

ROUNDTABLE

## New Directions in Political History

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### Abstract

This roundtable takes up old themes and new perspectives in the field of political history. Scholars engage with six questions across three main categories: the scope of the field, current debates, and teaching. The first two questions ask how we should think about political power and the boundaries of what constitute political history. The section on current debates interrogates the relationship between governing and social movements during the GAPE, and how to situate the political violence of the January 6, 2021, Capitol Hill riot in historical perspective. The final section on teaching takes up two very different challenges. One question is a perennial concern about connecting with students in the classroom about political history. The other dilemma is how to respond to the growing cascade of censorship laws passed by state legislatures that prohibit the teaching of so-called “divisive concepts.”

**Keywords:** Political History; Historiography; Social Movements; Imperialism; Teaching

### Introduction

This roundtable arrives in the wake of political crisis in the United States. On January 6, 2021, an angry mob stormed Capitol Hill to prevent the peaceful transition of power after the 2020 presidential election. That use of political violence followed a decade in which the country has reeled from one crisis to the next. A partial list includes lengthy government shutdowns, legislative brinkmanship over the country’s debt limit, a formal declaration of national emergency over immigration, and two presidential impeachments.

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Crisis is a stark reminder that politics matter, and so does political history. Scholars, students, and the public at large are clamoring for ways to think historically about political power. What might be the antecedents, lineages, or points of comparisons for all this contemporary tumult? At the very moment when political history seems newly urgent, however, state legislatures increasingly reach directly into the classroom to delimit educators' academic freedom to teach a host of terrain from race and gender to sexuality.<sup>1</sup>

The goal of this roundtable is to take stock of political history amidst a relevant but challenging moment for the field. Roundtable contributors assembled over Zoom during the spring of 2022 to orient the group and draft questions. We then circulated essays over three rounds throughout the summer. During our Zoom session, we informally discussed whether the field has gained a reputation—well-deserved or not—of being stale and even *dépassé*. We noted that many undergraduates arrive in class with a dismal view of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (GAPE) as a period whose political significance can be boiled down to “forgettable bearded presidents.”

Like many charges that cut, there is an element of hard truth. Political history has a traditional focus on what we might call the field's “regular party ticket”: elections, party politics, and governance. There is still more to learn here, of course. Charles W. Calhoun's revisionist account of the Grant presidency, for instance, has raised doubts about whether his administration truly was the so-called “lowest ebb.”<sup>2</sup> That charge had long set a moralistic tone for political historiography of the GAPE, even as many of the period's most consequential “movers and shakers” were women, not bearded men or even presidents.<sup>3</sup> Yet by perennially renominating the field's regular party ticket (that is to say, the same choices for study), we may also limit the scope of what is deemed political.

Corruption and reform are good examples of how traditional themes generate familiar choices. Early views written by historical actors themselves painted a lurid picture of party corruptionists followed by an age of purifying reform. Scholars continue to disagree over the extent to which patterns of public corruption were distinctive or not during the GAPE.<sup>4</sup> Influenced by trends in political science, one approach was to investigate, on quantitative grounds, the extent of electoral fraud.<sup>5</sup> Others have argued that charges of corruption boiled down to a politically contested sense of what was proper,<sup>6</sup> and that scholarly interpretations of reform efforts have always been tied to their own normative views about democracy.<sup>7</sup> Still, the idea that “corruption suffused government and the economy” persists, for instance, as a thread holding together Richard White's recent synthesis *The Republic For Which It Stands*.<sup>8</sup>

One effect of the corruption-reform dichotomy has been to center the field's attention on electoral politics and parochially bounded political institutions. In a sense, what has been studied as politics is what counts as political history. That dilemma plagues all fields of the academy, to be sure. But the logic means that Indigenous peoples, noncitizens or nonvoters, those politically excluded by law or custom, along with border-spanning processes like racemaking and imperialism, and comparative or transnational approaches, will forever be alien (at worst) or add-ons (at best) to how we study politics. Researchers doing exciting work, or newly curious students, may thus be drawn standing outside of traditional boxes or find themselves more comfortably analyzing the history of political power in adjacent fields. By contrast, what if we are willing to entertain fresh vantages? Novel questions or pathways of inquiry may arise.

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Contributors to this discussion engaged with old standards and new perspectives across three main categories: scope of the field, current debates, and teaching.

The first conversation is about the boundaries of political history. Research output today is vibrant and capacious. Yet taken as a whole, Nicolas Barreyre notes that these studies lack something of the old political history's coherence, which was narrowly focused on elections, parties, and policymaking. Barreyre foregrounds three strands—empire, state-building, and the New History of Capitalism—where emerging work may redefine the field. Drawing upon Lauren Berlant, Allan Lumba makes a distinction between conventional politics, where practical horizons are often closing, and “the political,” which is a future-oriented speculative investment in collective life. Lumba suggests that a “genealogy of affect” can problematize old standards in the field, from the reform ethos that pervaded the GAPE to artificial divisions that we as scholars have placed between the foreign and domestic spheres of politics.

How we typically characterize this field, with a Gilded Age followed in tow by a Progressive Era, may also be ready for reassessment. These labels have not served as two distinct eras, per Rebecca Edwards, so much as different interpretations of the same historical period. Would renaming the 1870s to 1929 “The New Imperial Era” better synthesize the continent-spanning trends of imperial acquisition and corporate power? Barreyre picks up this thread by arguing that more comparative and transnational approaches are needed to study the U.S. state. Not even national politics was so neatly confined within national borders. Political economy blurred the line with international dynamics when it came to the tariff, monetary policy, or the rise of a pre-World War I liberal order underwritten by militarism and foot-loose capital. Lumba closes this thread by thinking about the historical continuities raised earlier by Edwards. Tracking the *longue durée* of colonial structures is one way to connect larger scales and distant relations of power with the intimate and quotidian.

A second line of conversation probes the relationship between formal politics and social movements during the GAPE. Lumba urges us to locate the full spectrum of organizations, movements, and repertoires across the political spectrum that led to Jim Crow, the Chinese Exclusion Acts and Alien Land Laws, the Espionage and Sedition Acts, the 1917 and 1924 Immigration Acts, antisodomy laws, and anti-abortion laws. Lumba recommends that we reassess that policy architecture from the standpoint of Indigenous sovereignty, anticolonial internationalism, and the Black radical tradition. Social movements are ephemeral by definition. Yet Lisa Andersen draws our attention to the way that “losers” were often strategic in laying groundwork that proved resilient over the long run. Andersen cites, for example, belated victories by prohibitionists, trade unions, and the environmental justice movement. The time horizon of the most impactful social movements was often multigenerational.

A third conversation asked roundtableers to situate the political violence of January 6, 2021, in a historical perspective. Organized violence during the nineteenth century included a good deal of vigilantism, Lisa Andersen reminds us. She situates the Capitol Riot on January 6 alongside the history of violence that took place *within* antebellum Congress—the fist fights, duels, and beatings recounted by the pathbreaking work of Joanne Freeman. Post-Civil War efforts toward “reunion” sought to depolarize open conflict. But who does civility serve? Andersen cautions that national consensus, exemplified by decorum's return to congressional deliberations, was reached at the expense of the civil rights of Black Americans. To this legacy, Edwards raises a host of violence in American history whose intent was to exploit the symbolic importance of people or places, from assassinations to contemporary episodes of terrorism.

The final conversation takes up the challenges of teaching political history today. To combat student assumptions that the GAPE is boring, Andersen outlines a template for bringing Election Day to life in the classroom. Recreating the chaos of the polls with a

role-playing game can foster a vibrant historically grounded discussion about electioneering, political culture, and partisanship. And what about the blanket of “existential despair” that many students today feel when discussing politics? Michael Lansing urges us to take these affective priors seriously. One way to reach students is by emphasizing “the capacity to act in concert with others to create change,” even as we must acknowledge the limits of historical agency. Hope is not simply a decontextualized feeling, per Lansing, but rather “about aspiration and action and struggle” that taps into students’ political imaginary.

The other teaching issue, frankly, is grim. State legislatures are passing sweeping bans of so-called “divisive concepts.” Instead of burying our heads in the sand, Tara White counsels us to be proactive and deliberate. At minimum, we must educate ourselves about the textual minutiae of new laws, familiarize ourselves with campus policies, and access the full range of professional resources available through professional organizations like the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Historical Association (AHA), and the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to defend against legal threats. Edwards adds that we might also educate our students about these attempts at censorship. One possibility is to address the contradictory mix of state education mandates and prohibitions as a point of departure for discussions about historical interpretation. Edwards situates the trend to formal censorship within a broader climate of hostility to learning that includes fabrications on social media and disinformation campaigns. Teaching students to analyze the past through primary source materials and rigorous scholarly tools is more crucial now than ever.

### Section A. Scope of the Field

*Question 1:* How should we think about political power during the GAPE? Political history has a traditional focus on elections, political parties, and representative institutions. Has the field expanded beyond these older boundaries into new terrain? What are the benefits and limitations of these approaches?

*Nicolas Barreyre*

A few years ago, two scholars in the *New York Times* published an op-ed lamenting the disappearance of political history, described as “a specialization in elections and elected officials, policy and policy making, parties and party politics.” For them, the turn in the 1960s to the new social history, and especially to approaches from below, although fruitful, had carried the cost of impoverishing historians’, and more broadly Americans’, understanding of politics and their abilities to engage with the democratic process.<sup>9</sup> Needless to say, such a stance immediately ignited a fierce controversy, with numerous scholars pointing to the many works that they considered political histories.<sup>10</sup> The argument hinged on two disagreements: one was the definition of “political history,” as many found the one offered in the op-ed too narrow and old-school; the second is that, although many scholars still did work that could fall within that narrow definition, their work was advertised as rather belonging to other fields. One striking element of the controversy, in fact, was how many historians came out as doing political history who had never presented themselves as “political historians.”

