


EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Nations and Communities: New Ways of Seeing

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This past January, Donald Trump began a second, non-consecutive term in the White House. Having campaigned on an “America First” agenda, the new president immediately began signing executive orders to execute that vision.¹ To many observers, the common thread linking these actions, which ranged from declaring a national border emergency to instructing federal agencies to follow a two-gender policy, was obvious.² But to the extent that they may place “America first,” they raise a number of fundamental questions.

Which groups, for instance, are being invoked with the use of the word “America”? Roughly half of the American people cast their ballots for a different presidential candidate, and many plan to resist the Trump administration’s agenda. Four hundred and thirty languages are spoken in the US, more than a third of which are Indigenous. A majority of US citizens are White, but sometime in the next two decades that will stop being true. Three in ten adults are religiously unaffiliated. So who, exactly, is “America”?

And what does it mean to place America “first”? Does that mean retreating from the global community or dissolving relationships between nations? Does it suggest that the interests of the nation and its people can only be advanced at the expense of others? Is the movement to “Make America Great Again” isolationist by its very nature? Is it imperialist or neocolonial? Does it represent some new way of situating the US in the global context?

Such questions are currently unanswered. But these *kinds* of questions are not new. Looking to the past as a storehouse of experiments in living and meaning-making, historians have practiced ways of looking, ways of seeing, and ways of knowing that are particularly useful in a moment such as this.

The articles in this issue look at different national communities and international currents—here at home in the US, where *HEQ* is located, as well as abroad. Collectively,

¹Humeyra Pamuk, Maggie Michael, and Lena Masri, “Trump Administration Memo Tells USAID to Put ‘America First’ in Reviewing Foreign Aid,” Reuters, Jan. 26, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-administration-memo-tells-usaid-put-america-first-reviewing-foreign-aid-2025-01-26/>.

²“What Executive Orders Did Trump Sign on Day One?” *The Guardian*, Jan. 20, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jan/20/tump-executive-orders-list>.

these projects help us see in new ways by looking in new ways, looking to new places, and asking new questions about notions of community. They push us to imagine communities that are understudied, as well as to reexamine what it means to be a “nation.” And while they very much tackle the past on its own terms, they also sharpen our capacity to see and understand the present.

The issue opens with the Presidential Address that Adrea Lawrence gave at the November 2024 meeting of the History of Education Society in Chicago. Looking at a nation within a nation—the Indigenous Blackfoot community in the US—Lawrence explores how psychologist Abraham Maslow sought to understand an educational system that elevated a distinct set of communal values. His experience, she argues, changed his understanding of human development and human need. The address helps us understand the distinctive qualities of Indigenous communities through the lens of broader interpretive frameworks focused on self-actualization. Contemporary reexaminations of tribal identity and official recognition have much to gain from Maslow’s encounter with the Siksika tribe.

The first feature article in this issue is Funké Aladejebi’s and Jeff Bale’s “Race, Language, and Contested Solidarities: The Heritage-Language and Black Cultural-Heritage Programs in Ontario in the 1970s and ’80s.” Looking at our close neighbors to the north, Aladejebi and Bale explore the dynamics of power, self-determination, identity, and policy as they unfolded around the issues of language, race, and culture. Looking specifically at activism around heritage-language education and Black cultural-heritage programming in Toronto, the authors investigate tensions over official federal recognition of identity. These demands for inclusion at once complicate understandings of the Canadian context and echo past experiences within border communities in the US and around the world.

In the second feature article, “Making Global Citizens: Milton Eisenhower, UNESCO, and the Desegregation of Kansas State College, 1943-1950,” Brendan G. Lee tells the story of the lesser-known brother of the US president. Leading Kansas State College, Milton S. Eisenhower pursued a series of progressive reforms to promote democracy, citizenship, and global peacebuilding. These efforts were informed by Eisenhower’s global perspective and inspired a partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. The article reminds all of us of the kind of commitment higher education leaders in the US have had to international cooperation. And the case highlights a strong US tendency toward the global, despite the present flirtation with isolationism and protectionism.

The third article is Emma Peterson’s “Academic Freedom under Dictatorship in Chile: Coalition Building and Inter-stakeholder Collaboration from 1980 to 1989.” In this historiographical essay, Peterson examines academic freedom in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship. She brings together the separate experiences of three distinctive groups to tell a coherent story about political resistance. Gathering the perspectives of students, faculty, and members of the public, Peterson weaves a portrait of how academic freedom served as a focal point in struggle against dictatorship. At a time when academic freedom is under threat in the US and abroad, this study illustrates how powerful collaboration can be in the face of regimes that seek to control the free flow of ideas.

The final feature article in this issue is Nathan Tanner's "Resisting Termination: Native American College Student Activism and the National Indian Youth Council, 1953–1970." Tanner tells a largely overlooked story about Native American student activism through the case of National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). Using the Council's published voices and direct actions, the article highlights this organization's influence on federal tribal policies. Much like Peterson's work on Chile, Tanner shows the significance of coalition building within and across groups in relation to policy change. And both pieces outline effective patterns of collaboration and resistance in eras of heightened political tension.

The special forum included in this issue serves as another opportunity to merge the worlds of historical scholarship with present policymaking. This past summer, the American Historical Association (AHA) released a report called "American Lesson Plan: Teaching US History in Secondary Schools." The *HEQ* editorial team invited a brief, which is published in this issue: "Changing the Subject in the School Wars: An AHA Research Team Perspective." Additionally, we invited responses from four historians—Johann Neem, Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, Yoon Pak, and Larry Cuban. Together, they reflect on the report's conclusions based on a two-year study of state, district, and teacher decision-making as represented in thousands of pages of surveys and primary source data. The forum participants offer distinctive insights and approaches to responding to the AHA report and on what it means to teach history at the high school level.

History doesn't offer a way of peering into the future. Despite common wisdom, the past doesn't repeat itself; usually, it doesn't even rhyme. It does, however, instruct us in how to pay attention—how to critically engage with the present, and to imagine what could come next. That's important at all times. But it may be particularly important right now.