

O'ER THE RAMPARTS

Summer 2026

Editors

Adam Burns

Head of Politics, Brighton College
aburns@brightoncollege.net

Andrew Fearnley

Lecturer in US History, University of Manchester
andrew.fearnley-2@manchester.ac.uk

As the mercury scales new heights in British thermometers, we're pleased to bring you the summer edition of the BAAS Schools Newsletter. While, in electronic form, our issue can't be rolled up and used as a fan, its content may at least bring a moment's distraction from the heat and humidity! Below you'll find discussions of new research on major topics, including Vietnam and civil rights; ideas for making sense of recent US political and legal cases; and reflections on one of the most taught American novels at GCSE. As with all past summer issues we are delighted to announce the outcome of our BAAS School essay competitions, and to showcase several of the winning, or highly commended, entries. These two prizes continue to attract work on a wide array of Americanist subjects, from across disciplines, and from schools around the land, and they remain one of the best ways in which the Association supports and encourages pre-university Americanists. For those wanting to get a jump on planning for next year, we also offer a glimpse of forthcoming school events.

One strand that runs through the current issue is the way in which the British Americanist community often borrows from each other - taking topics, approaches, and arguments from neighbouring fields for use in our own subject. We celebrate this most obviously in our "Crossing Boundaries" feature, which in the current issue sees historian Beth Bailey place America's escalation of war in Vietnam amid the civil rights years. What impact did domestic campaigns for racial justice have on America's ability to fight the Cold War?

Her essay reveals how Vietnam and civil rights, often taught as separate subjects, in fact intersected, and underscores the value of explaining those entanglements. The cross-over of material between disciplines is also evident in Emma Kilheaney McSherry's analysis of the US Supreme Court's *Louisiana v Callais* (2026) decision, which reminds us that US civil rights is a subject studied by both A-Level History, and Government and Politics students. Kilheaney McSherry's piece offers a superb summary of this pivotal decision, showing exactly how it deepens the Court's weakening of voting rights, and how it fits within a quarter-century of US jurisprudence. It extends the commentary offered in last summer's Newsletter that the past few decades amount to a 'court-led counter-revolution' around US racial justice.

Our issue opens with 'Ten Questions On' the American writer and novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald whose novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) remains a cornerstone of pre-university American literature. Michael Collins, BAAS Chair, and Reader in American Studies, responds to questions posed by several teachers about Fitzgerald and his most famous work. Fitzgerald's novel is of course an emblem of Jazz Age America, but, in keeping with this issue's interdisciplinary bent, it might also profitably be read by students of contemporary US politics: how the scorn of the novel's narrator, Nick Carraway—"of those who "smash[...] up things...and then retreat[...] back into their money or their vast carelessness... and let other people clean up the mess they had made"—serves as judgement, and epitaph, of contemporary US political actors!

TEN QUESTIONS

ON F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

F. Scott Fitzgerald is a staple of many English Literature courses, especially his best-known and widely adapted work *The Great Gatsby* (1925). For the second appearance of our "Ten Questions" feature, we are joined by Dr Michael Collins, Reader in American Studies at King's College London, and current Chair of BAAS. Dr Collins is a specialist in US literature and, in particular, short stories, recently co-editing *The Cambridge Companion to the American Short Story* (CUP, 2023). Below he tackles ten questions from a variety of English teachers in the UK who are fascinated by Fitzgerald's work.

1. Is Fitzgerald's writing more interested in distinctions of status or wealth?

It's pretty hard to divide the two. Part of the point of his work is to show that in a highly capitalist society like the USA in this period status is typically a product of wealth. It is not like there is an especially significant intellectual class with high levels of social capital in his fiction. His characters are pretty braindead for the most part! What you have to remember about *The Great Gatsby* is that it is made pretty clear at the end that Jay Gatz is Jewish. It is really a story of racial or ethnic discrimination - perhaps the main thing in the USA that stops status and wealth being precisely the same thing. The discussions of white supremacy in the middle of the novel by Tom Buchanan when he talks about the fears of the "white race" being overtaken is more than just a side plot. It's pretty crucial to the meaning of the novel.

2. How influential do you think European sensibilities and settings were on Fitzgerald's writing?

Despite his long sojourns in Paris and Britain, Fitzgerald sets most of his fiction in the US. Unlike some of his contemporaries (Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos in particular) or the people he often admired and tried to emulate (Edith Wharton, Henry James) he is not especially interested in Europe for its own sake. This is probably why he gets taught so often as the example of "American" literature.

3. Why do you think *The Great Gatsby*'s popularity has endured?

I think part of the appeal is that it is often misread as a novel about romance. People tend to assume that *Gatsby*'s love

for Daisy is sincere and true, when it is actually more about how Jay cannot understand that even his sense of affection for her is bound up in admiration of money. The film adaptations especially lean into the romance. The romance of the era etc. too. She is, after all, extremely, even obnoxiously vapid and uninteresting. I think also fans of the novel want to go to the parties! More seriously, though, it tends to be favoured as a choice of English lit courses because Fitzgerald's principal talent was taking some of the complex aesthetic and intellectual forms of modernism and turning them into something more generally readable.

