included lodging his papers in the Vere Harmsworth Library, and for his role in its early development. ■

*Gareth Davies is Professor of American History at UCL and a Distinguished Fellow of the RAI.*



# Graduate Scholarship Reports

## Sage Goodwin

The Esmond Harmsworth Graduate Scholarship in American Culture has been invaluable in helping me complete my doctoral study of the relationship between television news and the African American freedom struggle. Financially, it has given me the mental freedom to develop my thinking, and the temporal luxury of devoting myself solely to getting words on the page. The RAI graduate office has provided a much-needed change of scene in a year confined to working from home. I am grateful to have benefitted from the intellectual and emotional support of the RAI community in this final stage of my degree, particularly the guidance of Professor Stephen Tuck and Dr Mara Keire.

This additional year has enabled me to share my research widely, including presenting papers at the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies International Ph.D. Seminar, the Edinburgh American History Workshop, the University of South Carolina Biannual Media and Civil Rights History Symposium, and the Historians of the Twentieth Century United States Annual Conference. These opportunities to test ideas and gain feedback from an international community of Americanists have been instrumental in developing my thesis. My personal highlight was a panel on media, culture, race, and religion in 1960s Birmingham which I co-organised with Dr Megan Hunt and Professor Brian Ward. I published an article in *Comparative American Studies* on the history of desegregation in American newsrooms since the 1960s, as part of a Special Issue on *Race, Brutality, and Protest in the United States*.

I have also organised a number of my own academic events. I continued to co-convene the *Cultural Histories, Cultural Studies* seminar series that I devised with fellow D.Phil. students. Our online format allowed us to host a fantastic line-up of international speakers. I also had the pleasure of sharing my passion for cinema and cultural criticism with the RAI community by running two terms of *The RAI Goes to the Movies* film discussions, allowing me to bring British and American academics into conversation with filmmakers and artists (see p. 17).

I am particularly proud of the multidisciplinary three-day virtual conference, *Racialisation and the Media: From Television to Twitter* which I co-organised with Cindy Ma. Alongside research-in-progress workshops and a session on public scholarship, we curated a public series of panel discussions featuring speakers from TikTok stars

and journalists to media history professors and sociologists, as well as filmmaker Cheryl Dunye as our keynote speaker. The thought-provoking conversations, which attracted over 600 registrants, are available on the RAI YouTube account.

Overall, my year as the Esmond Harmsworth Graduate Scholar has been immeasurably valuable for both my personal and intellectual development. I extend my sincere thanks to the RAI and the generous benefactors of the scholarship.

## Grace Mallon

I have benefited from the generosity of the RAI's donors throughout my time as a D.Phil. student, but it was a special honour and a particular relief to be in receipt of the Fourth-Year Scholarship in American Politics for 2020–21, in the depths of the COVID-19 crisis. Thanks to the RAI's support, I have at the time of writing almost completed my doctoral thesis, 'States of the Union: Federalism and the Origins of American Intergovernmental Relations, 1789–1820,' which argues that successful policy implementation in the United States has relied upon co-ordination and co-operation between the state and federal governments since the founding.

Despite the pandemic, my co-convenor Stephen Symchych and I continued to host the Oxford Early American Republic Seminar (OxEARS) in 2020–21. With the help of the RAI's wonderful staff, we took the seminar online, which gave us a new opportunity to engage with the global community of scholars studying early US history. Thanks to the general move online, I was also able to bring my thesis research to new academic audiences. In August 2020 I presented a chapter at the Edinburgh University American History Seminar, and in November I discussed my research at the City University of New York's Early American Republic Seminar. In the coming months, I will also present at the annual meetings of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic and the American Society for Legal History.

Over Michaelmas and Hilary Terms, I added my voice to the chorus of historians attempting to clarify the confusion of the 2020 election season. In December, I published an article in the *Washington Post's* 'Made by History' section on the Texas-led lawsuit for the disqualification of election returns from Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. After the Capitol riots, I talked to Adam Smith and Bruce Baker on the RAI podcast,





*The Last Best Hope?*, about political violence in American history. I also joined a roundtable for the history blog *Insurrect!* to share my thoughts on Joe Biden's inauguration and the future of Trumpism.

In the final few weeks of the academic year, I enjoyed speaking at 'Continuities and Disruptions in Transatlantic Histories', a symposium hosted by the RAI and Sulgrave Manor, the ancestral home of the Washington family. The opportunity to investigate George Washington's family history in preparing for my talk was especially welcome since, along with my co-panellist Dr Sam Edwards, I will be a Fellow at the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington in Mount Vernon, Virginia in the summer of 2022.

