All the World's a Stage: Teaching Daniel Immerwahr's *How to Hide an Empire*

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EMPIRE and its related themes of conquest, colonization, decolonization, and cultural imperialism loom large in the teaching of any history course on European, African, Asian, or Latin American history. Yet it was an interview with Daniel Immerwahr on NPR's *Fresh Air*, in which he discussed his book, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, that really piqued our interest in the possibilities of addressing the topic of empire in a new way, one where empire was more essential to the study of U.S. history, and to urge students to examine their world, as American citizens in the twenty-first century, afresh.[1] We both ordered copies of the book, and in downtime between classes, over coffee, and on our morning runs, we discussed Immerwahr's argument, approach, and how we could integrate the work into our courses on U.S., Latin American, and African history. It was not long before we realized that team teaching a course on the Americas, using Immerwahr's book as a central text, would allow us to bring together our separate expertise on U.S. and Latin American history, encouraging students to see the hemispheric and global connections that Immerwahr himself was demanding his readers acknowledge. *How to Hide an*

Figure 1: Depiction of the United States in the style of the "logo map."

Empire argues that the image (North) Americans have of their nation is that of what scholar Benedict Anderson termed the "logo map"—a silhouette shape representing just the forty-eight continguous states (**Figure 1**).[2] However, much has happened in the territories beyond those contiguous states that directly influences the mainland: "The overseas parts of the United States have triggered wars, brought forth interventions, raised up presidents, and helped define what it means to be 'American.'"[3] Only a history of the "Greater" United States, Immerwahr argues, will reveal the country "as it actually is."[4] Thus, while historians have long acknowledged U.S. expansionism and empire, what Immerwahr draws our attention to is the extent of the nation's overseas territorial possessions and the role that acquiring and defending those territories—and the policies directed toward the populations of those territories—has had on the development of what most Americans consider to be the United States: the Logo Map.[5]

The Immerwahr text satisfies a number of needs we identified in our world and U.S. history survey classes, our methods class, and in our upper-level offerings. World history textbooks provide extensive examples of empires across the globe, from the Roman Empire to

the Spanish, Napoleonic, and British empires. U.S. imperialism is mentioned, along with Manifest Destiny, but as with many topics in survey classes, these are often touched upon in brief, with little discussion of the long-term implications for the territories and populations claimed by the United States, for domestic politics, or for the ongoing neo-colonial influence of the U.S. in the Americas. Many of the students in the classes we subsequently taught—most of them History majors and minors, as well as Education majors—confessed to knowing few specifics about the U.S. occupation of territories such as Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Hawai'i. From the perspective of teaching the U.S. survey, we wanted to provide a broader global context for U.S. history and highlight U.S. engagement with global themes and events. Student and public understanding of U.S. history often recognizes the colonists' eighteenth-century struggle to free themselves from British rule, but ignores or is unaware of the historic and ongoing role of the U.S. in overseas expansion and influence. We wanted to present students with an opportunity to examine the implications of U.S. engagement in empire-building, and the ways in which colonizing influenced society and politics on the U.S. mainland. Most notably, as Immerwahr details, this led to using race and ethnicity as key qualifiers in defining who qualified as "American," and who could claim the rights that citizens were guaranteed by the Constitution. Immerwahr illustrates that U.S. history has often been taught with a triumphalist and nationalist narrative. His examination of U.S. empire-building is a counter to this narrative, one that our students, coming as they do from predominantly conservative school districts of southeast Ohio, have often consumed and accepted in their primary and secondary education.

The Immerwahr text also speaks to the way we teach students—in our methods class and elsewhere—to think of history as constantly being reevaluated. Accepting Hasan Kwame Jeffries' invocation to embrace hard history, we emphasize an investigation of the past as a means of seeing where the nation has been and where, ideally, the nation and its people would avoid revisiting. The study of the past is not an endeavor intended to evoke comfort or national pride, as Immerwahr has argued elsewhere, but rather an effort to assess actions and behaviors and outcomes that contributed to the world in which we now live.[6] We position our reading of Immerwahr

alongside other challenges to the established histories of the United States and elsewhere, such as the protests against and toppling of statues for Confederate Generals in the United States, Cecil John Rhodes in South Africa, or slavers like Edward Colston in the United Kingdom.

We have now taught two very different classes using the Immerwahr text. In Spring 2020, we taught "Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in the Americas," seeking to compare the ways in which nations in the Americas have been shaped by both the empires that colonized the hemisphere, as well as those that impacted the region after independence. In Spring 2021, we taught "Historical Research Methods," our department's methods course, with empire as the unifying theme. While the methods course more explicitly addressed the historian's craft and the skills necessary for careers in the field, we had many overlapping goals for the two courses. We sought to expose students to the process of historical thinking and scholarship, but we also wanted to make historical study relevant to understanding current events, to discuss and debate issues in the field and in broader society, and to provide students with avenues and tools to engage in lifelong learning. Supplementing *How to Hide an Empire* with primary and secondary sources, podcasts, slideshows, and videos, we were able to achieve these objectives.