4. Is Fitzgerald more influenced by Romanticism or Modernism?

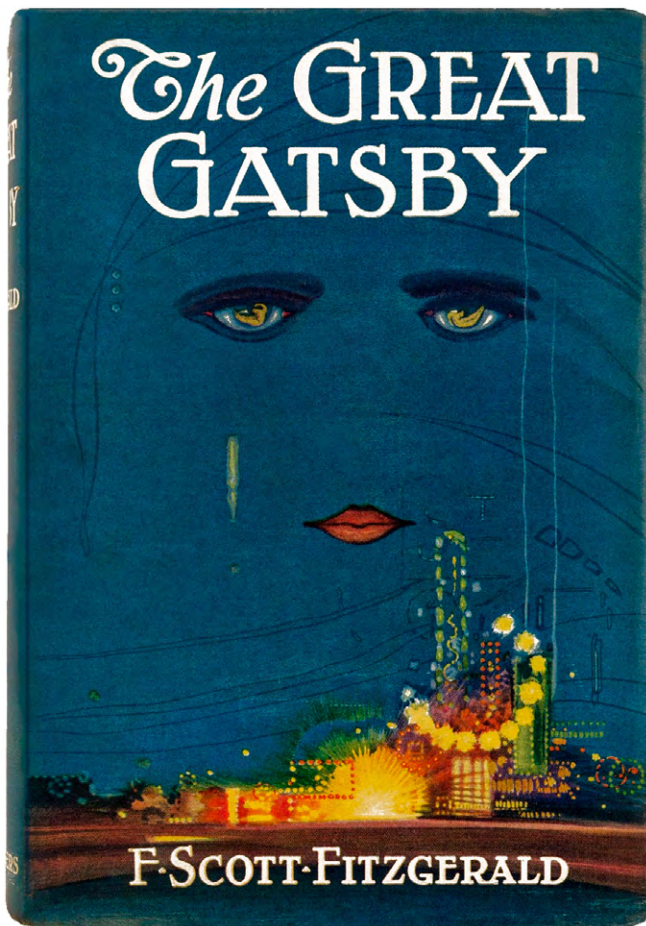
Both. Still more, I would say he is invested in "Realism", which is the literary movement of the late nineteenth century that he grew up admiring most. People like Henry James, Edith Wharton, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson. I would go as far as to say (and have done in some of my writing!) that Fitzgerald clings on to realism as a style long after everyone had abandoned it, because he is essentially nostalgic for the nineteenth century. He never really embraced modernity as a site of possibility. He always thought of the twentieth century tragically.

5. Do you agree that the female characters are generally shallow, vain or materialistic? If so, is that problematic?

Yes, I do think they are shallow, vain and materialistic. I don't think it has to be otherwise in his fiction, because his work is essentially satirical or mean-spirited towards his entire generation. This is only really problematic in itself if you don't compensate for the lack in his fiction by reading the work of his female contemporaries who have a different picture of things - many of whom were significantly more talented than him - Nella Larsen, Hilda Doolittle, Zora Neale Hurston, Susan Glaspell. It is more concerning to me that we don't read those people as much than that Fitzgerald depicts women as he does.

6. Where do you stand in the ongoing debate over the role of Zelda [a fellow author and Fitzgerald's wife] in Fitzgerald's work?

It is absolute. Not only was she his principal influence, she bankrolled him, popularised his work. He is almost wholly dependent on her for his success.



[Francis Cugat's 'celestial eyes' cover for] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Image in the public domain.

7. How compelling do you find the critical interpretation of *Gatsby* as racially 'othered'?

Absolutely compelling. There is a radical reading of the novel, which suggests that Fitzgerald is implying that racial "whiteness" is not an essential category of being, but something performed and that really *Gatsby* is just a bad performer of racial whiteness. That would turn the novel into a novel of racial "passing". Perhaps Daisy represents a whiteness through which *Gatsby* is trying to secure his future in America. The tragedy is that he doesn't have a future ultimately.

8. Is Nick's obsession with *Gatsby* tinged with homoeroticism?

Again, absolutely. Nick is highly queer coded. Consider the scene in the elevator at the party when he goes back to the man's house. Also, perhaps, consider how the romantic relationship with Jordan fails. Just as *Gatsby* is passing for white, Nick is passing as straight.

9. In a contemporary review of *The Great Gatsby*, Harvey Eagleton of the *Dallas Morning News* wrote that, 'in spite of all his cleverness, and his wit, [Fitzgerald] has no creative faculty. He has a photographic mind. He can not create experience beyond himself nor imagine experience very different from his own. He is continuously autobiographic. His heroine [...] is his wife, and his hero is himself.' Do you agree?