## Benjamin Schneider

The support of the RAI's American History Scholarship has enabled me to conduct the final stages of my thesis research into the impact of technology on jobs during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the United States and Britain. This project contributes to historical debates about the effects of industrialisation and to present-day discussions about how automation will change work in the future.

My research suggests that new technologies can lead to large-scale unemployment and rising inequality of wellbeing. Innovation frequently increases the scale of production, produces a rise in the complexity of business operations, and pushes firms to internalise (or 'bundle') related business activities. All three of these forces—which I show were key factors in the development of the American transportation sector during the

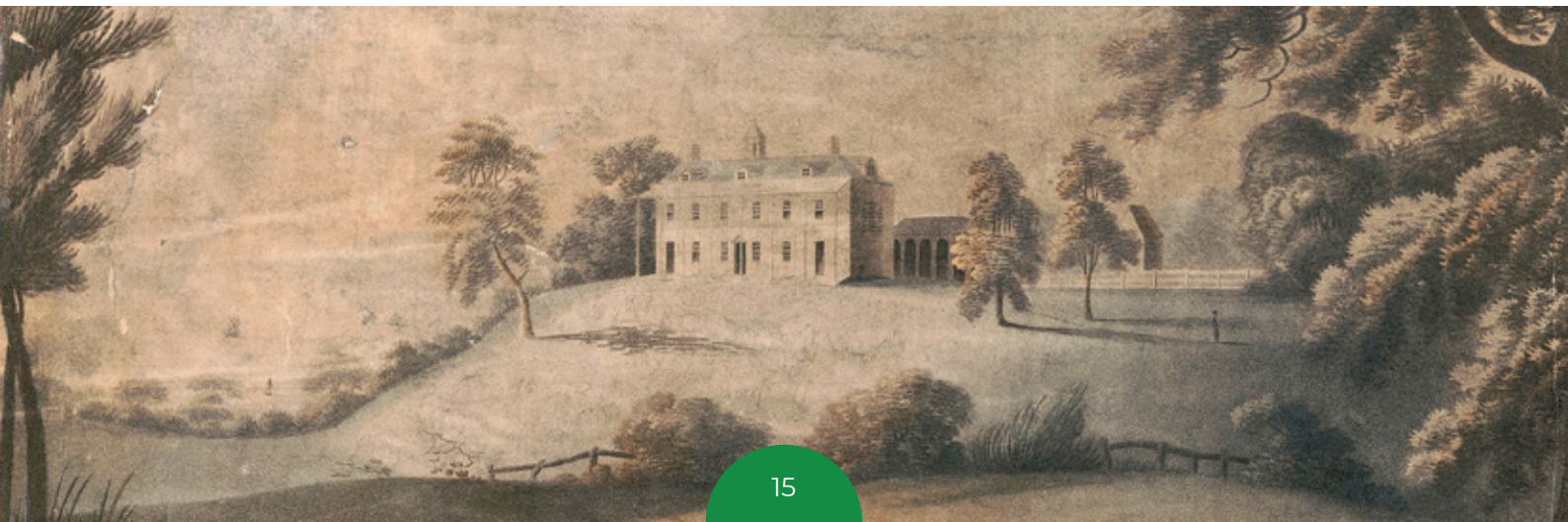
nineteenth century—increase the division of labour, which widens disparities in aspects of work-related wellbeing such as occupational risk and work intensity. These findings suggest that a future of good jobs may require policies that directly improve working conditions through full employment or collective bargaining. The RAI's support has enabled me to analyse the policy implications of my thesis more extensively, and to summarise these findings in a policy paper to be published in 2022.

My supervisor Professor Jane Humphries and I have also written a paper for *Economic History of Developing Regions* on the relationship between gender equality and economic growth in history. We argue that a key instance of technological change during the Industrial Revolution destroyed many jobs done by women and led to the development of the male breadwinner family in the nineteenth century. This family structure has shaped social expectations about the gender division of unpaid work up to the present.

At the RAI I have learned from and contributed to seminars, and presented at Zoom seminars at Cambridge, Oxford, and the LSE. I served as a Trustee for the Economic History Society and organised professional development talks and a workshop for doctoral researchers. I also reviewed two books about the future of work for the *Times Literary Supplement* with Professor Humphries.