Why recount this? I think it is telling of where political history stands today. On the one hand, many historians’ works have a political dimension, in a broad sense. They deal with power, they deal with laws, mobilizations, grassroots movements, resistance, violence. Many historians also draw openly political lessons from their research. Yet it seems that these do not amount to “political history” as a field, either because most of those scholars consider they primarily belong to another conversation, or because their research

questions pull in too many directions for them to give a sense of a collective endeavor. Could it be said that historians in general do a lot of political history, but political history as a field is, indeed, moribund? And, if it is, should we really revive it?

A rapid glance at the table of contents of *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* gives a good indication about political history for the period. A rough count shows that out of 170 research articles from 2010 to today, about seventy have a political dimension important enough to be identified from the title or the abstract. They ranged in topics from reform movements to women's mobilization for suffrage, from federal agencies to discourses about regulation, from corruption and the fight against it to American Indian activism, from judicial supremacy to the enclosure of urban commons.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, almost thirty of those research articles would actually fall within the narrower traditional definition given earlier, dealing with elections, state transformation, policy and regulations, international relations, or constitutional amendments.

So there is definitely no lack of political histories of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, both in a broad sense and in the narrower definition of elections, institutions, and policies. What might be lacking, however, is an intellectual core, which would give us a sense that we belong to the same field, and that we pull in the same direction. Again, whether "political history" as a broad field is something we need, instead of other subfields that can create this sense of collective scholarly purpose, is up for debate. I would propose that it is worth the try, however, and this roundtable might be a place to start.

There are several bodies of scholarship on this period that could provide a direction for such intellectual rethinking. Studies on imperialism are one, especially as new scholarship on the post-Civil War conquest of western territories—sometimes renamed "Greater Reconstruction"—starts converging with histories of overseas U.S. colonialism, and both uncover how these affected policing, citizenship, and state action domestically.<sup>12</sup> Studies of the state have also known a welcome renewal, maybe less intense than during the Early Republic but pushing us to seriously reconsider not only policies or regulations, but also the role of state structures and how they transformed the country during that pivotal period.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the history of the political economy, sometimes now called the "New History of Capitalism," is refreshingly pushing for more integration between our understanding of economic transformations and the central role of political institutions—and politicians—in shaping them.<sup>14</sup> Those three subfields, I surmise, might help us redefine political history as a place where we can centrally rethink how politics (both in the sense of elections and state actions, and in the sense of participating in the definition of civil life) broadly shaped the extraordinary transformation of the United States from the Civil War to World War I.

### *Allan Lumba*

Professor Nicolas Barreyre's essay has given me plenty to think about, especially how and why political history—especially during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era—could offer generative ways to rethink the genealogy of contemporary politics. I am in agreement with many of the possible historiographical horizons mentioned in the essay, specifically the themes of the "Greater Reconstruction" and the focus on "political economy." I have found analytical concepts such as "racial capitalism," "abolition," and "decolonization," as remarkably fruitful for exploring these kinds of field directions.<sup>15</sup> But, like other scholarship mentioned in the essay, I want to urge GAPE scholars to linger a little bit on the concept of the "political" in "political history," especially its relation to what Barreyre calls "civil life."

Political history is methodologically and historiographically equipped to further sharpen the difference between the “political” and “politics.”<sup>16</sup> The political, as Lauren Berlant has usefully conceptualized, is the place where one is always excited, while politics, is a place of constant disappointment.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, political history has normatively been viewed by readers as a field dedicated to “politics:” stories of the rise and fall of specific associations, institutions, parties, and historical actors. The disappointment of GAPE politics or the kinds of on-the-ground frictions, tensions, contradictions, compromises, and “failures” are especially resonant as we survey both intended and unintended consequences that continue to shape the present.

And yet, as a place of massive and micro excitement, as Berlant also reminds, the political is ultimately an investment in collective life.<sup>18</sup> Oftentimes entire political ideologies, social movements, and political parties are invented and gain traction as a result in this investment in collective life, especially an attachment to historically contingent notions of the “good life.”<sup>19</sup> Whether it be liberal reformers, imperial expansionists, revolutionary organizers, or utopic activists, the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning decades of the twentieth century are rife with these kinds of speculative thinking about the future of human society.

With this in mind, I see much of this same scholarship of political history as tracking a genealogy of affect. To me this seems very generative. Despite the constant disappointment in “politics,” the “political” continues to excite people to return to this investment in collectively created and maintained institutions. Seeing the political history of the GAPE as what Ann Czechovitz calls, in a different context, “an archive of feelings,”<sup>20</sup> sheds necessary light on how and why the political continues to attract those seeking what they see as “good” social relations; and at the same time, how certain politics leave many disenchanted. It also illuminates how historically contingent politics are interpreted differently by historical agents as giving their individual lives meaning, and why they see these meanings extending beyond the finitude of a biological lifespan.<sup>21</sup> Progressive faith in the power of knowledge, technology, bureaucracy, and legislation, to not only supposedly fix social problems, but to actually propel society toward a more perfect future, is one example of seeking meaning beyond individual finitude. Affect also enables a better understanding of revolutionary thinking. Indeed, the investment in the political oftentimes appears as a reparative desire in achieving justice for those violently cast out of collective life due to racialized, gendered, sexualized, classed, or other violent normative categories. This is not only true for GAPE in the United States but transnational histories as well.<sup>22</sup>

Affect also enables us to think about how the political shapes boundaries between the foreign and domestic in U.S. empire. American leaders justified rule over supposedly “backwards” peoples by arguing that certain populations were possessed by their feelings, and thus were not emotionally fit for sovereignty. Some examples of the deployment of this logic can be seen in the late nineteenth century “benevolent assimilation” of overseas imperial expansion or the Wilsonian “mandates” of the 1920s. This logic was also deployed “domestically” during what W.E.B. Du Bois called the continued “Civil War” in the wake of Reconstruction.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the structural violence of Jim Crow could only be possible with the white supremacist investment in the sentimental nostalgia for slavery and the paranoia of being victims to “freed” Black people.

The combined nostalgia and paranoia claimed by white supremacists also illustrates how political history can operate as a powerful heuristic into the historical intensifications of fascisms. It can help us examine how and why the desire to return to the pre-GAPE era of the United States (certainly a fantasy past of the “good life” before the long “civil rights”

era), continues to emotionally attract and excite an exponentially growing number of the U.S. population. And on the other side of the coin, it suggests why an increasing number of the U.S. population has disengaged with politics, disenchanted and alienated from what collective life could offer. Indeed, political history—as a method of examining the bonds between emotions and power—is especially crucial to understand: the rise of openly fascist gleeful disavowal of historical suffering by different minoritized groups, the legislated censorship of history driven by the possibility of “injuring” the feelings of “normal” students in schools, and the constant paranoid calls to inflict violence on political rivals.

*Question 2:* The GAPE is a period of territorial expansion, imperial conquest, and state transformation. Where do we draw the line between the “domestic” and the “international” spheres? Another notable trend is the transnational turn, more generally. What is gained and what is lost by redrawing boundaries of various kinds for the field?

*Rebecca Edwards*

As this journal’s title indicates, historians often connect the “Gilded Age” and the “Progressive Era” analytically while retaining two distinct names that offer political assessments—one negative, one positive. Traditionally scholars treat them as sequential, defining a Gilded Age (1870s–1890s), characterized by corruption and political stalemate, followed by a Progressive Era (1900–1920), when citizens mobilized for social justice and curbs on corporate power. Recent trends, however, trace many origins of progressivism to the earlier period, in initiatives ranging from the Knights of Labor to the foundation of Hull House in 1889. Historians of women, in particular, locate roots of progressive activism as early as the 1870s.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, some historical sites date the end of “Gilded Age splendor” to 1929—or to the arrival of New Deal taxes in the 1930s, which forced the sale of many extravagant mansions.<sup>25</sup> One could therefore argue that, instead of embodying two adjacent periods, the “Gilded” and “Progressive” labels reflect different interpretations of a single era.

Gilded *for whom*, though? Progressive *for whom*? Neither term speaks much to the experiences of immigrants or people of color, including those who found themselves dispossessed, newly overrun, or annexed by the United States. “Progressive” is a troubling adjective for an era that began with the Supreme Court decisions in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, as well as subjugation of the Philippines. The terms fit awkwardly, if at all, with exciting recent work in borderlands, Asian American, and Indigenous history. Meanwhile, historians of labor emphasize the 1870s and 1880s at least as much as they do later mobilization for workers’ rights.<sup>26</sup>

The commentators who originally deployed the terms “Gilded Age” and “Progressive Era” meant to call attention to the uses and abuses of political power.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps we need new names that reflect a fuller account of such uses and abuses. Here is a thought experiment: What if we followed historians of other regions of the world (and Walter LaFeber) and called this whole period the “New Imperial Era”?<sup>28</sup>

European historians who use the term “New Imperialism” emphasize industrialization and the search for raw materials and markets, in contrast to older forms of empire.<sup>29</sup> Was there a corresponding shift in the United States? Scholars widely agree that the United States built the bulk of its *continental* empire on North American lands taken from Native peoples. The Indian Removals of the 1830s and the Mexican-

American War of the 1840s represented a pinnacle of what we might call “old imperialism.”<sup>30</sup> The question is how to connect those developments to later ones. Empire-building took new forms in the decades after the Union victory and Emancipation, but it was not a novel enterprise.

