

## Q&A

# Teaching U.S. History in the World

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This is the second in a two-part Q&A series that explores the particular challenges and unique opportunities that historians face while researching, writing, and teaching American history outside the United States. To evaluate the diverse dynamics of teaching U.S. history beyond Europe, which was the focus of the previous Q&A, Sarah B. Snyder posed a series of questions to Julia Bowes (Australia), Zach Fredman (China), Jennifer Frost and Paul M. Taillon (New Zealand), Gerardo Gurza-Lavalle (Mexico), Fernando Purcell (Chile), and Ronny Regev (Israel).

### What draws your students to studying modern U.S. history, and what most confuses them?

**Gerardo Gurza-Lavalle:** This is a difficult question. I teach a survey of U.S. history from the colonial period to the end of the nineteenth century. Students are diverse, and they come to the course with different backgrounds and different predispositions toward the United States. Nonetheless, it is a valid generalization to say that most students in Mexico City are not particularly drawn to United States history, and that if the course were not mandatory, they would not choose to take it. Most know little about U.S. history, and many carry a heavy load of prejudices, through which they see the United States either as a country with a short and shallow history (and therefore uninteresting); as an imperialist bully; or as a country that was born modern, Protestant, and capitalist and that has followed a completely different historical trajectory from other countries in the continent. These prejudices are not the best basis to build the course on.

I have found, however, that the students become interested when they begin to appreciate similarities between Mexico or Latin America and the United States. That is, to the extent that the overview of U.S. history can depart from a standard exceptionalist interpretation (which has widespread influence in Mexico thanks to old textbooks and to the common use of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* in reading lists in humanities and social sciences majors) and can explain how the United States faced similar problems and had some similarities to other countries in the Americas, the students become more interested. I have found this strategy useful to draw in students, but it is not just a strategy, for I believe that there is much in favor of seeing the United States as an integral part of the hemisphere. In other words, exceptionalism draws them away, while an implicitly comparative approach opens to them a new perspective and engages their curiosity.

**Ronny Regev:** Students in Israel are drawn to U.S. history because of an urge to make sense of the popular culture they consume and of current events. Israelis consume a lot of television,

movies, and music from the United States. In class, students often mention songs they heard recently or shows they watched. When I teach African American history, for example, there are always several students who mention Kendrick Lamar. I think they are trying to ground their understanding of such popular works within a broader historical context. Since 2016, the turbulent years of the Trump presidency as well as the vibrant and cogent discourse generated by Black Lives Matter activists draw the attention of young people, some of whom wish to understand the history behind these developments. Of course, in Israel, there is also a specific interest in the role played by Jews in U.S. history.

Students are mostly confused by the messiness of history and the complexities of human interaction. I am not sure this is unique to the study of U.S. history, but, in this particular context, they are often confused by the lack of clear dichotomies. Students often ask many questions when we discuss the fact that slavery was not just a Southern institution, or that most Southerners did not hold slaves yet supported the Confederacy, or that the Franklin D. Roosevelt coalition included Southern Democrats as well as African Americans. Another point of confusion has to do with tropes and stereotypes. Here too, I don't think this is specific to the study of the United States, but there are several key concepts that students grapple with. One such concept is racism and the need to historicize it rather than treat it as a catch-all explanation. I usually assign Barbara Fields in order to start a more nuanced conversation. Another such concept is "the American Dream." I often encounter students who use this trope as if it is an ahistorical truism, and I find it hard to convey the idea that the United States, like all societies, is not a static nation with a static set of beliefs.

**Zach Fredman:** I teach at Duke Kunshan University (DKU) in China, Duke University's joint venture campus near Shanghai. Our student body is around 65 percent Chinese, 15 percent American, and 20 percent international from many other countries. Most students who study modern U.S. history at DKU tend to be interested in American culture and hope to attend graduate school in the United States. The most common interests among students I've taught are music, film and television, professional sports, comedy, and literature. All DKU students study abroad at Duke for a semester during their junior year, so some non-American students think that taking a modern U.S. history course will help them to prepare for this experience.

For Chinese students, it's difficult not to be confused by the United States. The country occupies a central place in Chinese public discourse, and its portrayal in domestic media is overwhelmingly negative. Whereas you'll never hear a bad story about China on the news here, anything that can cast the United States in a bad light gets amplified. And everyone understands that "foreign forces"—the Chinese government's preferred bogeyman for problems that can't simply be censored—means the U.S. government. But at the same time, students can see for themselves that the United States remains one of the main yardsticks by which progress in China is measured. They also know that a sizable portion of their wealthiest and most ambitious compatriots emigrate to the United States every year. And most students come to DKU because they want to earn an American college degree and enhance their chances of studying abroad after they graduate. These contradictions make for fascinating discussions in classes on U.S.–China relations and modern American history.

