

Rothermere American Institute



# Annual Report 2019-20

RAI

ROTHERMERE AMERICAN INSTITUTE



UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD



## Director's Foreword: Adam Smith

It was only last October that I took over from Hal Jones as RAI Director but already it feels like another era, not because of anything that has happened to me—though I have more grey hairs—but because the global pandemic has upended literally every aspect of university life. Had we been confronted by this kind of public health crisis twenty years ago, we would either have had to take the risk of continuing to teach and meet, or been obliged to go into total hibernation. As it is, of course, we have all somehow carried on, albeit in the half-life of Zoom (a sentence that would have been incomprehensible only a few months ago).



In our case, however, the Zoom era has presented real opportunities as well as problems. On the one hand, we sadly had to postpone two of our major annual lectures because of the impossibility of holding events in person. But on the other hand, we staged online events with speakers who might not otherwise have been able to travel to Oxford, and attracted bigger audiences than we would have done in person.

Some highlights that spring to mind include the discussion with the Black feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman about her extraordinary book *Wayward Lives*; a roundtable discussion about how to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mayflower sailing; and a discussion with Gary Younge and Alan Curtis about the Kerner Commission report on the 1967 race riots. Our regular research seminar series—the Oxford Early American Republic Seminar for early career researchers, the American History Research Seminar, the American Literature Research Seminar, and our American Politics Research Seminar—have all been well attended and featured some outstanding papers. Our weekly, informal ‘American Ground’ coffee mornings (now online) have also been well attended and have, I hope, helped many of us to maintain a sense of community at a difficult time. We have also found new ways to reach global audiences through our new RAI podcast, *The Last Best Hope? Understanding America from the Outside In*, where I host experts carrying out world-leading research within and beyond the Institute to discuss both topical and universal questions about the United States.

All this, I think, counts as a success and there are many people who have put huge amounts of work into making it all happen, including the convenors of individual events and seminar series, especially Mitch Robertson (for the US politics events), Daniel Abdalla and Zachary Seager (for the American literature events), and Grace Mallon and Stephen Symchych (for the Early American Republic seminar series). I do, however, want to pay particular tribute to my brilliant colleagues here at the RAI: Bethan Davies in the Vere Harmsworth Library, Jo Steventon, Richard Purkiss, Alice Kelly, and Karen Walker—the latter two only joining the





team in January as Communications Officer and Administrator respectively. These are all exceptionally talented, efficient, and dedicated people and a pleasure to work with. It has also been a joy to work with Sonia Tycko, our inaugural Kinder Institute Junior Research Fellow in Atlantic History. Sonia gives a flavour of her ground-breaking work on indentured labour in the early modern world on pages 10–11.

The lifeblood of the RAI are our graduate students. At least in normal times, they fill the common room and the kitchen, and provide energy, laughter, and ideas. A core part of our mission is supporting the next generation of scholarship on the United States, so there is nothing more important to me than that we have a thriving graduate student community. Getting to know our students in the last year has been a huge privilege.

Also vital to the intellectual buzz of the RAI, of course, are our academic visitors. The Harold Vyvyan Harmsworth Visiting Professor of American History this year was Peter Mancall (you can read an account of his time here on pages 6–7) and the John G. Winant Visiting Professor of American Government was Margaret Weir (see pages 4–5 for an outline of her Winant Lecture). I feel intensely lucky that these two were the visiting professors in my first year here because two people with more intellectual energy, humour, and good fellowship are hard to imagine. And then there are our Fellows-in-Residence (scholars who are attached to the RAI while visiting Oxford from elsewhere). We benefitted hugely from the presence and engagement of scholars with a diverse range of intellectual interests, coming from as far away as Japan to spend time at the RAI.

The coming year will present more challenges and opportunities. At the time of writing, we still do not know whether we will be able to hold events in person or whether our visiting scholars will be able to come. But having learned how to put on successful online events last term, I am confident that we will thrive whatever the circumstances. And there are pressing issues ahead that we will be trying to explain and contextualize, not least the presidential election and its aftermath.

We often hear it said nowadays that the pace of change seems to have sped up. On the one hand, historians know that every generation thought this, but on the other, we also know that some generations objectively did deal with more turmoil than others. Maybe we are one of them.

I believe it is not illusory to think that we are living through one of those critical periods in which old assumptions are crumbling and profoundly new power dynamics being established. In the US, the Black Lives Matter movement appears to be generating a welcome generational shift in racial attitudes. The rise of China, which might well be seen as a reversion to the balance of global power before the modern era, poses a potentially far more profound challenge to US global power than the Soviet Union ever did. There are real questions about the survival of liberal democratic forms of government—or at least of their ideological and moral dominance—after decades in which it was possible to believe in their inexorable advance.

When the Cold War structured international life, most people found it impossible to envisage how it could end. Few people now alive have lived without the institutions built in the aftermath of World War II to maintain international order, such as the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, or the EU; yet a long perspective suggests that just like every other attempt to maintain global stability in recorded history, they will not last forever.

For these reasons it has never seemed more urgent or necessary to understand the United States and its place in the world. The mission of the RAI is to help people to do this, and we can do so only because of the support of our academic colleagues and, of course, 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 in our capacity to support the next generation of scholars. To this end, we are now raising funds to support graduate scholarships in US history and politics. 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 using the address below.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined.

Adam Smith  
Edward Orsborn Professor of US Politics & Political History  
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Street in Livonia, MI, a suburb of Detroit (Andrew Jameson, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, cropped)

## View from the Winant Chair

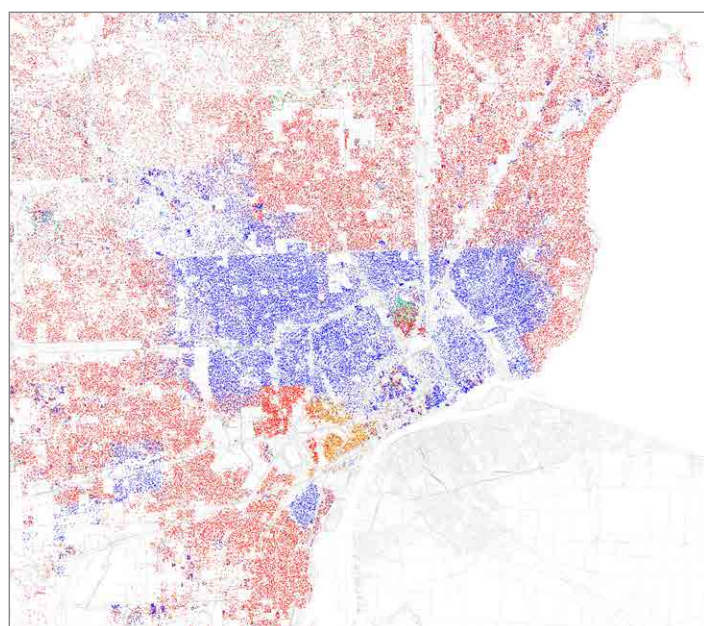
Each year, the John G. Winant Visiting Professorship of American Government brings to Oxford an eminent scholar of American politics and government. The Winant Chair was founded by Rivington and Joan Winant in honour of Rivington's father, John G. Winant, US Ambassador to Britain from 1941 to 1946. In 2019–20, the Chair was held by Margaret Weir, Wilson Professor of International and Public Affairs and Political Science at Brown University. *She writes:*

It was a great honour to serve as the John G. Winant Chair of American Government. My time in Oxford was sweet but, due to the pandemic, regrettably short. I arrived in January when the dark descends before 4.30 in the afternoon and left at the end of Hilary term just as the beauty that is Oxford in springtime began to reveal itself. Although I was only in residence for one term, it was an absolute delight to participate in the intellectual life of the Rothermere American Institute and Oxford more broadly.

My Winant inaugural lecture, entitled 'The Problem of the Public in Postwar America' examined the interplay between racial inclusion and public life in postwar America. Drawing from my research on metropolitan America, the lecture argued that federal and state policies segmented public life in two



Margaret Weir with Adam Smith before her Winant Lecture in American Government (Alice Kelly)



Racial distribution in the Detroit metropolitan area according to the 2010 US Census, red representing white, and blue representing Black residents (Eric Fischer, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.5, cropped)

ways that enforced racial inequalities. Horizontal segmentation allowed local political boundaries to divide populations by race and income, creating severe imbalances between local public resources and fundamental services, including education. Vertical segmentation, which since the 1980s has reduced federal place-based assistance, greatly exacerbated local resource inequalities. Rather than cushion the local imbalance between resources and needs, the federal government expected localities to solve their own problems through fiscal responsibility. The consequences of segmenting the public sector horizontally and vertically have reverberated throughout metropolitan America. They have stymied the development of the metropolitan public infrastructure and left some cities without basic services. At the same time, they have distorted ideals of democracy held by higher-income Americans, who now view local democracy as the right to be free from the burden of redistribution. These themes appear in my co-edited book *Who Gets What: The New Politics of Insecurity*, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

My colleague at Balliol, Sudir Hazareesingh, invited me to give a lecture on race in American politics to his undergraduate course 'Introduction to Politics'. In this lecture I examined the way racial exclusion and racist stereotypes have shaped America's welfare state and party politics. Building on my research on New

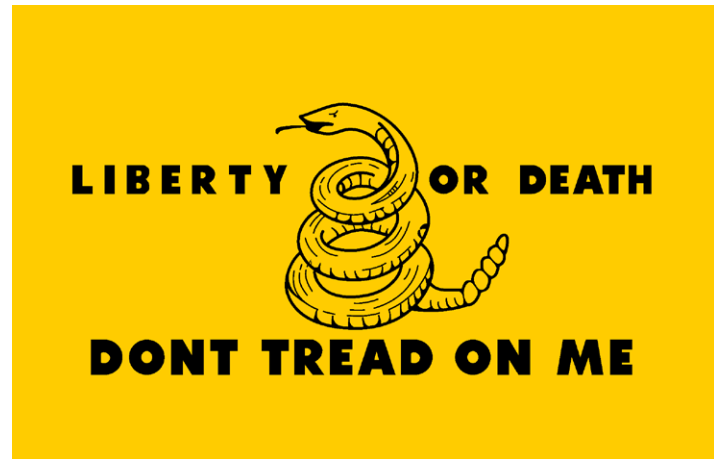


Urban decline in Delray, Detroit, MI  
(Notorious4life, Wikimedia Commons)

Deal and Great Society social policy, I discussed how American social benefits are split into a top tier of federal benefits for the elderly with long work histories and a bottom-tier of spotty and limited benefits provided by the states. The lecture showed how American party politics have become split along racial lines, with the great majority of Black and Latinx people supporting the Democratic party and whites favoring Republicans. I concluded by considering how demographic shifts, which are reducing the percentage of white Americans, will influence American politics. Emphasizing that “demography is not destiny”, I highlighted the way that American electoral institutions, including gerrymandering and the electoral college, may blunt the impact of demographic change.