One approach is to trace continuities. Walter Williams long ago illustrated links between U.S. conquest of the West and overseas, citing Theodore Roosevelt’s famous argument that if the United States was “morally bound to give the Philippines back to the Filipinos, it was morally bound to give Arizona back to the Apaches.”<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, one could document a gradual shift over time, from lands the United States swallowed whole and converted into states, toward lands it never fully incorporated and eventually relinquished. This trend is apparent among historians of the U.S. West, especially, in analyzing “Greater Reconstruction”: federal consolidations of power beyond the former Confederacy.<sup>32</sup> The United States began to count Hawai’i’s population in the federal census of 1900 and Puerto Rico’s in 1910; the Philippines, however, were never included. Intermediate annexations included Utah and New Mexico, which struggled to win statehood due to the allegedly alien nature of their populations—an issue that had also arisen in 1848, when the United States made the pivotal decision to seize the northern parts of Mexico and abandon any attempt to take the most populated portions of its neighbor.<sup>33</sup>

Alternatively, political historians may see a sharp break between Jacksonian Democratic expansion and later, Republican-directed forms of empire-building. With the exception of the U.S.-Mexico War, military exploits in the earlier period tended to be militia-led and often local- and state-driven. Even Claudio Saunt, whose recent history of Indian dispossession in the 1830s emphasizes the federal government’s role, shows that individual white aggressors did a substantial portion of the work of uprooting Native peoples and seizing their property. Much has been written recently about *counter-sovereignties* that have challenged federal power.<sup>34</sup> In an era of slavery, however, and frontier families with a dozen sons, patriarchal families operated more as *co-sovereigns* who shared both the goals and the work of expanding agriculture, slavery, and empire. The federal government benefited from their labors through cost savings as well as deniability and distance from atrocities on the front lines.

The later, Republican-led period of empire-building relied far more on the regular army and federally driven decision-making, while in Thomas Bender’s words Republicans gradually “forgot liberalism and remembered nationalism” as they bowed first to the rising political clout of the South and the West and then to the emerging demands of corporate interests.<sup>35</sup> In the “New Imperial Era,” Republicans worked to consolidate control and ensure advantageous flows of goods, capital, and labor within the U.S. sphere of influence, as well as impose a homogenous legal and social order.<sup>36</sup>

*Empire* creates a broad framework through which historians of the period can examine the wide-ranging political conflicts over which people, on the continent and elsewhere, were “fit” and “unfit” for inclusion, for particular types of education and labor, and for citizenship and voting rights. That included Black and Brown communities on and off the continent, immigrants from different parts of the world, and women. Struggles over these questions emerged in the wake of Emancipation and lasted through at least the early 1920s—political battles over immigration policy and women’s voting rights being two examples. Since corporations were central to U.S. empire, a “New Imperial” framework also draws our attention to the forms of labor that businesses sought and the extent to which they got it on the terms and in the places they wanted it. Accounting for the role of business, the significance of U.S. interventions in the Caribbean, and Republican policy



dominance, a good ending point for a “New Imperial Era” might be 1929, though one could make arguments for many other dates.

Such a framework would place new emphasis on the 1880s, which would no longer get stranded between Reconstruction and a late-emerging Progressive Era but instead take their place as a crucial decade of nation-building and population-shaping, through policies such as the Dawes Allotment Act and Chinese Exclusion. The 1880s also saw increasing state intervention on the side of capital against labor, most strikingly after the Chicago Haymarket violence in 1887, and the federal crusade to destroy the Mormon practice of plural marriage, which ended when the church surrendered the practice in 1890 in order to survive. All these were crucial components in the building of a new political order. If, as some historians have argued, the post-Civil War U.S. government was a “stockade state” with limited powers, there are some powers it exercised sweepingly beyond its stockade.<sup>37</sup>

What do you think, fellow roundtable participants? We have the opportunity to move beyond a narrow, restrictive periodization scheme and think about the politics of this era in new ways. Should the periodical we are contributing to, here, become the *Journal of the New Imperial Era*? If not, what?

#### Nicolas Barreyre

Rebecca Edwards’s suggestion to put imperialism at the center of our understanding of the history of the period between the 1860s and 1920s—however we might want to call it—is fruitful in a number of ways. First, it reminds us that the main chronology of U.S. history, the one we’ve been used to, has been tied to political history, and if a renewed narrative is to emerge from the recent scholarship, it will also need this close link. This, right there, is work for political historians that I would love to see tackled collectively. More substantively, such a focus can help us bring together the “domestic” and “international” spheres in new, meaningful ways, building on transnational approaches as well as scholarship on other regions of the world.

Claire Lemerrier and I have recently argued that exceptionalist approaches of the state have prevented us from understanding common threads across countries, and thus skewed our perspective on the early American state.<sup>38</sup> Breaking down those borders would, I submit, equally benefit our approach to the political history of the United States for our period. Simply consider, for instance, that the period going roughly from the 1860s to WWI is meaningful and significant across many parts of the world. Italy and Germany were born through wars of unification, completing the collapse of the order of the Vienna Congress. Britain, France, but also Belgium, Portugal, and Germany famously “scrambled” to conquer and divide the African continent among themselves. The second industrialization took off, bringing heavy industry, large corporations, and concentrated finance in most Western European countries—while others, like Russia, equally struggled to “modernize,” though with less success, from abolishing serfdom to borrowing large amounts of money to build railroads on a grand scale. Beyond Europe, imperialist attempts pushed Japan on its own modernization path, combining state-building, industrialization, and imperialist military efforts, while China mostly suffered from the same imperialist attempts, but within essentially the same chronology. In Latin American, Argentina, now more consolidated as a new nation, embarked on its own economic growth, but with much less industrialization (as large agricultural landowners had no interest in it), while Mexico, under a more stable dictatorship, also consolidated as a country, but with foreign economic interests (mostly American) that were more

powerful. What economic historians have come to call the “First Globalization” was mostly a *liberal* world order fueled by imperialism, financial flows, and military (threat of) coercion. This is what collapsed with World War I.

Recent scholarship on international relations and political economy offer, I believe, ways for weaving U.S. political history into those transnational developments, understanding how politics also responded to them as much as how political choices in the United States had an effect on the rest of the world. Political ideas traveled, through people and writings, and shaped the national conversation.<sup>39</sup> Yet it is also important to remember that political actors had a keen eye on what happened elsewhere in the world, and responded to it in local and national politics. This was true of international finance, especially as regarding the gold and silver standard, that always mixed national and international arguments.<sup>40</sup> It was true of another core political issue of the day, the tariff, where competing visions of national and international markets clashed.<sup>41</sup> Mass movements of labor and finance were as integral to the industrialization of a country like the United States and its drive for imperialist undertakings as they were for other nations like France, the United Kingdom, or Japan.<sup>42</sup> As Paul Kramer reminded us in this very journal, capitalism and imperialism were joined at the hips, and only politics can help us make sense of it.<sup>43</sup>

So the transnational turn, as well as new work on political economy, might help us political historians recenter a perspective that does not fetishize the national but does not discard it either. There were links between the local/regional and the global that were actively pursued and reworked by Americans,<sup>44</sup> while national politics itself was not neatly contained within national borders.<sup>45</sup> In fact, far from blurring the boundaries of US political history, I suspect such a sustained effort to re-embed it into larger transnational developments will help us make sense of why, unlike received wisdom tells us, nation-state-building and imperialism were the two faces of the same coin in the new political economy Americans were then actively building.

### *Allan Lumba*

Professor Rebecca Edwards’ original response to the cluster of questions that animate “Boundaries of the Field” is very generative. While the initial prompt urged political historians to rethink the literal borders of the field, particularly in a geographical and spatial sense, Edwards expands the provocation in two ways. First, this provocation enlarges its scholarly audience, addressing not merely political historians, but historians of the GAPE more generally (if not all historians). Second, this provocation seeks to denaturalize the chronology or the periodization of the bounded time we normatively call the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. An ethical question, one of the “uses and abuses of political power” as Edwards states, undergirds these two provocations.

As Edwards correctly points out, there is an assumed upward trajectory, one saturated and constituted by moral frameworks, that labels one end “bad” (the Gilded Age) and the other end “good” (the Progressive Era). This is of course akin to what Lisa Lowe argues about the longer nineteenth century, how it is ruled by the ruses of liberty, which “disavowed the violence of settler colonialism and narrated modernity as the progress from slavery to freedom.”<sup>46</sup> For the United States, liberal framings of history naturalizes the movement from the past to the present as one of a continuous linear line from “unfreedom” to “freedom.” One sees this especially in terms of emancipation narratives of the nineteenth century or immigration narratives of the twentieth. One must also see this process as spatial. As Professor Nicolas Barreyre deftly reminds us with his emphasis on

international relations and political economy, “globalization,” or the making and connecting of a coherent single “world” as we know it (a world of fissures and contradictions, but interconnected nonetheless), was “mostly a *liberal* world order fueled by imperialism, financial flows, and military (threat of) coercion.” This recalls the assertion by Chantal Mouffe on liberalism, that it claims to include its others through universalizing its own norms and hierarchies.<sup>47</sup> Imperial territorial expansion is driven by this liberal desire to incorporate disparate geographies and “backwards” peoples into a stable and secure political and economic hierarchical order, modeled on the imagined historical path of North Atlantic states and societies.

