

# O'ER THE RAMPARTS

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While many pundits tell us that the 2024 US presidential election will be 'unlike any other', in the second issue of the BAAS school's newsletter, American Studies scholar Philip Davies outlines the qualities that will likely set this contest apart, and those that place it in certain historical patterns. The piece directs our attention to a handful of battleground states, where polling forecasts – made 10 months before voters have even cast their ballots! – remain too tight to predict a likely outcome. It also underscores the deep fractures that cut through American political culture at all levels. Such hyper-polarisation has given rise to those who now equate the scale of such contemporary divisions to those which existed 160 years earlier – amid the American Civil War.

Indeed, there is something of a Civil War theme running through the current issue, which is also the focus of our 'Crossing Boundaries' section, where Catherine Bateson surveys nineteenth-century Irish song and music-making as a lens on to a conflict in which more than 200,000 Irish-born soldiers fought. It is also the historical topic of a new section which we are excited to launch – 'Sources of Expertise' – in which we pair perspectives about the use of primary materials from teachers (and examiners), with those of professional scholars. In this issue, teacher and AQA examiner David Knox, and historian David Silkenat consider the challenges and rewards of having students work with documents around the US Civil War and Reconstruction.

But the issue does offer features on other topics and periods, too. In our 'Keywords' section, historian Daniel

Matlin considers several of the terms that comprised the lexicon of Black Power in the late-'60s and '70s, words that he shows resonated with activists and adherents, and which have also offered recent scholars a channel into the movement's theoretical influences. Meanwhile, Rachel Farebrother brings a fresh perspective on Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1928), which OCR recently added to its A-Level English Literature syllabus, considering how that novel encourages us to think about the act of reading, both of texts and human bodies, and how the work heightens attention to the 'choreography of segregation' more generally.

Finally, we hope that this issue continues our efforts to showcase other strands of the Association's school-based programme. It offers a round-up of the recent Schools Conference, held Manchester in October 2023, an event we hope will, once more, become an annual fixture for the Association.

Those interested in hearing further about our next Schools Conference should check back in the summer issue for details about the location and dates. Finally, there's just a week now before the deadline closes for submissions to the two BAAS Schools Awards – deadline February, 29, 2024, and the Monticello Teacher Award (deadline March 1) – and we look forward to reading your students' best work on everything about the United States. For more details on all these matters, check out the Association's website (<https://baas.ac.uk/awards/>).

# KEY WORDS

## BLACK POWER

DANIEL MATLIN

For decades, historians addressed Black Power largely as a factor in the civil rights movement's decline. The Black freedom struggle was often portrayed as descending, in the mid-1960s, from peaceful pursuit of integrationist ideals into enraged expressions of separatism and a glorification of violence that alienated white Americans and set back the pursuit of further reforms. More recent scholarship, however, has revealed a three-dimensional Black Power movement that offered detailed analyses of the structural mechanics of American racism and encompassed a variety of ideologies, from Black nationalism to Marxism.

### BLACK POWER

After being held in custody by police intent on disrupting civil rights activism in Greenwood, Mississippi, Stokely Carmichael, leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, announced on 16 June 1966: 'This is the twenty-seventh time that I've been arrested. I ain't going to jail no more. The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. What we gonna start saying now is Black Power!'

The phrase captured the imagination of many Black activists who had grown disillusioned with the commitment to maintaining nonviolence in the face of police brutality and racist mob assaults. Carmichael's words also resonated with a long tradition of African American self-defence in response to white supremacist violence, and with histories of self-organisation and pursuit of collective empowerment through independent Black institutions.

### URBAN CRISIS

While the Black Power slogan marked a schism in the southern civil rights movement, many of the Black Power organisations that sprang up in the second half of the 1960s were headquartered in northern cities and had the problems of northern, urban African Americans squarely in their sights. Between 1940 and 1970, the geography of Black America changed dramatically as five million African Americans left the South for cities such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles or smaller northern cities and towns. Here, African Americans had long had voting rights but were systematically

impoverished and disempowered. Deteriorating conditions precipitated urban rebellions in Harlem (1964), Los Angeles (1965), and dozens of other cities during the mid- and late 1960s.