I found life at Oxford, both formal and informal, full of opportunities to learn from a wide variety of lectures and to interact with a remarkable range of scholars and public figures. At the RAI, I participated in the annual ‘Congress to Campus’ programme, moderating a panel with two former members of Congress, Elizabeth Esty and Jeff Miller. The RAI’s Politics and History seminars offered a stimulating setting to reconsider American politics from new perspectives. And talking with graduate students during the weekly coffee hours gave me insights into American history and politics far from my areas of expertise. During meals at Balliol, Nuffield, St Anne’s, Lincoln, and St Peter’s, I enjoyed meeting scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds as well as public officials and journalists.

As life went virtual after March, I was pleased to participate in RAI Director Adam Smith’s new podcast series *The Last Best Hope? Understanding America from the Outside In*. We had a lively discussion centred on the question of whether a country, like the United States, that has had a successful revolution is doomed endlessly to re-enact it. We began with the alarming spectacle of armed white men entering American state legislatures, demanding that the stay-at-home orders related to the pandemic be lifted. Charging that the state government had impinged on their freedoms, these protesters waved confederate flags as well as a flag from the time of the American Revolution known as the ‘Gadsden flag’. Bright yellow and emblazoned with a coiled rattlesnake snake ready to strike, the flag reads “Don’t Tread on Me”. We talked about how anti-government activists have used language and symbols from the American Revolution relating to rebellion and freedom to support their aims, ranging from opposition to taxes to refusal to wear masks during the pandemic. We ended on a different note, considering how symbols of equality stemming from the American revolution have been used by African Americans in their centuries-long struggle for freedom.



Gadsden Flag as carried by the Culpeper Minutemen in 1775, colorized (Wikimedia Commons, CCO)

I had a chance to reflect on the differences between the response to the COVID pandemic in the United Kingdom and America in a short article entitled ‘The Pandemic and the Production of Solidarity’, published in *Items*, the Social Science Research Council’s online newsletter. I argued that national emergencies, such as the pandemic, inspire solidarity but that enduring solidarity requires public action. In comparing the United Kingdom and the United States I examined differences in existing institutions, strategic decisions, and public leadership regarding racial and ethnic differences in producing solidarity. Neither country responded effectively when the virus first hit. Despite some scepticism from British observers, I argued that Britain’s existing health care institutions and its public decisions about how to provide economic support during the pandemic set the stage for building more solidarity than in the United States. America’s inequitable health care system and its scattershot approach to economic security compounded inequality, generating frustration and mistrust. In Britain, both major political parties have acknowledged that the racial and ethnic disparities evident in the pandemic are a matter of public responsibility. By contrast, in America, key public leaders have dismissed the toll the virus has exacted on communities of colour. Changing course will not be easy for the United States, but it is essential if the country hopes to emerge from the pandemic stronger and united, not weaker and divided.

It was my privilege to serve as the Winant Professor and to be part of the vibrant intellectual life at the University of Oxford. I look forward to the day when the pandemic has ebbed and I can return for a visit to see students reading on the college lawns and the spring in full bloom.



Queen's College Library  
(by permission of the Provost and Fellows  
of The Queen's College, Oxford)

## A Year in the Harmsworth Chair

Established in 1922, the Harold Vyvyan Harmsworth Visiting Professorship of American History is the oldest and most prestigious chair in American history outside the United States. It was created by the 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Rothermere in memory of his son Vyvyan, who died in the First World War. Associated jointly with the RAI and with Queen's College, each year the Harmsworth Professorship brings one of America's most distinguished historians to Oxford. In 2019–20 it was held by Peter Mancall, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of the Humanities and Professor of History and Anthropology at the University of Southern California. *He writes:*

When I received the invitation to join the Rothermere community as the Harmsworth Professor I anticipated that the year in Oxford would be life-changing. My partner, Lisa Bitel, a historian of early medieval Ireland, and I had spent one semester in London in 1985, followed by the spring semester in Dublin. I finished my dissertation in Ireland, typing away on a 'portable' computer that weighed about 45 pounds. While we had spent time away from the US in the years since then, we had not returned to Britain for an extended visit. Now the chance arrived, an out-of-the-blue invitation to one of the greatest gigs in the profession.

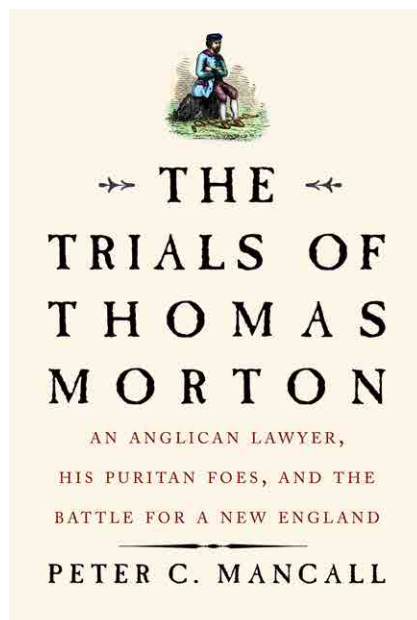
Well, my time in Oxford during the 2019–20 academic year was life-changing, but that was not unique since all of us have had our lives upended by COVID-19. But before the coronavirus started stalking, our year had been wondrous—multiple research trips to the Bodleian and visits to the Ashmolean (home of Powhatan's Mantle), going to High Table at Queen's and other colleges thanks to kind invitations from colleagues, spending time with old friends in town, living in the light-filled modernist gem that is the Harmsworth House, and continuing to write a book called *American Origins*, which will be volume one of the Oxford History of the United States. Then, in late March, we boarded a flight to Los Angeles for what was supposed to be a brief trip to check on our kids, dogs, and house. Alas, we have yet to return.

Still, while that sense of unfulfillment lingers, nothing can take away from what I learned while I was there. From the moment Lisa and I arrived in early October, we had been welcomed into Oxford's brilliant community of historians and the wondrous fellowship of The Queen's College, under the guidance of its inspiring new provost Claire Craig. As she has for previous Harmsworth professors, Elaine Evers helped us navigate the college, which has customs as complex to an outsider as its many mysterious paths. And, as they have for my predecessors, invitations came from across Britain to share

my work with early modernists as well as American historians of all chronological periods.

What I had not anticipated was the central importance of the RAI for my work. I arrived just after Adam Smith, the Institute's enthusiastic new director, had taken up his position, and spent many a profitable hour talking to Adam and to Alice Kelly, the RAI's inimitable Communications Officer. From the start, Oxford's early Americanists, including Pekka Hämäläinen, Katherine Paugh, and Peter Thompson, reached out to welcome Lisa and me. I learned more than I had expected from the weekly seminars for the M.St. students as well as gatherings of the Oxford Early American Republic Seminar. It was at the RAI that I got to know Sonia Tycko, the Kinder Junior Research Fellow, and hang out with my old friend Kariann Yokota, a visiting fellow. Perhaps most important, events at the RAI allowed me to spend time with Sir John Elliott, whose work has provided constant inspiration to me for years. Lisa and I will never forget a lovely Sunday afternoon spent with John and Oona at their house in Iffley, not far from the twelfth-century church of St Mary the Virgin. Being married to a medievalist, I have been to many clerical establishments across Europe. But rarely have I had the chance to spend time in one with a scholar like John who knew seemingly everything about this building, including answering questions about the immortal yew trees in its graceful cemetery.

During my time in Oxford, Yale University Press published my newest book, *The Trials of Thomas Morton: An Anglican Lawyer, His English Foes, and the Battle for a New England*. The book appeared in the US late in 2019, and in the UK early in 2020. The RAI sponsored a book launch, which brought together a panel that included Mark Peterson from Yale and Amy Morris from Cambridge as well as the Institute's own Sonia Tycko. I also had the opportunity to share my work at the American History Seminar at Cambridge, directed by former Harmsworth





The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth,  
Jennie Augusta Brownscombe (1914)

Professor Gary Gerstle, with penetrating commentary on my paper by Sarah Pearsall. In addition, I spoke to audiences in Exeter, Sheffield, Durham, the Moore Institute at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and at the Sorbonne, as well as a virtual seminar at Manchester in the age of the lockdown. Perhaps most important for me was the feedback I received on my Harmsworth Lecture, 'The Origins of the American Economy', not least at the post-lecture seminar at the RAI.

Many members of the intellectual community of the RAI provided sharp and perceptive comments on my book-in-progress. In many ways, this will be one of the most enduring legacies of my time as the Harmsworth Professor. In an earlier age of scholarship, early Americanists wrote almost exclusively about the English migrants who sailed across the Atlantic and established colonies on the mainland clustered along the shoreline. Fortunately, we do not live in that age anymore. Scholars now recognize that colonization was not a benign process of transferring one kind of civilization from an old world to a new one. Instead, we now focus our attention on the many peoples—free and enslaved, aggressors and resisters, Natives and newcomers—who together created the entity we now routinely call 'America', a term that had different meanings earlier. It may sound surprising, but I spent many an inspiring hour on the upper level of the library at Queen's, surrounded by ancient books in that long, vaulted room trying to narrate the history of North America before 1680. There and in the Vere Harmsworth Library I had time to think about the story that I wanted to tell, a luxury that is all too rare in the modern university.