Actually, I kind of do agree. Not totally though. I would say that some of his short fiction departs from that claim by Eagleton and is truly imaginative and creative ("The Diamond as Big as the Ritz", "May Day" for example). I think by the time he was writing novels full time he was capitalising on his notoriety in the press and public (as well as accounts of his generation generally) and using that to market his fiction. He becomes part of his own myth.

10. If the obsession with the acquisition of wealth was not so engrained in American culture, do you think *The Great Gatsby* would be as celebrated as it is?

I really don't think it would. I think he makes some compelling claims about US culture as it is contending with the position of America as among the richest powers in the world. He captures a transitional moment when old empires are collapsing and the US is rising. He was gifted at depicting the way that this mythology of the acquisition of wealth was built on fantasies and desires that ultimately turned people against each other. He is also weirdly fortunate in literary history in writing a novel that feels like it predicts the stock market crash.

Others also predicted that, but they did so from more overt, often socialist, positions. I think that Fitzgerald is as popular as he is because he saw himself as apolitical in making his claims and was not trying to encourage people towards various political positions like many at that point in American fiction. I think *Gatsby* is a novel that pulls its punches and people tend to interpret that as compellingly ambiguous and lyrical. I am less convinced that that ambiguity is not just a failure of conviction on his part.

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

THE US ARMY AND "THE PROBLEM OF RACE"

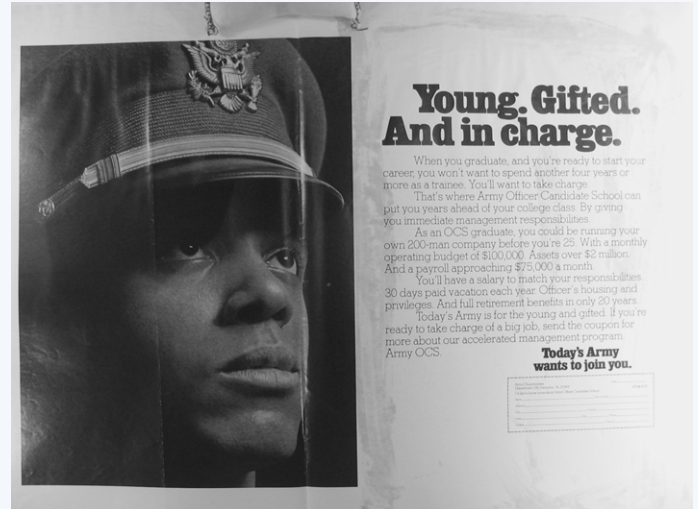
SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE VIETNAM ERA

"The war within the war," some called it, though racial violence stretched far beyond US troops in Vietnam. Fights erupted in barracks and bars, and spilled out into the streets of surrounding towns and cities. In 1969 at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina—the same night that the first human stepped onto the moon—groups of Black Marines made unprovoked attacks on individual or small groups of white Marines. They killed one 20-year-old corporal who'd been three-times wounded in Vietnam; fifteen other men were injured. A congressional investigation followed. In An-jong-ni, Republic of Korea, Black soldiers destroyed camp-town bars they believed were discriminating against them; camptown residents, brandishing sticks and sickles, chased them back to the post gates. Here, the violence of US troops provoked a diplomatic incident between the governments of the United States and the Republic of Korea.

Too often, tensions over minor issues—soul music or country? holding up the mess line—led to bloodshed. In West Germany, NCOs and officers, Black and white, began refusing to enter the troop barracks unless they were armed. "Race is my problem," said a white NCO to one of the ever-present journalists. "Not Vietnam. Not Russia." Race. At the cusp of the 1970s, racial violence was tearing the US military apart.

This was not supposed to be the story. As the United States confronted racial uprisings in its cities, with more than 170 in 1967 alone, the US military seemed to have escaped such conflict. It's not that anyone thought the military was perfect, but prominent Americans, Black as well as white, pointed to it as a model for the nation. "What the Army has achieved is what America...hopes someday to achieve—the elimination of race as a factor in human existence," concluded a 1967 NBC documentary, *Same Mud, Same Blood*. US Urban League director Whitney Young concurred, though in less optimistic tones. "The military has for years led the civilian sector in the matter of complete integration," he wrote in 1966, offering the military as a critique of civilian society. It is "shameful and ironical," he continued, that Black Americans find "more dignity, more security, and more chances for leadership as military men in Vietnam than in civilian life at home."

Such confidence soon dissipated. In the months and years following the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the US military no longer seemed a model for American society. What caused the outbreaks of violence within its ranks? What led to such uncontrollable racial crisis? As historians well know, there are rarely single explanations. In part, it was that young Black soldiers were unwilling to ac-



US Army Recruitment Ad. Image in the public domain.

cept the casual prejudice and structural discrimination that their fathers had borne. These were overlaid by a series of contextual factors, beyond the military's control, which exerted a considerable impact on its largest and most diverse branch, the US Army. By the late 1960s, its ranks were swollen with reluctant draftees. Too many soldiers had little regard for army rules and regulations; many were angry that their lives had been disrupted; others, that they were forced into a failing war. Within civilian society, Black Americans were also frustrated as legal victories, such as the *Brown* (1954) decision and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, had yet made little difference in their lives.