Hypersegregated by the discriminatory practices of landlords, mortgage lenders and public housing authorities, the growing Black communities in northern cities were excluded from economic opportunity. Black Power organisations confronted an 'urban crisis' whereby manufacturing jobs drained away from urban centres to outlying all-white suburbs, and city budgets and public services buckled as industrial decline and 'white flight' diminished tax revenues.

Groups such as the Black Panther Party, formed in Oakland, California, in autumn 1966, not only organised free food and medical programmes to meet the immediate needs created by unemployment and poverty, but also demanded a redistribution of public resources between suburbs and cities. As the historian Robert Self has argued, Black Power "brought concrete economic and political approaches, not merely psychological palliatives, to bear on the urban problems of the sixties and seventies."

### INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS

In place of the interracial organisations that had spearheaded recent civil rights campaigns, Black Power called for Black organisational independence. Empowerment would be achieved by marshalling Black people's collective energies and resources, whether in electoral politics, social provision, or the cultural sphere.

Black Power activists helped mobilise Black and other minority voters to elect the first Black mayors of major US cities, beginning with Carl Stokes' election in Cleveland in 1967, and sought to hold Black elected officials to policy platforms geared to the needs of working-class African Americans. Groups such as the Black Panther Party and Amiri Baraka's Committee for Unified Newark also founded Black schools, aiming to counteract racist pedagogy and centre Black history and culture.



Image courtesy of Special Collections, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz. Ruth-Marion Baruch and Pirkle Jones photographs. Permission granted by © The Regents of the University of California.

Though men largely dominated the leadership of national organisations, women including Kathleen Cleaver and Elaine Brown came to hold important leadership positions within the Black Panther Party. As historians such as Ashley Farmer have shown, women not only challenged misogyny within the movement and often provided the backbone of grassroots organising, but also generated ideas and strategies that shaped Black Power at local and national levels.

### INTERNATIONALISM

Many activists viewed Black Power as part of a global anticolonial struggle and understood the United States as an imperialist power, not least in relation to the Vietnam War. The Panthers articulated a form of Marxist ideology that emphasised the global role of racism and imperialism in class hegemony. These ideas circulated widely, including in the scores of books activists published, and they found a large audience on US college campuses and among European activists. Meanwhile, 'cultural nationalists' such as the US Organization called for a reorientation towards African cultural and social practices, alongside support for African decolonisation movements.

### PICK UP THE GUN

"The heirs of Malcolm X have picked up the gun," announced one Black Panther Party poster. In Oakland, their initial base, the Panthers won strong local support, and wider national media coverage, by mounting armed patrols of Black neighbourhoods to deter police brutality. Some groups also advocated armed revolution, though many activists were focused on gaining empowerment through Black institutions, and 'community control'. Police forces and the FBI responded to Black Power with a wave of repressive and violent measures. Prominent activists were incarcerated and Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton was shot dead in a raid on his home in 1969. Such repression contributed to the demise of many Black Power organisations by the late 1970s, though Black Power left significant and enduring imprints on American politics and culture.

Daniel Matlin is a Reader in the History of the United States of America since 1865 at King's College London. His first book, *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis* (Harvard University Press, 2013) won the 2014 Arthur Miller First Book Prize for American Studies, and more recently he co-edited *Race Capital? Harlem as Setting and Symbol* (Columbia University Press, 2018) with Andrew Fearnley.

# CROSSING BOUNDARIES

## READING SONGS AS COMMENTARIES ON THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

CATHERINE BATESON

The crowds gathered at Jones's Wood in August 1861, overlooking the East River in New York City, would no doubt have supported the message of a song sung for the occasion: "For the Union of our dear adopted land." They were at the event not only to come together within the first few weeks of the outbreak of the American Civil War, but also to champion the founding of an Irish Brigade in the Union Army. The song called for volunteers to "Bear aloft that Flag" and be "Foremost in the fight" against the Confederate South. The flag and adopted land referred to was not just the green of Erin, it was also a reference to the Stars and Stripes. The lyrics thus stressed Irish American identity in relation to the "red, white, and blue."

This song is one of over 150 ballads written between 1861 and 1865 that detailed the wartime experiences, sentiments, and changing views of Irish American involvement in the Civil War. At least 180,000 Irish-born soldiers fought for the Union (the figure might be higher—as highlighted by the research of the [Irish in the American Civil War project](#)), while some 20,000 Irish-born fought for the Confederacy. Additionally, thousands more of those descended from earlier Irish immigrants, around 1.5 million of whom resided in the US by 1860, also served.

