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Introduction
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TEACHING AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

An Introduction

Although it was founded in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, American studies has, since its inception, been an international field of study.[1] In the Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden[2]—the 1959 formation of the Nordic Association for American Studies (NAAS), and the subsequent development of national sub-associations, was important for creating a regional community of Americanists and fostering conversations about American studies. However, these conversations have been almost exclusively focused on research, leaving questions concerning teaching in the field underexplored.

In some ways, this is not surprising. Although American studies teaching has been a staple at universities across North America and Europe for decades, it is only in recent years that international conversations on teaching and learning in the field have emerged. In 2016, *American Quarterly* published its first-ever forum focused on teaching and pedagogy, edited by Julie Sze. It covered themes of public humanities and interdisciplinarity, transnationalism, and collaborative practices, and explored aspects of American studies teaching at US campuses.[3] Practical questions of curriculum design and best-practice teaching have of course always been questions for American studies scholars, just as they are for university teachers in all fields. Such questions have been discussed in some scattered articles, dealing, for example, with digital technologies. A notable intervention is the 2021 volume *Teaching American Studies: The State of the Classroom as State of the Field*, edited by Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Joseph Entin, and Rebecca Hill. It serves as a substantive resource of ideas and practices, grounded in a polarized political landscape and scholars' navigation of neoliberal US universities, where teaching is a form of production and students are commodities. The volume also centers on teaching as a defining dimension of American studies, asking the thought-provoking question: "[w]hat happens when we define American Studies by what we teach?"[4]

During the past decades, the contours of American studies have been redefined through the lens of transnationalism, and this turn has also begun to enter discussions on teaching. Recent examples are two roundtables on teaching American history and culture outside the United

States in *Modern American History* and a special forum of *Journal of Transnational American Studies* (JTAS) that engages with teaching in a selection of countries in Northern Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.[5] Although the JTAS forum represents a willingness to challenge the pedagogical impact of US exceptionalism and imperialism "around the globe," it is, as exemplified by *Modern American History*, important to underscore the specific national contexts—politically, culturally, and institutionally—within which American studies has emerged and developed. Such specific discussions have indeed been conducted (at least incrementally) in several European countries, with the most substantial contributions coming from Germany and the United Kingdom, perhaps the two nations with the strongest traditions of research and teaching in American studies outside of the United States.[6] In a special issue of *Amerikastudien/American Studies* from 2007, Gerhard Bach and Jürgen Donnerstag problematize the friction between highly theoretical scholarship and the incorporation of American studies in the training of English as a foreign language.[7] This challenge is grounded in the fact that American studies in Germany generally is located within the study of English language, literature, and culture. In the UK, however, many American studies departments and programs have a broad interdisciplinary grounding in history, culture, literature, and politics. Since 2020, the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) has organized the Teaching American Studies Network to gather UK scholars in sustained conversations on teaching and pedagogy.[8]

Discussions and scholarship on American studies teaching in the Nordic countries have likewise begun to emerge in recent years.[9] In an effort to forward this conversation, we organized a panel on teaching at the biannual 2023 NAAS conference in Uppsala, Sweden. The panel consisted of speakers from the four Nordic countries—Kasper Grotle Rasmussen from Denmark, Cassandra Falke from Norway, Rani-Henrik Andersson from Finland, and Jenny Bonnevier from Sweden, moderated by Adam Hjorthén. This special issue is a continuation and expansion of the engaging and critical discussions before, during, and after that panel. There are three interconnected purposes of this special issue. The first purpose is to map the Nordic teaching field, to establish a baseline for understanding the institutional and practical circumstances of American studies teaching in our four countries. Second, through a series of shorter essays, we wish to provide insights from scholars engaged in the day-to-day work of curriculum development, didactic considerations, the negotiation of institutional frameworks, and the challenges of meeting students' needs and expectations. Together, these essays are intended to create a greater understanding of the defining features of American studies as a field of teaching (though, as we shall see, not always as a discipline) in the Nordic countries, to show what our national circumstances look like, and to ask how we can turn its characteristics to a regional advantage.

The first section of this special issue maps the Nordic teaching field through four essays, each dealing with one of the countries represented in the Nordic Association for American Studies. The four essays approach the task in diverse ways, highlight a variety of concerns, and show that there are important differences between the national contexts that shape the teaching of American studies.

In Denmark, Kasper Grotle Rasmussen notes that American studies is currently experiencing a "downward trajectory," with a decrease both in the number of universities that offer courses or degrees with substantial American studies components, and in student numbers at the one university—the University of Southern Denmark—that currently offers both a BA and an MA program in American studies. Grotle Rasmussen suggests remedies, some of which are currently

being attempted, that include contextualizing the US globally; a greater focus on tasks that connect the theoretical material to real-world action and developments, which then highlights the usability of the subject; and a concrete suggestion for a Nordic summer school in American studies. If there are declining student numbers in Denmark, Rani-Henrik Andersson and Saara Kekki describe a generally positive trend for American studies in Finland, where it is mainly taught at the University of Helsinki and the University of Turku. Among recent changes that have yielded positive outcomes for the current teaching landscape is the growth of online teaching. Here, the development of MOOCs has made possible larger student numbers and enabled innovative teaching and assessment methods. In terms of the content taught, American studies in Finland illustrates the impact a few individual researchers and teachers can have on the field, a circumstance which also holds largely true for all the Nordic countries; in the case of Finland, its current strong focus on migration studies and Indigenous studies is the result of such an influence. Another aspect Andersson and Kekki emphasize is the usefulness of an "outsider's perspective" on American phenomena.

Cassandra Falke traces some important developments of the field in Norway by discussing key moments in its history, including the establishment of the Fulbright program and the professorship in American studies at the University of Oslo. While American studies in Norway today is still characterized by the interdisciplinarity emphasized in its early history, Falke notes that there are "fewer Americanist positions outside of English sections," a situation which leads to a stronger focus on aesthetic questions. However, "American studies teaching in Norway continues to juxtapose America's aspirations, often solidified in literary and historical texts, and in lived reality, especially as that reality is reported on by historically oppressed groups." Courses in American studies are thus important to the academic development of students, but Falke expresses a concern that their institutional invisibility within English sections can lead to their being overlooked by university leadership and education policy makers.