After completing my D.Phil., I will join the Centre for Research on Pandemics and Society and the Work Research Institute at Oslo Metropolitan University as a Postdoctoral Fellow, where I will compare how the 1918–20 influenza pandemic and COVID-19 changed jobs and wellbeing at work in the US. I am very grateful to the RAI for supporting my research and enabling me to analyse jobs in the past to inform future policymaking. ■

Mount Vernon, Virginia, engraved by Francis Jukes (1745–1812) (LOC)



# Fellowship Reports

## Olivia Wright

The period immediately following the end of a Ph.D. can be a strange one, with or without a global pandemic, as you find yourself without the comfort and familiarity of your home institution. Fortunately, joining the Rothermere American Institute as a Fellow-in-Residence for the 2020–21 academic year provided an ideal environment for postdoctoral study and progression. Whether meeting online or in person, each member of the RAI community was welcoming and approachable and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to benefit from the Institute's extensive resources. The numerous reading groups, lectures, and events provided a regular source of inspiration and discussion, and having access to office space in the RAI building was a privilege all the greater for following eight months of working from home.

The past year as Fellow-in-Residence has offered me the necessary time and space to work on my book *Caged Sister: Women's Prison Zines in the United States*, which is the first study to collect, analyse, and theorize the history of women's prison zines. It considers the ways in which the carceral state has affected the production of prison zines over the century: how censorship and outside involvement has influenced the style, production, readership, and content of the zines; and how serialization, reader involvement, and diverse authorship have shaped a distinctive and compelling sub-genre of American literature. Whilst at the RAI, I was able to share part of this research at the weekly Fellows' Forum, which offered a rare opportunity to receive feedback and advice from an outstanding group of scholars. I am indebted to them for taking the time to read and comment on my work, which will be all the stronger for it.

In a year full of uncertainty, I am thankful to have had the RAI as my academic home and I hope that it won't be too long before I can visit again.

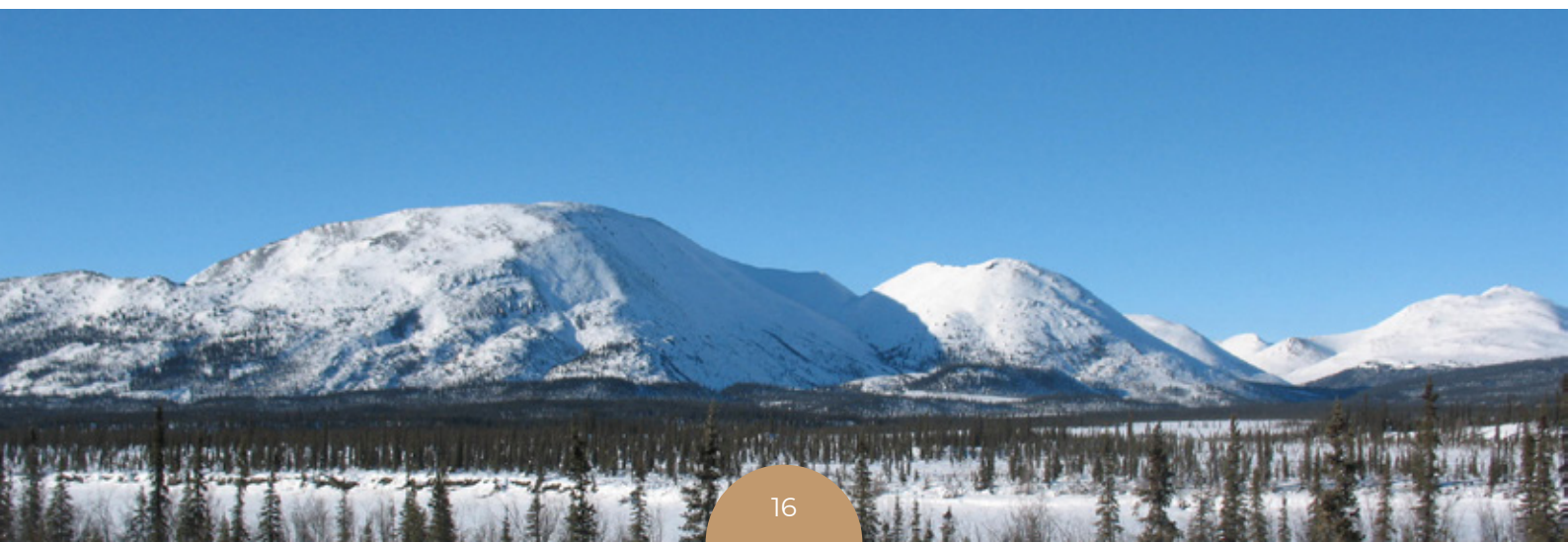
## Maximilien Zahnd

The academic year I spent at the RAI far exceeded my expectations. As a socio-legal scholar who examines Alaska's settler colonial history, my work regularly intersects with that of historians of the United States. I was thus very much looking forward to the interdisciplinary environment of the Institute.