**Fernando Purcell:** I would say that the curiosity to know in greater depth the history of a country that is culturally close to us because of movies, music, television, and the media in general. These media often generate stereotypical visions of the reality of the United States, which generates curiosity in students in Chile.

What confuses them the most are the contradictions between a history and identity full of democracy and freedom, which, when contrasted with slavery, racial discrimination, and exclusionary economic practices on military interventions, are difficult to understand.

**Julia Bowes:** Unfortunately, in a one-word answer to both questions: Trump. In both a pre- and post-Trump world, however, I would also say it is mass movements like Black Lives Matter that both inspire students to study modern U.S. history and seek to understand the complex history of racism and racism in the United States.

Teaching in an Australian context, I find it is the U.S.'s global power that draws students into the subject, and often the saturation of U.S.-based news, including excellent long-form investigative work and podcast series, as well as culture, lulls students into having a false sense of confidence about their literacy in U.S. history. When I previously taught in Hong Kong, it was the same—students felt a sense of obligation to understand and know more about such a dominant power in the world but were almost intimidated by their presumed lack of literacy and familiarity with the subject matter.

**Jennifer Frost and Paul M. Taillon:** Our students are both drawn to and critical of the United States, which is great because this spurs them to enroll in our courses to learn more! They closely follow U.S. popular culture and politics, and they recognize the important role the United States plays in the world and where it has been a force for good. They also still see the United States as a place of freedom and opportunity. But they are critical of racial inequality, police brutality, and lack of reproductive rights at home and many of our military interventions abroad.

What most confuses them is our system of politics and government and the fact that in the twenty-first century we are still governed by an eighteenth-century document, the U.S. Constitution. We always need to explain the division between the federal and state governments, the difference among the three branches of the federal government, and especially how the electoral college works. With a unicameral legislature and parliamentary system where the majority party forms the government, New Zealand's system is much simpler and more straightforward.

It's also more democratic, and this is what most surprises and disappoints our students about the United States: how partial and fragile our democracy is, which the Trump years made clear for all to see. In 2021, as a result of the Trump administration, the Republican Party's decades-long voter suppression efforts, and the January 6 insurrection, the United States garnered the label "democracy in decline," whereas New Zealand continues to be at the top of the list of world's most democratic nations.

**If you taught or trained in the United States before beginning your current position, what was the biggest surprise when you taught your first courses? Or put another way, how have you had to rethink your own assumptions when teaching U.S. history in your local context?**

**Fredman:** I was lucky to have experience working in Asia before taking this job, including a postdoc in Singapore and several years teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at the college level in Chengdu before graduate school. I made most of my rookie mistakes before coming to DKU.

Coming into this position, I knew that I had to adjust reading and writing loads and provide more context and explanation for things that American students might take for granted. Even after beginning classes, I make small changes by soliciting more feedback during courses, and not just waiting until I receive student evaluations after the term ends.

To this day, however, students and I sometimes see things in surprisingly different ways. We might think we're talking about the same thing, but we're not. For example, like most college-educated Americans, I see diversity as a good thing. But many students I've taught don't: they view it as a threat to social stability. Like my approach to the contradictory views about the United States I've encountered, I welcome the class discussions that emerge from such surprises and feel fortunate to be teaching in a pluralistic, international environment full of students and faculty with widely divergent life experiences.

**Bowes:** I've taught U.S. history in two quite different contexts: first I taught in Hong Kong during the pro-democracy protest movement between 2018–2021, then I relocated to the University of Melbourne in Australia (where I am originally from) mid-2021, and spent eighteen months teaching U.S. history in the adjustment back to campus after COVID and the Trump presidency.

What has surprised me is the weight of assumptions the students have brought to the course that have pulled in very opposite directions. Hong Kong students were very pro-American, and only became more so as the protest movement unfolded to the point that there were a number of very pro-Trump students who were very active in the Hong Kong protest movement, viewing the United States as a positive counterweight to the incursions of the CCP (and possibly placing misplaced faith in the hope of an American intervention). My Australian students, by contrast, are probably default center-left and have a very negative view of American politics, which they assume skews to the right and far-right. In both instances, I have needed to put work into ensuring my courses and how I steward tutorial discussion captures the political diversity and the contradictions of U.S. politics. Returning home has also involved a re-acculturation into views I unreflexively held as an undergraduate. To give one example, most Australian students do not know anyone who serves in the military and struggle to fathom why anyone would. I remember being that student, so now I put a lot of work into trying to find sources that open students up to trying to understand the culture of militarism and military service in the United States as well as critique it.