Understanding these songs, their lyrical sentiments, where they aligned and differed with the traditional story of nineteenth century Irish Americans, and how they reveal messages of identity, nationalism, and patriotism, has been the focus of my research for the past decade, and culminated in [Irish American Civil War Songs: Identity, Loyalty and Nationhood with LSU Press](#) in autumn 2022.

How do you go about trying to capture and unpack these lyrical sentiments from over 160 years ago? The first step required me to break from the traditional approaches of cultural history and develop an interdisciplinary understanding of musicology. So, different questions of texts were asked—such as, what does it mean if songs are forms of contrafacta (ie. they are using the same tune but singing different words)? This was common practice in 1800s American music; for example, the wartime songs "The Gallant 69th Regiment" about the Irish Brigade's New York 69th Regiment was set to the tune of an

1840s anthem called "Columbia, Gem of the Ocean".

A handful of Irish tunes were also set to "The Star Spangled Banner," before both copyright and its 1931 cementing as the US national anthem. While a musicologist would be interested in the sharing of the tune from one song to another, the cultural historian in me used this to question why it mattered that Irish-born soldiers wrapped their words around an established American tune. The answer was that it served to reinforce messages of their adopted American identity and loyalty to reuniting the country as one indivisible union.

Beyond that, my research also called for understanding more traditional military history to tease out countless references about battlefield experiences. Such lyrics touched on the battles of Bull Run, Vicksburg, Fredericksburg, and those around Richmond, among others. Often these lyrics revealed heavy use of poetic license and fake ballad news reporting of officer deaths, yet were mixed with truthful accounts of extreme heroism. Some of the songs examined were also produced in Ireland, alongside the not-infrequent use of anglicised Irish language lyric phrases (such as refrains chanting "Faugh a Ballagh"—meaning "Clear the Way", a common military refrain in Irish foreign military service).

Songs are often seen as non-traditional primary sources, but I find that this is also what makes them of greater interest for students than more traditional written accounts. The ephemeral nature of such works, alongside the fact that a song is never just a song, is a really good way to unpack contemporary understanding of a topic. There's far more going on than just singing "For the Union of our dear adopted land".

Catherine Bateson is an Associate Lecturer of American History at the University of Kent. Her first book, *Irish American Civil War Songs: Identity, Loyalty, and Nationhood*, was published by LSU Press in 2022, and began life as an offshoot of her time working as an intern with the British Library's Americas Collection and Eccles Centre. She is also an Associate Editor of the 'Irish in the American Civil War' project, and Academic Liaison Manager for the British Online Archives.

# BAAS ANNUAL SCHOOLS CONFERENCE



In October 2023, BAAS revived its schools conference event, hosting students, teachers, and academics at Manchester's Central Methodist Hall for a day-long conversation about "US Politics & Modern American History." The day focused on late twentieth century US politics, a major topic of both A-Level History, and Politics courses, with discussions organized around the mechanics of contemporary US government, and the social issues that have shaped and textured recent political debate and alignments.

In the morning session, talks addressed the institutions of US government, focusing on the modern Supreme Court, as well as the place and profile of Congress over the past half century. Professor Iwan Morgan (UCL) explained how cases make their way to the Court's docket, and how decisions impacted public policy, and unpicked how, in the past decade, the Court has become an overtly political agent, and how this imperiled its wider legitimacy. Dr. Patrick Andelic (Northumbria) next turned our attention to the position of the legislative branch of government, tracing the relationship between congress and the presidency over four decades, and conveying how the arrival of a cohort of Democratic politicians in 1974, known as the 'Watergate Babies,' brought about a modest adjustment in the balance of power in Washington.

Following lunch, our attention turned to two major social issues of recent US politics, in racial justice and environmental policy. Dr. Andrew Fearnley (Manchester) examined the period 'after' the civil rights revolutions of the 1960s, and encouraged students not to think in terms of particular presidential administrations' approach to this subject, but to see how the decades from the 1980s to the late 2010s mark a 'distinct period in the longer history of the Black freedom struggle.' Dr. Rebecca Elliott (LSE) took the creation of America's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), in the mid-1960s, to lens debates about climate change and homeownership in recent American politics, and her talk captured the role of ordinary actors in shaping such policies, as well as the strange coalitions that have formed around this policy.