But a focus on U.S. imperialism, and I would like to sharpen the lens a little more by calling it a focus on U.S. colonialism, causes disorder to this neat chronology of historical progress. The original prompt of the question captures the GAPE scholarship of the last decade and a half, which has renewed its attention on how and why the U.S. state expanded its imperial reach during the late nineteenth century, violently spreading unfreedoms into new spatial territories.<sup>48</sup> GAPE historians have certainly accounted for how and why overseas imperialism in the Pacific and the Caribbean was not an “exception,” as Barreyre fleshes out in the previous essay. But I also respectfully wonder if the kinds of imperial processes during the GAPE were not necessarily a “break” from previous imperialisms in the sense that some claim.<sup>49</sup> I would urge to rethink the GAPE expansion not as an intensification, shifting, or even mutation of U.S. imperialism. Nor do I want us to consider GAPE “imperial formations” as merely another example of a comparable category of macropower divorced from a relational conception of imperialism.<sup>50</sup> Instead, I want to linger longer on Edwards’s suggestion of “continuities,” and urge the idea of tracking the *longue durée*, the structures of interlocking colonialisms—extractive, settler, neo—that can better explain the enduring structural violence of sometimes competing colonialisms.<sup>51</sup>

How could political history help us think more acutely about the structures of colonialisms during the so-called GAPE? Perhaps it may seem like a contradiction, but thinking structurally is not simply an accounting of how power expands into larger scales and more vast geographic spaces. Thinking structurally also entails shedding light on how colonial power shrinks down to the most intimate of relations. Perhaps political history, with its attention to granular affiliations and connections, is particularly suited for this two-pronged analysis. While recent studies of U.S. empire have convincingly illustrated how imperialism entails spatial enlargement and the management of distant relations of power, these same studies can, at the same time, lose sight of the porousness of such large-scale power. As I have mentioned in another roundtable essay, colonialism constantly attempts to plug up holes of the ordinary, the quotidian, the normative, or the micro. It seeks to increase the density of power, making violent political relations—which are shot through with contradictions—feel ahistorical, timeless, and natural.

An apposite example can be found in the myriad and variegated histories of personhood in the wake of the 1870s. As both Edwards and Barreyre mention, from the 1880s through the 1920s, vast populations were “freed” from previous forms of social relations, and forced into new, yet connected violent kinds of social relations. From those recently granted second-class sovereignty through emancipation (Black Americans), to those whose sovereignty was stolen because of dispossessed land (American Indians and Pacific Islanders), to those whose sovereignty were differently denied due to race, ability, gender, or sexuality (in the Philippines, or Chinese Americans, or migrants considered disabled, “deviant,” or anarchist): Political history’s attentiveness is crucial to how and why colonial power was able to bury itself into the very epidermis of subjects, animating (or limiting)

their political decisions and desires. Moreover, this specialized attentiveness makes political history especially equipped to better reckon with the supposed natural structures of colonialisms; colonialisms located within, before, and beyond the GAPE.<sup>52</sup>

## Section B. Current Debates

*Question 3:* There are always tensions between formal politics (elections, parties, representative institutions), and what happens outside of them. How should we understand the interplay between social movements from across the spectrum, those that were emancipatory or reactionary, and what they accomplished inside—or outside—of mainstream political institutions?

*Allan Lumba*

Gilded Age and Progressive Era (GAPE) historians have successfully focused on how and why social movements have continuously applied pressure on formal politics. Indeed, the history of party politics, state bureaucratic institutions, or political governance from the 1870s through the 1920s cannot be divorced from the rise and fall of agrarian populisms, worker mobilizations, industrial strikes, extractive labor stoppages, or novel urban organizations.<sup>53</sup> If one looks from the perspective of radical organized labor, this scholarly attention makes sense. The Knights of Labor claimed to have 750,000 members at its peak; the International Workers of the World were involved in over 100 strikes; in New York, 20,000 garment workers spontaneously went on strike in 1909; and violent “Mine Wars” between union workers and government authorities would last almost a decade.<sup>54</sup> Reforming the social problems that erupted from the fissions between capital and labor would propel the emergence of socialist and progressive organizations that threatened the hegemony of more orthodox U.S. parties.<sup>55</sup>

Social movements during the GAPE, however, were not only driven by the longing to expand rights and protections of those traditionally excluded but by an obsession with the desire to diminish or destroy rights and protections. In response to economic and political crises after Reconstruction, reactionary social movements would foment white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, and nationalist legislation and policy. As W.E.B. Du Bois has argued, the “counter-revolution of property” that was forged in the wake of emancipation in the United States, would continue a “civil war” that was fundamentally based in race and class (and I would add gender and sexuality).<sup>56</sup> Myriad organizations—both clandestine and formal—would spring up in this war against the radically democratic promise of Reconstruction. These counter-revolutionary organizations operated through “vigilante” networks and by capturing positions of authority. They inflicted violence, organized riots, and carried out lynchings upon the most legally and economically vulnerable, and institutionalized public and intimate cultures of quotidian threat, intimidation, and harassment. Jim Crow, the Chinese Exclusion Acts and Alien Land Laws, the Espionage and Sedition Acts, the 1917 and 1924 Immigration Acts, antisodomy laws, anti-abortion laws—all of these were supposed political solutions that enshrined the systemic and structural violence of reactionary social movements.

During the later decades of the twentieth century, after the worldwide political and economic crises of the Great Depression and the World Wars, and the global hegemony of U.S. capital, military, and culture, domestic progressive social movements seemingly overturned unjust laws and turned openly white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, and nationalist politics into fringe politics. Or so it seems. As a consequence of the so-called “Second Gilded Age” of intensified wealth inequality, imposition of austerity, and the

erosion of social welfare, the beginning decades of the twenty-first century have been saturated by social upheavals and political crises in the United States. Social movements, like Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and the national waves of worker strikes and unionization over the last decade have challenged the power of the state and capital to enshrine rights and protections for those most vulnerable to crises. The response by those in power has been far from a new age of social reforms. Led mainly by the mainstreaming of reactionary movements that have taken aim to erase the legal rights and recognitions gained by women, trans, queer, migrant, non-Christian minorities, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, politicians of both major parties have intensified legal violence against radical politics and stripped the power of organized (and disorganized) labor.

In light of contemporary reactionary political conditions, three recent scholarly books have urged me to rethink the GAPE history of social movements and the possible political futures of the present. First, Manu Karuka's *Empire's Tracks* has urged me to think about Indigenous sovereignty—its demands and longings—and rethink the possibilities and limits of social movements in the United States. Indigenous sovereignty, after all, was grounded in the defense of traditional American Indian material relationships—both human and more-than-human. Karuka also shows that the “railroad colonialism” of the latter half of the nineteenth century—a necessary condition of the Gilded Age—could only come about through violently disrupting Indigenous relations.<sup>57</sup> The consequence was the territorial, legal, and economic isolation of different Indigenous nations and the loss of autonomy. Indigenous autonomy is conceptualized not as individual liberty or the self-possessed figure of legal personhood (or even the anti-Black personhood of the corporation)<sup>58</sup> but rather as one bound to relations with others and the world.

Second, Moon-Ho Jung's *Menace to Empire* has pushed me to reconsider how deeply interdependent anticolonial internationalism was to “domestic” social movements. Jung traces the historical entanglements between transpacific anticolonialism and global anarchism, on the one hand, and U.S. imperialism and transatlantic antiradicalism, on the other. The book asserts that during the first decades of the twentieth century, parallel desires for national sovereignty and worker autonomy gave rise to unanticipated solidarities that cut across nation, class, and race.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, anti-imperial demands tied together the fates of anticolonial nationalists in Asia, migrant workers across North America and Hawai'i, and revolutionaries across the world. Despite the massive expansive U.S. security state that would emerge in reaction to radical internationalisms, Jung convincingly urges us to continue to “excavate persistent struggles against and beyond white supremacy and empire, to inform (and hopefully transform) ... our own politics.”<sup>60</sup>

Finally, Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* has pushed me to reexamine the radicalness of U.S. social movements—in particular Black radical and anarchist traditions—through the intimate worldmaking of Black women and girls. Through Hartman's archival exploration, anarchism is historicized differently from GAPE histories of urban anarchism.<sup>61</sup> Anarchy is considered a state of ungovernability, in which one is “propelled by ... whims and desires.”<sup>62</sup> Again this was not the idealized individual of self-possessed liberty nor is it a romanticization of the underclass. Rather, Hartman urges us to rethink the history of the “slums” and the first Great Migration by placing the autonomy and experimentation of Black women and girls at the center of the “Black Radical Tradition.”<sup>63</sup> While progressive reformers were constantly flummoxed by the mass waywardness, the idleness, and the deviance of Black women in the city, Hartman sees in these non-normative relations, kinships, affiliations, and intimacies a “revolution” where “young Black women” were “trying, speculating, discovering, exploring new avenues, breaking with traditions, defying law, and making it.”<sup>64</sup> Hartman thus

offers a heuristic for GAPE historians to revisit social upheavals, not as a weigh station toward the expansion (or negation) of rights and protections, but instead as a revolutionary social movement that was never allowed to massify and flourish.

In these three examples—on Indigenous sovereignty, on anticolonial internationalism, and on the Black radical and anarchist traditions—I see the potential to provoke dialogue, to set off a series of further explorations and reassessment of GAPE experiences and relations during social upheavals. Taking inspiration from Raymond Williams, this endeavor in training our attention to social movements is meant to not only unearth the residual histories that continue to shape our present, but to also clear space for the possible liberatory futures that have yet to emerge.<sup>65</sup>

### Lisa Andersen

Looking at the social movements that Professor Alan Lumba found inspiring, I was struck by how their themes—Indigenous autonomy, internationalism, Black radicalism—converge in the historical scholarship about environmental justice’s long origins, especially regarding the distinct intellectual traditions fueling green policies. As a political historian, I find work in this field especially captivating because it includes pathbreaking studies on how and when coalition building can unlock previously elusive political achievements.

The coalitions mobilized within environmental reform have been exceptionally resilient despite their precariousness; there are unexpected bedfellows, and passionate activists often disagree. To get a sense of the breadth of environmental justice’s expanding constituency, consider some of the noteworthy titles that explore the movement’s Progressive Era years: Dina Gilio-Whitaker’s *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*; Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver*; Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll’s edited volume *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History*; Char Miller’s *West Side Rising: How San Antonio’s 1921 Flood Devastated a City and Sparked a Latino Environmental Justice Movement*; Ian Tyrrell’s *Crisis of the Wasteful Nation: Empire and Conservation in Theodore Roosevelt’s America*; Kimberly K. Smith’s *The Conservation Constitution: The Conservation Movement and Constitutional Change, 1870-1930*. The environmental movement brought together people with ideologies and experiences notoriously difficult to bridge: grassroots / elites, urban / rural, transnational / local, liberal / conservative. The crumbling of these coalitions since the 1980s adds urgency to historians’ endeavor to understand their value and the reasons behind their relative stability until that point.