By the mid-1960s the Black civil rights movement had begun to splinter, as many—particularly young Americans—rejected integration into a white-dominated society and embraced separatism, cultural nationalism, and Black Power. In this context, young enlisted men, white and Black, carried with them the tensions of the age even as they donned identical uniforms. The army proclaimed that "the only color I see is o.d. [olive drab]"—an admirable goal for an institution that had practiced racial segregation until 1954. But it was increasingly clear that "o.d." tended to default to white.

By the late 1960s, senior US Army leaders defined "the problem of race" as one of the most critical issues the service faced, second only to the war in Vietnam. That's not because they recognized the moral and ethical dimensions of US race relations, though of course some did. Army leaders focused on race because they believed that racial conflict threatened the ability of the US Army to fulfil its

mission of national defense. If racial conflict undermined combat readiness, “race” was a problem the institution had to solve. (As we should regularly remind ourselves, none of the struggles of the era happened in isolation; Black freedom struggles affected the Vietnam-era military, just as military actions affected multiple struggles for social change.)

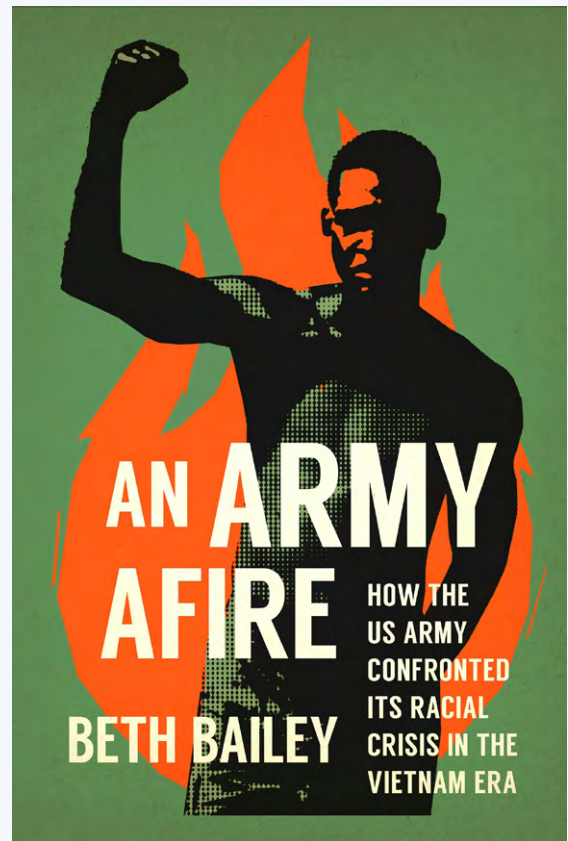
What did they do? Confronted with this problem, leaders first turned to the tools at hand. Rank hierarchy has its uses, after all. Orders could be given, regulations issued. Such goes a long way toward altering behavior. Over time, military justice systems faced scrutiny and reform; affirmative action programs were adopted. All fitted neatly into the army’s institutional logic, its normal ways of managing the challenges it confronted.

Nonetheless, facing the crisis at hand, the institution also showed great creativity and willingness to experiment. Newly-created enlisted men’s councils gave select privates direct access to post commanders, skirting layers of NCOs and officers in-between—though violating the fundamental principle of rank hierarchy. New training and education programs focused on African American history and the impact of slavery, many adopting the emotionally-charged process of “sensitivity training” (intense group discussions meant to force participants to confront their prejudices and assumptions) at the leading edge of US corporations’ and other civilian institutions’ use of such methods.

Strikingly, army policies changed, recognizing the significance of identities beyond “soldier” as well as the extent to which “o.d.” defaulted to mean white. As young Black soldiers sought to express Black identity, army regulations allowed (modest) Afros and the army sent a prominent Black barber to Army installations around the world to teach local barbers how to cut Black hair. The post exchange created a new category of goods aimed at Black servicemembers and their families: Afrosheen joined shampoos designed to “bring out the blonde”; soul music found its place alongside country western and rock on the shelves. By the early 1970s, one-fifth of all dolls carried at the PX were Black. That may sound inconsequential, but this was the world’s third largest retail establishment. Such policies changed the fortunes of Black businesses along with the merchandise available to army clientele.

Did the US Army solve “the problem of race”? By its own standards, the answer is yes. The goal was to stabilize the army. The army’s own actions, along with changes in American society and the larger geopolitical environment, made that happen. Did the army create what I’ll shorthand as a “racial paradise”? Obviously not. But the actions taken by an institution in crisis went a long way toward improving the lives of its Black members, and of other people of color who served.