In our own essay on teaching American studies in Sweden, we focus on a distinction—addressed to some extent in the three other essays—between, on the one hand, interdisciplinary programs and courses in American studies, and, on the other, courses on American topics offered within other subjects or degree programs. American studies in Sweden, we suggest, is best described as archipelagic. Sweden has a series of small islands of America-focused courses offered in subjects such as English, political science, and history at several universities, but only one institution, the Swedish Institute for North American Studies (SINAS) at Uppsala University, offers interdisciplinary American studies courses. For this model to be sustainable, connections between these institutions need to be strengthened across Sweden. In addition, American studies at SINAS also needs to be developed to offer its own degree programs.

Two points of comparison can be noted based on the summaries of these essays above. First, the small national contexts mean that a few key individuals, centers, or professorships in each country have a large impact on the field, shaping both approaches and the content of courses, as well as the varied weighting of different subject disciplines within American studies. Second, and relatedly, the existence of America-focused courses in many different subjects impacts American studies in all four countries, but in different ways and to varying degrees. In particular, the relationship between American studies and the subject of English shapes the field in both Norway and Sweden, and to an important extent also in Denmark, but, perhaps, somewhat less

so in Finland. Finally, it should be noted that it is not possible to determine any larger Nordic trends in student numbers. This is mainly due to important differences in national contexts when it comes to higher education policies, economic developments, etc., but there is a sense that changing attitudes to the US in the Nordic countries, both generally over time and in response to specific political changes, have an impact on student numbers. Exactly what this effect is remains unclear. Andersson and Kekki suggest an increase in interest in American studies in Finland following the election of Donald Trump in 2016, whereas Grotle Rasmussen notes the opposite trend in Denmark.

The second section of the issue contains four essays that explore specific aspects of institutional and disciplinary contexts, with a focus on Sweden and Denmark. Three of these essays deal explicitly with the implications of studying North America from the outside. Dag Blanck writes about courses offered in American history at Uppsala University and argues that "location matters" in teaching American studies. Perhaps most importantly, students—including both Swedes and international exchange students—often have limited previous knowledge of American history. This has consequences for the selection of course literature, among other things. Many textbooks on US history are produced for American college students, who have a deeper understanding of the topic at hand. As Blanck notes, however, the internationalization of higher education and the digital connectedness of young generations in Sweden might make the meaning of location less palpable over time.

Focusing on the teaching of American studies within intellectual history in Sweden, David Östlund's essay explores the "the possibilities inherent in seeing things at a distance." He emphasizes the value of an area studies approach to thinking and writing about, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Alain Locke. This approach, Östlund submits, often makes teaching "become exercises in translation," where the different meanings of concepts such as "race" and "liberal" can be explored comparatively in Swedish and US contexts. The pedagogical value of the outside perspective is likewise explored by Christophe Premat, who discusses a course in Canadian history taught at Stockholm University. Through an analysis of submitted student assignments, Premat describes the pedagogy of exploring students' cultural stereotypes of Canada as a way of fostering critical thinking about Canadian identity, multiculturalism, and First Nations history. In doing so, the essay argues for the inclusion of Canada as a natural part of American studies in the Nordic countries and beyond.

Anne Mørk's essay engages the crucial question of what careers we envision for students of American studies, and how we might best prepare them for a job market that may appear challenging for many students in the humanities and social sciences, but perhaps even more so for students of a subject that may not be widely known among potential employers. Mørk addresses how faculty, administrators, and students seek to balance academic content with training in practical and generalizable skills. Here, Mørk argues that there might be promise in the interdisciplinarity of American studies, where students are taught skills and approaches beneficial to a variety of businesses and organizations.

The third and final section of the special issue includes five essays that all focus on methods and/or content matter involved in teaching American studies in the Nordic context. These essays reflect some of the concerns outlined in the mapping of the field in section one, primarily the relation between English—especially literary approaches—and American studies, the ques-

tion of the interdisciplinarity of American studies, and the opportunities offered by the particular Nordic context.

In an essay of the role of media studies in American studies, Joel Frykholm draws on his own experience of teaching media within American studies courses and makes a case for moving away from traditional foci on mass media and hermeneutic, representational approaches to an understanding of media "as assemblages of platforms and practices." He pays particular attention to the interdisciplinarity of American studies and the possibilities this offers from a media studies perspective. Frykholm's essay can usefully be read against the dominance of the subjects of history, political science, and literary or cultural studies approaches in American studies noted in the mapping articles. In the essay that follows Frykholm's, Erik Mustad, Maren Anderson Johnson, and Sean Taylor discuss teaching historical approaches to American studies, one of the main disciplinary backbones of the field. However, they place their discussion within the subject of English, where, as we have noted above, most American studies teaching at Norwegian universities takes place. The English subject in Norway today, they observe, leaves less room than it used to for American studies content. They argue for a "game-based simulation pedagogy" to teach American studies in this context, more specifically a form of immersion pedagogy called Reacting to the Past. Discussing their experiences of using this method in both the US and Norway, including student feedback collected through surveys, they emphasize the importance of creating learning communities and argue that "introducing the simulation pedagogy will hopefully result in deepened learning and bring past events, decisions and actions into current perspectives."

Stefan Rabitsch's essay also emphasizes the Norwegian context. Here, however, the focus is on how a particular content, "the American West," takes on specific resonances when Norway is the location of teaching. Rabitsch's essay draws on the graduate-level American studies seminars he has taught at the University of Oslo, as he shares both the method of cultural geography fieldwork where students look for traces of the American West in Norway, and the insights provided by the resulting material. As Rabitsch argues, the article "illustrates how that which we study from 'afar' may be found in more local(ized) Norwegian contexts, imaginaries, and cultural practices."