This is not to say that the pathway for social movements’ success was unbounded, or that coalition building was (or is) the solution to every problem. There is also a robust political history outlining the institutional features constraining reformers and activists during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era: a Constitutionally-limited and resource-strapped federal government, a “winner take all” electoral system, and the perpetuation of the same two major parties since the 1860s. These features prodded American social movements to pursue some strategies, set aside other tactics, and occasionally provoke institutional innovations that circumvented government altogether.

What I’d ultimately like to add to Lumba’s comments is a description of how exerting “pressure on formal politics” translated into concrete practices, and how these practices illuminate a critical inflection point in the history of American government’s institutions, responsibilities, and capacity. For example, if we revisit workers’ movements, one thing that stands out about American GAPE unionists is the narrowness of their request, an

adaptation to the paltriness of federal government. Many union leaders had limited faith that government could provide workers with authentic and substantial protections simply because their experience was that federal government did little and what it did was so often harmful. Most problematically, unions were harassed under antimonopoly laws initially intended to prune corporations, and federal injunctions ended their strikes and picket lines. If a suspicion of federal government's capacity for aid was generally held among unionists, so much more for African American unionists such as A. Phillip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (founded in 1925); the federal government had not proven trustworthy when it came to protecting the well-being of Black people, as perhaps most gruesomely evidenced by the failure to pass anti-lynching laws.<sup>66</sup>

So what did unions demand? Some (if not all) GAPE unionists argued for a vision wherein government need not be the only way to solve problems, and pressured federal government to limit the ways that it would intervene, even when encountering problems on the scale of industrial capitalism. They advocated the strategy of "voluntarism." Unions could deploy boycotts and strikes to cap working hours, raise salaries, and make workplaces safer. Most workers (though notably not those in domestic service or agriculture, who were largely people of color) secured the legal right to form unions and collectively bargain after the National Labor Relations Act in 1935.<sup>67</sup>

A look at one of unionists' allies—middle-class maternalists—suggests a second way in which social movements transformed American political institutions. Led by internationally-recognized figures such as Mary Church Terrell (National Association of Colored Women), Frances Willard (Woman's Christian Temperance Union), and Jane Addams (Hull House), as well as countless local study groups and women's clubs, maternalist organizations aimed to meet public needs in such a compelling fashion that local, state, and federal government would be obliged to adopt these piloted programs as their own. Kindergartens, sanitation, foster care, tenement houses, and urban beautification are part of the maternalists' legacy. Maternalists pressured policy-makers to massively expand government's domain of responsibility.<sup>68</sup>

I think that it will be really interesting to see how new historical scholarship will build upon some of these well-established narratives. In particular, promising work on everyday politics and anticolonial activism, as featured in the works highlighted by Lumba, might result in new readings of maternalism's ethical and logistical limits.

Though forged of necessity, maternalists' political style and adeptness at lobbying anticipated what would be the era's most important institutional innovation: the advent of single-issue nonpartisan pressure groups.<sup>69</sup> This new form of political organization helped stabilize social movements, and pressure groups arguably supplanted political parties as the main way to channel voters' opinion for policy-makers. The Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1893 to lobby for local option and other laws restricting liquor sales, perfected this sort of work.<sup>70</sup> In close elections, nonpartisan pressure groups had the opportunity to determine electoral outcomes, pledging to switch their votes to whichever party made the best offer.

And what about the people who were eligible to vote, but had the frustrating problem that their preferred party rarely won? From 1860 until Cleveland's election in 1884, and again from 1896 until Wilson's election in 1912, Republicans controlled the presidency. So historians have asked what the Democrats—or minor parties like the Populists, Socialists, and Prohibitionists—were doing with themselves while alienated from the office-holding necessary to wield power in government. Historians are actively exploring how partisan "losers" used political culture as a life raft from which they could continue

building constituencies, preparing for another day. They created utopian cities, developed partisan-run companies, invented school curriculums, established cooperatives, and pressed publicity-grabbing lawsuits. They focused on local, winnable elections.<sup>71</sup>

And sometimes hanging in there was all it (eventually) took.

*Question 4:* Can we situate the political use of violence that took place during the Capitol Riot on January 6, 2021, in historical perspective? When was political violence deployed during the GAPE, and to what ends?

*Lisa Andersen*

When asked to generate examples of grassroots political violence in American history, most historians immediately think of voter intimidation during Reconstruction, and the long history of lynching. In the Gilded Age, jostling at the polls was not uncommon in northern cities and was widely cited as a reason why women should not vote—it might prove impossible to protect their bodies from abuse. Everyday Americans used arson, assassination, riots, kidnapping, and other forms of violence against eligible voters and office holders, and often targeted immigrants and people of color.

Moreover, there's a parallel history of political violence perpetrated by the government, one that reinforced a climate where all forms of violence became normalized. This history began with genocide perpetrated against American Indians, and with laws and slave patrols that kept Africans' descendants enslaved. When not cast as war or self-defense or protecting property rights, this violence was facilitated and focused through a wide variety of nineteenth-century civil systems. For example, political scientist Jonathan Obert's book, *The Six-Shooter State*, has described how private forms of organized violence including vigilantism emerged in tandem with institutions such as professional police forces and the National Guard. There are many successors to this story. Elizabeth Hinton's *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime* is one excellent contribution to the growing history of a "carceral state."

Many of these cases of political violence caused more fatalities and misery than the events of January 6, and several shifted into ongoing terrorism. But historians understand that scale is not the only way to gauge significance. Ultimately, we should not declare that "American history has always included political violence, and thus January 6 was not a particularly significant event" but rather contend "American history has always included political violence and January 6 still felt like a chilling standout within that tradition." At its core, January 6 is important because political violence on the floor of the Capitol illuminated the frayed condition of ties binding us together, and it did so in a particularly dramatic and hurtful way.

For me, it is Joanne Freeman's *The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War* that best argues for the importance of location in understanding the meaning of political violence. Her work helps me to understand why is it that I saw a rowdy protest outside the Capitol as one thing but seizing the vice president's Senate chair to pose for photos—hardly the most violent act in American history—as quite another. Publishing in 2018, Freeman anticipated that her readers—like me—would assume that the floor of Congress was a place set apart from violent action, and that a certain sacredness inherent to the space assured that it could remain consecrated to democratic deliberation. Sure, there would probably be heated debate and eye-rolling, but physical attacks were unlikely, and Charles Sumner's caning seemed like an exception proving the rule. Freeman therefore went to the unusual length of including an appendix about her methodology,



getting ahead of would-be doubters who might question her deep investigation into the *Congressional Globe's* fleeting references. Who knew that the floor of Congress had been—that it could be—so full of fury that it would make physical attacks by congressmen upon other congressmen routine? Freeman cataloged a striking series of examples, a narrative of fist fights and threats over three decades.

Make no mistake, Freeman noted, antebellum violence in Congress had “meant extreme polarization and the breakdown of debate. It meant the scorning of parliamentary rules and political norms to the point of abandonment” (xiv). It would eventually mean Civil War.

Freeman's narrative of political violence feels new and uncomfortable: Decades of intervening history had made the idea of physical fights on the floor of Congress unimaginable because such conflicts had once signaled movement toward devastating national rupture. From the 1870s to the 1920s, an extraordinary amount of political capital was dedicated to *not* going back to war and to covering up the cause of disputes, perhaps best illustrated by selective remembering like that described in David Blight's *Race and Reunion*, and also in endeavors like Frances Willard's WCTU outreach to white Southern women. Much of this “reunion” was conducted at the expense of African Americans and their civil rights, as Ida B. Wells was quick to point out. So it was sometimes for better and sometimes for worse that Americans rallied to the idea that the congressional floor was a place set apart from political violence, and instead embraced vigorous debate as a means to siphon off bad feelings while performing strenuous masculinity.

With the floor of Congress re-established as a zone wherein stabbing, shooting, and striking were unacceptable, and memories of that former status quo safely packed away, the space could acquire a certain nearly-sacred quality that it had maintained until January 6. Partially as an adaption to the increasing numbers of senators and representatives, and partially because the Progressive Era included movements to rationalize and moderate all forms of bureaucracy, rules committees in both houses created guidelines for decorum that reinforced the sense that the congressional floor was a place apart from either the congressional halls or the nation as a whole. The floor of Congress required suits and enforced rules against spitting and profanity. Tourists watched from the galleys as though they were pilgrims, lowering their voices. It became a location that was special and refined. It was well-protected and the one space that (people like me believed) could be kept at peace by virtue of both law enforcement and political norms. Even if nowhere else could.

What we saw on January 6 was historically significant not only because it exemplified a long history of American political violence, but because it ruptured one of the few spaces where political violence had become unthinkable, and where its consequences could be most dangerous. Last time, political violence on the floor of Congress had signaled a willingness to embrace indiscriminate and wide-scale political violence throughout the nation. The feeling that knowledge provoked—a panicked awareness of political culture shifting gear in irreversible ways—was significant.

### *Rebecca Edwards*

Lisa Andersen draws on compelling recent work to contextualize the violence of January 6, 2021. She focuses on the escalating conflicts that led to the Civil War as well as the many forms of violence that persisted or emerged during Reconstruction and were central to its downfall. The ongoing terror that was slavery; the war that led to its abolition; the new

forms of unfreedom that replaced it—all are essential, central themes of U.S. history. The insights in this roundtable, however, invite us to consider other violent struggles during the same decades, waged—as were the Civil War and Reconstruction—over which political order was legitimate.