Immerwahr provides a nexus for our comparative study of the Americas, the historical origins of our present world, and our exploration of the historian's craft. Students could trace the growth of the United States from colony, to republic, to empire, understanding the unifying (yet contradictory) ideals that underpinned those changes. Using additional sources, we could study the national and racial identities that framed citizens' notions of what the U.S. stood for and compare those with the experience of peoples in Latin America. A spoil of the War of 1898, Puerto Rico allowed us to examine the contrasting fortunes of mainland and territorial citizens of the United States, and the ongoing complications created by imperial incorporation of a people seen by the conquerors as "other." Recent events in Puerto Rico enabled students to examine contemporary issues with the benefit of their historical knowledge. In the methods class, we were able to connect the ways in which Immerwahr sought to revise our understanding of the United States through the lens of empire, with contemporary

discussions of revisionism in other areas of global history. Thus, we were able to engage in discussions about the relevance and worth of monuments, and how historians are, in fact, constantly revising what we know about the past.

Teaching "Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in the Americas"

Our "Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in the Americas" course was intended as a way to address these topics in a specialized class, rather than only as topics in our individual classes. Moreover, as a team-taught course, it became one that addressed these issues in the Americas as a whole, allowing students to see the place of the United States in the larger world, as well as see the similarities and differences in the histories of countries across the Americas. We hoped these comparisons would generate greater understanding of both the U.S. and Latin America. Another aim we discussed was to bring contemporary issues into the classroom, demonstrating to students the importance of studying history in order to understand the issues we face in our contemporary world. Both of us do this in our other classes, linking U.S. southern border migration issues to U.S. intervention in Central America during the Cold War, for example, but we had also recently begun listening to an NPR podcast, *Throughline*, which more explicitly examines the historical roots of current or ongoing conflicts. Podcasts are potentially more accessible for students, providing an entryway into an issue or era, or delivering an overview that is not like what they might find in a textbook or lecture. Often, the journalists have a wonderful eye—or ear—for a story and can tell it using documentary soundbites and interviews with experts in a way that delivers a listenable and engaging narrative for students. Podcasts also improve auditory comprehension skills, provide another opportunity for critical thinking, and can pave the way for lifelong learning as students develop a habit of accessing history and news in this way. Asking students to think about the evidence that podcasters have used to build their story also makes them think about the importance of sourcing when writing history. An excellent example of the work that Ramtin Arablouei and Rund Abdelfatah do on *Throughline* is the episode "Four Days in August," which examines the relationship between Iran and the United States through the involvement of

the CIA in the 1953 overthrow of the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadegh.[7] We used the aforementioned *Fresh Air* interview with Daniel Immerwahr in class, of course, but we also supplemented our reading of his text with forays into other means of presenting the ideas and topics he examines in the book.

U.S. Empire and the Cherokee Nation

Children's cartoons, documentaries, and animated educational productions were all means we used to study the growth of the United States from colony to empire, encouraging students to think about the implications of this transformation for the populations living in both the United States and its territories. Immerwahr begins his examination of the "Greater United States" with westward expansion in the eighteenth century, pointing out that the now-celebrated frontiersmen like Daniel Boone were often mere "banditti" to the Founding Fathers. George Washington worried that the uncontrolled movement of Boone and his ilk across the frontier would provoke unrest and disruption, as they would "bid defiance to all authority."[8] What Washington, Jefferson, and others wanted was a more restrained, compact expansion—one that the government could control. The rapid growth of population in the nineteenth century necessitated, ultimately, that the government grant squatters the right to purchase their land and, eventually, to give away "homesteads" to those who wanted to move west. Expansionism—state-sponsored expansionism—was, of course, predicated on the belief that the land into which they were expanding was both limitless and uninhabited. Despite the Cherokee Nation adopting a constitution based on that of the United States, or Cherokee becoming a written language, the Cherokees were seen as other and unwanted, and were forced to move west and settle with other Native American peoples in Indian Territory—an ill-defined geographic area initially one-third of the contiguous U.S., but ultimately reduced to a portion of what became Oklahoma. The myth of the frontier and the limitless territory to the west is, of course, widespread in film and literature. In class, we watched the first episode of the *Daniel Boone* television series from 1964, entitled "Ken-Tuck-E."[9] Students reflected on the portrayal of this