The final two essays both explore the place of literature in American studies. Cathryn Halverson does so in an almost literal sense in her discussion of using mapping as a method in literary courses in American studies. The essay is based on her experiences of adapting a course on regional literature to work in Nordic contexts through making use of maps to place characters and events. Focusing on *The Great Gatsby*, Halverson shows the usefulness of her method to the teaching of literature, but also demonstrates the important roles that literature can play in American studies. Similarly, Myrto Drizou's essay focuses on her experiences of teaching a particular text—Carmen Maria Machado's memoir *In the Dream House*—to make her case for the usefulness of teaching literature in American studies. Drizou argues that American studies necessitates an engagement with questions of identity and presents an opportunity, perhaps even an imperative, to employ a "cross-cultural perspective that helps our students articulate their stories and draw more expansive geographies of their selves."

Together, the nine contributions in these two sections showcase the innovative work being done in the teaching of American studies. The interdisciplinary nature of the subject encourages methods that help push both teachers and students outside traditional subject areas. In particular, it is worth noting that the specific national

contexts in which the teaching takes place are central to the approaches described in these essays. These contexts are either made part of the explicit content matter being taught, or they are used to decide what questions are addressed in the teaching. In some cases, the national context functions in both these ways simultaneously.

The contributions to this special issue provide ample proof of the rich and rewarding teaching and learning that is taking place in American studies and North America-focused courses across Nordic universities. Yet, with few but still notable exceptions—at the University of Southern Denmark, Uppsala University, the University of Helsinki, and the University of Turku—American studies in the Nordic countries is weakly developed as a teaching subject. It is instructive to return to the question posed by Duclos-Orsello, Entin, and Hill, and to think about how our teaching, rather than (only) our research, defines what American studies is. Because of the relatively weak institutionalization of American studies in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, and the fact that American studies in the region is less established as a discipline and exists more as a vaguely defined teaching field, that question has substantial impact. Members of the American Studies Network (ASN)—a pan-European group of American studies research centers—have recently called for greater collaboration in teaching and research between American studies institutions in Europe.[10] Although that certainly would be beneficial, we would also encourage collaboration within the Nordic Association for American Studies; perhaps in the form of joint courses or, following the suggestion by Grotle Rasmussen in this special issue, a Nordic summer school. Such collaboration would naturally involve institutions of American studies. Crucially, it would also involve scholars of American studies employed within other disciplines. Such collaboration must, then, be conditioned on an understanding of American studies as an evolving entity, and as contingent on the specific features and history of Nordic higher education.

There is great public interest in US politics and culture in the Nordic countries. It remains to be seen how recent developments, including the return of Donald Trump as the forty-seventh president, will affect public interest, student enrollment, and the futures of American studies teaching and research. We believe, however, that, in light of the firm connections between the Nordic region and the United States—further solidified after Finland and Sweden joined NATO in 2023 and 2024, respectively—these developments make it all the more important to foster broad and complex knowledge of the United States.

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12 December 2024

Notes

1. Blaustein, *Nightmare Envy*. See also Barreyre et al., eds., *Historians across Borders.*

2. Iceland is a member country of NAAS, though the Icelandic seat on the NAAS board has been vacant for many years and there is currently no active national American studies organization in Iceland.

3. Julie Sze, "Introduction: Engaging Contradictions," 341–45.

4. Duclos-Orsello, Entin, and Hill, "Introduction," 10. See also Howard, "American Studies," 277–91; Takacs, "Making Globalization Ordinary," 221–54.

5. Fazzi et al., "Teaching American History," 366–75; Fredman et al., "Teaching U.S. History," 114–26; Shu and Lai-Henderson, eds., "Special Forum."

6. See, e.g., contributions in Steiner and Danner, eds., *Exploring Spaces*; Kleinberg, "Teaching American Studies," 43–54; Blaustein, "Empire as Province."

7. Bach and Donnerstag, "Teaching American Studies."

8. British Association for American Studies, "Teaching American Studies Network."

9. Hjorthén, "Curriculum Development," 76–87; Falke, "Essentially the Greatest Poem," 283–301; Hanssen, "We are Citizens," 267–82; Dougherty, "We Need to Talk," 249–66.

10. Fazzi et al., "Teaching American History," 374–75.

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SECTION I:

Mapping the Teaching of American Studies in the Nordic Countries

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MAKE AMERICA RELEVANT AGAIN!

Teaching American Studies in Denmark

Abstract: Danes are pro-American and generally fascinated by the United States, but university students are not flocking to American studies programs in Denmark. During the last five years, enrollment numbers have dropped in the country's only BA and MA programs in American studies at the University of Southern Denmark, and fewer courses in American topics are offered at other Danish universities. This article presents the American studies teaching landscape in Denmark and zooms in on the BA and MA programs in American studies at the University of Southern Denmark in the city of Odense to analyze the problem of enrollment numbers and suggest a remedy consisting of a greater focus on "Global America" in context, greater focus on solving real-life problems in class, and greater teaching cooperation across the Nordic countries.

Keywords: American studies, teaching, transatlantic, employability, usability, humanities in crisis, Nordic cooperation

Danes are generally fascinated by the United States and hold the country in high esteem. After a downturn during the years when Donald Trump occupied the White House, the number of Danes that viewed the United States as an ally with shared interests and values experienced an uptick from 35 percent in 2021 to 54 percent in 2023 according to a study from Think Tank Europa and the European Council on Foreign Relations. A further 38 percent in 2021 and 32 percent in 2023 considered the US a necessary partner.[1] As is the case the in the other Nordic countries, adoption of American popular culture in Denmark is pervasive, Danes have a good command of the English language, the use of American technology is second nature, and interest in American politics is widespread.

This general positive attitude to the United States and all things American, however, has not resulted in massive enrollment numbers in Danish academic American studies programs, nor has it resulted in American topics being taught in great numbers in adjacent fields. The trend actually points toward a downward trajectory, and while it is premature to declare an outright crisis, this issue calls for analysis and perhaps measures of rebalancing and partnership development. Consequently, this article attempts first, to briefly draw up the landscape of American studies teaching in Denmark. Second, it zooms in on the case of the American studies programs at the University of Southern Denmark (Odense), analyzing its make-up and current challenges. Finally, the article presents a call to action, proposing a stronger focus on America in a global context and on the usability of American studies in our teaching, as well as on further Nordic cooperation.

Where is "America" in Denmark?