First and foremost, I want to thank Adam Smith for his comments on a paper I started at the beginning of my fellowship, which sheds light on the 1921 Alaska fur tax and its impact on Alaska Natives. The paper was workshopped during Hilary Term at the Fellows' Forum, which Mandy Izadi kindly chaired. I am grateful for the many thought-provoking comments and suggestions I received on the paper from attendees. I also wish to thank Daniel Rowe, who invited me to present my doctoral work, which focuses on the socio-legal history of an Alaskan tribe that used tax law to push back against settler colonialism, at the American History Research Seminar. Pekka Hämäläinen, who chaired the seminar, has been a constant source of support and inspiration. I am thankful for his advice and availability. Moreover, I am extremely grateful for the large, private workspace I could use as soon as regulations allowed. I also benefited from the Institute's first-class facilities, including the impressive collections housed at the beautiful Vere Harmsworth Library. I am indebted to the Institute's wonderful staff for making my stay feel like a very stimulating and rewarding writing retreat.

By the end of my fellowship, I had a paper ready for submission at a peer-reviewed journal. Lastly, my time at the RAI was pivotal in helping me frame and begin a new research project, which will chronicle the environmental history of Alaska through the lens of tax law. ■

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from near Arctic Village, Alaska (Maximilien Zahnd)





# The RAI Goes to the Movies

## Sage Goodwin

In Trinity term of the first academic year to be turned upside down by the pandemic, putting on a full programme of events with only the newly-acquired RAI Zoom account was no easy task. Yet our Communications and Events Officer Dr Alice Kelly managed to come up with ingenious ways to keep us all engaged in an online format, including resurrecting her film discussion series *The RAI Goes to the Movies*. Each week, attendees viewed the week's film ahead of time and came together virtually for a discussion led by a RAI scholar.

Fast forward to the start of another year where we had to continue life largely from home. Alice asked me to direct the next series, allowing me to steer it in a new direction. I have long been a fan of the past decade's renaissance in African American filmmaking and have keenly followed the new set of conversations it has sparked in public discourse about representations on and behind the screen in Hollywood and the wider American film industry. I therefore seized upon the opportunity to curate a set of discussions about significant films in American cinema by Black filmmakers. With generous consultation from Nataleah Hunter-Young, an associate programmer for the Toronto International Film Festival, we narrowed down an expansive list to a set of films by Black filmmakers that showcased a range of genres, time periods, and perspectives—all of which had started vital conversations and hold important places in the history of American cinema. From Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* to Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, we settled on a set of extraordinary movies for the two-term series.

My search for someone with relevant expertise for each film quickly morphed into sets of pairings between scholars from a range of disciplines with expertise in the topics the films covered, and young Black filmmakers, artists, and critics.

This experiment in putting the creative world in conversation with the academy turned out to be a winning formula. Bringing together perspectives from the ivory tower and the film industry resulted in a set of fascinating conversations that revealed new dimensions of each film. In Hilary Term, we extended our expert speakers to groups of three, allowing for even more expansive conversations. Some highlights in curating this array of guests included: inadvertently reconnecting director Tayo Amos with her former Stanford History professor, James T. Campbell, to discuss Ava DuVernay's *Selma*; hearing from the producers of Netflix's *Who Killed Malcolm X?*, Phil Bertelson and Rachel Dretzin, about *I am Not Your Negro*; and a magical conversation about Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* between filmmaker, Winter Dunn, historian of Gullah culture, Dr Melissa Cooper, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies scholar Alexandria Smith.

Over the two terms, our public audience became larger and larger. As well as a dedicated group of college students studying a film and TV production course, audience members joined us each week from around the world. One particular participant came forward quite unexpectedly. Towards the end of our discussion of Barry Jenkins' 2016 film *Moonlight*, an anonymous audience member asked if they could speak. The secret Zoom account turned out to be the Oscar Award-winning director, Barry Jenkins, himself!