As described above, I think I was first drawn to studying U.S. history out of the same knee-jerk assumptions a lot of my Australian students have; of course it was the audacity-of-hope Obama years, back when I was still drawn to understanding U.S. conservatism, so in a sense I have been using U.S. history to rethink my own assumptions about Australia since I embarked on a PhD. The sticking points now, for my students, are what I would categorize as negative American exceptionalism—to think of racism as a uniquely American problem, the rise of the far-right and white nationalism as distinctly American phenomena. Interestingly, Hong Kong students were the same in condemning American racism while showing little introspection in the role race and racism played in their own society. As far as my own assumptions, I guess I'm still trying to work through what is local and particular and what is transnational/instructive about these themes in the contexts in which I teach and will hopefully get there by pushing my students to do the same.

**Purcell:** My first surprise was to always find, sitting in my classes, exchange students from the United States interested in learning, from a different point of view, aspects of their own national history. This led me to be very conscious, from the beginning, of the need to make explicit the

points of view chosen for the analysis. Rather than rethinking my own assumptions, I always had to put on the table how things could be seen differently. The international students wanted a local view, and the Chilean students wanted to know more about the inner United States, about those stories not related to interventions in Latin America.

**Regev:** The main surprise, which in hindsight I should have anticipated, is the lack of advanced knowledge. U.S. history is not taught extensively in Israeli high schools, and, therefore, I find that, in most of my classes, I have to explain even the most basic facts like the difference between the federal government and state government, the structure of Congress and how it operates, and even some basic geography. So, in many ways, all the courses I teach are also, at least to some degree, introductory courses. On the flip side, there is some benefit to starting with the basics. For example, when I teach about redlining, I often need to explain the interaction between federal agencies such as Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), local authorities, and public and private agents. I think eventually, the students have a very firm understanding of the complexities of structural racism. Finally, since they are removed, many students tend to think of U.S. society as a monolith, therefore they are seeking to understand "American society" or "the Americans." I need to spend much time stressing the differences between various groups of Americans and the differing, contradicting, and overlapping interests and ideologies.

**Gurza-Lavalle:** Mexican students in general have only superficial knowledge of U.S. history, so it is necessary to provide more context and explanation. At the graduate level, it is also necessary to include more historiography. Apart from that, however, I would say that students in Mexico share many interests with their peers from the United States: slavery and the complex racial, social, and political problems it produced; colonialism and dispossession of indigenous groups; women and changes in gender ideologies. There are, of course, some themes that are particularly interesting to Mexican students, such as expansionism and the U.S.–Mexican War.

Lest this gives the impression that teaching U.S. history in Mexico is almost the same as teaching in the United States, I should add that it has been some years since I had close contact with history students in the United States, and I know that the situation in higher education has changed significantly in the last five or six years. Mexican students have also become more aware of racial and gender inequalities, and other kinds of discrimination in the last several years, but I would say that the intellectual exchange has not become too polarized. In Mexican seminar rooms, it is possible to approach difficult subjects in a frank and open way.

**Frost and Taillon:** Our students challenged several of our assumptions right from our arrival in 1999 and prompted us to revise existing courses and offer new ones.

One revision had to do with how we teach U.S. continental and overseas expansion. Due to New Zealand's foundational Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi, signed in 1840 between the British Crown and indigenous Māori, we now pay more attention to treaties—broken and kept—in the U.S. context. Earlier we presented the United States as an "informal empire," which students strongly objected to, given that New Zealand's Pacific neighbors include U.S. territories, such as Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands. Now we teach about formal empire and territories, which also fits with recent scholarship by Daniel Immerwahr and others on the "Greater United States."

One surprise was finding out that the civil right movement is a prominent part of the high school history curriculum in New Zealand, so our students had studied it and wanted to

delve deeper. The movement and connections to modern Māori protest resonate in New Zealand. Although the modern Māori movement continued an indigenous historical struggle, it also was shaped profoundly by the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power in the 1960s. These connections and students' interest prompted us to offer a new course on African American freedom struggles. This course is very popular and offers students an opportunity to ask and answer questions about social justice, politics, and history in both countries.