Denmark is home to eight universities, and education is organized following the European Bologna framework.[2] Two of those universities, the IT University (ITU) and the Technical University of Denmark (DTU), only offer specialized technical and IT-related degrees and hence no teaching that could fall under our current understanding of "American studies." Two other universities, Roskilde University (RUC) and Copenhagen Business School (CBS), used to offer teaching related to the United States, but no longer do. At RUC, this was mainly done through its now defunct English program, which took in its last cohort of students in 2016.[3] CBS had an entire BA and MA curriculum related to American studies, dating back at least to the beginning of the 2000s, taught by faculty organized in the Center for the Study of the Americas that included both North and South America. In keeping with the university's focus on business education, American studies was a large concentration that students could include in their BA or MA degrees in International Business Communication.[4] Smaller course components on American history and society were also included in the university's degree programs in Business, Language, and Culture (BLC). Due to a re-organization of the educational portfolio, CBS closed down the American studies concentrations around 2012–14. The BLC program had its last intake of students in 2024.

At Aalborg University (AAU) in the north of Jutland, at Aarhus University (AU) in the east of Jutland, and at the University of Copenhagen (UCPH) in the Capital Region, we find the subject of "America" taught in both core and elective courses. In terms of size, UCPH is the largest in the country (approx. 36,000 students), AU is the second largest (approx. 31,000 students), and AAU is the fourth largest (approx. 18,000 students).[5] In the BA programs in English at AAU

and UCPH, American studies components are integrated into larger core courses focused on cultural and societal analysis during students' first four semesters of study and are frequently offered as electives in both the BA and MA programs.[6] In the BA and MA programs in history at UCPH, no core courses in American history are offered, but students can choose a number of electives focusing on the American West, the history of anti-communism, the American Right, and other topics.[7] Aarhus University's BA program in English requires students to take a 10-ECTS course in American history and society in the second semester of study, while American literature components are included in the three 10-ECTS literature courses in the first three semesters of study.[8] Beyond the core courses, electives are offered to both BA and MA students, and Aarhus University is also home to the research center "American Studies Center Aarhus," founded in 1996, which houses a specialized book collection in the university library.[9] The faculty specializing in American studies at these three universities are thus mainly located in English and history programs, and few, if any, courses are offered outside of these educational settings.

The Odense Hub: American Studies at the University of Southern Denmark

Denmark's third largest city, Odense, is home to the country's third largest university (approx. 19,000 students). The University of Southern Denmark (SDU) has become the country's largest hub for teaching and research related to the United States. The American studies faculty currently consists of ten full-time members focusing on literature, culture, history, and politics. Additionally, a year-long Fulbright Scholar position brings in a rotation of eminent American scholars. The Center for American Studies, founded in 1992, provides the immediate organizational unit embedded in the larger Department of Culture and Language. The University is today home to the only BA and MA programs in American studies in Denmark, launched in 2012 and 2003, respectively. A BA minor program, now defunct, was in existence for a few years from around 2020. Prior to establishing the formal programs, American studies faculty taught courses in the fields of American literature/culture and courses in American history through degree programs in history and, especially, in English language and literature, similarly to the way it was done at other universities. The University of Southern Denmark's programs in political science and media studies, among others, have also offered dedicated courses on American topics in the past.

The BA Program in American Studies

The BA program in American studies consists of 135 ECTS, meaning two and one-quarter years of teaching. Added to that is a minor subject in another program for a total of 180 ECTS, or three years full time.[10] Students have four semesters of teaching followed by a fifth semester in which they write their BA projects while taking classes in their minor subject. All courses are 10 ECTS, classes are four hours per week, and semesters are thirteen weeks long. Students take three parallel courses each semester for a total of twelve teaching hours per week. The program has gone through several iterations and adjustments since its inception in 2012, but its main focus on history, politics, literature, and culture has remained constant. The newest curriculum, which is the one presented here, dates from 2023.

In their first semester, students take survey courses in "American History" and "American Literature and Culture" that serve as broad foundations of the constituent elements of the program and are assessed by written papers. They

also take "Introduction to American Studies," which introduces students to theoretical and methodological debates in American studies, offers a practical "how-to-guide" to research, and requires students to conduct a small research project in groups using one of the taught methodologies to create a product (podcast, SoMe-campaign, online exhibit, etc.). This course is co-taught by faculty with backgrounds in both history and literature/culture, which is the norm in most courses throughout the program.

In their second semester, students take courses in "American Politics and Government," "American Business," and "Philosophy of Science"—half of which is an epistemology course in which students are taught with cohorts from other programs, and the other half is dedicated to how knowledge is created in American studies, typically through one foundational text (in recent years the musical *Hamilton* has been used), which is analyzed through a variety of theoretical lenses. The politics course provides a historical and contemporaneous introduction to governmental structures, political culture, and the role of parties, ideology, and the media. "American Business" introduces students to American business history and the role of business in cultural texts, as well as case studies and sector analyses of select business segments, such as Silicon Valley, Hollywood, the financial sector, and the Great Recession.

The third semester consists of the core courses "America in the World" and "USA Today" in addition to an elective course. In the latter, students choose from interdisciplinary electives offered to students in the entire Faculty of the Humanities. "America in the World" situates the United States as part of the global flow of ideas and interests as students engage with the history of US foreign policy, transnational connections, and cultural perceptions about "America." "USA Today," which is co-taught with the MA course "America Today" and one of several brand-new courses that will be taught for the first time in the fall of 2024, delves into hyper-current affairs as it looks at the 2024 presidential election, conspiracy theories, political culture, and climate change. The specific topic for this course will change every year to reflect up-to-date developments in the United States. In the fourth semester, students take courses on "Themes in American Literature and Culture," "Case Studies in American History," and "Grassroots America." The first and second courses invite students to delve into a deeper study of selected historical case studies and cultural themes. Previous examples include the history of race, democracy, and technology, and cultural themes of gender, war, and dystopias. The latter course is new and will run for the first time in the spring of 2025. It deals with social movements in the US such as abolitionism, the suffragettes, the Tea Party Movement, and Black Lives Matter from both a cultural and a historical perspective. In their fifth semester, students take courses in their minor subject as well as write a 15-ECTS BA project. The topic of this mini research paper (20–25 pages) is chosen freely by themselves, and they receive one-on-one supervision from an assigned faculty member.