While living in Oxford, Lisa and I often spent weekends driving through the countryside. Among the places we visited was Burford, a charming town in the Cotswolds that is home to the spectacular St John the Baptist church, begun in the late twelfth century. There, in what would seem to the world to be a quintessentially English town, is a shrine to Edmund Harman, barber-surgeon for Henry VIII, erected c. 1569. Carved into the front are images that resemble Tupinambás, the indigenous people of coastal Brazil who fascinated Europeans in the sixteenth century. It is possible that the likeness is accidental and that the sculptor was depicting the fabled wild men and women who populated the fantastic imaginations of early modern Europeans. But I think that the sculptor had in mind those Brazilians since European artists depicted them on maps soon after the Portuguese first brought back word of their existence. (There are famous renderings of them in the Atlas Miller of 1519 in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the Vallard Atlas of 1547 at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California.) I had written about Tupinambás and European depictions of them in

a book entitled *Nature and Culture in the Early Modern Atlantic* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). And, to be fair, I was not the first scholar to see this Burford shrine through early modernist eyes attuned to Atlantic history. Still, seeing them face-to-face in a church, including on one occasion when I was the only person in the building, was (for lack of a better term) a rush. It was the same feeling I had had years earlier during my first trip to Oxford when I was writing a book on the younger Richard Hakluyt. Living in a canyon on the west coast of the US can often seem very far from the communities I write about. Being in Oxford, walking from Headington via Cuckoo Lane into town and then on the narrow streets that wind around Queen's, past New College and to the Bodleian, and then on to the RAI, was a daily reminder of older worlds and ancient paths known well by at least some of the characters in the book I am writing. My book will be much better because of the research I was able to conduct in Oxford and the many chances I had to talk about it with colleagues at the RAI.

By the time we left in March, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to discuss early America not only with scholars but in public-facing venues, including a wonderful, RAI-enabled virtual panel marking the upcoming 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Mayflower* voyage and the launch of permanent English colonies in New England. Having just written a book about an English lawyer who had been exiled three times from the colonies, first by New Plymouth and then twice by Massachusetts, I welcomed the opportunity to discuss the different ways we can approach this anniversary. That panel brought together Jo Loosemore, a collaborator with Wampanoag scholars and the primary curator of the Plymouth museum exhibit on the anniversary; Sarah Schuetze from the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay; Trevor Burnard, the newly installed director of the Wilberforce Institute at Hull; and Sonia Tycko, demonstrating again the breadth of her interests and scholarship. I also had a chance to contribute to ongoing public debates with two pieces in *The Conversation*, one on impeachment and the other on the risks inherent in reopening the American economy.

As I write this in August 2020, I am guardedly optimistic about the chance to return to Oxford for Trinity Term in 2021. Lisa and I had much anticipated a June visit to Essex to visit Alexandra and Vyvyan Harmsworth and the chance to explore parts of the English countryside that we do not yet know well. I also look forward to renewing ties at the RAI, attending the M.St. classes, and—I hope!—talking about a complete book instead of one still in progress. Fortunately, there will still be time to rethink parts of it, and for me to learn still more in Oxford in general and at the RAI in particular. For that, in a world gone astray, I am grateful.



Dr Tara Stubbs speaking at an 'American Cool' event at the Ashmolean Museum (Jan Wallman)

## Public Engagement at the RAI

As the RAI's Director of Public Engagement, Dr Tara Stubbs has taken on the public dimension of the RAI's mission to promote greater understanding of US history, culture, and politics. As she steps down, she reflects on some particularly successful events and looks forward to others still to come. *She writes:*

During my three years at the RAI—aside from a brief hiatus to have a baby—I've been involved with lots of exciting public events, reflecting the Institute's aim to engage the wider Oxford community with ideas and debates around American culture, politics and history. The biggest turnout was definitely for Claudia Rankine's Esmond Harmsworth Lecture in American Arts and Letters, in May 2018; her discussions of white privilege and racial bias gain ever greater relevance as 2020 continues. Her workshop the following day, with students and lecturers, was transformative.

That same summer, the RAI was involved with the Ashmolean's ambitious project 'American Cool', which coincided with the

'America's Cool Modernism' exhibition; during a 'Live Friday' event at the Museum, the RAI organized five-minute 'flash talks' on a range of topics including American Cool, child gangs in Prohibition-era Chicago, the iconography of the little black dress, African American literature and culture, and American masculinities. Other RAI fellows and graduate students took part in a prohibition role-play, dressing up as a figures from 1920s and '30s America in the Ashmolean's speakeasy; while one of our Fellows, Karen Heath, organized a still life drawing event based on the art of Georgia O'Keeffe. This was in addition to our work with Blackwell's Bookshop in compiling a curated selection of books to accompany the exhibition, together with a discussion at Blackwell's on American modernism in art and culture.

The size and ambition of the programme made us think more creatively about how we could engage the public not only by contributing to public events, but by thinking up ways of bringing the public to the RAI building itself. We therefore re-oriented the RAI Live events set up by my predecessor, Professor Michèle Mendelssohn, as RAI Open Fridays, as anecdotal evidence had told us that while students and fellows were less likely to attend events on Fridays, members of the public were more likely to come, particularly if talks were held at the end of the working day. Our first Open Friday event, a wonderful and spirited talk by Anthony Penrose on his mother, the model, muse, photographer (and cook!) Lee Miller, was brilliantly well-attended, and several other events followed—on photographic narratives of the Obama and Trump eras, on historical American maps, on art history and biography, and even a musical and lyrical performance telling the story of 'Woody Guthrie and Old Man Trump' (Old Man Trump being Fred C. Trump, father of the current President).

The academic year 2019–20 began on a high, with the advent of our new Director and following on from Deborah Treisman's



Claudia Rankine in 2014 (John Lucas, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, cropped)

<p><b>RAI Special Event</b></p> <p><b>Antony Penrose</b> Photographer and Co-Author of the Last Miles Archive</p> <p><b>Lee Miller: Witnessing Women at War</b></p> <p>Friday 10 January 5.30pm</p> <p>To be followed by Q&amp;A with author and illustrator Nathaniel Anderson (RAI Fellow)</p> <p>14 South Parks Road Oxford OX1 3JH</p> <p>AMERICAN BOOKS IN OXFORD</p>	<p><b>RAI Best</b></p> <p><b>Obama: 101 Best Covers</b> Ben Arongrade</p> <p>Author and publisher, <i>White House Book</i></p> <p>Ben Arongrade is the author of the new book and book, <i>Obama: 101 Best Covers</i>. It features the story of the president's image as it shifts through an eight-year period of cultural and political change.</p> <p>It is a celebration of those portraits, power and propaganda. Arongrade will present a selection of ten favorite covers from the book, alongside 'Obama vs Trump', comparing the former leader's final years with those of America's current Commander in Chief.</p> <p>Arongrade is the author of two books, including <i>White House</i>, the latest history of images and their impact, a cultural history of the book image, which was honored by the New York Public Library as one of the Library's 100 most significant books of the year.</p> <p>Thursday 10 May 5pm</p> <p>Registration required. Please visit <a href="http://www.oxford-oxford.com">www.oxford-oxford.com</a> or go straight to <a href="http://www.oxford-oxford.com/raibest">http://www.oxford-oxford.com/raibest</a> for more information.</p> <p>To be followed by a wine reception Nathaniel Anderson (RAI Fellow)</p> <p>14 South Parks Road Oxford OX1 3JH</p> <p>AMERICAN BOOKS IN OXFORD</p>	<p><b>RAI Special Event</b></p> <p><b>THE COUNTER-NARRATIVE, THE RACIAL IMAGINARY AND VISUAL ART</b></p> <p>The 2018 Esmond Harmsworth Lecture in American Arts and Letters</p> <p><b>CLAUDIA RANKINE</b></p> <p>Thursday 10 May 5pm</p> <p>Registration required. Please visit <a href="http://www.oxford-oxford.com">www.oxford-oxford.com</a> or go straight to <a href="http://www.oxford-oxford.com/raibest">http://www.oxford-oxford.com/raibest</a> for more information.</p> <p>To be followed by a wine reception Nathaniel Anderson (RAI Fellow)</p> <p>14 South Parks Road Oxford OX1 3JH</p> <p>AMERICAN BOOKS IN OXFORD</p>	<p><b>RAI Special Event</b></p> <p><b>Open Friday</b></p> <p>Film screening and discussion <b>In the Name of Peace: John Hume in America</b> With film director, Maurice Fitzgerald</p> <p>John Hume served as leader of Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labour Party from 1979 to 2001. He and Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble shared the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize for their work towards the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The screenings of the film Hume returned with the Nobel Peace and US Congress award received at the annual sessions of the Good Friday Agreement.</p> <p>Directed by John Humeon, this documentary relates some intriguing encounters with US President Bill Clinton and Jerry Calton, US House Members John Dingell and Tony Danza, as well as many US Senators, US Congressmen, and book leaders.</p> <p>Friday 24 October 17:00-18:45</p> <p>Refreshments provided by American Books in Oxford</p> <p>The event is open to the public. To be followed by a wine reception.</p> <p>AMERICAN BOOKS IN OXFORD</p>	<p><b>RAI Book Event</b></p> <p><b>Meet You in Atlantic City: Travels in Springsteen's New Jersey</b></p> <p>Author: James Freese St Croix College</p> <p>James Freese served as leader of Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labour Party from 1979 to 2001. He and Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble shared the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize for their work towards the Northern Ireland Peace Process. 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Susan Schultze uses 100 maps to explore the spatial history of American history, from the cartography of European discovery to the digital age. Driven primarily from the British Library, the examples range from the seven to the cellular. Each is discussed in terms of its specific historical as well as its wider historical significance.</p> <p>Friday 14 November 17:00-18:30</p> <p>Refreshments American history 14 South Parks Road Oxford OX1 3JH</p> <p>AMERICAN BOOKS IN OXFORD</p>
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Dr Nicholas Buccola speaking at an RAI Open Friday event in January 2020 (Adam Smith)

highly entertaining Esmond Harmsworth Lecture in the summer, in which she discussed her decades as fiction editor of *The New Yorker*. Deborah and I have since stayed in touch, and she has inspired our (currently online) short story reading group, which meets monthly and discusses a short story from the magazine: Deborah has been sending me ideas for discussion, and has given some very interesting context to some of the stories—she is also threatening to ‘drop in’ to one of the online discussions soon!

In the autumn we established the RAI’s new Book Club, where we discussed two novels in person (Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* and Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*) before lockdown began. Since then, thanks to the initiative and energy of our new Communications and Events Officer, Dr Alice Kelly, the Book Club has moved online with a discussion of Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (W. W. Norton, 2019). Alice also organized online RAI Wellbeing sessions open to all to alleviate the stress of working from home, and a film series *The RAI Goes to the Movies* featuring films about American politics.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, some of the plans we had for this year haven’t come off. Before lockdown, we had a very successful Open Friday, where a packed room saw Nicholas Buccola discuss his new book, *The Fire is Upon Us* (Princeton UP, 2019), a dissection of the fascinating debate between James Baldwin and William F. Buckley Jr. at the Cambridge Union in 1965.