**If you teach courses about the relations between the country where you teach and the United States, what are the dominant narratives that exist and how do you problematize them?**

**Purcell:** I have never taught only the diplomatic history of U.S.–Chilean or Latin American relations. I have consistently taught about relations of a different order situated in transnational fields. So, with this I have sought to complexify many of the settled views around the political, ideological and economic history of the United States in its relationship with Latin America. These visions are often directly linked to the numerous interventions of the United States in the region, several of them bloody and painful, especially during the Cold War. A good example of this exercise is in the analysis of the influence of cinema where issues of cultural diplomacy and imperialist commercial practices that sought to overshadow European or Latin American industries were mixed with the tastes and free decisions of different Latin American societies attracted by movie stars and their modernizing imprint. So, this type of example helps students to see history with multiple colors and flavors, avoiding simple and binary narratives where there is room for only good and bad, victims and victimizers.

**Frost and Taillon:** For ten years, Jennifer co-taught with our colleague in Māori history, Aroha Harris, a first-year course called “Racial Histories: New Zealand and the United States.” We organized this comparative course both chronologically and thematically. It was an incredible opportunity to learn about the history of New Zealand race relations, and the course put the similarities and differences between the two countries in high relief. They share, of course, a heritage as Anglo settler societies that colonized, marginalized, and expropriated land from the indigenous nations they encountered. They each have a national narrative of exceptionalism: the United States as a “city upon a hill” and New Zealand as “God’s Own Country.” But 200 years passed between their founding moments.

The British empire that created colonies in North America was different from the empire that created New Zealand. Profound changes in the beliefs and values of the British imperial ruling class, the economy and class relations, and especially slavery and abolition had occurred. Historian David Hackett Fischer’s 2013 comparative history of New Zealand and the United States, *Fairness and Freedom*, addresses these key differences. The difference our students most cited (and took pride in) was the absence of a system of racial slavery in New Zealand in contrast to that of the United States. Yet, unfree labor systems and migration extended across the Pacific World, and New Zealanders, as traders, merchants, and consumers, greatly benefited. In the web of imperial relations, New Zealand did not stand apart from labor exploitation.

**Fredman:** I’ve done a lot of teaching on U.S.–China relations at Duke Kunshan, including broader survey courses on the topic and more specialized, research-driven seminars covering shorter time periods. I’ve also mentored several senior thesis projects on U.S.–China relations. As I mentioned above, the dominant narratives here are one-sided and anti-American. Public discourse in the United States is similarly negative when it comes to China. So, I see these

courses as an opportunity to challenge conventional wisdom and use historical thinking skills as a way to better understand contemporary challenges and opportunities in bilateral relations.

My survey course covers U.S.–China relations from 1776 to the present, paying equal attention to Chinese and American perspectives. Students write a research paper for the course on a topic of their choice, and in some years, I've specified that their topics must challenge a dominant narrative from at least one of the two countries. I've always given the same take-home, final exam: students work in groups of three as policy advisor teams writing for either the U.S. Secretary of State or the Chinese Foreign Ministry. They must prepare a four-part policy report: (1) provide an honest assessment of the historical roots of distrust in the other country; (2) make historically informed recommendations about what, if anything, their government can do to alleviate this distrust; (3) identify one area of important historical cooperation between China and the United States; (4) devise a plan for either strengthening cooperation in this particular area or applying the historical lessons from this area in order to strengthen cooperation on a different area or issue. Students draw on primary and secondary sources from the course to complete the exam.

**Bowes:** I teach a course on the United States and the World here, and I think it helps in some ways to help decenter the United States, funnily enough because it intersects with so many of the other courses my colleagues offer in Modern China, the Soviet Union, the Cold War in Asia, etc. Students are able to bring in great perspectives from those other courses into discussions in “U.S. and the World” to counter a dominant narrative that the United States has and always will be a dominant power. The second way I do that is obviously through periodization; drawing the history back into the nineteenth-century helps to defamiliarize students and set up a narrative arc for the course about when the United States emerged as a dominant power, and for how long?

**Regev:** I do not offer courses about the relations between the United States and Israel. This is partially due to the disciplinary structure of the university I teach in. Jewish and Israeli history are clustered as a separate discipline and not taught by the history department. I am also not an expert on this topic. However, I do make an ideological choice to minimize the discussion of Israel in my own classes. There is a dominant narrative about the special relationship between Israel and the United States and, by emphasizing other regions, other countries, and domestic affairs, I hope to problematize this narrative and decentralize the national story that is hyper-emphasized here.