The MA Program in American Studies

The MA program in American studies has been in existence from 2003, and thus predates the BA program by almost a decade. It consists of 120 ECTS, or two years of full-time study, and the entry requirement is a BA degree either in American studies or in another field, with at least 60 ECTS of literature and history courses, which are deemed a necessary foundation for instruction. The curriculum of the MA program in American studies has gone through a few different versions since its inception in 2003, though the pri-

mary components—the history, politics, literature, and culture of the United States—continue to dominate. In its current incarnation, students take two semesters of core courses, each semester consisting of three parallel 10-ECTS courses and a total of eight hours of instruction per week; a third semester with internships, study abroad, or electives (in addition to one core course); and a fourth semester spent writing an MA thesis.[11]

When the program was launched in 2003, there was no "natural" BA program to recruit from, which meant that students came from a multitude of educational backgrounds such as English, history, journalism, anthropology, etc. And because the program was (and is) taught entirely in English, about one-third of students did come from other countries than Denmark—especially the Nordic countries and the rest of Europe, although some students also came from the United States, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. These characteristics continue today, even though the university's BA program in American studies provides roughly one-third of the student intake for the MA program.

The first semester of the MA program includes "Topics in American History and Society," "Topics in American Literature and Culture," and "Theory, Method and Research Practice in American Studies." The first two attempt to give a relatively broad introduction to history/society and literature/culture, while still focusing on specific topics through time or space. The latter introduces students to American studies as a discipline (or, more correctly, a field), and gives them a theoretical and methodological basis for their work.

The second semester requires students to take "American Business and Society," "Communicating American Studies," and "Perspectives in American Studies." The latter course has revolving "perspectives" that students delve into—such as myth, exceptionalism, immigration, and isolationism—and is co-taught between faculty with expertise in literature/culture and history. The communicating course (also co-taught) takes on a broad topic, such as race in history and culture, and is divided between classroom teaching and students crafting their own products, in which they "translate" the topic to a communicated public. Previous examples include podcasts, board games, and T-shirts. The course in American business includes an overview of business history, analytical models, and sector analysis, and requires students to work on a business and societal analysis using empirical data from a contemporary business case, preferably obtained through interactions with a company doing business in the US.

The third semester offers the opportunity to study abroad for an entire semester, to take an internship (typically at 20 ECTS, or two-thirds of a full semester), or to take elective courses. If students are not pursuing a study-abroad semester, they take the course "America Today"—a new current affairs course co-taught with the BA course "USA Today" described above—while interning or pursuing electives. Roughly one-half of the student cohort usually do internships in businesses, organizations, public administration, or the media, while only a few students study abroad. The fourth semester is wholly dedicated to the MA thesis (60–80 pages) on a self-chosen topic written under faculty supervision.

Students progressing from the BA to the MA program in American studies will inescapably experience some overlap between the two programs in terms of subject matter. Efforts are made, however, to minimize this by requiring deeper study, more reading, and avoiding direct replication of class teaching. MA students who come from different backgrounds than American studies do tend to feel that their fellow students with a BA in American studies have a head start, at least in the first semester, when basic

knowledge and skills are honed. From the second semester onwards, however, the focus is more on analytical skills, research, and methodology, which tends to even out the differences.

Content and Approach: How and What We Teach

American studies as a research field has been subject to much debate and has undergone changes and divisions throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Because of the strong ties between research and teaching, developments in the former spill over to the latter and affect classroom discussions, syllabi, and curricula. The original "Myth and Symbol" school remains a strong foundation for teaching, but America's idiosyncratic building blocks are of course not investigated through a nationalist lens from our vantage point, given that it will always be the outsider's view looking at the United States from afar. The influences of the "New Americanist" approach, which has dominated many American studies programs in the United States, seems to have served more as an important correction and inspiration, rather than as a guiding principle, in the sense that we ask students to critically investigate historical and cultural developments with respect to power, inequalities of race, gender and class, nationalism, and other hallmarks that have appeared in the United States. Transnational and comparative approaches function as important lenses, in the sense of a basis for classroom investigation, but also as a fact of life, inherent in the experience of both researcher, teacher, and student in an educational program far removed from the United States.[12]

How, then, are these American studies programs taught? We use a mix of traditional lectures, classroom seminars, and one-on-one supervision, as well as internships. Students are engaged in reading traditional texts (in all varieties) but are also subjected to case studies, as well as an increasing amount of guest lectures by scholars and practitioners (such as embassy officials, NGO workers, and business professionals)—some of whom are former students. There is a certain *Americanization* of class requirements, as students at the BA level have an attendance requirement of 80 percent of class meetings (though classroom performance is not assessed), and more than half of their exams follow a portfolio model, meaning that they hand in written products during the semester instead of only at the end of the semester (which for many years was the norm in Denmark). Students in some courses—such as the BA courses "Introduction to American Studies" and "American Business" and the MA courses "American Business and Society" and "Communicating American Studies"—are asked to consider the *usability* of a given course outside of academia, but this concept might deserve, or even need, to be expanded to other courses. This aspect will be treated more fully below.

The Problem

Student enrollment is down in the American studies programs at the University of Southern Denmark. In 2018, forty-one and thirty-six students matriculated in the BA and MA programs, respectively. The following year the numbers were fifty and thirty. The 2020 intake was forty-three and thirty-six—the last year that aggregate numbers exceeded seventy students. In 2021, sixty-three students in total were admitted, thirty-nine BA students and twenty-four MA students, while 2022 and 2023 have been *anni horribiles,* with meager intakes of 22/17 and 17/21 students in the BA and MA programs. While the numbers have improved in the 2024 intake, with twenty-seven BA students and eighteen MA students, the tendency remains the same.[13] Which factors contribute to this development? It seems

that we can mention at least four: COVID-19, geography and demography, a "humanities in crisis" narrative, and the content of the program. To some extent, these factors are interrelated, because while the pandemic contributed to a short-term decline in student intake, the other factors are indicative of a long-term challenge.
The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected the years from 2020 to 2022 both in terms of student intake and the student experience. The majority of Danish public sector institutions—among them the universities—shut down at various intervals during this time, which meant that students were forced to attend classes from home, or hybrid versions, where half the class was at the university and the other half was joining online. Nobody remembers those years with fond affection. This setup was also duplicated in the rest of the educational sector, so high-school students graduating between 2020 and 2022 had already lived through this uncommon and not very beneficial or pleasant experience.