The larger lesson here concerns how we discuss struggles for social change. Stories of such struggles offer compelling examples, replete with the bravery of unsung heroes, char-



An Army Afire: How the US Army Confronted Its Racial Crisis in the Vietnam Era (University of North Carolina Press, 2023)

ismatic leaders who gave voice to hopes and fears, tales of conflict and violence and, at times, triumph. Teaching about social movements allows us to emphasize both the possibility of change and the roles that regular people have played—and can play—in making change.

As history and as inspiration, such stories matter. But we miss something critical when we focus narrowly on social activism. For change to make a real difference, movements are only a first step. Change has to be enacted into law, translated into policy, or managed through the institutions of American life, whether those are economic institutions, educational ones, or media—or, as my own research demonstrates—the US Army, an institution that affected the lives of millions of Americans, especially during this critical moment in the Cold War era.

During the Vietnam era, struggles for African American civil rights and Black Power are inextricably tied to the massive and hierarchical institution of the US Army. And, in turn, what happened in the US military had far-reaching impact in American society.

Beth Bailey is a Foundation Distinguished Professor in the Department of History at the University of Kansas, and she was the visiting Pitt Professor of American History and Institutions at the University of Cambridge in 2025–26. She is the author of several works, most recently *An Army Afire: How the US Army Confronted its Racial Crisis in the Vietnam Era* (2023).

NOTES FROM THE BLACKBOARD

US Civil Rights history is not only studied by A-Level History pupils across the UK, but also by A-Level Politics pupils, who focus some of their attention on evaluating race and rights in contemporary US politics, as well as the protection of civil rights and liberties in the contemporary US. The recent US Supreme Court case, *Louisiana v Callais* (2026) should be of great interest to those studying either subject at A-Level.

LOUISIANA V CALLAIS (2026)

In April 2026, the US Supreme Court ruled that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 does not require the state of Louisiana to create an additional majority-minority district for the use of racial representation. The Court's ruling means that states can no longer allow race to be considered when drawing congressional and district boundaries. This decision goes substantially further than the 2013 *Shelby County v Holder* ruling which struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, and effectively ended the pre clearance requirement from the Department of Justice before states could change their voting laws. These two cases effectively gut the Voting Rights Act, un-doing over 60 years of civil rights protections with regards to voting rights.

Six of the nine justices on the Court, all nominated by Republican presidents, ruled that Louisiana's redistricting map, which created a second majority-Black district to comply with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, amounted to an unconstitutional racial gerrymander under the Fourteenth Amendment (the Equal Protection Clause and the prohibition on racial discrimination in voting). Justice Samuel Alito, in his majority opinion, wrote "Because the Voting Rights Act did not require Louisiana to create an additional majority-minority district, no compelling interest justified the State's use of race in creating SB8, and that map is an unconstitutional racial gerrymander".

This decision also fits into a broader pattern of "sun-setting" or closure pronouncements made by the US Supreme Court since the early 2000s, with Alito noting that "...vast social change has occurred throughout the country and particularly in the South, which have made great strides in ending entrenched racial discrimination". In the Court's view, race-based solutions are increasingly outdated, and therefore unnecessary.

1965 VOTING RIGHTS ACT

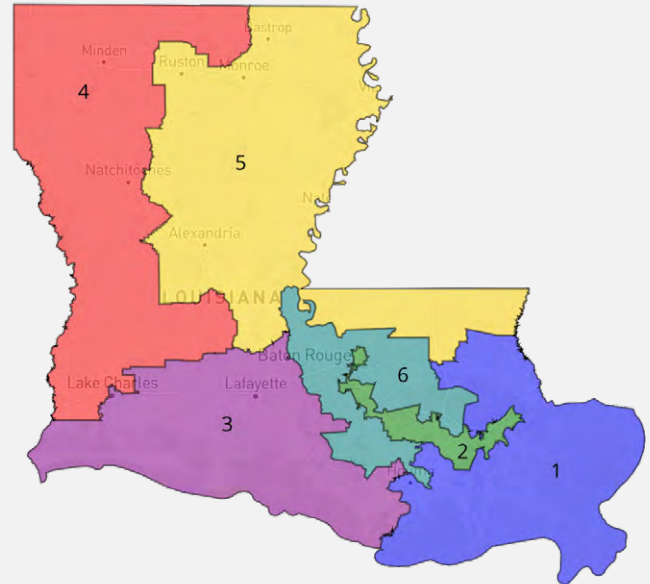
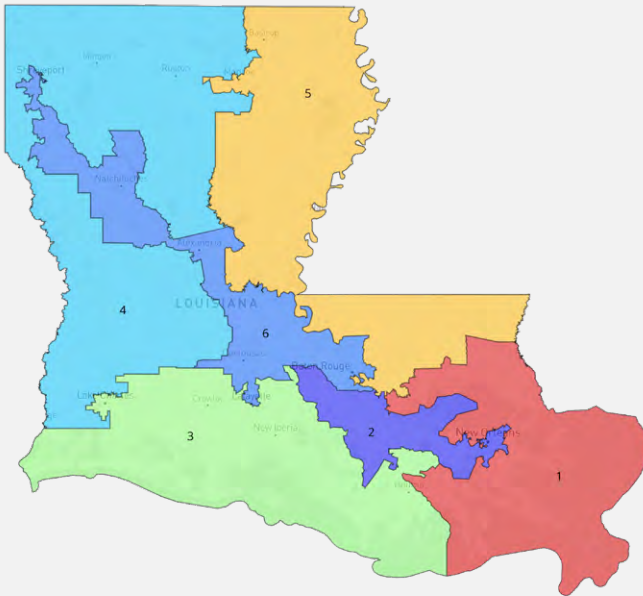
The Voting Rights Act was passed by Congress in 1965 to prevent injustices relating to voting rights. By using the Commerce Clause and the Fifteenth Amendment, Congress was able to legislate to dismantle actions by states that upheld historic discriminatory voting measures.

Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act banned racial discrimination in voting nationwide, across all US states. Any voting law that discriminates against voters based on colour or race, including the manipulation of district boundaries to dilute minority votes, was outlawed. After amendments to the legislation in 1982, which strengthened such protections, the Voting Rights Act was expanded to mean that any laws that had discriminatory effects, as well as those that were intentionally discriminatory, were banned.

This led to the US Supreme Court, in the *Thornburg v Gingles* (1986) ruling, that states are required to create majority-minority districts where a racial or ethnic minority group makes up the majority of the voting-age population. This would help to protect minority voting rights by preventing vote dilution of minority communities and ensure minorities can elect candidates of their choice. As a result of the 1986 ruling, Georgia's 5th Congressional district was re-drawn to empower Black voters in Atlanta. It was represented by John Lewis, a civil rights activist.

Section 4 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act required states with a history of discrimination to stop using racially discriminatory voting or literacy tests that disadvantaged racial minorities. This put an end to the Jim Crow laws that had been employed by many southern states for decades to disenfranchise Black Americans. Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act also required states (and several counties) with a history of discrimination to receive "pre clearance" from the US Department of Justice before changing voting laws.

In 2013, in the case *Shelby County v Holder*, the US Supreme Court struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, effectively ending the pre clearance requirement from the Department of Justice before states could change their voting laws as outlined in Section 5 of



Map of Louisiana's US Congressional districts, 2024 and 2026 [post Callais decision]. Maps from Davesredistricting.org.

the act. This case resulted in at least 28 states passing new restrictive voting laws, which undermined the voting rights of many minority groups. Whilst the US Supreme Court in the recent *Louisiana v Callais* case did not declare Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional, in reality the decision makes Section 2 of the Act redundant if states can no longer allow race to be considered when drawing congressional and district boundaries to protect majority-minority districts.

IMPACT OF LOUISIANA V CALLAIS ON US CIVIL RIGHTS

The Court's decision resulted in Louisiana, Tennessee and Alabama re-drawing their congressional maps and delaying some 2026 primary elections until this process was complete. The Republican governed states are hoping the re-drawn boundaries will enable them to win districts with Democratic incumbents that have been elected by Black voters. Alabama Republican Governor Kay Ivey, delayed four House primary elections in May until August 2026 to give the state time to re-draw the boundaries of four out of seven districts in the state. Two of the four districts being re-drawn are represented by Black Democrats.

Representative Steve Cohen, the sole member of Congress representing the 9th Congressional district in Tennessee saw his existing majority-Black district split into three after Tennessee re-drew its congressional map to favour the Republicans after the *Louisiana v Callais* ruling. Steve Cohen decided not to contest the newly drawn district.

The loss of majority-minority districts in states including Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee and Texas is likely to result in up to fifteen House seats currently held by Black members of Congress being re-drawn. Louisiana's re-drawn map is likely to mean that the two Black members of Congress that Louisiana had, reflecting a Black population of roughly one-third, will lose their seats. The Republicans are hoping to use the *Louisiana v Callais* ruling to allow them to re-draw district boundaries to dilute the impact of Black voters, who are far more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate, to help the Republicans win more seats in the House of Representatives in the 2026 mid-term elections.

Harvard law professor Nicholas Stephanopoulos predicts the Court's ruling in *Louisiana v Callais* will alter the makeup of Congress in a more significant way than any time since the Civil War. The Pew Research Center predicted that the decision will reverse the most racially diverse Congress on record. There is no doubt that the US Supreme Court's ruling in *Louisiana v Callais* has undone 60 years of progress on civil rights in the US by gutting the Voting Rights Act, dismantling the final part that allowed the 15th Amendment to be realised for Black Americans.