**Gurza-Lavalle:** I do not teach Mexico–U.S. relations in a specific course, but I touch upon some difficult episodes in the relations between both countries in the nineteenth century. The U.S.–Mexican War, especially, is still a somewhat sensitive subject, and for a long time the dominant narrative in Mexico was one that blamed the war and its consequences on the perfidy of the U.S. government. It is important to point out that, in this subject, the revisionisms in each country's historiography have run in opposite directions. That is, in the United States since the 1960s, historians became more critical of the motives and conduct of their country in the international scene. On the other hand, as of the 1990s, Mexican historians also started producing more balanced assessments of the conflict, in which the negative view of the United States was somewhat tempered by a recognition of the many blunders and miscalculations of the Mexican governments of the time, and by a more careful analysis of the diversity of opinion within the United States. This tendency has been applied to other periods and episodes of the binational relation and has helped to leave behind more manichaeistic interpretations. In both my teaching and my written work, I have adopted this kind of revisionism.

**How has your pedagogy been reshaped by recent economic, cultural, and political trends? Could you say more about momentous events in the United States or in the countries in which you teach that required new approaches to instruction, research, or public engagement among faculty and students?**

**Regev:** The new forms of populism dominant in politics in the United States, Israel, and many other countries around the world have certainly affected my teaching. While governments change, I used to take for granted the stability of democracy itself. Recently, in the United States, in Israel, and elsewhere we are witnessing the vulnerability of democratic institutions like courts, elections, and parliament. This certainly changes the tone of my courses, especially courses on the twentieth century. For one, it makes it difficult to end the historical narrative on an optimistic note. Furthermore, it also requires a reframing of how I teach big themes such as liberalism for example. In the past, I think I treated the liberal state and the New Deal as harbingers of a new era in world politics. Now, looking back at the twentieth century, I pay close attention to ideas and groups challenging the liberal consensus.

In Israel, the past year brought an intense political struggle over the new government's plans for judicial reform. These plans caused a rift in Israeli society that was manifested also in the classrooms, as most universities and faculty members, including myself, objected to the proposed changes due to, among other things, their detrimental implications for academic freedom. In classes, I usually try not to take a political stand. I never hide my opinions, but I do not teach them. The threat to democracy and to the university from within the political sphere made this aspiration very difficult.

**Gurza-Lavalle:** I do not believe that my pedagogy has been shaped or altered by recent events, but there is no denying that the presidency of Donald Trump has changed the way in which many students see the United States. Trump's rhetoric and policies restored to good health many old prejudices that had been losing strength gradually in the last decades. As I pointed out in my answer to the first question, many Mexican students carry some negative prejudices regarding the United States, but it is my belief that before 2016 they were more open to revise their preconceptions. Regrettably, I would say that now it is more difficult to dissuade them from a view of the United States as a self-centered, aggressively nationalistic society, still imbued with racism and anti-immigration feeling.

**Bowes:** There is a strong demand in Australia to have experts speak to the constant news cycle of momentous events from the United States, especially the indictment of Trump. It's actually led me to be more cautious about how and when I do public engagement: I think there is a tendency for the news media to take overly reductive and simplistic historic parallels and run with them, or students want me to comment on contemporary politics, which I view as a bit beyond my expertise. That said, I do think historians can obviously offer something incredibly important for parsing our present moment in providing non-U.S. audiences with some much-needed context. So for Supreme Court decisions like *Dobbs*, I try to get ahead of the game a bit in publishing articles that put *Dobbs* and reproductive rights into a longer historical context, then field questions based on that.

In Hong Kong, I had already initiated a course on U.S. protest movements in 2018, in part due to the fact the university students there had come of age in the Umbrella Movement of 2014. But it took on a whole new resonance and intensity in 2019 when the National Security Law and pro-democracy movements started, and I found the course was actually a really nice space for the students to get some distance and historical perspective on their own movement. It was a bit of a relief valve actually for them to be able to read about tensions in the New Left, or debates over women's role in the New Left, and get outside their own specific context.

**Purcell:** A few years ago, I taught an elective course entitled “How to Understand Trump.” It was basically an effort to situate Trump not as an oddity in U.S. history. From the present we went back to the Reagan years of the Cold War, the immigration crisis and restrictions of the 1920s, and countless other moments and contexts. At the same time, exceptional situations of the present impact the organization of seminars, colloquia, or the very free topics on which students choose to do their essays or small pieces of research. There is certainly a direct connection.