A second factor is tied to the geographical location of Odense. Young people prefer the allure of the biggest cities, i.e., Copenhagen and Aarhus, which are seeing a net influx of students. And if they live in these cities already, they do not travel in great numbers for university, even though Denmark is a very small country. Projections of demographic change tell stories of fewer young people of university age in the years to come, which tends to exacerbate the difference between Copenhagen/Aarhus and universities in other parts of the country: fewer students will come to Odense because we recruit from a smaller segment of the population on the island of Funen and the southern part of Jutland.[14]

A third factor revolves around the narrative of "humanities in crisis," which has persisted in many parts of the world at least since the end of the twentieth century, or perhaps, according to Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, since the dawn of the humanities themselves.[15] In Denmark, this debate has been focused on *usability* and *employability*, perhaps especially because Danish university education is publicly funded, and the narrative has thus centered around wasted tax "kroner" and little return on investment. Moves have been made to push young people toward STEM education programs, but recently also to nudge students to choose shorter professional degrees in nursing and primary school teaching, as well as vocational trades such as carpentry, plumbing, and the like. Legislation has been put in place to restrict student intake in the humanities based on employment numbers. Student enrollment in American studies programs, however, has for a number of years fallen short of even these restrictions.[16]

These debates have been accompanied by almost pervasive changes in the structures and rule sets governing the university teaching sector in Denmark over the last twenty years since the Danish University Act of 2003 applied both tighter political control and instituted appointed university leaders and an Executive Board, where the majority of the members came from outside the university. In recent years, new rules on the number of students in each program have more or less been set by the Ministry for Education and Science, and universities have been forced to ensure that students finish within the allotted time (for example, by shortening the MA thesis-writing period from six to four months, and the length of the thesis from 80–100 pages to 60–80 pages). An upcoming cut will reduce many MA programs from 120 ECTS to 75 ECTS.[17] While it is still not completely clear which MA programs will be forced to scale back, it is expected that the MA degree in American studies at the University of Southern Denmark will be among them.

While the first three factors mentioned are to a large extent *structural,* or at the very least *exter-*

nal, we must also look inward as COVID-19, geography, demography, the humanities in crisis, and changes in the university sector cannot stand alone in explaining the drop in enrollment numbers in American studies. The fourth factor relates to the nature of what the program offers its students. Program participants gain something akin to expert status (or, at least, that is the desired outcome) in many aspects of American society and culture. We must continually ask ourselves whether this deep, almost mono-focused expertise is the best way of conveying knowledge to our students and whether the American experience is exceptional enough to merit this approach. Should we provide more context? More tools to deal with global crises, all of which transcend national borders, either directly or indirectly in terms of causes, consequences, and possibilities for solution? Should we ask the students to create prescriptive solutions alongside descriptive analysis?

The fascination of all things American and the exceptionality of the United States might not hold as much allure as they once did, even if, as mentioned in the beginning of this article, the reputation of the United States in Denmark is on the rise once again. It is easy—and probably too easy—to point to Donald Trump's recent tenure in the White House, which will now be repeated following the 2024 election. But just as we suspect, though without data to support it, that there might have been an Obama effect in bolstering enrollment numbers in American studies at SDU earlier on, a Trump effect might have played a role in shrinking those numbers—with a time delay for each development. We might also consider the fact that as crises have dominated the European and Nordic agenda in the past years, and, indeed, often the same types of crises (right-wing nationalism, populism, economic downturn, war, disinformation, and climate change), students have become less interested in examining American issues.

Related to this, we should consider whether a reason for the drop in enrollment numbers is related to our inability—even if our intention is the opposite—to contextualize American culture and society, to convey to students that America is still relevant to their world, and to convince them that a research-based knowledge about dynamics involving the United States is necessary? Perhaps we should also consider whether we have provided sufficient focus on the *usability*, on students' ability to enact concrete change in the world by using American studies in practice? This latter notion is far removed from many academics' views of what research-based teaching should be, and, I will admit, it has been a foreign concept to me as well, at least in the past. I have, however, slowly come to the realization that this might be something we should focus more on, though not exclusively. In the American studies programs at SDU, we have already implemented this way of thinking in several course elements, but by no means all.

The Remedy

The problem of a decline in enrollment calls for different solutions. While little can be done about structural factors, two steps might be considered in terms of content: a stronger focus on context and global American studies and a stronger focus on usability and direct applicability in the programs. I will suggest a third additional action here that can be taken, namely establishing a joint Nordic summer school at the MA level—and perhaps offered to advanced undergraduates and PhD students as well—and a Nordic network for teaching American studies.

Global America

If we argue that a strict focus on American issues in teaching is a thing of the past, is the way forward, then, global studies programs instead of area studies? This has a certain ring of the 1990s

to it, when the Cold War-era area studies programs were declared dead, and a certain idealism led to the creation of global and international studies.[18] American studies, as Paul A. Bové reminds us, has never been an area studies program in the Cold War sense (and also predates that era), because it was not linked directly to gathering information and educating people who could influence and implement US/Western foreign policy toward more hostile areas of the world.[19] Nevertheless, as part of its cultural imperialism and public diplomacy, the United States *did* offer funds through the United States Information Service for American studies in Denmark (and many other countries), and both the US Embassy in Copenhagen and Fulbright Denmark were instrumental in setting up the Center for American Studies at the University of Southern Denmark, as well as supporting the educational programs.[20]

To Danish (and probably Nordic) students, American studies *is* an area studies program, where they can study close to everything about the United States. While students may find the US fascinating, this mono-focus is not currently sufficiently fascinating to many students interested in world affairs. But a global studies program will probably not offer sufficient depth. The answer may lie in transferring the transnational and comparative research focus to the classroom and contextualizing the American experience with Nordic, European, and global ones. This will probably necessitate a number of compromises, as the current overarching focus in both the BA and MA programs at the University of Southern Denmark is the United States within its national borders, mythology, and culture. Could we be better at comparing American history and culture at every instance with its global counterparts? We could, and probably should.