But other plans—to utilize the atrium for exhibitions on science and American poetry, the upcoming elections, and even for an exhibition of tapestries—have had to be put on hold. Do look out for information on these, however, as I know that my colleagues are keen to get back into the building as soon as they can, and to open up the space for even more events.

Please also put a note in your diaries for the upcoming Esmond Harmsworth Lectures for summer 2021 and 2022, when we will be welcoming the novelist, scriptwriter, and director Michael Chabon (2021) and the US’s first Native American poet laureate,

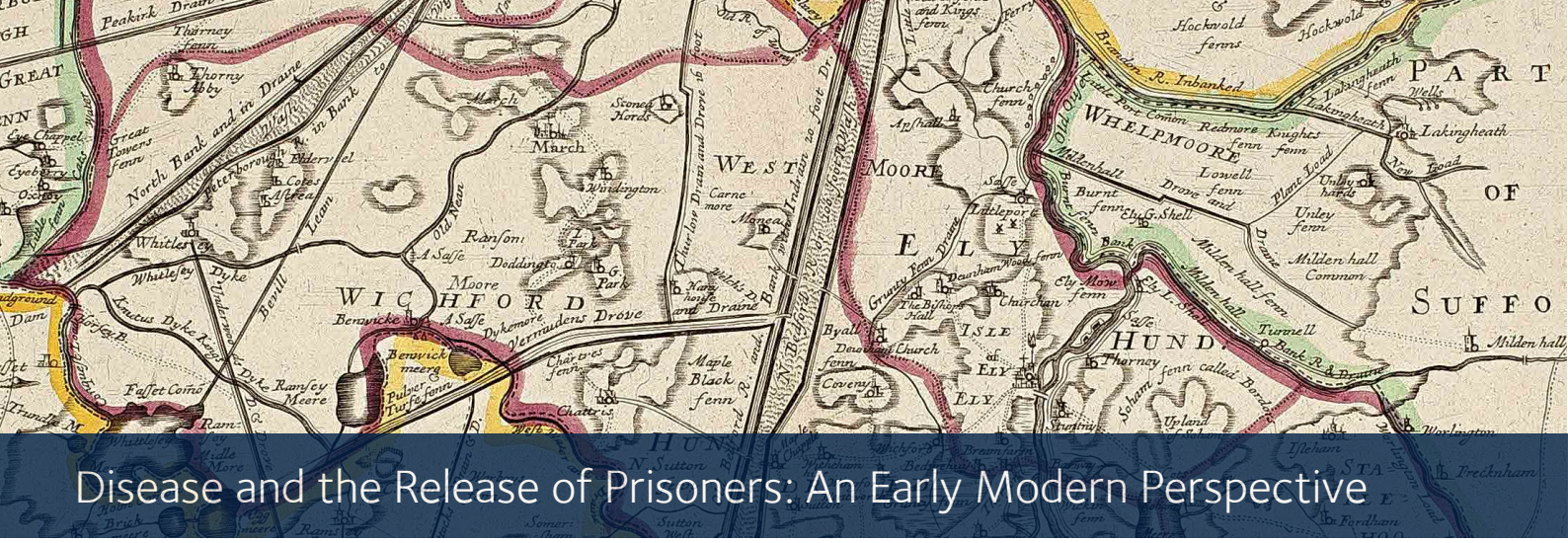
Joy Harjo (2022). We are thrilled that both speakers will be coming to the RAI to share their talents and insights.

I have had a wonderful time at the RAI since beginning my role in Michaelmas 2017. It is the people who make a place, and this is undoubtedly true of this fantastic institution. I want to thank Dr Hal Jones for making me feel welcome and valued from the outset; Jane Rawson (now Rawson-Jones!) for all her kindness and intelligence; Jo Steventon for, well, everything; and Richard Purkiss for his calm efficiency and hard work. Dr Huw David was also a fantastic colleague, and I know he is still missed. Thank you so much to Dr Tessa Royon for performing the role so brilliantly while I was on maternity leave. And thank you, of course, to the ‘new’ gang: Dr Alice Kelly, for her infectious enthusiasm, hard work, and innovative ideas; Karen Walker, for her unflappable spirit and calm presence; Bethan Davies, for her positivity, energy and wit; and, of course, Professor Adam Smith, for steering the ship through the choppy seas of handovers, staff changes, and a global pandemic. I’ll miss you all.



The RAI Book Club, March 2020 (Alice Kelly)

<p><b>RAI Special Event</b></p> <p>Open Friday</p> <p><b>Making Oscar Wilde</b></p> <p>Holistic Humanities (Manfield College)</p> <p>in conversation with Jennifer Nettlea Croce (Specialist, Elizabethan Play Workshop of Rhodes House), Eago Goodwin (D.Phil. candidate in History, University College), and William Mordaunt-Melville (Visiting Ph.D. candidate in History, St Antony's)</p> <p>Making Oscar Wilde reveals the parallel story of Oscar Wilde's career as Victorian England's most famous aesthete. This event will be an interdisciplinary adventure to make his name and give international students, with special rights and an assist, for story telling. Humanities taught to all the amazing young historians who are so responsible for Oxford's future, but also with the special and world of recovering the world.</p> <p>Friday 8 February 17:00-18:30</p> <p>Rathfriland American Institute 1a South Parks Road Oxford OX1 1UB</p> <p>This event is open to the public.</p> <p>AMERICAN FRIDAY AT RATHFRILAND</p>	<p><b>RAI Special Event</b></p> <p>Open Friday</p> <p><b>Woody Guthrie and Old Man Trump</b></p> <p>With Katherine, University of Cordoba Lecturer</p> <p>Woody Guthrie (1912-1967) was an American singer-songwriter famous for his folk music. In 1941 Woody Guthrie was elected to the American Songwriting Competition. His music was revolutionary and his lyrics were powerful. He was a pioneer of the folk revival movement and his music inspired a generation of young people. He was a pioneer of the folk revival movement and his music inspired a generation of young people. He was a pioneer of the folk revival movement and his music inspired a generation of young people.</p> <p>Friday 8 February 17:00-18:30</p> <p>Rathfriland American Institute 1a South Parks Road Oxford OX1 1UB</p> <p>This event is open to the public.</p> <p>AMERICAN FRIDAY AT RATHFRILAND</p>	<p><b>NEW YORKER FICTION THROUGH THE DECADES</b></p> <p>The 2019 Esmond Harmsworth Lecture in American Arts and Letters</p> <p><b>DEBORAH TREISMAN</b> Fiction Editor, <i>The New Yorker</i></p> <p>Deborah Treisman is the Fiction Editor at <i>The New Yorker</i> since 2003, having joined the magazine in 1998. She hosts the award-winning <i>New Yorker</i> Fiction Festival. She has edited the magazine 201 Under 40 stories from <i>The New Yorker</i> (2018) and <i>Essays</i> (recently with) Peter Christy, Walter Dignat, The Green Center (it is at the 2017).</p> <p>Thursday 13 June 6pm</p> <p>All welcome</p> <p>Registration required Please email us at <a href="mailto:raiv@ox.ac.uk">raiv@ox.ac.uk</a> or <a href="mailto:raiv@ox.ac.uk">raiv@ox.ac.uk</a> or <a href="mailto:raiv@ox.ac.uk">raiv@ox.ac.uk</a></p> <p>Rathfriland American Institute 1a South Parks Road Oxford OX1 1UB</p> <p>RAI Lecture</p>	<p><b>RAI Special Event</b></p> <p>Made by America</p> <p><b>The Great Debate</b> James Baldwin, William F. Buckley and the Civil Rights Revolution</p> <p>Open Friday with Nicholas Buccola, Oxford Lecturer in conversation with Raphaela Goodwin, St Antony's University and RAI History Research Fellow</p> <p>On 18 February 1965, a great Cambridge Union witnessed a seminal debate between James Baldwin, the leading African American writer and intellectual, and William F. Buckley Jr., a conservative pundit and the host of the radio show <i>The Fifties</i>. This event will be a re-enactment of the debate, with Baldwin and Buckley seated at the front of the room, and the audience in the back. The event will be a re-enactment of the debate, with Baldwin and Buckley seated at the front of the room, and the audience in the back. The event will be a re-enactment of the debate, with Baldwin and Buckley seated at the front of the room, and the audience in the back.</p> <p>Friday 15 June 6pm</p> <p>This event is open to the public.</p> <p>We will be followed by a music reception!</p> <p>1a South Parks Road Oxford OX1 1UB</p> <p>RAI Lecture</p>	<p><b>RAI Special Event</b></p> <p><b>RAI Book Club</b></p> <p><b>The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton (1905)</b></p> <p>Open Friday with Nicholas Buccola, Oxford Lecturer in conversation with Raphaela Goodwin, St Antony's University and RAI History Research Fellow</p> <p>Edith Wharton's <i>The House of Mirth</i> is a classic of American fiction. It tells the story of Lily Bart, a young woman who is forced to navigate the complex and often cruel world of New York City's high society. The novel is a masterpiece of social realism and is a testament to Wharton's skill as a writer.</p> <p>Friday 8 February 17:00-18:30</p> <p>Rathfriland American Institute 1a South Parks Road Oxford OX1 1UB</p> <p>This event is open to the public.</p> <p>AMERICAN FRIDAY AT RATHFRILAND</p>	<p><b>RAI Book Launch</b></p> <p><b>The Trials of Thomas Morton</b></p> <p>An Anglican Lawyer, His Puritan Fans, and the Birth of a New England</p> <p>Peter C. Mancall Professor of History and Anthropology, University of Southern California Harcourt Professor, History of American Thought</p> <p>Registration from Amy Hamlin, Cambridge; Susan Tarkenton, Oxford; and Mark Peterson, Yale</p> <p>This exciting biography of Thomas Morton explores the tension between his religious convictions and his pursuit of a life of luxury and pleasure in the New World. Morton's story is a testament to the power of individualism and the struggle for freedom in a new land.</p> <p>Friday 8 February 17:00-18:30</p> <p>This event is open to the public.</p> <p>To be followed by a wine reception!</p> <p>1a South Parks Road Oxford OX1 1UB</p> <p>RAI Lecture</p>
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## Disease and the Release of Prisoners: An Early Modern Perspective

Dr Sonia Tycko, the RAI's Kinder Junior Research Fellow in Atlantic History, shares some of her latest research on a subject with contemporary resonances.