The majority of *electoral* violence took place in the South. But as Andersen notes, other forms of violence had equally far-reaching political results: seizures of Native land by intruders who dispossessed the occupants and asserted permanent jurisdiction; defeat of leaders who asserted counter-authorities, from Sitting Bull to Queen Liliuokalani and Emilio Aguinaldo. One could include, from another angle, antebellum filibusters such as John Quitman and William Walker, who failed to secure federal support, but whose expeditions presaged later U.S. assertions of power in the Caribbean and Central America.

Andersen reflects on the Capitol in Washington, D.C., as a revered space, a site rich in national historical meanings. In this vein, one might compare the January 6 violence with other attacks on symbolic locations. Timothy McVeigh's 1995 destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, an outpost of federal power, might in retrospect be viewed as the starting point for a new period of terror on U.S. soil that has not yet ended, in which government itself is one of the targets. Of course, the most obvious moment in that era was the September 11, 2001, assault on multiple symbols of U.S. economic, military, and political power: the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and apparently (though the fourth hijacking was thwarted) the Capitol. How far future *domestic* acts of terror will broaden beyond the Capitol to other symbolic governmental sites is a grim question that remains to be answered.

However hallowed the Capitol may be, January 6 was not just an attack on the location and the events happening there. Some members of the mob apparently came near to murdering elected officials, including Vice President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. The insurrection thus fits into the history of U.S. assassinations and attempted assassinations. Historically most of those have focused on the presidency, not Congress. With the exception of one attempt on the life of Andrew Jackson, their history begins with the violence of John Wilkes Booth and his co-conspirators, who targeted the executive branch. The specter of violence has haunted the presidency ever since. An attack on Congress *as a collective body* is more novel—except in the September 11 attack. In this sense, January 6, 2021, was an ugly antipode to the courageous action, two decades earlier, of passengers on United Flight 93, who decided that their own lives could not be saved and sacrificed them to save others—apparently at that very same Capitol.

### Section C. Teaching

*Question 5:* A perennial challenge that teachers face is that students arrive in class with a view that political history in the GAPE is boring—one stereotype of this era is that of the “forgettable bearded presidents.” How can we engage with students in a way that will convince them that this period is in fact crucial to study?

*Lisa Andersen*

If Gilded Age electoral politics was so boring, then why did upward of 80 percent of eligible voters vote? And why did so many people ineligible to vote wish to do so? If we shift focus from the presidents to the people, we can explore “political style” and the nuts-and-bolts of era-specific electoral laws that shaped Americans’ political experience. In no other era can students so easily engage the porous category of “corruption,” interplay

between political culture and political institutions, and the ways in which the grassroots can leverage political power. Students care about these matters deeply.<sup>72</sup>

Historians can emphasize some of the period's under-noted features, which often surprise students: the frequency of elections, some women's participation (even before the national suffrage amendment), the absence of a secret ballot, and the prevalence of polling places within saloons. Politics in this era was a constantly-stirring pot, a sport, and a gamble.<sup>73</sup>

I've found that asking students to apply their newfound knowledge in a quick re-enactment gives them the opportunity to evaluate what is gained and lost with the procedural changes aiming to make politics more rational, predictable, and calm. I usually convene an election day reenactment by setting up a ballot box at the front of the classroom, and appointing two students to represent the Gilded Age Democratic and Republican ballot distributors. I hand each of the party heads a different-colored stack of pre-printed ballots, and then ask the first would-be voter to get ready to cast a vote. What follows: a tentative attempt at harassment, a proffered bribe, careful observation of the voter at the box to check which color ballot is submitted. Then we re-play the process with a table of women appealing to voters' consciences before they enter the polling arena. Then with someone loudly announcing each vote as it is cast. Then with three observers crowding the ballot box. Then with an employer watching from the side.

Flipping the story, I torment the party workers by planting a voter who changes his vote at the last minute, reaping a promised gift despite breaking his pledge. I ask students to consider: What might the partisan organizers do to ward off a recurrence? How might they eliminate the opportunity for voters to scratch their ballot, replacing one candidate with another from the other party? What would they be prepared to offer? What might they try if they wanted to sabotage their rival?

To invite students to think strategically about institutional constraints is also to accept the possibility of ahistorical outcomes—students could role play choices that no one made in the past. But this risk seems worth it because the exercise also makes it easier for students to evaluate the past on its own terms. This is particularly important when grappling with the idea of “corruption”: Was it corruption to compensate a voter for a day's lost wages? Especially when elections took place several times per year? What if the voter was going to cast a ballot for that party no matter what? Is it realistic to expect a voter to carefully research a hundred candidates running for dozens of offices? Is the difference between voting a party line and voting with a pre-printed party ticket really significant? What values and character could be demonstrated by publicly proclaiming your vote, and to what extent to these attributes correspond with those of the ideal citizen?

As a final exercise, I ask a leading question that reveals my own bias toward the limited but crucial role of secrecy in democratic governance, and my own fears about where elections are most vulnerable: Why is it arguably a good law to disallow people from taking take selfies with their completed ballots? By using historical imagination, students are often able to explain how such evidence of voting for particular candidates could be required by employers as a condition for employment, or by parents as a condition for housing, or by spouses who threaten abuse.

With each Progressive Era procedural change in election laws, something was gained—public order, confidence in outcome, privacy, participation, expertise, public will—and something was lost. The aim of maximizing democracy while minimizing chaos might have origins before the Progressive era, but it was this era that put that goal front and center.

*Michael Lansing*

Despair. Defeat. Disengagement. Across the nation, instructors report that undergraduate students are struggling more than ever. Paired with the global pandemic, existential challenges such as climate change, racial injustice, economic inequity, democratic decline, and the downward slide of empire leave them unable to see the point in, well, anything. The situation is dire. Disruption, apathy, burnout, trauma—these are the watchwords of teaching and learning history in this moment.<sup>74</sup>

To be sure, unjust structures seem to grow stronger. Disasters—nothing natural about them—dominate the news. Consumerism threatens to envelop us all in passivity amid supposed plenty. Trenchant critiques of neoliberal meritocracy find their way from the streets to our screens. The ongoing threat of far-right insurrection looms large in our politics.<sup>75</sup>

Popular visions of the American past don't help. They rightly reclaim and emphasize longstanding forms of oppression. But as historian Matthew Karp suggests, their intense focus on continuity in our nation's past inadvertently creates inevitability. This forecloses on the potential for shaping different futures and helps propel what Cornel West once called the "monumental collapse of meaning, hope, and love."<sup>76</sup>

Clearly, the biggest challenge in our classrooms is pushing back against existential despair. As historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, we are well positioned to do exactly that. After all, like all storytellers, our task is to engage hearts as well as heads. The stories we and our students find, excavate, and share show us that in the most difficult times, action produces hope. Indeed, "hope," as James Baldwin said, "is invented every day."<sup>77</sup>

What is hope, exactly? Let's start with what it's not. It's not an emotion. Nor is it a synonym for optimism. Christopher Lasch made that clear in his pointed rejection of any teleological faith in progress. "Hope," he noted, "does not demand a belief in progress. It demands a belief in justice ... " In fact, Lasch claimed that hope was "a character trait, a temperamental predisposition" that proved more durable, powerful, and realistic than any certainties about progress.<sup>78</sup>

Grace Paley, writer and feminist founder of Women Strike for Peace, agreed. In her formulation, hope as a predisposition was defined by agency. She noted that "the only recognizable feature of hope is action." More recently, abolitionist and educator Mariame Kaba expanded on this idea by claiming that "hope is a discipline" sustained by everyday participation in communal struggle to right the wrongs of the world. Kaba suggested that "it's work to be hopeful ... you have to actually put in energy, time, and you have to be clear-eyed, and you have to hold fast to having a vision ... to believe that it's possible ... " Organizer Alicia Garza recently added that this work requires "people to come together, across difference, united in pursuit of a common goal." This is what hope looks like.<sup>79</sup>

Decades ago, Paulo Freire and bell hooks made it clear that educators must center their classrooms on this vision of hope.<sup>80</sup> The capacity to act in concert with others to create change—something that social historians long ago taught us remains in nearly every circumstance, no matter how oppressive—created hope during some of the most painful and sordid moments in U.S. history. Even as we respect the limits of historical agency, we cannot forget this insight.<sup>81</sup> Deep democratic currents ran strong in the GAPE, despite profound structural inequalities. The creative use of free spaces sparked civic agency. In the face of injustice, many understood democracy not as an abstraction or an institution but instead what philosopher John Dewey called "a way of life."<sup>82</sup>

W.E.B. DuBois's magisterial *Black Reconstruction* (1935) shows how Black people made this vision of democracy real in the years after the Civil War. Steven Hahn's *A Nation Under Our Feet* (2003) reminds us that African American resistance to the rise of Jim Crow that followed involved Black people of every kind in "collective struggles" for "meaningful power" as well as "self governance." Crystal Feimster's *Southern Horrors* (2009) documents the gendered political resistance to commonplace racial and sexual violence. Omar Ali's *In the Lion's Mouth* (2010) charts the "multiple ways in which African Americans practically and collectively asserted their independence" in popular movements for Black land ownership "during the final two decades of the nineteenth century."<sup>83</sup>

Other popular movements embodied diverse and contradictory visions of democracy. Charles Postel's *Equality: An American Dilemma, 1866-1896* (2019) outlines the painful limits of labor, women's rights, and farmer movements in an age of industrialization, urbanization, and intensifying white supremacy. As the country's economic divides grew ever wider, many went directly into party politics. Postel's *The Populist Vision* (2007) chronicles their challenge to the expansive power of corporations. Those same Populists—as Nathan Jessen notes in *Populism and Imperialism* (2017)—challenged the search for an overseas empire. Kevin Mattson's *Creating a Democratic Public* (1998) shows the broader push for power by everyday people in the wake of the People's Party's defeat. The ongoing struggle against concentrated capital, as Robert Johnston's *The Radical Middle Class* (2003) suggests, resulted in major gains for direct democracy in the early 1900s.<sup>84</sup>