rugged individualist—a "big man" and the "rippin'est roarin'est fightin'est man the frontier ever knew," as the theme song tells us—who nonetheless "fought for America to make all Americans free," and compared it with the historical version shared by Immerwahr. These myths of national identity are powerful in creating the nation's sense of itself. The story of Johnny Appleseed, as told by the Disney film in 1948, gives the viewer a vision of an unbounded natural wilderness welcoming to settlers willing to make of it as they see fit. Their destiny is the nation's destiny, supported enthusiastically by the woodland creatures as well as the (almost) visible native population.[10] We asked students to consider how film, literature, television, and the histories that they learned growing up have formed their view of what it means to be "American." A nation develops a very particular view of itself, one that it then projects onto the world, and which it uses to interpret the world. One means we used to stir the students' creative juices as they pondered the question of national identity was to have them watch "National Identity is Made Up," an animated feature from "The Interpreter," a column and newsletter from *The New York Times* that examines and contextualizes contemporary issues.[11] Did the "Great American Melting Pot" create a new version of nationalism based on the presumption that the U.S. accepts newcomers of all races and creeds that share values such as freedom and hard work, or have race, religion, and language always been as much a part of what it means to American? These questions about national identity and belonging are crucial to understanding the forging of an American Empire and the status of those new inhabitants within the expanding nation and empire.

U.S. Empire and the Philippines

The territories the U.S. gained from the war against Spain at the end of the nineteenth century caused a crisis of identity in the United States. While many welcomed the "responsibilities" thrust upon them by Rudyard Kipling in "The White Man's Burden," others like Mark Twain questioned whether empire was consistent with U.S. values. Immerwahr quotes Twain, who suggested: "There must be two Americas…One that sets the captive free, and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him, and picks

a quarrel with him with nothing to found it on; then kills him to get his land."[12] Twain's assessment was based on events in the Philippines. Filipinos fighting Spanish rule had welcomed U.S. involvement in the war, and even designed their flag around that of the United States, their new brothers in arms. However, when the U.S. betrayed the Filipinos by purchasing the islands from Spain and ruling the territory as their own, the insurrection continued. U.S. commanders used concentration camps—a concept initiated by the Spanish in Cuba—to resettle populations that might give sustenance to the guerrillas, and applied a water torture that forced liquid down a captive's throat until, as one soldier wrote, "they swell up like toads."[13] U.S. extermination of their Filipino opponents culminated in the massacre of Bud Dajo, where retreating guerrilla soldiers hunkered down in the crater of a dormant volcano were killed over four days in 1906. As Twain wrote, we left "not even a baby alive to cry for its dead mother."[14] To U.S. soldiers, Filipinos were "other," as one soldier underlined in response to President William Taft's reference to them as "our little brown brothers."[15] The song soldiers sang went: "They say I've got Brown Brothers here, but I dunno what it means. I like the word Fraternity, but still I draw the line; He may be a brother of William H. Taft, but he ain't no friend of mine."[16] Other songs used far more racist and pejorative terms to emphasize that Filipinos were not Americans, not least of all because of their race. At the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, some 1,000 Filipinos were brought to the U.S. to be part of a "living exhibit" of recreated "Philippine villages."[17] Students listened to an NPR podcast and watched a slideshow we had prepared using images of the World's Fair. We discussed the podcast and these extraordinary images, reflecting on what this said about U.S. views of Filipinos and of the territories the country ruled in 1904. It was not lost on the class that this Fair was taking place at the same time as U.S. troops were brutally crushing Filipino opposition to their rule of the islands, and two years before Bud Dajo.

U.S. Empire and Puerto Rico

Race defined American identity. A reckoning with racial identity and national identity likewise shaped American approach to empire. Engaging with the nation's approach to populations beyond those

inhabiting the Logo Map also pushes students to engage with race beyond a Black/White divide. The legal status of Puerto Rico, and the island's inhabitants, was confirmed in a series of Supreme Court decisions known collectively as the "Insular Cases." In 1901, the Court ruled that Puerto Rico, "is a territory appurtenant and belonging to the United States but not a part of the United States."[18] Unlike the western territories later incorporated into the nation as states, this meant that the Constitution did not automatically apply in Puerto Rico, and so its inhabitants were denied full equality. As Immerwahr lays bare, "the Insular Cases were about race." The majority decision included warnings about "savages" and "alien races" being included alongside those who then enjoyed the protections of the Constitution. Immerwahr quotes one of the justices who wrote that bringing Filipinos into the nation might "wreck our institutions," even causing the "whole structure of the government" to be "overthrown."[19]