Prison and detention centre authorities around the world have released some inmates in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the urging of prisoners' rights activists. These releases vary from the unconditional release of convicts who were already near the ends of their sentences, to the temporary release on bail or licence of prisoners on remand or mid-sentence. With advocacy efforts and media attention focused on the decisions about release, little has been reported about what awaits prisoners beyond the prison walls. Historically, captors have often let captives go from hazardous disease environments. Past jailors' methods and prisoners' reactions can remind us that the mere fact of release—while clearly a crucial public health measure today—is not, in itself, enough. Prisoners should not be expected to be indiscriminately grateful for release. How prisoners are freed matters, and disease plays a major role in their experience of freedom.

I briefly mentioned the effects of disease in my article, 'The Legality of Prisoner of War Labour in England, 1648–1655' (*Past & Present*, 246, February 2020), which explains that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prisoners of war were regularly 'freed' to work for state-selected masters. Work release programs in US prisons today offer a striking contemporary parallel. During my period of focus, the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (1639–1652) and the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654), prisoners-turned-servants went to work both near and far: in England, Barbados, and Massachusetts.

In light of the current crisis, I have revisited my research to understand how disease affected the release of early modern war captives. Infectious diseases, poor sanitary conditions, overcrowding, lack of food and warmth, and minimal provision of medical attention were all characteristic of early modern incarceration. When I workshoped drafts of my article, a number of colleagues told me that they thought that early modern war captives might have welcomed the opportunity to work in exchange for release from insalubrious places of captivity. I was suspicious of this interpretation because it echoed so perfectly the justifications of the governments and their collaborators at the time: they insisted that they had treated their prisoners with great mercy by sending them to work.

Indeed, freedom from prisons likely improved prisoners' life chances but at the same time, prisoners did not welcome their transportation to the English American colonies or the coercion

of their labour. In fact, they ran away, refused to work, and even petitioned for protection from hard labour under the laws of war. One reason for prisoner resistance, which I did not explore in the article, was that their health, and that of the women and children who accompanied them, remained in danger in their new sites of work.

Masters screened prisoners for health before recruiting them as labourers in order to avoid the costs associated with nursing the sick. A fen drainage company in the Bedford Level, north of Cambridge, repeatedly recruited *healthy* prisoners of war to dredge and build canals for them. In October 1651 the drainage company sent a representative to York to procure Scottish prisoners of war as workers. He was directed to "inform himself how many able persons there are of them hale and sound without wive[s] and willing and accustomed to labour and forthwith to return the Company account thereof by the first post". In May 1652, the company sent another representative to Durham, again specifying that the recruits must be hale, which is to say, free from both injury and disease. Healthy men could work the hardest and longest.

Recruiters preferred single men most likely because they wanted to avoid the expense of caring for prisoners' wives' health, especially during childbirth. Today pregnant prisoners are amongst those considered for early or temporary release from prisons, although the practice of keeping incarcerated women bound during child-birth still prevails. There is little evidence about the treatment of captured dependents in the 1650s, and this makes the one mention of women "big with child" in the fens



Today the landscape of the Cambridgeshire fens bears little resemblance to what it was when prisoners of war worked on the drainage project in the 1650s. (Sonia Tycko)



Facing page: Detail from a map of Cambridgeshire and the Fens printed by Philip Lea after Sir Jonas Moore, c. 1689 (Cambridge Antiquarian Society)

Above: The New Bedford River, dug between 1649 and 1652, near Welney (Amanda Slater, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0, cropped)



Upon completing terms of indentured servitude in Massachusetts, Scottish prisoners of war founded the Scots Charitable Society, which nearly two centuries later established this plot in Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA. (Sonia Tycko)



Reconstructed forge and mill at Saugus Iron Works, active between 1646 and c. 1670 (Daderot, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, cropped)

all the more valuable. In the source, local villagers petitioned the drainage company to take responsibility for any costs associated with Scottish workers' babies, thereby reserving locally raised charitable funds for local people. The released prisoners were not welcomed by their neighbours in the fens; even their infants did not inspire sympathy.

Prisoners of war faced extra challenges in holding their masters to established standards of care. As displaced 'strangers' with degraded social status and few if any friends and family in their new communities, they could not rely on the same safety net as civilians. In insisting that the drainage company provide for their servants, the neighbours in the fens expressed anxiety that, because these foreign servants came from captivity, their new masters would not feel beholden to typical contractual obligations. Early modern English masters generally entered verbal or written contracts with their servants. They were expected to provide servants with the necessities of life, including medical care as needed. The masters of civilian apprentices and domestic servants often fell short on this count, which we know because their subordinates duly took them to court for their failure to provide.

We do have some evidence that the Scottish prisoners sent to Massachusetts in the 1650s were provided with medical care by their masters. The leading minister John Cotton bragged to Oliver Cromwell that "Such as were sick of the scurvy or other diseases have not wanted physick and chyrurgery". This claim seems to have been true: the account book for the ironworks company in Lynn and Saugus, Massachusetts, list payments to

five men and one woman for "physick" or nursing and medicine. While presumably welcome, this succour came only after forced transatlantic transportation and dispossession. The healthcare provisions for other prisoners-turned-servants remain unknown. Today, released prisoners face similarly grave problems.

This history raises pressing questions about the conditions that released prisoners are finding in the present crisis. How can such prisoners access healthcare, especially in countries without universal healthcare systems? Some released people might be able to make claims to protection, humanitarian aid, and civil rights based on a certain status, for example as citizens or refugees. Are their societies recognizing these claims, or re-categorizing them in convenient ways that exclude them? Health is a marketable quality, and jobs often come with social benefits. Are more resources going to prisoners who can work in lockdowns? These are all questions suggested by the historical study of prisoner releases.

The legal status of prisoners of war has been just one of the subjects of my research during this past year, my first in the new role of the Kinder Junior Research Fellow in Atlantic History. I am currently writing a book manuscript, 'Captured Consent: Forced Labor and the Rise of Freedom of Contract'. I look forward to an array of early American events at the RAI next year and to teaching the inaugural Oxford summer term of the University of Missouri's Kinder Institute M.A. in Atlantic History and Politics.

*This article is reproduced from the Past & Present Blog with the kind permission of the Past and Present Society. It first appeared at <https://pastandpresent.org.uk/disease-and-the-release-of-prisoners-an-early-modern-perspective/> (9 April 2020).*



## Graduate Scholarships at the RAI

Thanks to the generosity of its benefactors, the RAI has once again been able to offer financial support to graduate students writing up their theses in American history, politics and international relations, and literature. Here, the four 2019–20 scholarship recipients reflect on the impact of this support on their doctoral research.



Left to right: Mitchell Robertson, Daniel Ibrahim Abdalla, Emma Day, and Zachary Seager

### Daniel Ibrahim Abdalla

An Esmond Harmsworth Graduate Scholarship in American Literature provided me with invaluable experience in the final stages of doctoral study, and a firm foundation for transitioning into an early-career researcher. In particular, it allowed me to develop my research among supportive colleagues, gave me a platform for connecting with other academics working in my field, and gave me resources to help my work in public engagement.

Over the course of this year, I have nearly completed my D.Phil. thesis, ‘Science and Decadence: Evolutionary Biology in the Works of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Elizabeth Robins’. My thesis shows that these authors were deeply influenced by various developments in *fin-de-siècle* drama that applied developments in evolutionary thought to topics like marriage, family and the future of race. Furthermore, my work recovers Robins’s once-best-selling novels—spanning such diverse topics as the Yukon gold rush, hereditary illness, cousin marriage, and human trafficking—as valuable intertexts in American literature. In forthcoming work, I explore Robins’s direct influence on Cuban-American playwright María Irene Fornés and shared intellectual framework with African American playwright Angela Weld Grimké.

My interest in expanding the field also informed my co-convening of the American Literature Research Seminar (2019–20). This forum

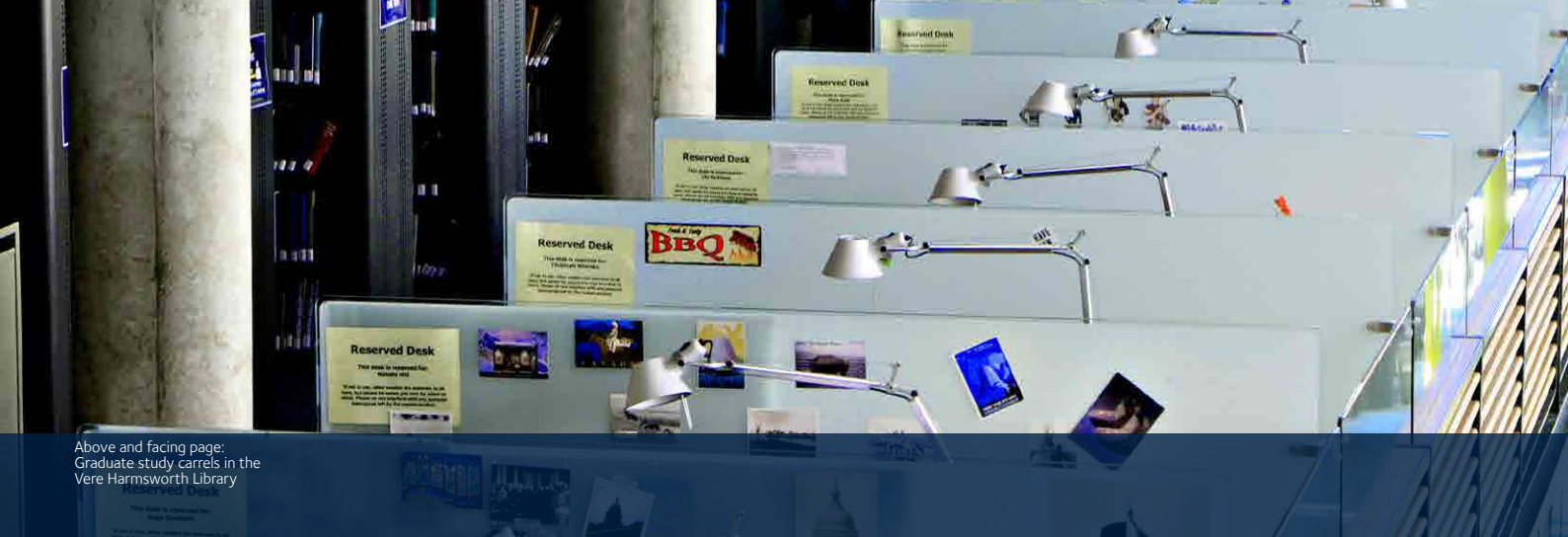
featured papers on diverse topics spanning Hemingway’s relationship to Latin America, the transatlantic slave trade, contemporary Asian-American fiction, and undervalued women writers. Complications due to COVID meant that the seminar was forced to scrap its planned Trinity term programming; however, we quickly turned around a new termcard, which ultimately gave me the opportunity to present my own research on Wharton in conversation with two international scholars. Attendance was notably strong all year, and we regularly had 15–30 attendees from across disciplines—a situation that was sustained (perhaps surprisingly) after we were forced to transition our seminars to Zoom. Furthermore, this year, we were able to form strong and sustained bonds with many members of the M.St. cohort, in large part by encouraging them to accompany our speakers to dinner.