Nature, too, proved to be an object of political struggle. Conservation brought out the best and the worst of the American experiment as Dorceta Taylor's overview *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement* (2016) makes clear. Public protection and the so-called "wise use" of unjustly seized Indigenous lands—illustrated by Mark Spence's *Dispossessing the Wilderness* (2000) and Karl Jacoby's *Crimes Against Nature* (2001)—depended on the creation of state and federal agencies dedicated to land management, science, and public health. The transformation of the law and state that made such agencies possible, explored in Kimberly Smith's *The Conservation Constitution* (2019), nonetheless ensured that the primacy of property rights did not destroy the nation itself. Lesser-known conservation efforts recounted by Benjamin Johnson in *Escaping the Dark Gray City* (2017) put nature at the center of most Progressive Era reform efforts.<sup>85</sup>

Every one of these movements, distorted by white supremacy, patriarchy, and settler sensibilities, proved imperfect. Every one of these movements, by many measures, failed. Yet every one of them produced hope. Hope—then and now—is not about purity or idealism or success. It is about action and aspiration and struggle. We must look back to find forbearers who looked forward. We must use these histories to build our students' capacity to imagine, define, and fight for a multiracial, multigender, and multisexual democracy. As Astra Taylor's *Democracy May Not Exist, But We'll Miss it When it's Gone* (2019) suggests, the future of human dignity and survival depends on it.<sup>86</sup>

**Question 6:** State legislatures across the country are passing laws that circumscribe what can be taught or even discussed in the classroom around issues of race, gender, and sexuality. How should we respond to this censorship, especially when educators and vulnerable students in our classroom may increasingly become the targets of vilification, legal suits, and coordinated harassment on social media?

*Tara White*

The 1925 trial of Tennessee educator John Thomas Scopes for violating the Butler Act (1925) attracted national attention to the town of Dayton because of the nature of the law.

The Act criminalized the teaching of evolution by public educators. Anyone in the state found guilty of violating this act would be fined between \$100 and \$500.<sup>87</sup> Conflict over the teaching of evolution and religious fundamentalism dovetailed with the massive changes that had taken place in Progressive-Era America as the nation grew more urban and its outlook more modern. These issues also served as a barometer for Americans who supported the status quo and launched a backlash against the more diverse nation of the 1920s, as well as the Progressive Era's expansion of democracy. Educators throughout the country watched this censorship with great interest and concern.

More than a half-century later, the specter of censorship has been revived in classroom teaching, this time around the "1619 Project" and critical race theory (CRT). As with the Butler Act, there are serious professional and legal implications for educators who violate the law.<sup>88</sup> College professors have had to contend with these attempts at suppressing ideas that some find uncomfortable and even threatening to their worldview.<sup>89</sup>

In September 2020, concerns about professional development workshops aimed at diversity and inclusion for federal civil service and contract workers led to an executive order that banned certain ideas from being addressed in the federal workforce.<sup>90</sup> The language and definitions from this executive order found their way into local conversations about the teaching of history in the nation's schools. Under the banner of CRT, right-wing activists warned about brainwashing and indoctrination that they felt were now happening in primary and secondary schools across the country. State boards of education and legislatures began to pass laws that banned the teaching of topics considered "divisive concepts" as early as January 2021, according to *Education Week*.<sup>91</sup> These laws were also being aimed at college and university teaching, especially where college professors cover diverse histories that discuss gender, race, and sexuality. Professional history organizations, such as the American Historical Association (AHA), along with 155 other organizations, issued a joint statement on these efforts to restrict teaching these concepts.<sup>92</sup>

This essay suggests several strategies for history professors working in this type of hostile teaching climate. The first strategy is awareness. Historians should become familiar with the text of the actual laws in their states, as well as the legal and professional resources that are available. The second strategy is deliberate professional practice; historians should rely on the most current scholarship of teaching and learning in history, practice evidence-based teaching that stresses historical processes, which includes primary source analysis, and incorporate historical thinking. Teaching students to think critically about the past is crucial in this moment of censorship, especially in history survey courses. Finally, historians should document their teaching, archiving copies of all lectures, along with PowerPoints, primary sources, audiovisual resources, and notes about their teaching approaches.

Much of the legislation developed to limit the teaching of "divisive concepts" have similar language regardless of the state. It is imperative for historians to examine the laws in their respective states and make sure that they know exactly what is covered in each state's bill.<sup>93</sup> Many states, such as Texas and Florida, are more explicit in naming the topics and subjects that are off-limits in the legislation. Knowing the state law will be beneficial should faculty members find themselves accused of transgressing the statute.

Finally, historians should then review their university's policies regarding faculty and free speech (especially measures aimed at combatting social media harassment), and university resources available to faculty members should they come under attack. Local and state units of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the Organization of American Historians (OAH), and the AHA, offer resources for historians

under fire. These organizations have all issued statements opposing the bans, which they feel are “ideologically motivated government dictates for subject matter expertise and undermining the integrity of the academic enterprise.”<sup>94</sup>

For more than a decade, historians have become more intentional about researching *how* students learn history and incorporating this knowledge into their teaching practices. Beginning with the Tuning Project, which uncovered the knowledge, ways of knowing, and habits of mind that history majors should possess when they leave an undergraduate program, the AHA has sought to provide new and established professors with the philosophical foundation for building strong programs. The AHA expanded on this work as it realized that history survey courses are often classes where many undergraduate students fail to matriculate. Given that these courses have the potential to recruit undergraduate majors, faculty should be aware of the particulars of these classes. Through a Mellon Foundation funded partnership with the John H. Gardner Institute, the AHA worked to reimagine the introductory survey courses through “reevaluation and substantial revision” for undergraduate students.<sup>95</sup> Through targeted professional development at AHA conferences and an Annual Texas Conference on Introductory History Courses, history faculty have been introduced to the latest evidence-based scholarship in teaching and learning. Teaching practices, such as introducing historical thinking, primary source analysis, and other tools are helpful to encourage history faculty members to create robust courses that introduce non-majors to the discipline by exploring the ways of thinking and practices of historians. By relying on historical scholarship and endeavoring to keep lectures impartial and free from overt political biases, history faculty members can avoid some charges of political correctness and revisionism.

History faculty should be proactive and intentional about documenting all aspects of their teaching during the semester; this should already be a part of the annual review cycle for most colleges and universities. Lecture notes, video lectures, PowerPoints, as well as the primary and secondary sources used should be noted and preserved in a file at the end of every semester for each course. In the instance that challenges arise, faculty members can have material evidence that can support and defend their work.

American higher education in the twenty-first century is a professional landscape that has been made difficult by shrinking state investments (especially for public colleges and universities), restructuring, declining enrollments, increasing tuition and fees, and fewer job prospects. Impending threats of censorship, together with limits on academic freedom and social media harassment, makes the university an increasingly tough career choice. Hopefully, a commitment to professionalism, passionate, scholarly teaching, and intentional documentation will help historians to weather the censorship of this historical moment.

### *Rebecca Edwards*

Tara White’s revisiting of the Scopes Trial poignantly contrasts with a recent trial whose outcome was announced the day I first read her comments: Alex Jones, who makes millions peddling conspiracy theories, was ordered to pay almost \$50 million to parents of a child murdered in the Sandy Hook shooting. While the Scopes Trial pitted the ancient authority of the Bible against scientific forms of knowledge that some Christians found threatening, Jones just made stuff up, claiming on the basis of zero evidence that Sandy Hook was a “hoax” and victims’ families had conspired with the government to pretend their children were killed. Jones’s adherents subjected grieving parents to stalking and

threats. Though two more trials are pending, Jones's parent company has reportedly raked in more big bucks since the verdict came down.<sup>96</sup>

In this climate, with news channeled largely through social media platforms, it is more urgent than ever to teach students how to assess information with a critical eye. Tara White is surely correct that teachers and professors should protect themselves and know their states' laws. They may also want to share those laws with their students. The Texas statute, in particular, makes for interesting reading. One could invite students to reflect on the list of concepts and documents legislators wants them to learn. (The figures now mandatory in Texas history curricula include not only George Washington and Thomas Jefferson but also Ona Judge, Sally Hemmings, Cesar Chavez, and Dolores Huerta.) After studying the history of slavery and racism, do students agree with the law's statement that these must be viewed as "deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to, the authentic founding principles of the United States"? How might we reconcile the law's stipulation that a teacher who introduces a "controversial issue ... [must] strive to explore the topic from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective," with its declaration that students must know "the history of white supremacy, including but not limited to the institution of slavery, the eugenics movement, and the Ku Klux Klan, and the ways in which it is morally wrong?"<sup>97</sup> Reading such laws carefully—as we would any other primary document—may be pedagogically as well as professionally fruitful.

I heartily support White's call for renewed attention to primary sources and historical thinking skills, so that students engage with multiple points of view and learn to contextualize those perspectives and trace change over time. They also need hope and comfort. This fall, in addition to teaching about American Indian boarding school experiences, I am assigning my first-year students to watch "Dawnland," a documentary about Maine-Wabanaki REACH and Maine's Truth and Reconciliation Commission that centers Wabanaki voices of survival and cultural resilience.<sup>98</sup> In addition to studying the history of lynching we will discuss the Equal Justice Initiative's National Museum for Peace and Justice in Alabama.<sup>99</sup> While studying Chinese Exclusion we will also learn about Chinese Americans who accessed the courts and won protections under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, shaping modern definitions of U.S. citizenship in the process. And we will learn that first-trimester abortions were very widespread in the nineteenth-century United States and perfectly legal in most states until the 1860s or later—a far more complex history than most Americans today understand. We all, with humility, still have much to learn. Under difficult circumstances, the best we can do is keep trying to learn together.