Students recognized the connections between patterns established during westward continental expansion and U.S. claims to overseas territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As one student wrote, "The pattern of imperialism: preventing representation, stripping rights, and segregation, would emerge in several of the United States' colonies throughout the 20th century." This was the consequence of what Immerwahr refers to as the "trilemma": "Republicanism, white supremacy, and overseas expansion—the country could have at most two." For could not the newly conquered people now lay claim to the "inalienable rights of man" and bristle at the "injustice of taxation without representation"?[20] Another student noted that the decision in the Insular Cases meant that the United States could deny peoples in the territories:

> basic human rights, such as freedom of speech and the right to a fair trial by a jury of [their] peers…all because they were racially and ethnically different. The attitude [of] one Georgian senator would set the tone for colonial expeditions long before they occurred, as the precedent was set with the Native Americans, that white men in [C]ongress were "not prepared to receive the Indians into this hall."[21]

Empire-building thus reinforced racial divisions already existing in the United States, denying territorial populations and non-white citizens the rights guaranteed to whites. The student responses

justified our decision to use the text and to teach the class. As Immerwahr argues, the history of the U.S. is incomplete without the acknowledgement and inclusion of this history of empire-building.[22]

The twentieth century saw a number of changes in the status of Puerto Rico and its inhabitants, but their status with regard to the mainland United States—the Logo Map—remained relatively unchanged. A recurring theme is the indifference, and even contempt, with which U.S. authorities and professionals regarded Puerto Ricans. Immerwahr reveals, in the chapter entitled "Doctors without Borders," how the approach to eradicating hookworm differed in Puerto Rico compared to the American South. Hookworms find their way into the body of a host through the exposed skin of the feet, normally of those working barefoot on farms, eventually making their way into the lungs and small intestine, where they feed on blood and leave the human host shorn of muscle mass, pale, and weak. Medical professionals working in Puerto Rico developed a pill that would cure those suffering from the debilitating effects of hookworms for less than a dollar per patient. Mainland authorities, with the help of a grant by John D. Rockefeller, greatly reduced hookworm in the South (increasing productivity and lengthening the period children stayed in school). In Puerto Rico, such funds were not forthcoming, and an initially successful campaign stalled after 1910. Worse was to follow.[23]

A hurricane in 1928 and then the effects of the Depression, which led to a collapse in sugar prices and widespread unemployment, further stunted economic development. The 1930s also brought a Harvard-trained physician and pathologist, Dr. Cornelius "Dusty" Rhoads, to the island in order to study the campaign against hookworm. Rhoads worked under the auspices of the Rockefeller Institute in San Juan and "appeared to regard Puerto Rico as an island-size laboratory."[24] He experimented on his patients by refusing some of them treatment for anemia—or inducing it through lack of food in others—in order to compare the effects with those he did treat. He revealed his contempt for the population in a letter he wrote to a colleague in Boston. A lab assistant found the unsent letter and it began to circulate among Nationalist circles in Puerto Rico, stirring up anger and animosity toward not just Rhoads, but also the nation that held the island as a colony. Rhoads referred to the islanders as "the dirtiest, laziest, most degenerate and thievish race

of men ever inhabiting this sphere."[25] He also claimed—through his experimentation—to have begun their necessary extermination by, in his words, "killing off 8 and transplanting cancer into several more."[26] No one could prove whether Rhoads had in fact killed anyone, but the outcry was understandable and fueled a Nationalist movement that, in 1954, would lead to members opening fire at lawmakers inside the U.S. House of Representatives.

We paired the "Doctors Without Borders" chapter in Immerwahr's book with a later one entitled "Nobody Knows in America, Puerto Rico's in America," which covers further medical experimentation, economic growth through tax breaks to mainland-based companies, and the migration of islanders to the U.S. mainland. Reading about the choice of Puerto Rico as location for the first clinical trial of the contraceptive pill, students were horrified at the comparisons with the activities of Rhoads in the 1930s. Researchers prescribed higher dosages than are used for today's pill on women in the public housing project of Río Piedras. When women complained of extensive side effects, the pill's co-inventor, Gregory Pincus, put the complaints down to what he descsribed as "the emotional super-activity of Puerto Rican women," and then ignored the principle of informed consent by attempting to give the women doses without any warnings of side effects.[27] As one student contributed to our online discussion: "Pincus, like Rhoads probably saw Puerto Rico as many did in the United States empire, as a playground to experiment." Students also read the 1943 *Life* magazine feature on poverty in Puerto Rico, which Immerwahr references in his chapter. Mainlanders had long focused on population growth as one of the "problems" holding back Puerto Rican development. The *Life* article highlights these concerns, noting that "There are few places in the world with slimier slums, more acute poverty, or a denser population," with the author reasoning that this was a result of the "unlimited fertility of the people and the limited fertility of the soil."[28] Much of the blame fell at the feet of the Catholic Church because, although the U.S. government had disseminated hygienic information, "the Church's traditional opposition to birth control is a contributing reason for Puerto Rico's basic problem—overpopulation."[29] The Catholic Church certainly had an influence on practices and laws, but so did patriarchy and a lack of education on birth control.[30] Instead, as one student wrote:

> …some doctors encouraged female sterilization. This of course effectively slowed the population growth, but there is [a] question as to whether or not women wanted to be sterilized or doctors pushed for them to be. Some operations were performed within hours of women giving birth, [when] they would not be in the best condition to give consent, but other women saw sterilization as the only way to avoid having children.