Dr Emma Kilheeney McSherry, Head of Politics at The Manchester Grammar School. She is co-author with Sarra Jenkins of the US Politics Annual Updates (Hodder Education).



BAAS NEWS

SCHOOL ESSAY PRIZE WINNERS

Many thanks to all of those who took the time to enter our BAAS competitions for schools 2026. We would like to congratulate **Joely Axelrod** (Greig City Academy), who was awarded the **Barringer/Monticello Teacher Award**, which will see them head to Thomas Jefferson's former home in Monticello, Virginia, to develop a series of lessons alongside several US-based educators. Please do consider applying next year for what is a truly memorable experience. We are pleased to say that 2026 has once again seen an increase in submissions to our main BAAS school essay competition, showing that engagement with American Studies is continuing to increase. Do keep encouraging your students to enter an essay, especially for the BIPOC competition – entering is excellent preparation for those considering university study across the humanities and social sciences!

The **2026 BAAS School Essay Award** was won by **Olivia Reay** of Brighton College, with an impressive piece on anti-intellectualism and its growing impact in US politics, titled "From Anti-Intellectualism to Epistemic Hubris: How Improvised Expertise Fuels Political Authority in the United States".

The competition for an honourable mention was extremely tight this year, and so this time around the judges awarded an unprecedented three to: **Sophie Butterworth** (Xaverian College), "Claudette Colvin"; **Peter Macdonald** (Altrincham Grammar School for Boys), "To what Extent Can Parallels be Drawn Between the Repatriation of Mexican Americans During the Great Depression and the Policy of President Trump towards the Southern Border and Mexican Immigration During his Second Term?"; and **Johnny Moesel** (Sherborne School), "'Hegemony by Invitation': Was the European Recovery Program an Act of Imperialism?"

The **2026 School Essay Award for BIPOC Students** was awarded to **Christabel Fashola** (Trinity Church of England High School), for an innovative investigation into the

history of US covert operations in a piece entitled: "To what extent should the CIA be held accountable for the assassination of Patrice Lumumba?" The range of topics covered by these essays highlights the variety of topics and approaches taken by the students that entered. A selection of introductions from these pieces is provided below, where permission was kindly provided, to give you a taste of the winning entries:

BAAS SCHOOL ESSAY AWARD: OLIVIA REAY

From Anti-Intellectualism to Epistemic Hubris: How Improvised Expertise Fuels Political Authority in the United States

In February 2016, during a victory speech in Nevada, Donald Trump expressed a populist alignment with his audience that appeared to invert conventional assumptions about education and authority. "I love the poorly educated," he gloried. Though perhaps a crass statement at face value, it acts as an example of a recurring tension within American history – anti-intellectualism being championed above academics and scholars. Educational attainment is frequently presented as a form of social capital, associated with merit, or even personal success. Why, then, does political rhetoric in the United States so often succeed by positioning intellectual authority as suspect rather than esteemed? How does rhetoric that appears to devalue education nonetheless function as a claim to authority in American politics? This essay argues that contemporary American anti-intellectualism is increasingly weaponised not only through the rejection of expertise, but through the purported demonstration of expertise without actual knowledge or reasonable evidential basis — a phenomenon which this essay terms *epistemic hubris*. It will first position anti-intellectualism in its historical context, before examining a contemporary political case through close rhetorical analysis, and finally connecting this informational shift to the dynamics of misinformation and political authority in the United States.

HONOURABLE MENTION: PETER MACDONALD

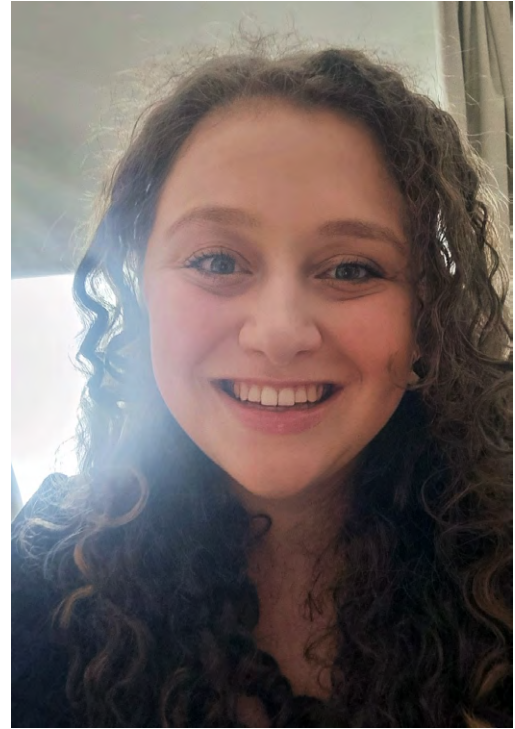
To What Extent Can Parallels be Drawn Between the Repatriation of Mexican Americans During the Great Depression and the Policy of President Trump towards the Southern Border and Mexican Immigration During his Second Term?