One of the main aims of the conference was to discuss recent political history not yet covered in classroom materials or textbooks. In the talks, and lively Q&A that ensued, participants thought about several recent landmark US Supreme Court decisions, including *Shelby vs Holder* (2013) and *Students for Fair Admissions vs. President & Fellows of Harvard* (2023), which have eroded



earlier provisions to create a more equitable democracy, as well as *Dobbs vs. Jackson* (2022), which overturned the *Roe vs Wade* (1973) decision, and which Professor Morgan presented as one of the recent decisions which has inflamed broader political campaigns.

This event, which brought together more than one hundred A-Level students, from schools and colleges in Manchester and across the wider North-West region, was a considerable success, and the Association looks forward to hosting further such events in the future. Those interested should consult the summer 2024 issue of *O'er the Ramparts*, or check the BAAS website for further details.

# SOURCES OF EXPERTISE

## TEACHING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR WITH DOCUMENTS AN EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

DAVID KNOX

The transition to a new format for A-Level History assessment commenced in the summer of 2017. The demands of the new paper were uncharted territory for most students – and for many teachers and examiners. While the requirements of the essay-based paper did not come as much of a shock, the primary source paper has proven to be a greater challenge all round.

From the examiners' perspective, finding and researching the right types of sources has two sides to it. From one perspective, it is exciting, explorative, and illuminative as to what documentation exists than can be assessed, especially on such an important yet complex area as the US Civil War and Reconstruction. The flip side is that these documents – a speech by Abraham Lincoln; a newspaper article from a publisher associated with the former Whig Party; correspondence from such an iconic figure as Henry Clay – can be daunting for contemporary students. The pressure of completing an assessment of such accounts, often in relation to a particular question, and in a limited time, poses a considerable challenge.

The US Civil War certainly offers scores of primary sources that can be accessed for A-level courses. In a period of American political history where speeches were routine, they tend to take centre stage. Speeches are usually assessed well by students, especially if the author is a well-known part of the course. Yet speeches by less obvious figures, such as Lyman Trumbull, James Polk, or even Archibald Dixon of Kentucky, can halt candidates in their tracks. The rhetoric any of these authors used, in the middle of the nineteenth century, can also bring its challenges. Examiners must select

those that display the right pitch and language to help modern students understand the minds of these elite gentlemen and how they conveyed their arguments.

Students are required to demonstrate several areas of analysis within the primary sources selected each year by the Lead Assessment Writer. The main areas to be assessed include commenting on a source's content and provenance. Traditionally, students find content easier to critique than a source's provenance. In past years, attempts to explain provenance were often 'bolted on' as part of a student's responses with some reference (mostly underdeveloped, or briefly stated) to concepts such as the source's purpose, date, or authorship. The expectation is that students will then support this with relevant, contextual knowledge, showcasing what they know, and building up their confidence and the quality of their answers. With time restraints, and the need to explore three different sources, it can become a highly intense task.

As a seasoned examiner, it is always refreshing to see a student's response attempting to demonstrate a wealth of well-revised, clearly-applied knowledge. In fact, this is one of the highlights of being an examiner. However, one of the daggers to the sides that examiners experience every season, is that many answers go off topic and have little or no relevance to what is being asked. 'Panic mode' is certainly engaged by many, and the demands of the source paper often bring this out in candidates. The main focus of the paper on the primary sources is to 'assess the value' of such accounts in relation to a specific prompt. The language of 'value' is completely alien to most A-level students, and it



Abraham Lincoln and his Emancipation Proclamation, Strobridge Lithograph Co., c1888. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

does take time to come to grips with what this term means. The unveiling of the term 'value' also brought further obstacles in the early stages of the reformed A-levels. There remains, in some cases, an uncertainty as to what is meant by 'value': valuable for what? Valuable to whom? While student responses over time have improved, most remain happier thinking about a source's 'utility' or 'reliability'.

The 'A' in A-Level certainly still stands for 'Advanced'. The demands of the source paper – whether it be for America, modern China, France, Germany or Russia – are telling. Progress has certainly been made over the course of the previous seven years, since the move to the revamped specification, and no doubt this will continue. Common obstacles will continue to exist but perhaps will be less scary with time.

David Knox is a teacher of History at the Archbishop Holgate's School, York.