Another student quoted the astounding figures that Immerwahr includes in his chapter:

> Immerwahr notes that, in 1965, "more than a third of Puerto Rican mothers between the ages of twenty and forty-nine had been sterilized" (250). Patriarchal and religious obstacles stood in the way of widespread effectiveness of birth control on the overwhelmingly Catholic island. Sterilization was an option for women to obtain some sort of freedom, to take control over their own bodies, and it could be done behind closed doors, so to speak, which is why it was supported on the island. On the mainland, however, what little people knew of Puerto Rico was that they were overpopulated and impoverished.

The class followed the 1943 *Life* reading with the magazine's 1954 reporting of the attack in the U.S. House carried out by Puerto Rican Nationalists that same year. Alongside reporting on the Capitol shooting, the magazine ran an editorial in which it quoted Edna Kelly (Democrat of New York), who said, "The Puerto Rican issue is a tough break for Hawaii and Alaska…but I'm going to switch my stand. No statehood for non-Americans. From now on, I'm against it."[31] The editors of *Life* countered the declarations of Rep. Kelly and acknowledged the changes that had taken place on the island since their own reporting in 1943. They pointed to the efforts of Governor Luis Muñoz Marín and "Operation Bootstrap," which had led to industrialization, job growth, greater life expectancy, and improved education. As President of the Puerto Rican Senate, Muñoz Marín had overseen development of Operation Bootstrap, a set of policies that lured U.S. companies to Puerto Rico through tax breaks, spurring industrialization. *Life* did not mention that he was also instrumental in the passing of the 1948 "Gag Law" (*La Mordaza*), which made it a felony to oppose the government by force, created juryless trials, and established punishments of up to ten years in prison.[32] The law criminalized the display of the Puerto Rican flag, the singing of the

national anthem ("La Borinqueña"), and any writing or actions that advocated independence from the United States.[33] The Gag Law helped clear the way for the transformation of Puerto Rico's status from colony to commonwealth, giving the island greater control over domestic affairs while allowing the United States to maintain ultimate authority. One student wrote:

> I would say that after Muñoz Marín was elected governor the politics of Puerto Rico became even more violent and extreme. For example, Marín's urging of the colonial Congress to pass a Gag Law oppressed the voices of the Puerto Rican people, particularly the nationalists. I would argue that taking away their civil liberties to free speech angered the nationalists even more so, leading to more violent behaviors, as well as the attempts to assassinate important political officers.

The Commonwealth Constitution came into effect on July 25, 1952, on the anniversary of the landing of U.S. troops on the island in 1898. At a time when the United Nations was putting pressure on imperial nations to grant independence to their colonies, this change in status meant that Puerto Rico now qualified as "self-governing." However, as Immerwahr asks, "[w]as this liberation, or was it empire by another name? Despite having 'free' and 'state' in its Spanish-language name, Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, the commonwealth was neither."[34] Politically, the island was still divided, as the events of 1954 that *Life* reported on bear witness. In terms of economics, the island became even more closely linked to the mainland as the government offered all kinds of incentives to lure U.S. companies to set up facilities in Puerto Rico.

As companies drew workers in from the countryside, raising living standards, Muñoz Marín's government also ensured that migration provided a release valve for the under- or unemployed. Puerto Rican authorities encouraged people to move to the mainland United States where, of course, they could legally settle as citizens. Pamphlets, English classes, and training in domestic service led waves of islanders to settle, largely, in New York City. Almost 60% of those leaving were women. Between 1950 and 1955, the number of Puerto Ricans *not* living on the island went from one in seven to one in four.[35] The vast majority of Americans living within the "Logo Map" of the United States knew little about the island or its inhabitants until the 1950s. That changed with

expanded migration, the attacks by Nationalists on mainland targets, and, strangely enough, the opening of a Broadway musical. After premiering in 1957, *West Side Story* would be reproduced some 40,000 times and go on to further success as a motion picture, receiving ten Academy Awards after its film release in 1961. The storyline, the dialogue, and—in particular—the lyrics reflected the more general U.S. media portrayal of the island and its migrants. The musical's central song, "America," describes Puerto Rico as "an 'ugly island' of 'tropic diseases,' with 'hurricanes blowing' and its 'population growing.'"[36] While mainlanders became convinced that Puerto Ricans were gang members, they knew little else about the island's inhabitants or its status as a pseudo colony. Immerwahr quotes from the same song, writing, "Nobody knows in America, Puerto Rico's in America."[37] After viewing a number of clips from *West Side Story*, students participated in online discussions, reflecting upon both the creators' views of Puerto Rico, as well as Puerto Rican views of themselves in this film. One comment was representative of what many students expressed:

> The film portrays a very stereotypical view of Puerto Rico. An example of this is when the women complain about the hurricanes and overpopulation in Puerto Rico. In the movie, the men are strictly separated and make no attempt to blend in or assimilate into American culture. This is unlikely because most immigrants kept their native culture, but did assimilate. The movie makes it seem like the only problem immigrants face is racism, when in reality, they faced much more than that. The women in the movie see America as a place of opportunity, but women faced oppression in America, especially women of color. The movie also portrays all the men as violent and the women as passive which are also stereotypes.

Another student noted that some aspects of the film did reflect islanders' experience in New York: "It is clear that while Puerto Ricans understand that they are Americans at birth, it is not that simple. They are not seen as Americans by their white, New York born neighbors. Their accents, skin tone and culture set them apart." One of their peers made a similar observation: "As they argue through song back and forth, the line, 'Life is alright in America—If you're all white in America!' (51:40)…shows the attitude that it is better in the United States, but you still aren't equal with your peers around you."

Puerto Rico's place in the U.S. constellation of colonies and territories remains a point of ongoing contention and debate. What continues to be clear is its secondary status vis-à-vis the mainland. Students examined the contemporary status of the island through assignments that focused on responses to the devastating Hurricane Maria of 2017, and the 2019 domestic protest against the island's political leaders. They viewed an online slideshow showing the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria,[38] watched short news videos that included interviews with island residents,[39] and read about the visit of President Donald Trump to the island, where he denigrated the suffering of the residents and threw paper towels to a crowd who had gathered to hear what the U.S. government might do to ease the suffering of the population.[40] Several students recognized the links between the chapters they read in *How to Hide an Empire* and the present conditions:

> The concept of Puerto Rico being second to the mainland has been present for a while now, given the history and the research we have done into the Rhoads Letter through *West Side Story*, it is clear things have changed very little on how the U.S. treats the Puerto Rican people.

Another student wrote:

> One care worker in Puerto Rico recognized this problem and stated that, "If we were a U.S. state, instead of a possession. We would have been treated differently." This could be true beyond Hurricane Maria, such as the medical practices that took place during the 20th century in Puerto Rico. If Puerto Rico was recognized as a State, or even having political autonomy, Puerto Rican women would not have been the core of medical experiments. Overall, the lack of recognition as a group of people that have their own identity, culture, and traditions will always force Puerto Ricans to the bottom of the list.

The student's recognition that it was the distinguishing culture of the Puerto Ricans that made them "other" demonstrated their understanding of the ways in which American identity has been constructed from the perspective of the dominant, white ruling class on the mainland.

In order to dig deeper into the current circumstances on the island and the ways in which this is shaped by Puerto Rico's relationship with Washington, we asked students to listen and

respond to podcasts, videos, and articles that examined the political protests that followed the revelations in 2019 of the corruption, mismanagement, and misbehavior of Puerto Rican politicians, especially Governor Ricardo (Ricky) Rosselló.[41] Investigations led to the arrest of several politicians, and salt was rubbed into the islanders' wounds when they learned that Rosselló and his close associates had exchanged homophobic, misogynist, insulting, and mocking messages regarding political opponents, island residents, and even celebrities, like Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin. The demonstrations drew many well-known Puerto Ricans out onto the streets to protest, and several internationally famous artists composed, recorded, and released a song that galvanized public opinion and drew global attention to the situation on the island. Students read a review of the song, "*Afilando los Cuchillos*" ("Sharpening the Knives"), and how the artists iLe, Residente, and Bad Bunny had come together to create it.[42] They then watched videos of the song (with translations of the lyrics) and of the protests themselves.[43] On the discussion board, students recognized that the frustration of the Puerto Rican people was due to decades of neglect and bad government. One student commented:

> After the shock of Hurricane Maria had set in and the corruption of some government officials was uncovered, the Puerto Rican people began to realize just how badly they were neglected when it came to political representation and autonomy.

Another student recognized the power of media and public protest to gain attention, writing:

> The coming together of many of the country's biggest media influences, such as rappers, has a large impact because it reaches all people. The video using images of the protest is especially powerful because you can see the amount of support the Puerto Ricans are using to try to get effective change. The young lady painted in the flag with her mouth taped shut in the video is a great representation of how the Puerto Rican people feel, powerless to do or say anything.