## Notes

1 For a list of education gag orders impacting higher education and K-12, see Jeremy C. Young and Jonathan Freidman, "America's Censored Classrooms," PEN America, August 17, 2022, <https://pen.org/report/americas-censored-classrooms/> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).

2 Charles W. Calhoun, *The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017); C. Vann Woodward, "The Lowest Ebb," *American Heritage Magazine* 8 (April 1957): 52–57, 106–109.

3 Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Israels Perry, "Men Are From The Gilded Age, Women Are From The Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1 (January 2002): 25–48; Corrine McConaughy, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in America: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Karen Pastorello, "Political Movers and Shakers," Christopher McKnight



Nichols and Nancy Unger, eds., *A Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 284–95.

4 Mark W. Summers, *The Gilded Age, or the Hazard of New Functions* (Hoboken, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), Chapter 13; Charles W. Calhoun, “The Political Culture: Public Life and the Conduct of Politics,” in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 239–64; Paula Baker, “Politics During The Gilded Age and Progressive Era” in Paula Baker and Donald Critchlow ed., *The Oxford Handbook of American Political History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 115–34.

5 Peter H. Argersinger, “New Perspectives on Electoral Fraud in the Gilded Age,” *Structure, Process, and Party* (London: Routledge, 1992), Chapter 4.

6 Alexander Keyssar, *The Right To Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 130; Jeffrey D. Broxmeyer, *Electoral Capitalism: The Party System In New York’s Gilded Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 19–23.

7 Robert D. Johnston, “Re-Democratizing the Progressive Era: The Politics of Progressive Era Political Historiography,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1 (January 2002): 68–92.

8 Richard White, *The Republic For Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

9 Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood, “Why Did We Stop Teaching Political History?” *New York Times*, August 29, 2016, <http://nytimes.com/2016/08/29/opinion/why-did-we-stop-teaching-political-history.html>, (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).

10 For just one example, see Marc Stein, Fredrik Logevall, and Kenneth Osgood, “Political History: An Exchange,” *Perspectives on History*, January 2017, <http://historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2017/political-history-an-exchange> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).

11 There is something inherently subjective in assigning articles to political history as, precisely, its contours as a field are at issue. Yet it can help us get a sense of magnitude, even though precise numbers are illusory. Concretely, I included articles explicitly dealing with elections, parties, and policy (including foreign policy) to the “narrow” definition of political history; I added articles dealing with social movements, everyday practices of power in the public sphere, and Americans’ relations to state power and civic participation to the “larger” definition.

12 Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, eds., *The Word the Civil War Made*, Steven and Janie Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano, eds., *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

13 Carol Nackenoff and Julie Novkov, eds., *Statebuilding from the Margins: Between Reconstruction and the New Deal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Susan J. Pearson, “A New Birth of Regulation: The State of the State after the Civil War,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 5 (2015): 422–39; William J. Novak, *New Democracy: The Creation of the Modern American State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

14 Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011); Noam Maggor, ed., “Special Issue: The History of Capitalism in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15 (2016): 241–362; Stefan Link and Noam Maggor, “The United States as a Developing Nation: Revisiting the Peculiarities of American History,” *Past & Present* 246 (2020): 269–306; Jonathan Levy, *Ages of American Capitalism: A History of the United States* (New York: Random House, 2021).

15 For more GAPE and abolition, see Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). For more on GAPE and racial capitalism, see Peter Hudson *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) and Destin Jenkins, *Bonds of Inequality: Debt and the Making of the American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

16 There has been much in political philosophy on the difference between the “political” and “politics,” especially in the twentieth century. Some useful texts to start are: Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Michel Foucault *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); and Carl Schmitt *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

- 17 Lauren Berlant, “Public Feelings Salon with Lauren Berlant,” Barnard Center for Research on Women, May 10, 2011, Youtube Video, 46 :03, [https://youtu.be/rIOeWta\\_M0U](https://youtu.be/rIOeWta_M0U) (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).
- 18 Lauren Berlant, “Public Feelings Salon with Lauren Berlant,” Barnard Center for Research on Women, May 10, 2011, Youtube Video, 46 :03, [https://youtu.be/rIOeWta\\_M0U](https://youtu.be/rIOeWta_M0U) (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).
- 19 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 20 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 21 For some thought provoking examples on affect and desire during the GAPE, see: Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) and Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
- 22 For more on the pleasures of revolutionary activities, see: Alyosha Goldstein, “The Anti-Imperial Horizon,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 7 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.5749/CES.0701.Goldstein> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022); Moon-Ho Jung, *Menace to Empire: Anticolonial Solidarities and the Transpacific Origins of the US Security State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022); and Robin Kelley’s *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).
- 23 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998 [1935]); Christina Heatherton, *Arise!: Global Radicalism in the Era of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022); Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876 – 1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Manu Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017); William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).
- 24 In this journal, see, for example, Elisabeth Israels Perry, “Men are from the Gilded Age, Women are from the Progressive Era,” 1 (2002): 25–48; and forums on these questions in issues 5 (July 2006), 8 (Oct. 2009), and 13 (July 2014). Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2002) and Robert D. Johnston, “The Possibilities of Politics: Democracy in America, 1877 to 1917,” in *American History Now*, eds. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press/American Historical Association, 2011), 96–124, are two introductions to a set of questions familiar to readers of this journal. See also Christopher McKnight Nichols and Nancy C. Unger’s recent *Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). I am grateful to Kristin Hoganson and Lydia Murdoch for conversations that shaped this essay, though mistakes and misconstructions are my own responsibility.
- 25 See, for example, the Flagler Museum, <http://flaglERMuseum.us/history/gilded-age> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022); <http://thoughtco.com/what-is-gilded-age-architecture-176011> (“historians often mark the end of the Gilded Age with the stock market crash of 1929”—a questionable claim); and the Morgan Library’s use of “Gilded Age” for a project begun in 1903 and completed in 1906; <http://themorgan.org/McKim/updates/gilded-age-visit> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).
- 26 See, for example, Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 43 (quoting Leon Fink on the year 1886 as “the American worker’s single greatest push for political power”).
- 27 See commentary in the forums cited in endnote 1, particularly by JGAPE editor Alan Lessoff.
- 28 Walter F. LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963). Few historians of the United States seem to have taken up LaFeber’s terminology or used the European term “new imperialism,” though there are exceptions; see, for example, John Seelye, *War Games: Richard Harding Davis and the New Imperialism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). More often historians refer simply to “imperialism” or “empire” starting in the 1890s. Books in the “American Empire Project” series, for example, focus on twentieth- and twenty-first-century history. More popular treatments take the same path; Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of American Empire*, for example, written with Mike Konopacki and Paul Buhle (New York: Metropolitan, 2008), begins with the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890. Interestingly Greg Grandin, who in *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan, 2006), defined “new imperialism” as emerging after the attacks of 9/11/2001, says little about empire in the nineteenth-

century chapters of *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (New York: Metropolitan, 2019), using the frame of the frontier instead.

29 See M. E. Chamberlain, *The New Imperialism* (London: Historical Association, 1970); Harrison M. Wright, *The "New Imperialism": Analysis of Late-Nineteenth Century Expansion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1976).

30 Recent treatments of those developments include Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2020); John P. Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); Anders Stephenson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); and Amy Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

31 Walter L. Williams, "United States Indian Policy and the Debate over Philippine Annexation: Implications for the Origins of American Imperialism," *Journal of American History* 66 (March 1980): 810–31.

32 See, for example, Carole Emberton, *Axes of Empire: Race, Region, and the "Greater Reconstruction" of Federal Authority after Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and David Prior, ed., *Reconstruction and Empire: The Legacies of Abolition and Union Victory for an Imperial Age* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021).

33 On some of these transitions, see Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2019), though he focuses primarily on developments after 1898.

34 Two examples are Laura F. Edwards, *The People and Their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) and Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, eds., *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); see, especially, Downs and Masur's introduction, 1–21, and Steven Hahn's afterward, 337–56.

35 Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 175–81.

36 Richard Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

37 Masur and Downs, *The World the Civil War Made*, 6.

38 Nicolas Barreyre and Claire Lemerrier, "The Unexceptional State: Rethinking the State in the Nineteenth Century (United States, France)," *American Historical Review* 126 (2021): 481–503, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhab195> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).

39 Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Ian R. Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire, America in the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

40 Nicolas Barreyre, "The Scales of Money: Monetary Sovereignty and the Spatial Dimensions of American Politics after the Civil War," trans. Michael C. Behrent, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales (English Edition)* 69 (2014): 311–39, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2398568200000789> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022); Steven P. Reti, *Silver and Gold: The Political Economy of International Monetary Conferences, 1867–1892* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).

41 Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Marc-William Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle Over Empire and Economic Globalization, 1846–1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

42 Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009); Mae M. Ngai, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021).

43 Paul A. Kramer, "Embedding Capital: Political-Economic History, the United States, and the World," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15 (2016): 331–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781416000189> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).

44 Kristin Hoganson, "SHGAPE Presidential Address: Mind the GAPE: Globality and the Rural Midwest," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 19 (2020): 176–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781419000604> (accessed Sept. 13, 2022).

45 Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830–1910* (New York: Random House, 2016).

- 46 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 36.
- 47 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso Books, 2009).
- 48 Paul Kramer wrote an excellent survey of U.S. imperialism in “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *The American Historical Review* 116 (December 2011): 1238–391. And as I have written in responses in this roundtable, there is a long and deep genealogy of anti-imperial scholarship of GAPE political history, most famously with the Wisconsin School.
- 49 For example, some have argued for the supposed “newness” of U.S. imperialism in the Philippine colony: Paul Kramer, *Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippine* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), and *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, eds. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).
- 50 One primary example of imperialism as a category to conduct case studies: *Imperial Formations*, eds. Ann Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter Perdue (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007). Instead, I propose to follow imperialism as Walter Rodney casts it, as relational. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso Books, [1978] 2018).
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