Usability

American studies (at least in Odense) would probably also gain greater enrollment numbers if we, in addition to offering more context, also ask students to consider the real-life applications of their knowledge at every stage of their training. I should hasten to add that many of my colleagues already practice this approach in their teaching, but the program as such does not afford usability as great a role as it does to a reproduction of scholarly arguments, crafted in written and oral exams. Perhaps if we put equal weight on the production of a social media campaign about Black Lives Matter as we do on critical analysis about social movements, students would fill seats in our auditoriums in greater numbers. So, too, if we require students to produce podcasts about Nordic immigrants in the Civil War instead of a traditional oral exam. Or perhaps students could curate a critical online exposition about the Odense Robotics Cluster—many of its members have been bought by American companies—instead of writing a paper about US-Danish technology transfer.

There are undoubtedly countless other examples, but the main concept is usability outside academia, translating student knowledge and skills while they study instead of leaving this to students after graduation. Will we lose academic rigor? Perhaps, though not necessarily. If we manage to combine the product with a traditional analysis (written or oral), maybe we can have the best of both worlds. Will we be able to carry out such a transition of traditional academic teaching? Perhaps, but it does require additional resources and time. If we need to include external partners, my experience is that it is time-consuming but extraordinarily beneficial to students. Additionally, by combining the Global America and usability components, students could be made aware of the increased relevance of their study program. They could be trained to solve problems in a transatlantic context using their academic knowledge and bolster

their employability. If communicated correctly, this might very well be a key feature in attracting students.

A Nordic Summer School and Network for Teaching

Through our biennial NAAS conferences, national conferences, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, and other inter-Nordic networks and contacts, our *research* collaborations as Nordic American studies scholars are well established. But to my knowledge, there is little, if any, concrete collaboration on the teaching side. A yearly summer school, co-taught and interdisciplinary, might be a good first step to establish such a collaboration, perhaps supported by sessions dedicated to teaching at the NAAS conferences.

This summer school could have multiple purposes. First, we could gather a critical mass of students (we might aim at a minimum of twenty-five to thirty) and thus bolster the number of American studies students in the Nordic countries. The course should be open to students from many different educational backgrounds (i.e., not only those from American studies programs), so that we could satisfy an interest in American issues while students could still pursue other degree programs. Second, students would be able to form networks and gain new perspectives that supplement their national ones, and then be exposed to the highest level of research-oriented teaching in the Nordic countries.

The summer school should perhaps be centered on hyphenated American studies, i.e., Nordic-American studies in both a historical and a cultural context. Many Nordic American studies scholars work on immigration history, which would be a natural starting point. Research on other connections between the US and the Nordic countries, such as the reception of American popular culture in the Nordic countries or the reception of the Nordic welfare model in the US, would also be relevant. Perhaps the export of American and Nordic products across the Atlantic could form the basis for a discussion about global capitalism, and—from my own research—perhaps an analysis of the Americanization of Nordic conspiracy theories could create interesting insights about transnational networks, the power of social media in spreading ideas, and the consequences of global political events, such as the War on Terror, the Great Recession, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The summer school should be able to award academic credit, perhaps 10 ECTS, or one-third of a semester's course load. The duration should be roughly one week, and the school should be held in a new location every year. While some participant payment could perhaps not be completely avoided, efforts should be made to limit this by applying for funding at the national and Nordic levels. The US embassies seem a very relevant place to start.

A Nordic network for teaching American studies could not only coordinate the summer school, but it could also facilitate a much-needed exchange of ideas and teaching material. This would not only be beneficial for already established programs, but it could also serve as inspiration for nascent programs and for faculty teaching only a few courses in existing English or area study programs. The conversation started at the NAAS conference in Uppsala in 2023 needs to be continued—hopefully in Turku in 2025!

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Notes

1. Schacke-Barfoed, ”Ny måling.”
2. The Danish educational landscape also includes university colleges that offer professional bachelor’s degree programs in teaching training, social work and the like. These institutions are not included in the present article as they offer only scant teaching in American topics. Danish educational programs apply the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), where three-year bachelor’s degree programs (BA) consist of 180 ECTS (60 ECTS/year), and two-year master’s degree programs (MA) consist of 120 ECTS (60 ECTS/year). BA programs in the humanities must consist of two subjects, a major of 135 ECTS and a minor of 45 ECTS. See Ministry of Higher Education and Science, “Danish Higher Education System.”
3. Taarnhøj, “Engelsk kæmper stadig.”
4. Copenhagen Business School, “Previously offered programmes.”
5. Dyvik, “Leading Universities in Denmark.”
6. Aalborg University, “Bacheloruddanelse: Engelsk”; University of Copenhagen, “Bachelor i Engelsk.”
7. University of Copenhagen, “Course Search.”
8. Aarhus University, “Engelsk Bacheloruddannelse.”
9. Aarhus University, “American Studies Center Aarhus.”
10. University of Southern Denmark, “Amerikanske Studier: Bachelor.”
11. University of Southern Denmark, “American Studies: Master Programme.”
12. For more on these debates and approaches, see Nye, “American Studies as a Contested Crossroads”; and Nye, “American Studies in Stereo.”
13. These figures are derived from the Danish Ministry for Higher Education and Science, “Uddannelsesstatistik og Analyse,” https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/statistik-og-analyser.
14. Statistics Denmark, “Population projection.”
15. Reitter and Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis.*
16. Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, “Dimensionering på Universiteter.”
17. Oddershede, “Danish Universities”; Nielsen, “The Government”; Thomsen, “Three Rectors Look Back.”
18. Franzinetti, “The Strange Death,” 835–47.
19. Bové, *A More Conservative Place.*
20. See e.g., Brøndal, “The Study of U.S.,” 83–100.