Elizabeth Robins (1862–1952)  
(Library of Congress)

Over the course of the year, I completed an article exploring James’s interest in heredity, which has been accepted by *Modern Drama*. Additionally, I have recently been asked to contribute an article on Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* to *The English Review*. Finally, this position gave me the opportunity to develop my public engagement experience as an organizer of an RAI Book Club session on *The House of Mirth*.

Such success was only possible due to the strength of the RAI community. In particular, I wish to thank Alice Kelly for her expert guidance on all aspects of the role; Tessa Roynon and



Above and facing page:  
Graduate study carrels in the  
Vere Harmsworth Library

Raphaël Lambert for being committed members of the ALRS community; Tara Stubbs for her support; Professor Adam Smith for his commitment to supporting early-career researchers; and the other Graduate Scholars, Mitch Robertson, Emma Day, and my co-convenor Zachary Seager.

## Emma Day

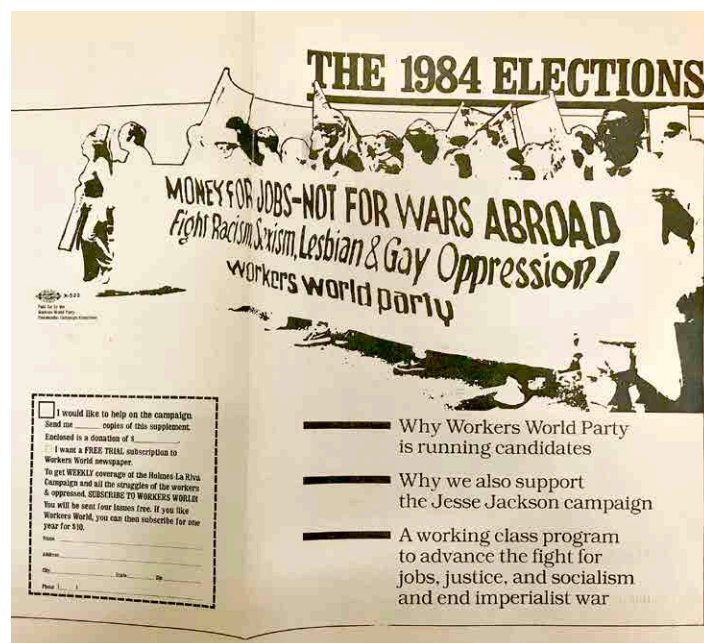
I have spent the majority of my time as this year's History Graduate Scholar at the RAI completing my D.Phil. I submitted my thesis, 'Out of the Silence: Women Protesting the AIDS Epidemic, 1980–2020', in February and passed my viva in May. The scholarship provided me the physical space as well as intellectual, emotional, and financial support necessary to complete my D.Phil. within the four-year deadline, and I am extremely grateful to the Institute for its ongoing encouragement of my research.

One of the biggest highlights of my academic year came from my role as the Postgraduate Secretary of the organisation Historians of the Twentieth Century United States (HOTCUS). With the support of the RAI's Conference and Events Fund, as well as funding from the British Association of American Historians (BAAS) and the Royal Historical Society (RHS), I organized the annual HOTCUS Postgraduate and Early Career Conference at the RAI in October.

The theme of the conference was 'The Regulated Body', and a number of postgraduate students from around the country as well as from the RAI community spoke on subjects ranging from race and the professionalization of nursing at mid-century, to the history of American campus policing and the history of copwatch and community counter-surveillance in the long twentieth century. The keynote address was delivered by Professor Douglas Charles from Penn State University, who spoke on the process of researching his book, *Hoover's War on Gays*. His keynote was combined with the first American History Research Seminar of the academic year. In parallel, I also organized a work-in-progress meeting at Lady Margaret Hall where HOTCUS members Dr Megan Hunt from the University of Edinburgh and Liam O'Brien from University College Cork shared their research.

This year, I was also accepted to present my own research at the Organization of American Historians (OAH)'s annual conference, which was due to take place in Washington, D.C. in April. I planned to present my work exploring the relationship between AIDS and reproductive rights in the 1980s, and was awarded funding from the OAH Presidents' Travel Fund for Emerging Historians. The meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19, but my paper, which is part of the panel, 'The Politics of AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s', has been accepted for next year's meeting in Chicago.

Alongside finishing my D.Phil., I have continued writing for different online platforms. Drawing on materials from the Philip and Rosamund Davies U.S. Elections Campaigns Archive at the Vere Harmsworth Library (VHL), I wrote a piece on the historical relationship between the gay rights movement and Presidential elections for the VHL blog. I had an article historicising abortion clinic closures in the US in the wake of COVID-19 published on the Made by History blog of the *Washington Post*. I have also become a regular contributor to the political and economic risk consultancy Oxford Analytica, writing briefs on topics related to gender, politics, and health policy. I look forward to continuing to participate in the RAI community as a Research Fellow next year.



Workers World newspaper, 1984 (Philip and Rosamund Davies U.S. Elections Campaigns Archive, Vere Harmsworth Library)



Obama-Biden campaign buttons, 2012 (Philip and Rosamund Davies U.S. Elections Campaigns Archive, Vere Harmsworth Library)

## Graduate Scholarships at the RAI *continued*

### Mitchell Robertson

I can vividly remember receiving the email from former RAI Director Hal Jones informing me that I had been awarded the RAI's Graduate Scholarship in Politics. I wrote in reply that this was "life changing news" and my experiences over the past year have borne that out. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the benefactors of the Rothermere American Institute, whose generous support has made this possible.

The most significant impact of the fourth-year scholarship is that it enabled me to complete my D.Phil. thesis, 'The Afterlife of the Great Society'. My dissertation investigates how little-considered sources of power in the American political system—notably the bureaucracy and the courts—come to shape the course of domestic policy far more than the President. My specific area of research is in the survival of anti-poverty programmes during the presidency of Richard Nixon.

In particular, the extra year has enabled me to spend longer thinking about the 'bigger picture' of my dissertation as well as conducting targeted oral history interviews with key lawyers, policymakers, and bureaucrats from my chosen programmes.



The Great Society: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as Martin Luther King and others look on, on 6 August 1965. (LBJ Presidential Library)

One of the primary responsibilities of the Politics Graduate Scholar is to convene the Institute's American Politics Research Seminar. This year's papers presented some fascinating, cutting-edge research undertaken by Oxford graduates on topics ranging from public opinion on cyber-attacks to détente, regulation of financial fraud, and rationales for bombing in the Vietnam War. These seminars are not only stimulating for the audiences but provide an important forum for graduate students to receive feedback on their work-in-progress. I know that at least one of the papers presented at the seminar this year has subsequently been published in a high-impact journal.

In Michaelmas Term, I was pleased to co-ordinate the visit of Jeffrey Weinberg as Practitioner-in-Residence at the RAI. Jeffrey has served in the Office of Management and Budget under every President from Nixon to Trump. His visit included a terrific seminar moderated by former RAI Director Nigel Bowles, in which Jeffrey shared his insights into the modern policymaking process. Jeffrey's visit also included a public engagement event at a local school as well as one-on-one discussions with interested researchers, including myself. An hour with Jeffrey illuminated the complex legislative clearance process more than many books I have (tried to) read on the subject!

The end of Michaelmas provided one of the highlights of my time at the RAI. After several years of oft-mocked failure, I managed to emerge victorious as the 'Presentation Winner' in the Great RAI Christmas Bake Off.

This most unusual of Trinity Terms has also been a busy one, particularly in terms of public engagement. Along with Rivers Gambrell, I introduced and moderated the discussion of the 1977 film *All the President's Men*, about the Washington Post's reporting on the Watergate crisis. This was part of the RAI's excellent *The RAI Goes to the Movies* film series. In the final week of term, I was also pleased to chair a symposium entitled 'Healing Our Divided Society: The Kerner Commission at 50'. This featured Gary Younge, Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester and former US correspondent for *The Guardian*, and Alan Curtis from the Eisenhower Foundation. The event comprised two captivating talks which linked history, politics, the media, and social policy. At a time of deep turmoil in the United States, it reminded the audience of the structural inequalities present in American society but also presented evidence-based ideas to heal America.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to the benefactors of the Rothermere American Institute for support over not only my entire degree programme, but in particular for the fourth-year doctoral scholarship in US Politics.

Above and facing page:  
Study carrel decorations in the  
Vere Harmsworth Library

## Zachary Seager

I had a productive and exciting year at the Rothermere American Institute. Thanks to the generous support I received as an Esmond Harmsworth Graduate Scholar in American Literature, I was able to complete my D.Phil. on the major American novelist, Henry James, and the uses he made of the art of painting. I successfully defended my thesis at the end of Hilary Term, and have since published an article drawn from this research, which touched on the reception of the Barbizon School of French landscape painters in the United States.