As one student wrote, the protests demonstrated:

> Puerto Ricans realize they do not have a voice in electing the president. They can elect the governor, but they were shown their government on the island cannot be trusted and does not have the

peoples' best interest in mind, which is shown by the inappropriate and cruel comments by the governor and his aides. They felt the president was not taking their crisis seriously because he thought it was not a "real disaster" like Hurricane Katrina, so people protested outside of the governor's residence in Puerto Rico. They held signs about the comments and the unsolved problems of Maria.

Additional Approaches to U.S. Empire

The long-term economic, political, and social consequences of empire-building in the Americas were themes that ran through the second part of our class. In addition to the segments on Puerto Rico, we introduced students to ways in which race, ethnicity, and identity played a role in defining what it meant to be "American" or "Brazilian" or "Puerto Rican" in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, and how those signifiers continue to influence the lived experience of individuals in contemporary societies. We developed units on topics as diverse as European immigration to the U.S. and Argentina, the Harlem Renaissance, the emergence of a Chicano identity, and the journey of samba from the music of enslaved Africans to representing Brazil's multiracial national identity. As COVID-19 forced us to shift to online learning, we also adapted the content of the class to examine the uneven impact of the pandemic on populations across the Americas, where in countries like Brazil and the United States, non-white populations found themselves adversely affected as a result of the inequality we had addressed in the first half of our class.

Teaching "Historical Research Methods"

Following the success of our "Race, Ethnicity, and Identity" course, we decided to use the Immerwahr text as a central reading when we taught our department's "Historical Research Methods" course in Spring 2021. Our practice with the methods class has been to introduce students to a variety of skills via weekly assignments that improve competencies in areas such as finding materials on library databases, integrating sources, and writing a book review, film analysis, etc. In previous iterations, we have chosen a theme—global 1960s, Cold War, and decolonization—in order to provide

coherence to class discussions, to encourage peer review, and so that we could provide assignments that kept to the theme and allowed students to incorporate their weekly activities into their ongoing research paper (due at the end of the semester). In Spring 2021, we chose the theme of empire, aiming to incorporate the Immerwahr text and outside readings into the class assignments. While the quality of project execution varied, we feel that the exercise was extremely useful for teaching research and writing skills. The common reading gave the class a unity of purpose we had not seen in previous classes, and students who grasped the concept we put forward were able to use elements of the Immerwahr text in their research papers. The students interpreted "empire" in a very broad way, from what might be seen as the traditional (Alexander the Great) to more innovative approaches (how contemporary Dutch society is re-evaluating the problematic Christmas tradition of St. Nicholas's companion, Zwarte Piet; how a museum in St. Augustine tells the story of the city's imperial past; how Protestant missionaries used education to spread U.S. values in the Philippines; or how Native American populations are decolonizing their own educational experiences in the boarding schools they attended growing up in the United States).

Historiography

Historiography, in the experience of all members of our department, is a concept that students struggle to understand. This was one of the motivations for developing a research methods class a decade ago. We had first added a reading seminar to precede the writing of a senior seminar in order to give students both a broad and deep exposure to a topic on which they might then be able to write a strong seminar paper after additional research. We followed that with the addition of the research methods class, as we found many students could still benefit from additional, guided instruction in several areas of the field (historiography being one). In the first week of our class, students read Immerwahr's Introduction, as well as three short additional pieces. All four readings were designed to have students think about what we do as historians and why we do it. In "History Isn't Just for Patriots," an article in *The Washington Post*, Immerwahr argued, "The aim of history

class isn't to get students to love or loathe their country. It's to prepare them to live in it."[44] His article lays out in simple terms the goal we have in teaching history—namely, to provide students with the tools necessary to examine how past experiences led us to the present moment. As Immerwahr wrote, "knowing how slavery ended or the Second World War began will equip students to think intelligently about the present" and give them the understanding that their society is "a complex, dynamic place that is theirs to change or conserve."[45]

Rewriting and Revisionism

The two other articles that students read examined the fact that "revisionism," in the public eye, has a very negative connotation, and suggests that historians who engage in such activities are somehow "rewriting" what we know about the past in order to suit their own particular interests—interests that often coincide with what the same critics might call (using a similarly pejorative tone) "politically correct." Charlotte Riley focused on the debate over the removal of statues, such as that of the slave trader Edward Colston, which protestors in Bristol, England toppled into the Bristol harbor in June 2020. Riley argued that rewriting history is what historians have always done: "The past may be dead but history is alive, and it is constructed in the present."[46] We paired this reading with a podcast in which host Dan Snow interviewed a number of leading historians, including Charlotte Riley and Natalie Zemon Davis, about their craft. Both Riley and Davis argued strongly for an ongoing re-examination of the past in order to better understand the present.[47] This line was echoed by Carl Robert Keyes, who, after a semester teaching a public history class, challenged students:

> [T]ake a three-part approach in their studies: learn about the past, learn about how professional historians have interpreted the past, and learn about how the general public understands the past. This became yet another way to demonstrate that course content has relevance outside the classroom and beyond the semester.[48]

The discussions these readings and podcasts generated set the tone for the semester. Students began to understand that "rewriting" was reexamining based on new sources or new viewpoints and that rather

than "erasing" history, it enhanced our understanding of the past. They also began to grasp that this constant reexamination produced the historiography we kept harping on about to them. It also gave us ammunition for our constant admonitions of them to find more—and more recent—secondary sources for their topics. Not least, it helped us emphasize the importance of history in understanding the present circumstances in which we find ourselves, and gave our students the ability to explain to their peers, family members, and their own (future) students what history is and why it is important.

Student Projects

Several students demonstrated quite clearly that they had heard and understood this message as they put together their projects over the semester. In her study of "Education as a Form of Decolonization Within Indigenous Communities," one student examined how Indigenous communities across the United States are "reclaiming traditional knowledge and practices"—lost as a result of U.S. imperialism—to understand themselves and regain a sense of place and belonging. Another student examined the literature of a historic site in Saint Augustine, Florida in light of the history of the location that she read in primary and secondary sources. She highlighted some of the inaccuracies in the site's literature and posited that the lure of tourism income might have something to do with the intentional blurring or stretching of the historical record. This has real consequences, she noted, as the public may learn what they know of the area from just this one historical site: "its inaccuracies, whether deliberate or not, show the effect of the tourism industry on historical sites and how detrimental that could be to those communities whose history is being told." These students will leave the class prepared for both the historiographical reading seminar and the senior seminar project that await them. While not all students were as successful in their final projects as these two students, by exposing our students to the ongoing debates in our field, and presenting them with the tools necessary to go about their craft, we believe that all students in the class will be better prepared for upper-level classes in the department, and will have the potential to become better historians.

Reflection

We found that teaching these two classes around the theme of empire was also not without its challenges, and will result in some changes as we move forward. However, the approach was successful in a number of different ways and has led us to think about new methods, materials, and organizational strategies that we will use and refine in our teaching, not only in these classes, but in future classes we teach, either individually or together.

First, team teaching "Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in the Americas" provided a number of advantages: opening up students' awareness and knowledge of not only their own country, but also the commonalities and differences shared with the peoples of Latin America. Putting our expertise together was valuable, too, in the way that we learned from each other as we discussed assignments and areas of comparison across the hemisphere. Having a central text, especially in the case of *How to Hide an Empire*, gave us structure. Using Immerwahr's chapters as a starting point, we were able to build units around enslavement and abolition, Black culture across the Americas, immigration, Japanese-American internment and identity, the Chicano experience, etc. Students read about the competing visions of W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey and could then compare them with the similarly contrasting ideas of the Brazilian scholars of race, Manuel Querino and Gilberto Freyre. They learned about the Harlem Renaissance alongside the transformation of samba from the music and dance of the Afro- Brazilian population to a phenomenon that now defines Brazilian identity.

Second, the topics we addressed in our classes are ones that remain central to studying and understanding societies across the Americas, which was a central goal we had: to explain the historical context of our current conditions and challenges. The struggles faced by Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria, the rising prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of the numerous deaths of Black Americans at the hands of the police sworn to protect them, and the global attention to the way that monuments and public history have reflected the views of the rulers to the detriment of large segments of the population, underlined the role and importance of history in understanding the

present. We want students to leave university equipped with the tools to understand and interact with their world.

Third, in the "Historical Research Methods" course, the central text provided a more coherent structure around which we could build a class designed to introduce students to the skills and practices of historians. We used the Introduction and subsequent chapter introductions to ask students to identify the author's thesis. As Immerwahr developed his argument, we asked students to identify his methodology and sources. And, as mentioned above, we used individual chapters to explore the desire for and consequences of empire.

One area where we would be more circumspect would be in allowing students free rein in selecting their topics. If and when we return to empire as a central theme for their research papers, we would restrict the time period to that of the book and perhaps require use of the text or its central themes and ideas in their papers. Doing so would provide more opportunities for peer-to-peer cooperation and evaluation. On the whole, however, using empire as a central theme in our classes, and utilizing Immerwahr's book as a common text, provided an extremely fruitful teaching and learning experience.

Notes

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