## AN ACADEMIC'S PERSPECTIVE

DAVID SILKENAT

One of the great pleasures of researching and writing about the American Civil War is the wealth of primary source material, much of it digitised and easily accessible. One of the great challenges in teaching about the Civil War is figuring out which of the millions of diaries, letters, speeches, and images are the right ones to share with students.

As David Knox points out, the language and context in Civil War era documents can be challenging for students, so picking the right documents matters a lot. Beyond picking the right document, it is important to help students develop the skills necessary to read documents critically and to read beyond the surface level meanings of a given text.

One of the hardest things to teach students is that context is often more important than content when it comes to evaluating historical documents. Indeed, I would argue that you cannot really understand what a document says without understanding the author, audience, and the broader context. My archaeologist friends tell me that an artefact loses most of its evidentiary value when it's removed from its context, and I think the same is true for historical sources.

There is probably no better example of this than Abraham Lincoln's letter to editor Horace Greeley, in August 1862. In his newspaper, the New York Tribune, Greeley had criticised Lincoln for not pushing a more expansive emancipation policy and not fully implementing the Second Confiscation Act.

Greeley urged Lincoln to act more boldly against slavery. Lincoln's response, which generations of historians and students have scrutinised, appears contradictory upon first reading. In the opening of the letter, Lincoln claims that:

"My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union."

Taken in isolation, this passage suggests that slavery amounted to a secondary issue for Lincoln, and that he was largely indifferent to the plight of enslaved people. However, Lincoln ends the letter with a statement that makes him sound like an abolitionist:

"I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free."

How can these two claims be reconciled? Here, students need to look beyond the text of the letter to think about the broader contexts in which Lincoln was writing. How and why had the Lincoln

administration's policy on slavery evolved since his inauguration?

How had the recent failure of the Peninsula Campaign shaped Northern public sentiment towards Lincoln and the war effort? How did the looming 1862 midterm elections shape the context of both Greeley's and Lincoln's letters?

Thinking about this broader context – and looking at other sources – reveals that more is at play in Lincoln's letter than appears at first glance. Lincoln had already decided to issue an Emancipation Proclamation but was persuaded that doing so when the Union war effort had stalled would look desperate. He would wait until after the Union victory at Antietam before issuing the preliminary Proclamation.

In this light, Lincoln's words take on a new meaning. Lincoln had already made the kind of bold policy decision that Greeley was advocating, but he wasn't ready to put it into action until the right moment. Teaching students to unpack documents to see these underlying meanings takes time, but they can get there with practice.

David Silkenat is a Professor of History at the University of Edinburgh and co-hosts the American history podcast *The Whiskey Rebellion*. His latest book, *Scars on the Land: An Environmental History of Slavery in the American South* (Oxford University Press, 2022) was shortlisted for the 2023 Frederick Douglass Prize.

# READING CLARE KENDRY IN NELLA LARSEN'S *PASSING* (1929)

RACHEL FAREBROTHER

Nella Larsen's *Passing* – recently added to OCR's A-Level Literature spec – begins with a scene of reading. Irene Redfield, a mixed race, middle-class woman who prizes the security of her bourgeois life in Harlem, receives a letter from Clare Kendry, a childhood friend she encountered by chance two years earlier in Chicago's Drayton Hotel. "Stepping always on the edge of danger," Clare is passing as white, which provokes in Irene "a fascination, strange and compelling." The letter encapsulates Clare's 'exotic' seductiveness and the intensity of Irene's unacknowledged desire, both for Clare and her transgression of the colour line.

The tantalising sensory pleasures of reading – bodies and texts – are an important part of Larsen's portrayal of Irene's intense, repressed desire for Clare. Such acts of reading also contribute to an interrogation of the perception of race, not least because "identity politics is figured as a skill of reading" in narratives of racial passing. The novel abounds with examples of misrecognition that identify the colour line as a social fiction, albeit one with an enduring social potency. Irene's readings of people are often defective. Larsen repeatedly highlights her protagonist's "unseeing eyes," even though the novel's events (and our perception of Clare) are refracted through Irene's unreliable perspective (149). Indeed, Irene only recognises Clare on the rooftop of the Drayton hotel when she hears her laugh.

Associated with travel and mobility, Clare's "sly," "furtive" letter also underscores the centrality of spatial dynamics to the passing narrative. Harlem Renaissance examples of the genre, such as Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun* (1928), undertake a precise mapping of urban geography from hotel rooftops and parlours, to streets and cars.