Convening *The RAI Goes to the Movies* was one of the best parts of my past year. I am very grateful to the RAI for making it possible, to Tangula Chambers and Mitch Robertson for their help in running and recording these sessions so that anyone can revisit the conversations on our RAI YouTube channel, as well as to our expert speakers and everyone who attended. ■

*These sessions have been transformative experiences for my students and they're much more open to applying to research intensive universities than they were a few months ago because the whole thing feels less intimidating and more exciting. I know it's hard to find silver linings to the pandemic, but ordinarily my students would never have had access to something like this and I just wanted to say thanks—you may well have helped change a few lives.*

—Further Education teacher



# Congress to Campus 2021

## Alice Kelly



Former Rep.  
Ben Chandler  
(D-KY, 2004–13)



Former Rep.  
Ann Marie Buerkle  
(R-NY, 2011–13)

Congress to Campus, our popular annual schools event, brings two former Members of Congress—one Democrat, one Republican—to the Institute to discuss American politics and government with school students and undergraduates studying History or Politics. The former Members of Congress offer first-hand insights into how American democracy works by sharing their experiences as candidates and office-holders. The programme is organised in collaboration with the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library and the US Association of Former Members of Congress, with support from the US Embassy, London.

Determined not to be thwarted by the pandemic, this year we moved Congress to Campus into an online format—and managed to attract a larger audience than ever before. Our first ever RAI Intern, Tangula Chambers, a Masters student in History at Roehampton, was with us for eight weeks in Hilary Term 2021 and one of her key tasks was to co-organise Congress to Campus with me. This gave Tangula the opportunity to play a key role in one of our high-profile public events, liaising with speakers, organising promotion, and navigating the challenge of running an event entirely online—as well as allowing the RAI to benefit from Tangula's exciting ideas. One of the particular benefits offered by running this event online was that we were able to reach a more diverse range of students and schools.

This year's speakers were the former Representatives Ben Chandler (Democrat-KY, 2004–13) and Ann Marie Buerkle (Republican-NY, 2011–13). Held in March 2021, the event was introduced by our Director Professor Adam Smith, and chaired by Professor Robert Lieberman, our 2020–21 Winant Visiting

Professor of American Government. More than two hundred secondary school students tuned in to hear our panel discuss subjects ranging from how bills are actually passed to polarisation and electoral reform, as well as current issues such as the Capitol riots. The recording is available on the RAI YouTube channel as a learning resource for students who couldn't attend the event live (or anyone else!).

Former Representatives Chandler and Buerkle were enthusiastic and engaging speakers, and the expertise of the panel ensured that students responded very positively to the event. In a survey, one student valued 'getting to hear the insider details of what being in Congress is truly like'. Another student enjoyed 'the personal insight and perspective on the state of US Politics from individuals who have served in Congress. It was invaluable to have many of the arguments we discuss so often validated by those who have been through it and seen it!'. Many respondents told us how much they benefitted from being able to ask the speakers questions and hearing different points of view from across the political spectrum. Another student valued 'the balance between commentary on current events, but also the day-to-day running of politics'. One respondent captured the essence of the event: 'it offered an insight into the workings of government that you can't get through a politics lesson'. The main comment we received on what we can improve in our next Congress to Campus was that the event was too short: 'Longer please!' was a common refrain.

The next Congress to Campus will be held in November 2022 in collaboration with the Eccles Centre. ■



# Support the RAI

## *Guy Collender*

Thanks to its generous donors, the RAI has a proud tradition of supporting scholars and early career academics. As public funding for graduate research continues to decline, the RAI is redoubling its efforts to nurture the professors of tomorrow by fundraising for an endowed master's scholarship in US History.

This is an important campaign as the impact of financial support upon talented young thinkers is profound, giving them the opportunity and confidence to continue with their research. Ella St George Carey, a doctoral student at Oxford's Faculty of History and the RAI, is the Captain Hon. Harold Alfred Vyvyan St George Harmsworth Scholar. Her scholarship is funded by the Rothermere Foundation. Ella is researching early twentieth century nursing culture in the US. Ella said: 'I am able to dedicate myself to my studies and have no financial worries because I am able to rely on the scholarship. Without this scholarship, which has kindly been extended because of the pandemic, I would have had to discontinue my studies.'

Another beneficiary of donor generosity is Dr Mandy Izadi, the RAI's Broadbent Junior Research Fellow in American History—a position associated jointly with RAI and St Edmund Hall. Her work focuses on the intersection of Indigenous history, environmental history, and African-American history. Her current project investigates the history of North America's Southeast and the Greater Caribbean from the eighteenth century through the twentieth century. The fellowship has been endowed and established by the William S. Broadbent Family.