**Fredman:** Political trends and other issues in China and the United States have loomed large since I started this job: the Hong Kong protest movement, Trump’s trade war, the COVID pandemic, and the general deterioration of U.S.–China relations over the past five years. Like most professors around the world, I had to adapt to remote and hybrid teaching over the pandemic, with China’s zero-COVID policy and the absence of international students on campus from January 2020 until spring 2023, exacerbating the challenge. I’ve updated syllabi to account for some of these trends and events, and I participated in teaching a team-taught course on the Hong Kong protests. Students have also delved into some of these topics in their own research.

**Frost and Taillon:** Even before the pandemic we were concerned about student engagement and participation in our classes. Our university instituted lecture recording a decade ago, which led to a dramatic fall in attendance, so we continually work to demonstrate the “value added” of coming to class. To that end, we began using the Reacting to the Past pedagogy in two of our courses: the “Making of Modern America, 1865–1919” and “Making Sense of the Sixties, 1955–1975.” This immersive, active-learning pedagogy developed by Mark Carnes “gamifies” an event in the past using role play, strategy, and teamwork. The games—one about the 1913 Paterson Silk Strike and one about the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago—met with great success in 2016–2018, and we have only just returned to it this year. We had doubts about whether our current cohort of students, who experienced remote learning during the pandemic, would show up and engage, but they did! They fully participated, had fun, learned a lot, and demonstrated that they will indeed come to class (at the very least for the two and a half weeks of our game).

And even before Trump, the rise of Make America Great Again (MAGA), and extremist attacks on academic freedom, lecture recording led us to self-censor in the classroom. Although we are unionized and have good employment relations laws in New Zealand, we don’t have tenure. We didn’t want to express any frank opinions that would be recorded and could be made public by our students. But starting in 2015 after Trump declared his candidacy, so many questions came from students wanting us to explain Trump’s popularity and political impact that we had to respond. We began offering a bimonthly lunchtime forum for discussion about U.S. politics and current events and invited students to come along. We called it “What the #@%&\* is going on in the USA?” And it worked really well. Expatriate Americans outside of history also started to come along, and it was both clarifying and cathartic ... until Trump won. After the 2016 election, we discontinued the forum, although we still self-censor in the classroom and converse with our students about politics only outside.

### **How has the geographic context in which you teach modified your own understanding of and writing about U.S. history?**

**Regev:** As I am typing these answers, there is a war going on between Israel and Hamas, the organization controlling the Gaza strip, which could turn into a broader conflict. This round of hostilities has already proven to be longer and deadlier for both Palestinians and Israelis. The

Biden administration is taking a leading role, and Congress expressed its support of Israel. But, public opinion, especially in big cities and American colleges, is very critical of Israel and its government. It is too early to say what will be the lasting results of this war. Naturally, its effect on my teaching and research are not my primary concern at the moment. However, I am sure my students will ask questions about the various American responses to this conflict, specifically about the academic response. Additionally, I fear students will become more militant and extreme in their views. In a recent interview, Columbia professor Rashid Khalidi suggested that students, due to their young age, are not yet politically mature in their views, which leads to some outrageous opinions and statements. While he was speaking mostly about the activist left, I fear I will encounter such a problem also from the Israeli right. On top of that, several historians, whose work I taught in the past, expressed outrageous opinions (some for and some against Israel). I suspect it will be challenging to read and teach the work of these historians with my Israeli and Palestinian students. I will no longer be able to separate the discussion of U.S. history from current sentiments about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

**Gurza-Lavalle:** I wish to go back to a previous answer: being a born-and-bred Mexican, and teaching in Mexico, has made me question the more simplistic versions of American exceptionalism. Having a background in Mexican and Latin American history has made it possible for me to do comparisons and to find common problems and shared challenges in the historical trajectories of the different countries of the hemisphere. Also, living in a neighboring country, and one that in several ways has a shared history, makes it almost inevitable to consider a transnational perspective.

**Fredman:** I worked in Asia for five years before beginning my PhD, which motivated me to go graduate school and study U.S. history from a transnational perspective. Working at DKU all these years has reinforced this inclination, as has my time living in other countries outside the United States, which has accounted for most of my adult life. My first book examined U.S.–China relations during World War II and the Chinese Civil War. My new project looks more broadly at U.S. relations with the Western Pacific region. Because of my background and research interests, all my teaching about U.S. history approaches the topic from a transnational or global perspective.