In *Passing*, Larsen plots the spatial dimensions of passing along a vertical axis, opening the way for indirect commentary on class privilege and racial identity.



Image courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Permission provided by © Carl Van Vechten Trust.

Take, as an example, the symbolic associations between Clare's criss-crossing of the colour line and tall buildings, such as the Drayton Hotel, and the elevated window from which Clare falls to her death. Allied to modernity, sophistication, and consumption, such interior and external spaces confirm Clare's privileged status as someone who has secured economic advantages, and her precarious position as a mixed-race woman married to a racist white American.

Clare refuses the choreography of segregation, with its partitioning of space according to "a principle of exclusion and social discipline." In contrast to literary depictions of passing over the colour line to live as white, she shuttles restlessly between Black and white social worlds. Clare even entices Irene (and their friend Gertrude) into passing by inviting them to a tea party when she knows that her white husband will be at home. John Bellevue's arrival exposes Irene and Gertrude to a racist diatribe. In the confines of his home, John presumes that he is among white people, declaring a hatred for Black people in language littered with racial slurs.

The irony, of course, is that his wife and his daughter have Black ancestry. The scene underlines the aptness of Amy Robinson's characterisation of the "triangular theater of the pass" based upon relationships between the passer, the dupe, and the "in-group clairvoyant". Irene (and readers) are assigned a ring-side seat from which to watch Clare's artful performance of whiteness. Having orchestrated the whole scenario for her own risky pleasure, Clare incites uncontrollable, uneasy laughter at the "priceless joke" of Bellevue's obliviousness to the racial identity of the women with whom he is drinking tea (171).

Rachel Farebrother is a senior lecturer in English and American Studies at Swansea University. She is a scholar of modern African American literature and culture, and author of *The Collage Aesthetic in the Harlem Renaissance* (Routledge, 2009), as well as editor of several collections on the history of the Harlem Renaissance.

## Endnotes

1. Nella Larsen, *Quicksand and Passing*, ed. Deborah E. McDowell (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), quotations at 143 and 161.
2. Amy Robinson, "It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest," *Critical Inquiry* 20 4 (1994), 716.
3. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 334.
4. Robinson, "It Takes," quotations at 724 and 716.

# NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2024

PHILIP DAVIES



"2024: Like No Other Presidential Election in Our History," wrote Jerry Goldfeder, in the *New York Law Journal* (7/9/2023); "An Election Like No Other" was the title of Jeffrey H. Anderson's piece in the *Claremont Review of Books* (12/11/2023). Even the mighty *New York Times* joined this chorus with its headline on December 6, 2023, "The 2024 Election Will Be Unlike Any Other."

The press, pundits, political parties, and pollsters alike are almost as prone to hyperbole as Donald Trump. Similar headlines can be found for earlier years. But a case can be made that 2024 looks different. In the words of *PBS News Hour* "Americans agree that the future of democracy is on the line in the 2024 election, but disagree about who poses the greater threat" (15/12/2023).

President Biden is the oldest ever US president. Donald Trump, currently leading the field to take the Republican nomination was the oldest ever US president before he was defeated by Biden, a loss that his strongest supporters continue to believe was achieved illegitimately.

When Andrew Jackson lost the 1824 presidential election to John Quincy Adams his supporters cried 'bargain and corruption,' and swept him to the White House four years later. When Grover Cleveland lost his 1888 bid for presidential re-election in the Electoral College, in spite of leading the popular vote, his supporters rallied four years later to return him to the White House.

Donald Trump's campaign for a second term as president has some of the same look, except that he has never led the national popular vote. His claims of electoral interference on the part of his opponents and the 'dark state' have been repeatedly defeated in the courts, while some charges against him and his team have been upheld and others continue to be pursued. None of his predecessors had a body of followers willing to attack the national Capitol in pursuit of the presidential office.

Nevertheless, at the start of election year the polls suggest that November 2024 will see a rematch of the 2020 contest. The same polls suggest that issues such

as inflation, employment, the economy, immigration (especially across the southern border), the conduct of foreign affairs, and even the relative ages of the candidates, are working to the incumbent's disadvantage.