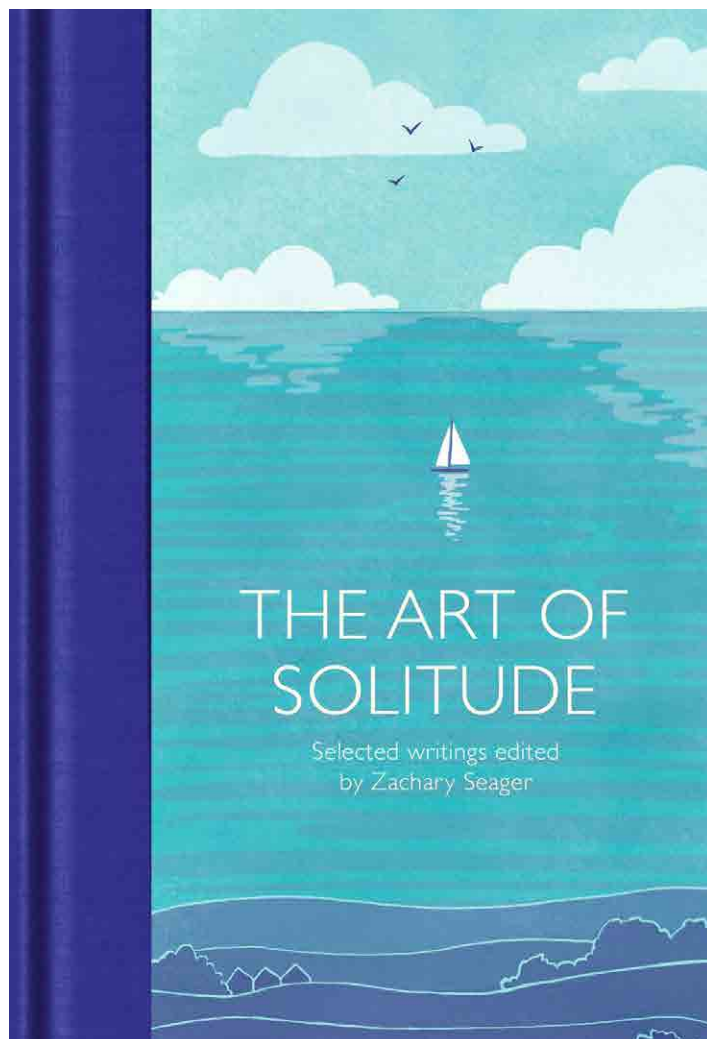
Alongside my thesis, I edited and introduced *The Art of Solitude* (Macmillan, 2020), a collection of poems, short stories, and essays about solitude. I included a host of American authors in this collection, from major writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson to lesser-known figures such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a pivotal figure in the early stages of the American women's rights movement. Research for this book was facilitated by the Vere Harmsworth Library and its excellent collections, as well as the reliable coffee machine in the RAI kitchen.

I benefited, too, from a large office at the RAI. After years spent roaming the libraries, it was an unqualified joy to have a desk to myself. But it was far from a lonely experience, because I had the privilege of sharing the office with exceptional young scholars. More generally, it was wonderful to be a part of the RAI community. I especially enjoyed the regular coffee mornings, which provided a relaxed environment in which to encounter the RAI's range of visiting fellows and permanent staff, and at which I received, alongside friendly conversation and delicious pastries, invaluable career advice and ideas for research.



Henry James (1843–1916), c. 1900 (William M. van der Weyde)

Alongside my research and writing, I co-convoked the American Literature Research Seminar. It was a wonderful challenge to engage both the academic community at Oxford as well as a broader audience through more public-facing events. The challenge changed during the lockdown but we responded well. We even had some of our biggest audiences in attendance at our virtual seminars. Personal highlights over the year have included the book launch for poet and aphorist Yahia Lababidi's *Where Epics Fail*, Bridget Bennett's talk on 'the dissenting Atlantic', Harriet Stillely's paper on Asian-American crime fiction, and the launch of Raphaël Lambert's *Narrating the Slave Trade, Theorizing Community*. Overall, I had a fantastic time hosting a diverse range of exceptional scholars, and have made friends and connections that I hope will endure.





Chinese American men arrested after a shooting in Chinatown, New York, 1906 (Library of Congress)

## Reflections on Visiting Fellowships

Every year, the RAI welcomes a number of visiting research fellows to write, conduct research, and join the Institute's scholarly community. Here, literary scholars Dr Harriet Stilley (University of Edinburgh) and Professor Raphaël Lambert (Kansai University) look back on their time in Oxford.

### Harriet Stilley

In Hilary term I was fortunate enough to come to Oxford as one of the RAI's Postdoctoral Visiting Research Fellows. I benefited from a large office overlooking the Institute's garden, regular coffee mornings, and a host of seminars and public-facing events – which provided me with invaluable space, time, and inspiration to work on my forthcoming monograph on masculinity in contemporary Asian American crime fiction. This project is the first work to critically examine the interrelations between Asian American literature and masculinity in terms of the crime genre, and as such encourages critics not just to read familiar texts differently, but to read a variety of texts that do not currently rest easily within the rubric of 'Asian American' literature, thus destabilising the limits of canonical categorisation.

During my stay in Oxford, I completed the second chapter of this project, on Chinatown Noir and its power to critique the regulatory laws of genre over Asian American literary representation. My research was facilitated by exceptional collections on Asian American literature, history, and culture in the Vere Harmsworth Library. Very few libraries outside America house materials relating to Asian America, and the significant advances I made with my monograph would not have been possible were it not for this unique fellowship opportunity. Thanks to the support of the RAI and its extensive resources, my research has since been recognized by the prestigious international Sisters in Crime organisation in the form of an Academic Research Grant. This award will enable me to continue to create fresh challenges for the field of Asian American studies in the UK, and to promote the ongoing advancement and recognition of minority crime writers.

Alongside my monograph, I am now in the process of guest editing a special issue of *Crime Fiction Studies*, and an essay series on Asian American solidarities in the age of COVID-19 for *U.S. Studies Online*. The ideas behind these collections were inspired by stimulating conversations with members of the RAI community. I am especially indebted to the co-convenors of the American Literature Research Seminar for inviting me to present my research. This offered a valuable opportunity to share my work with an audience of exceptional academics but, moreover, allowed me to thank the RAI for making this research possible, and for providing me with some of the most rewarding, productive, and enjoyable moments of my academic career so far.

### Raphaël Lambert

I greatly benefitted from my year as an Associate Visiting Research Fellow at the RAI. I particularly enjoyed the vibrant and convivial interactions between professors, graduate students, fellows, and guests. I am grateful to Adam Smith for his kindness and support, and to Sonia Tycko, Raymond Lavertue, and Kevin Waite for many enriching conversations. I am also indebted to the staff for ensuring everything runs smoothly. The stimulating environment at the RAI helped me establish strong academic ties and forge meaningful and long-lasting friendships.

I came to the RAI with a new research project about the notion of property in slave and neo-slave narratives and thus spent my first weeks at the RAI exploiting the impressive resources at the Vere Harmsworth Library. I was a regular at the weekly morning coffee breaks on Tuesdays and attended many of the RAI talks and conferences.

At the beginning of the second term, the American Literature Research Seminar, run by Zachary Seager and Daniel Abdalla, allowed me to present and discuss my book *Narrating the Slave Trade, Theorizing Community* (2019). I am especially grateful to discussants Tessa Roynon and Kariann Yokota for their pertinent comments and questions, which compelled me to reflect on my argument. I enjoyed participating in the Hilary Term edition of RAI Open Friday, where I was the respondent in a conversation with Nicolas Buccola about his book, *The Fire Is upon Us: James Baldwin, William F. Buckley Jr., and the Debate over Race in America* (2019). At the end of the term, the Institute for Black Atlantic Research at UCLan-Preston invited me to give a talk about slave agency and Afro-pessimism.

In the last term, RAI activities went on despite the lockdown. To the satisfaction of everyone, Alice Kelly maintained an online version of the Tuesday morning coffee gatherings and also hosted The RAI Goes to the Movies—a weekly discussion group. I also joined Tara Stubbs's *New Yorker* Short Fiction reading group. I gave an online talk for the American Studies Encounters series at the University of Warsaw, and I completed, in tandem with my colleague Michio Arimitsu, an ambitious piece for *Global Ralph Ellison*, an upcoming essay collection that Tessa Roynon is co-editing with Marc C. Conner. I really enjoyed my time at the RAI, and I am already thinking of coming back.





Madison, Wisconsin skyline, viewed from Picnic Point on Lake Mendota (Av9, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0, cropped)

## Travel Awards for Primary Research in the United States

The generous support of the RAI's friends and benefactors allows the Institute to make travel awards to undergraduate and graduate students undertaking primary research in the United States. While the COVID-19 pandemic has rendered travel impossible for much of the 2019–20 academic year, awards will be carried over for those students still able to take them up. Below, Sage Goodwin (D.Phil. in History, University College) reports on a research trip in the summer of 2019. *She writes:*

My RAI Postgraduate Travel Award enabled me to travel to the United States to conduct research in Madison, Wisconsin; Washington, D.C.; and New York. The material that I was able to inspect on these archival visits will form the foundation of my thesis on television news coverage of the struggle for black freedom in the United States.

A key facet of my project is the exploration of decisions made behind the scenes by network newsmen in covering civil rights. To this end my time spent at the Wisconsin Historical Society Library and Archive was invaluable. The trip allowed me to spend three and a half weeks peering under the hood of the National Broadcasting Corporation's (NBC) 1950s newsroom. The archive's Mass Communications History Collection is home to the paper records of the era's leading television network. I was able to scour the office files of key decision-makers, such as news director Reuven Frank and executive news producers Irving Gitlin and Gerald Green, for references to race and civil rights. Through the inter-office memoranda, policy documents, and production files these collections contained, I can now piece together part of the story of how America's leading network learned to cover the race beat.

Furthermore, crucially for my project, this trip allowed me to access a complete set of scripts for the network's flagship nightly evening news programme, the Huntley-Brinkley Report, in the years 1957 and 1958. Analysing these scripts has made it possible for me to ascertain which civil rights stories the network news covered and how the nation's favourite anchormen Chet Huntley and David Brinkley reported these segments.

The core of my thesis involves analysing what American audiences at home saw of the civil rights movement on their television screens. Therefore, accessing archival civil rights footage is imperative. The financial support of the RAI travel award helped make possible a further research trip, to the Library of Congress's Moving Image Research Center, which contains significant broadcast holdings pertaining to the freedom struggle. During my time there I was able to make notes on two key civil rights prime-time television news documentaries that do not exist anywhere else—a crucial piece in my civil rights footage puzzle.

Fittingly, I conducted the remainder of my archival research in a production studio in the home of television, New York City. Aside from the MIRC's holdings there are very few ways of accessing archival footage, as both NBC and its main competitor news network, CBS, do not open their in-house film archives to the public, including researchers. Fortunately, the producers of a recent NBC documentary on the civil rights movement and the media gathered a large number of civil rights broadcasts in the course of their project. They very kindly allowed me to visit their production studio to survey and catalogue the collated material. This proved to be a treasure trove. Due to time constraints, I was only able to analyse one or two key broadcasts but I hope to return on a future research trip to finish the job.

My research this summer has been instrumental in developing the ideas of my thesis. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the benefactors of the RAI's travel awards for making this trip possible.