**Bowes:** As stated earlier, the Australian context in which I grew up definitively shaped the questions I took to graduate school, which still animate my work. In a nutshell, they are why do Australians love compulsory state power so much (we have compulsory everything from compulsory voting to compulsory pension funds etc.), whereas Americans are so anti-compulsion (or many Americans are)? This theory was again borne out in the vastly different responses to COVID! Over time, it's helped me actually see what is exceptional about Australian political culture more so than American political culture, where there is more overlap with British ideas about liberty, etc., as well.

Living through the Hong Kong protests also helped me to think differently, and perhaps more sympathetically, about anti-statism.

**Purcell:** One raises historical questions to bring to the classroom or research from where one is situated. More than modifying the understanding of the United States, the Chilean context, in my case, defines the way things are seen. For the same reason, everything I teach or research about the United States establishes connections and comparisons with Latin America. If I talk about slavery in the United States, I cannot but compare it with what happened in Brazil or Cuba, for example. If I teach colonial history, I need to raise questions based on what happened in the Spanish case. And I could go on and on mentioning multiple examples.

In other words, I do not teach a walled history of the United States because I firmly believe that such a history simply does not exist; it is only the result of national projects or visions that isolate or disconnect “connecting cables” in an artificial way.

The same is true for research. I have always developed research that involves the United States and Latin America with a transnational perspective.

**Frost and Taillon:** Teaching in a small island nation, located at the bottom of the world (or is it the top?) reminds us continually of the size, wealth, and power of the United States. For better or worse, the impact of the United States on New Zealand is profound, and our students know this.

We were here on 9/11 and in the aftermath received an outpouring of care and concern from New Zealanders. The New Zealand government also supported the United Nations (UN) effort in Afghanistan, including sending troops in 2001. But as the George W. Bush administration forged ahead with plans for an invasion of Iraq, without the backing of the UN, the New Zealand government did not offer support. For a small country, the international system of law and institutions, and multilateralism are critical, and the government wanted the UN weapons inspection process to proceed before resorting to the use of force.

Of course, that didn’t happen, and the United States, along with its “coalition of the willing,” invaded Iraq with disastrous, tragic results and no weapons of mass destruction found, as we now know. The Bush administration’s torture policies and the terrors at Abu Ghraib prison then became public, and international opinion of the United States plummeted. When George W. Bush ran for re-election in 2004, Jennifer shared with her students that we can vote as American citizens (and taxpayers) living abroad. One of her students said, “The entire world should be able to vote, given the terrible impact the United States has on the world.” Interactions around the Iraq War such as this clarified early on our position and perspective as both “insiders” and “outsiders” of the United States and on U.S. history. That duality shapes our teaching, research, and public outreach.

**As we discussed in last issue’s Q&A with Americanists based in Europe, many teaching U.S. history are facing budgetary restraints and/or political pressures. Have you or your institution had to adjust your approach to research, writing, and public engagement? If so, how, and toward what end?**

**Frost and Taillon:** All universities in New Zealand are public institutions, and political and budgetary pressures affect all of our professional activities. One outcome is our Performance-Based Research Fund evaluation. This evaluation requires us to submit a research portfolio documenting our research “output,” “impact,” and “peer esteem” over the previous five years. From there, a panel evaluates our portfolios individually and assigns a grade: A, B, C, etc. (Yes—so we know how our students feel.) Each university then gets a collective ranking that determines its portion of research funding made available through the government. This has both negative and positive effects for us. We are pressured to publish, but, to make that possible, we also have very good research funding and sabbatical policies.

Another outcome of recent pressures is wholly positive. Due to climate change and the need for climate action, sustainability is a high priority. So, now it is recommended that research and conference travel funding go mainly to early-career academics who are building their research profiles, rather than to the established scholars who right now do the most carbon-emitting international travel. Another idea being discussed informally is that established scholars

consider intergenerational equity, not just their own self-interest, when they get to retirement age. Although there is no mandatory retirement age in New Zealand, and not every retirement will yield a job for a younger academic, many will, so that's a factor we need to consider as we work toward a sustainable future.

**Regev:** Luckily, this has not been the case in Israel or in my institution so far. We do struggle with declining enrollment in the humanities; however, to my surprise and delight, U.S. history and particularly African American history have served as reliable magnets that attract students to the classroom. I hope it stays this way. In research, there has been an emphasis on outside grants, due to some budgetary constraints. Unfortunately, there is a short supply of research scholarships in the United States that are available to foreign citizens, as non-U.S. institutions do not tend to prioritize research about the United States.