Following the economic, political and social turmoil inflicted upon the United States by the Wall Street Crash in October 1929, the Hoover administration and local authorities, in the years 1929 to 1933, engaged in a systematic effort to repatriate Mexican Americans, who were racially scapegoated for the economic malaise thrust upon the nation by the Great Depression, in what is now almost universally viewed as a morally and legally unacceptable violation of constitutional law. Just under a century later, President Trump, after his second inauguration, has embarked on a similar campaign of forcefully deporting "illegal aliens" who have crossed the US-Mexico border, with 4,094 Mexican citizens being deported in the first week of Trump's second term alone. Furthermore, although no official government reports on the matter have been released, major American media outlets such as the *Washington Post*, have published credible accounts of American citizens being deported forcefully, and without due process. This has led many scholars and historians to argue that many disturbing parallels can be drawn between Hoover and Trump's immigration policies and rhetoric. Trump's expansive and often imprecise deportation policies (which some experts argue are unconstitutional) do indeed bear an alarming resemblance to the Mexican Repatriations during the Great Depression, in motive, method and consequence.

HONOURABLE MENTION: JOHNNY MOESEL

"Hegemony by Invitation": Was the European Recovery Program an Act of Imperialism?

In the 77 years since its inception, the European Recovery Program (ERP) has attained virtual policy canonisation in the public sphere – the ultimate symbol of America's noble commitment to freedom, with George Marshall as her Cincinnatus. Paradoxically, few policies have also had their motives more heavily disputed within academia. In particular, critics have long debated the strategy's apparent magnanimity, instead interpreting it as an instrument of veiled imperialism. This essay contends that such charges are legitimate, but only upon surpassing our traditional Westphalian understandings of 'imperialism'. Preceding from a reconceptualization of the term, this essay establishes three key criteria for imperialism: sustained power extension, an establishment of a new power relationship, and the institutionalisation of this relationship through structures. Given that the ERP resoundingly fulfilled these tenets, this essay contends that it must be regarded as an act of imperialism.



*Monticello Award winner, Joely Axelrod
(Greig City Academy)*

BAAS SCHOOL ESSAY AWARD - BIPOC: CHRISTABEL FASHOLA

To what extent should the CIA be held accountable for the assassination of Patrice Lumumba?

As a consequence of an investigation into Belgium's imperial past, a public declaration of 'moral responsibility' for the assassination of Patrice Lumumba was issued to the citizens of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2001 (Bustin, 2002). While many see this as the resolution to this generational colonial tragedy, this vague and insensitive wording has undermined the external influences and motivations behind this assassination, contributing to a form of historical erasure regarding the full scope of Western involvement (Barr, 2011). Historically, the role of the CIA in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba has been dismissed or downplayed compared to the Belgian role (Weissman, 2014). This essay assesses the view that parts of the CIA are undoubtedly culpable in Lumumba's assassination, especially in the case of weaponizing Lumumba's anti-colonial motivations for aligning with the Soviet Union, using an innate fear of communism as a justification to support the assassination. Furthermore, collective accountability should be shown by the CIA for being the first national organisation within the Western Bloc to internally discuss and even go as far as to plan a potential assassination of Lumumba (Scipes, 2023). This signalled to other nations that the United States of America feared Lumumba's influence over the DRC, and the role he was playing in shaping a generation of Congolese citizens that began to separate their cultural identity from colonialism and western influences.

EVENTS

2026 – 2027



2024 US Politics Today Conference.

US POLITICS TODAY CONFERENCE

The annual US Politics Today Conference will run this autumn on the **week commencing November 9, 2026** at the British Library, the University of East Anglia, and De Montfort University. This fantastic annual series brings two former members of Congress (one Republican and one Democrat) to London, Norwich, and Leicester to talk about their experiences and thoughts on US politics, alongside a number of UK-based academics.

Videos and written resources from last years Conference are now available on the BAAS website: <https://baas.ac.uk/community/resources-for-schools/us-politics-today/>

The exact timings for the 2026 Conference are still to be confirmed, but there will be opportunities to attend in person and online, and further details will be sent out by email once announced. If you want to join our mailing list, please email: Dr Adam Burns adam.burns@baas.ac.uk

BAAS SCHOOLS CONFERENCE

The BAAS Schools Conference 2027 will take place at Brighton College in Sussex on January 12, 2027. The event will take a focus on US politics and political history this year, including coverage of things such as: the outcomes of the November 2026 midterms and the new shape of Congress, and the start of the presidential races for 2028 and the impact on the Trump presidency. Further details will follow in due course, but the day will be targeted at Upper Sixth/Year 13 students and will include several speakers addressing topics linked directly to the AQA and Edexcel Politics A Level specifications.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Dr Adam Burns adam.burns@baas.ac.uk with the number of students and staff you would like to bring. Further details will follow as soon as they are available.