The Huntley-Brinkley Report: Chet Huntley presents from NBC's New York studio while David Brinkley appears on screen from Washington, D.C. (NBC)



The United States Capitol  
(Architect of the Capitol)

## Congress to Campus 2020

Congress to Campus is the centrepiece of the RAI's programme to engage schools in the politics, history, and literature of the United States. Working in partnership with the British Library's Eccles Centre for American Studies, the US Embassy in London, and the Association of Former Members of Congress, the initiative brought former US Representatives Jeff Miller (Republican, Florida) and Elizabeth Esty (Democrat, Connecticut) to the UK, and to the RAI, to discuss the forthcoming US Presidential elections and to share their own experiences of working in Congress. Todd Carter oversaw their visit. *He writes:*

Working closely with the wonderful team at the British Library's Eccles Centre for American Studies, in March 2020 the RAI once again welcomed the Congress to Campus programme. During a six-day visit, Elizabeth Esty and Jeff Miller, the two former members of Congress, addressed large groups of A-level students at London Metropolitan University and Wellington College; took part in a livestreamed question-and-answer session at the British Library; and, at the RAI, held a fascinating discussion of the US political scene with Professor Margaret Weir (Brown University and John G. Winant Visiting Professor of American Government), RAI Director Professor Adam Smith, and sixth-form students and teachers from schools across the country.



Left to right: Philip Davies, Margaret Weir, Elizabeth Esty, Jeff Miller, and Adam Smith (Alice Kelly)

This year's tour also saw, for the first time in the programme's history, the two visiting members of Congress travel to the north-west of England, where they participated in two discussion events for students at Liverpool John Moores University; a sold-out public debate on the forthcoming US Presidential Elections at Waterstones bookstore in Liverpool, and a lively day-long conference—focusing on US domestic politics, foreign policy and judicial processes—in front of 120 Politics A-level students at Loreto College in Manchester. In combination with the November event, hosted and run by the Eccles Centre, the 2020 Congress to Campus programme reached an audience of just over 2,000 people. Fortunately for all concerned, this year's tour was not derailed by COVID-19, nor did it overlap with the start of the nationwide lockdown in Britain or the United States.

Elizabeth Esty served as US Representative for Connecticut's 5<sup>th</sup> congressional district, covering central and northwest Connecticut, from 2013–19. While in Congress, she served on the Committees on Veterans' Affairs; Transportation and Infrastructure; and Science, Space, and Technology. She also served as Vice Chair of the US House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force and as co-chair of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus's

infrastructure Task Force, and she was an active participant in the Aspen Congressional Program. Esty is the author of several dozen bills and amendments that were signed into law by both Democratic and Republican presidents.

Jeff Miller represented Florida's 1<sup>st</sup> congressional district from 2001–17. In Congress, he chaired the House Veterans' Affairs Committee for three terms, and also served as a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Miller also championed numerous pieces of legislation to support veterans and provide tax relief to American citizens. He is currently a Co-Chairman in public strategy firm Mercury's Washington, DC and Tampa, FL, offices.

As the primary organizer, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Jeff Miller and Elisabeth Esty for sharing their first-hand experiences of working in the House of Representatives, and, for the financial support and assistance they provided, to the British Library's Eccles Centre for American Studies, the US Embassy in London and the Association of Former Members of Congress. Equally, the programme is indebted to Dr Cara Rodway, Dr Phil Hatfield, Professor Phil Davies, Professor Andrew Moran, Professor Margaret Weir, James Dahl, Tarla Woolhouse, Ben Lewsley, Dr Matthew Hill, Dr Malcolm Craig, Dr Tom Tunstall Allcock, Dr Jonathan Parker, Stuart Robertson, and to all the other speakers and participants who helped make each event so successful and rewarding for the students who attended.



## Finances and Fundraising

The RAI continues to maintain a healthy financial position despite global challenges: endowed funds continue to perform well, in combination with the generosity of our benefactors and careful control of expenditure.

In 2019–20, the RAI generated revenue of £592,000 (2018–19: £599,200), comprising an income of £383,200 from its endowment funds (2018–19: £403,800), £115,300 from donations spent in-year (2018–19: £69,700), £52,400 in University funding (JRAM and other central funding) (2018–19: £80,100), and £41,100 in other income such as rent for room hire and for the space occupied by the Vere Harmsworth Library (2018–19: £45,600). Expenditure of £614,400 (2018–19: £598,700) comprised £340,900 in pay (2018–19: £239,700), £166,000 in non-pay expenses (2018–19: £226,700) and £107,500 in infrastructural and capital costs (2018–19: £132,300).

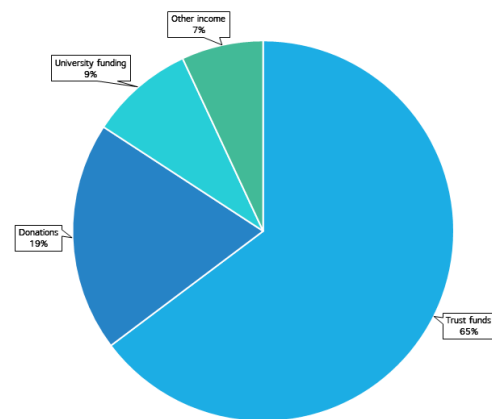
The RAI was the beneficiary of £676,359.50 in new funds in 2019. This total included two gifts in excess of £100,000, totalling £566,000 from an anonymous donor to endow the Edward Orsborn Professor of United States Politics & Political History. The Institute also benefitted from an anonymous donation of £58,085.50 for the Kinder Junior Research Fellowship, and £38,819.27 for the Institute's general endowment, as well as numerous smaller gifts from a number of donors. All of these gifts are greatly appreciated.

The RAI records its special gratitude to those donors who made or pledged major gifts during 2019, including Joan Winant, William and Camille Broadbent, the Rothermere Foundation, Paul Dodyk, and the Association of American Rhodes Scholars. The total value of the endowments which sustain the RAI's academic activities stood at around £13.5m by market value in December 2019, and the RAI's trust funds generated approximately £515,000 in 2019–20 (2018–19: £457,000).

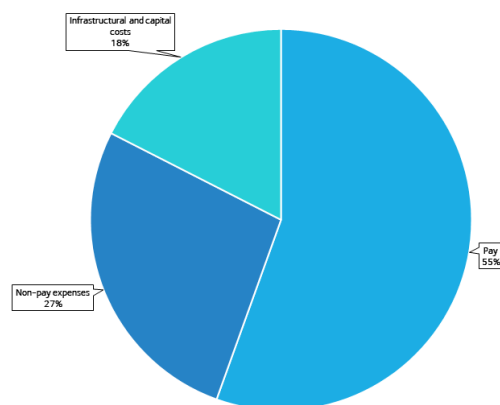


'Parallax 2001' by Julian Stocks, RAI atrium

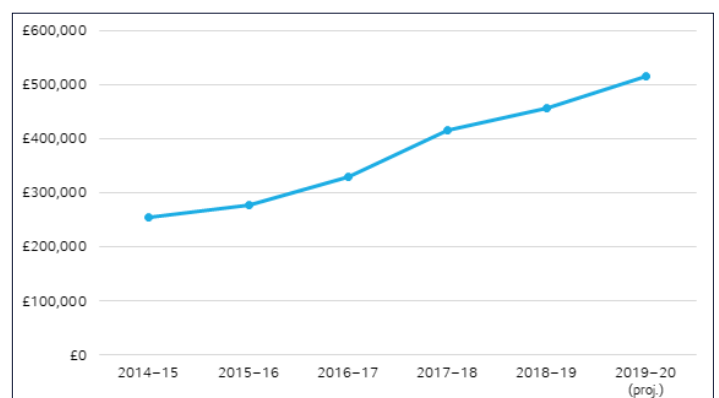
Income 2018–19



Expenditure 2018–19



Increase in yield on endowment





## The Vere Harmsworth Library in 2019–20

My first year at the RAI as Vere Harmsworth Librarian has been one filled with new developments for the library, writes Bethan Davies.

I took up my role in August 2019 and was struck by how central and valued the VHL is to the RAI community. I feel very privileged to be working in such a beautiful library with committed, hard-working colleagues, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at the RAI who has made me feel so welcome this past year. We also welcomed Louise Trevelyan, our new Library Assistant, who joined us in September. It is my particular pleasure to thank Judy Warden, who retired from the VHL this April. Judy had been working with the US History collections since 2005, when they were still formally in the care of Rhodes House. Many readers will have spoken with Judy at the Enquiry Desk or sought her help in finding items that only she could locate. She has been a real pleasure to work with, and I am sure that all will join me in wishing her a happy retirement.

Many of the changes we have seen within the VHL have occurred as part of the temporary Radcliffe Science Library Decant (2020–21), which has allowed us to make some key changes. Thanks to our RSL colleagues we have been able temporarily to extend our opening hours. More study spaces have been added, and new study rooms have been created on the upper floors.

We are now at the stage where the works required by the decant have been completed. Getting to this point has required a lot of work by all library staff, alongside much patience from our readers and the RAI. I would especially like to thank our core readers for their understanding and fortitude whilst works were ongoing within the library, and for providing me with thoughtful feedback throughout the entire process.

We have also been able to purchase new online resources, greatly expanding the primary sources available to our readers. These include:

- *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* (alongside Social Science Library funding): This searchable database gives Oxford researchers full access to the Miller Center's online, annotated transcripts of the White House tapes, recorded during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon eras.

- *Black Abolitionist Papers* (alongside Bodleian Libraries funding): A unique collection of over 15,000 primary sources, focused on African Americans actively involved in the US abolition movement in the period 1830–65.
- *African American Periodicals*: This vast collection features over 170 titles of periodicals created by, and for, African Americans, spanning over 150 years of American history.

We would like to record our thanks to all those who have donated books and other materials over the course of the year, notably Ecton Manning for his generous gift, and the Association of American Rhodes Scholars for their ongoing support of the Aydelotte-Kieffer-Smith collection. I would further like to thank

Ian Syers (pictured), who kindly donated his first edition of Edith Wharton's 1911 novel, *Ethan Frome*. This particular copy has a special significance for us, having been the personal copy of Lady (Viscountess) Northcliffe (1867–1963), the wife of Lord Northcliffe. We are very grateful to Mr Syers for his thoughtful donation, which is now housed with our historical material.

We are always delighted to welcome visitors to the library. You can find us online both on the RAI website at [www.rai.ox.ac.uk/vhl](http://www.rai.ox.ac.uk/vhl) and on our own site at [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/vhl](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 would like to keep up with our news.



Bethan Davies with Ian Syers (Alice Kelly)

# RAI



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