**Gurza-Lavalle:** Fortunately, I have not faced any restraints or pressures in my institution, and as far as I can tell, my colleagues from other public institutions of higher education have not experienced any restrictions or limitations to academic freedom. I should add, however, that earlier this year the Mexican government approved a new law of science and technology. The law changes considerably the scientific policy of the federal government and has elicited apprehension in the academic community, especially among those who work in the public research centers funded by the federal government and supervised by the National Council of Sciences, Humanities, and Technology (CONAHCyT). The reason for this is that the new law gives the government more power to shape the research priorities of the public research centers. Potentially, this could affect academic freedom, but it is too soon to tell. Let us hope that it doesn't come to pass.

**Purcell:** The truth is that I am part of a very small group of specialists in my country. Restrictions have always existed. There are no graduate programs in Chile specifically related to the United States, for example. What is done here is along the lines of the larger group understood as American history or History of the Americas. The privilege is given to Chilean national history and in second order to Latin American history. It is paradoxical, but the study of the most influential nation in the history of the continent, in the last 200 years, does not have enough resources for greater development in the country at the level of study programs. However, it is still possible to obtain generous research funds in the national system equivalent to the NSF in the United States, so that the few specialists that we have can develop research and publish without major problems.

**Fredman:** My institution has done an excellent job protecting academic freedom in the classroom and helping to facilitate my research. I haven't adjusted my approach in these areas. But working in China is challenging: the country now ranks second-to-last after North Korea in the Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index. I need a VPN for 95 percent of my internet needs, and getting hard copies of books into the country can be difficult. I'm not eligible for external domestic grant funding, and working in China also disqualifies me from applying to some sources of funding in the United States. I was fortunate to receive internal funding to complete my first book and get a second project underway, and being able to rely on the Duke University Library has been tremendously helpful. But like many other institutions, we are now feeling the impact of post-COVID belt-tightening.

Public engagement is the one area where I've had to adjust my plans. As a grad student, I dreamed of someday becoming a public authority on U.S.–China relations. But needing a Chinese visa to do my job has made me more reluctant to write op-eds on contemporary U.S.–China relations, though I am still thinking about ways I can do this without

compromising my integrity or risking my visa eligibility. Luckily, I have found other rewarding avenues for professional development. Joining DKU as part of the inaugural faculty cohort has allowed me to take up leadership, service, and program-building responsibilities not usually available to early-career scholars.

**Bowes:** I had to fight against the temptation to pre-empt this question in my answer to the last! Yes, we are facing a lot of pressure to consolidate our teaching, which I fear over time will mean less and less U.S. history. In some ways this will (hopefully!) be part of an important corrective to the Euro-American bias that our curriculum, like so many history departments, needs to confront, but I think it is also part of a general pressure to make courses broader and more general. I now teach predominantly global gender history courses, which I love, and it has given me important space to think about how to integrate U.S. history into global courses. I hope when I can revisit teaching U.S. history, I will still have the scope and flexibility to offer more narrow and detailed subjects on topics of U.S. history, like the history of race and reproductive rights, that allow students to dive deep and get a good grasp of one topic. I worry as we consolidate that everything will become a broad surface sweep survey course, which is antithetical to the historian's quest to deeply contextualize!

As far as research and public engagement go, there is definitely a different set of metrics here for publications, but I try to keep myself to American standards because ultimately that is the community of researchers I am seeking to speak to and engage with. As for public engagement, no matter how much they gut the humanities, there will always be a strong thirst for expert takes on U.S. politics, so I'm not worried about running out of business on that front!

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**Zach Fredman** is an associate professor of history at Duke Kunshan University. He teaches courses on the history of U.S. foreign relations, Sino-American relations, American counterculture movements, and heavy metal music.

**Jennifer Frost** is associate professor of history and **Paul M. Taillon** is senior lecturer in history, both at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She teaches courses on Hollywood's America and African-American freedom struggles, he teaches the introductory survey and postgraduate course in U.S. history, and they team-teach upper division courses on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, as well as the 1960s.

**Gerardo Gurza-Lavalle** is a professor of history at the Instituto Mora in Mexico City. He teaches U.S. history from the colonial period to the end of the nineteenth century.

**Fernando Purcell** is the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. He teaches courses on modern U.S. history, the history of the United States and the Cold War, and immigration to the United States.

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