But it remains a long time until November 5, 2024, US Election Day. Unexpected events as well as strategic campaigning can have an impact during this period. The candidate teams engage in energetic campaigning, fundraising, promotion and advertising starting well in advance and in every possible format.



It sometimes seems always to be election season in the US. The presidential election itself involves almost a year of caucus meetings, primary elections, local and statewide conventions in every state, in US territories, and, through the international operations of the main political parties, in locations across the globe where US citizens reside.

The Electoral College members are selected separately in each state and, as people are now perhaps more aware than ever, their votes are tallied in Washington DC two months after the public election day.

Electing a president and vice-president is not the only obligation on the shoulders of the US electorate. There are about half a million other offices to be filled at the federal, state and local level, with terms of office typically of two to six years, and with election dates spread across the calendar, usually at the discretion of the different state and local governments. Election season may have peaks and troughs, but it never does go away. And there is more than the presidency in play.

The US really does face an untypical election year. The age and nature of the candidates, the context of increasingly polarised major party politics, the possibility of significant minor party candidacies, and the historically small party majorities in US Senate and House, combine to make every federal race critical. The significance of states in the Electoral College, and the devolution by Supreme Court decisions of important policies like the regulation of abortion to the individual states, has increased further the importance of state-level races. So, in the wake of the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary results, what are the pollsters, the press, and the political parties predicting?

The website *270towin* aggregates the research and predictions from *Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball*, *The Cook Political Report*, *Inside Elections*, *Split Ticket*, and *US News*. Observing the 11 gubernatorial elections taking place in 2024, this group feels that all eight of the currently Republican states lean to or will safely be in the Republican column after the election.

Of the three governorships currently held by Democrats, two are judged likely or safely to stay Democrat. North Carolina, also headed by a Democratic governor going into 2024, is thought too close to call.

In the US House of Representatives these same teams tentatively award the Republicans 207 seats, and the Democrats 204, with 24 seats too close to make even a judgement that they 'lean' one way or the other. Of these 'toss-up' seats, sixteen are currently or have most recently been held by Republicans. The consensus, then, is that the battle for control of the US House is likely to follow the trend of recent elections. The Republican House leadership has found its tiny House majority very difficult to manage, and whichever party ends up in control of the US House in 2025 may well face the same problem in the next Congress.

The US Senate elections seem currently to favour the Republicans. There are 34 seats up for election in 2024, with 31 of these at least leaning towards their incumbent party. Of the three remaining seats, Ohio, and Montana are at risk of being taken from the Democrats into the Republican camp. Arizona, currently represented by Kyrsten Sinema, a former



Photograph courtesy of Marc Sigoloff.

Democrat now styling herself independent of any party, is considered a toss-up state. Again, the elections could be very tight, and the result could give either party a slim Senate majority.

For the Presidency our polling and predicting teams currently rack up 226 Electoral College votes at least leaning to the Democratic candidate, and 235 going to the GOP opponent, leaving 77 too close even for speculation. Those 77 Electoral College votes are in Arizona (11), Georgia (16), Michigan (15), Nevada (6), Pennsylvania (19) and Wisconsin (10). All of these states will be familiar to both parties' campaign teams, and to anyone who seriously followed the last election.

Public opinion polls at the end of January 2024 have President Biden and former President Trump neck and neck. The experience of US elections in the first quarter of the twentieth century has been that the Electoral College has tended to operate to the advantage of Republican presidential candidates, and this is likely to happen again. Both parties will be working especially hard to get out their vote in states where the polls are close, an effort that may reach down the ballot to influence the results in other elections in what is called a 'coattails effect'.

In the majority of contests since 1968, US elections have resulted in control of the branches and chambers of the federal government being divided between the two major parties. US elections prior to the late 1960s

generally resulted in a single party controlling the Presidency, Senate and House. Both parties aspire to return to that situation, and with margins so close, and party polarisation so evident, it is likely that they will put even more enormous resources into this election than is usual. Perhaps it really is shaping up to be 'An Election Like No Other'.

Professor Philip Davies has worked at universities on both sides of the Atlantic and was Director of the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library for sixteen years. Much of his more recent work has focused on US political campaigns and elections. He also established the University of Oxford's archive of US election materials, held at the Rothermere American Institute: [The Philip & Rosamund Davies US Elections Campaigns Archive / Rothermere American Institute \(ox.ac.uk\)](https://raim.ox.ac.uk/).