To build on these successes and expand the academic pipeline for the future, the RAI is now focussing on garnering support for a scholarship to exist in perpetuity for Oxford's M.St. in US History. Ranging from the emergence of Native America to the history of the present, the course explores the richness and dynamism of past and contemporary US historical writing and develops intellectual familiarity with advanced research in US history. Students on the M.St. in US History attend seminars and lectures at the RAI, and typically use the Vere Harmsworth Library for their research. The RAI is their intellectual home, and the programme is administered by the Faculty of History, where the students are formally registered.

Fundraising successes in the last year at RAI have included a major anonymous donation—matched by RAI funds—to establish a new part-time Deputy Director position for the next three years. The Deputy Director will develop and deliver public events, welcome and oversee fellows-in-residence, mentor and supervise post-doctoral scholars, and develop a supportive community for doctoral researchers. Additional funds are still being sought to secure the important new role for the long term. Above all, donations to RAI's endowment are welcomed as they allow the RAI the flexibility to expand its programme of research and public activities. ■

*If you would like to support the RAI's scholarship campaign for the M.St. in US History, or the RAI's other fundraising priorities, please contact Guy Collender, Senior Development Executive – Humanities, University of Oxford Development Office at [guy.collender@devoff.ox.ac.uk](mailto:guy.collender@devoff.ox.ac.uk) or +44 (0)7850902561.*

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*—Ella St George Carey, D.Phil. in History*



# The Vere Harmsworth Library in 2020–21

Bethan Davies

The academic year 2020–21 presented the Vere Harmsworth Library with new challenges and new opportunities. The library was able to re-open to readers for Michaelmas Term, with reduced, bookable seating spaces to allow for social distancing. Readers with borrowing rights could also use our Click and Collect service to pick up reading material without browsing the open shelves, and we also contributed to the wider Bodleian LibraryScan service. We alone have provided nearly 500 scans since the facility was set up!

Throughout the academic year, in the face of a continually evolving national situation and changing guidance from the University, I was struck by how understanding and supportive our readers were. This has really helped us in keeping the library open and our readers and staff safe, and I, alongside all the library staff, would like to thank everyone for their continued support.

In order to continue building our collection, the VHL committed funds towards monographs in physical and electronic formats. This included the purchase of four Project Muse e-book packages, containing a total of 157 monographs from the years 2019–2021, mainly comprising university press publications focused on regional American studies. These purchases, alongside physical titles, will help teaching and research to stay abreast of the latest work.

We have also been able to purchase the following new online resources:

- *Black Thought and Culture*: This impressive database contains a collection of approximately 100,000 pages of non-fiction writings by major American black leaders, covering 250 years of history.
- *Black Authors, 1556–1922: Imprints from the Library Company of Philadelphia* (funded jointly with the English Faculty Library): a remarkable collection of around 550 searchable works written by Black authors between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- *Time Magazine archive, 1923–2000*: an important record of national and international news, and twentieth-century life.
- *The Atlantic/Atlantic monthly archive, 1857–2014*: another important periodical

for modern American studies, this archive provides researchers with a broad view of American thought with literary and cultural commentary.

I would like to record our thanks to all those who donated books and material over the course of the year. This includes the continued support of the Association of American Rhodes Scholars for the Aydelotte-Kieffer-Smith (AKS) collection.

I would also like to thank Professor James Munson, who helped to facilitate the donation of over 200 titles from the library of the late Dr R. F. Mullen. This wonderful collection of recent and historical monographs focuses on the military history of the American Civil War and will be of great interest to our historians. The titles have been interfiled with our open-shelf historical material.

Another person I would like to thank is Professor Philip Davies, who, as well as donating monographs, has continued to add items to the Philip & Rosamund Davies US Elections Campaigns Archive. This continuously growing resource contains fascinating items related to national and regional elections, and will be of interest to those studying political and social history. The VHL has been able to commit funds for a new cataloguing project, for materials added since 2010, which will increase the usability of the archive and help to preserve the treasures within it.

For the most recent updates on accessing the VHL, and other Bodleian libraries, visit: <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/service-updates>. You can find more information on the VHL on the RAI website at <https://www.rai.ox.ac.uk/vere-harmsworth-library> and on our own site at <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/vhl>. We also have a blog (<http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/vhl>), Facebook ([facebook.com/VereHarmsworthLibrary](https://www.facebook.com/VereHarmsworthLibrary)) and Twitter ([twitter.com/vhllib](https://twitter.com/vhllib)) if you want to keep up with our news. ■