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Teaching North American Studies in Finland
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TEACHING NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES IN FINLAND

Searching for Crossdisciplinary Perspectives

Abstract: The authors examine the historical roots of Finnish interest in North America, which can be traced back to early Finnish immigration and a broader fascination with Indigenous cultures. Over the past several decades, this interest has grown within academic circles, leading to the creation of several cross-disciplinary North American studies programs in Finland. There is a long tradition of research in fields such as Indigenous studies, immigration history, ethnic minorities, media studies, and environmental issues. While these areas remain central, new scholarship—focused on settler colonialism, decolonizing research, and transnational American studies—has added depth and new perspectives to the field in recent years. This article primarily highlights the North American studies program at the University of Helsinki, but it also touches on research and teaching at the University of Turku.

Keywords: North American studies, cross-disciplinarity, settler colonialism, decolonizing research and teaching

Three Hundred Years of "American Studies" in Finland

The year 2026 will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the North American studies program at the University of Helsinki. Despite this seemingly brief history, the study of North America has deep roots in Finnish academia. Already in 1756, Pehr Kalm, a student of Carl Linnaeus representing the Royal Academy of Turku (now the University of Helsinki), wrote extensively on his 1747–51 travels in North America. His journals were published as *En Resa till Norra America*, which was translated into several languages. Kalm made notes about the nature, plants, animals, and Native Americans he encountered. He may have been the first European scholar to describe Niagara Falls and even wrote about these magnificent waterfalls to Benjamin Franklin. Kalm's student Anders Chydenius wrote his master's thesis *Americanska Näfwerbåtar* (1753) on the birch-bark canoes used by the Native peoples of the Great Lakes area. For more than two centuries, Finnish scholars continued to engage with North American topics in fields such as history, politics, and literature. Starting in the early twentieth century, the increasing Finnish migration to North America attracted another new strand of scholarship.[1]

A move toward cross-disciplinary American studies started in the 1980s, spearheaded by Markku Henriksson's doctoral dissertation "The Indian on Capitol Hill: Indian Legislation and the United States Congress, 1862–1907" (1988). Gaining support and establishing legitimacy for a cross-disciplinary field was difficult. Some more established scholars looked down on North American studies, and students struggled to define their identity as aspiring scholars in the field. "Why do we need North American studies and what are its prospects in Finland?" were repeated questions to the early researchers.

Nevertheless, interest in North American studies courses was great, and thanks largely to Henriksson's efforts, minor programs were established in the early 1990s at the universities of Tampere, Helsinki, and Turku. From a modest start, these programs have developed into true cross-disciplinary American studies programs. This is especially true at the University of Helsinki, which is the only program to offer bachelor's degrees (as a part Cultural Studies), master's degrees (as part of Area and Cultural Studies), and doctoral degrees with specialization in North American studies. At the University of Helsinki, North American studies was first part of the Renvall Institute, and then in 2010 became a subject under the umbrella program of Area and Cultural Studies at the Department of World Cultures, which in 2016 was reinvented as the Department of Cultures.

The interest in and the legitimacy of American studies in Finland has fluctuated over the past few decades depending on world events, and, quite concretely, the personality of the US president. Since the emergence of Donald Trump in the political arena and its global ramifications, the number of students has steadily risen in both Helsinki and Turku. "Understanding the United States" has become a valid field of study. A further boost was seen when Finland joined NATO in 2023. Some of the questions people have today cannot be answered simply through knowing politics or history but require broader and more multifaceted interpretations.[2]

Defining the field of American studies is not only a Finnish struggle. Rather, it has been part of the essence of American studies globally over the past decades. One definition is presented by Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson in their book *American Studies: A User's Guide*: it is "an interdisciplinary practice that aims to understand the multiplicity of the social and cultural lives of people in—and in relation to—the United States,

both past and present." They also discuss the definition or the name that should be used: is it US studies only, American cultural studies, or a more inclusive North American studies that includes the study of Canada and maybe even Mexico?[3]

Echoing this, the University of Helsinki defined North American studies from early on as the "crossdisciplinary and multimethodological study of the culture(s) of United States and Canada."[4] At the University of Helsinki, the decision was made to incorporate areas south of the United States into Latin American studies, while the University of Turku has traditionally included Mexico, the Caribbean, and even Cuba in its definition of North America. In either case, the approach to the area at hand was to be as broad as possible. The choices truly are unlimited, as is exemplified by the themes of courses offered during the 2023–24 academic year in Helsinki: Indigenous environmentalism, Black athletes, prisons, and North American regionalism, to name a few.

Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson have also discussed the complexity of method and methodology in the field. They address some criticism toward the lack of clear frameworks, calling the situation "methodological anxiety."[5] The attempt to find true crossdisciplinarity in research and teaching is challenging and students in Finland struggle with this especially when writing their BA, MA, or PhD theses. There are a plethora of North American studies approaches or traditions to draw from, but for students more familiar with traditional monosciences like history or literature, it is difficult to overcome or find their own voice in this methodological complexity discussed by Deloria and Olson. There is no singular way to do American studies, and at the University of Helsinki, as well as at the University of Turku, we have traditionally been open to all topics and approaches, but crossing disciplinary borders has been at the center of research and teaching. Despite some challenges in finding their own student/researcher trajectories, and because of this openness, our courses are often considered different from many others offered at the university. As Benita Heiskanen incisively explains:

> [t]he most frequent feedback we get from students is that our classes are exciting. Because we use multiple sources, and take both societal and popular discourses seriously, students find it easy to engage in critical thinking and analysis. As far as history classes are concerned, seeing the continuation of contemporary phenomena all the way from the colonial period up to the present . . . is eye opening for students.[6]

What also characterizes Finnish North American studies is the fact that we look at North America from the outside. As outsiders we notice and react to things that might go undetected for an American scholar. We are also less limited by historical constraints when it comes to difficult topics like slavery or Indigenous genocide. As outsiders, however, we need to understand and appreciate the history and the larger frameworks of the field. While we are not bound or limited by the burdens of, let's say, Turnerian frontier ideology, New Western History, or transnationalism, we need to recognize them and present challenges to current paradigms.

Our geographical distance has also helped us to be open-minded about new methods and technology. Ten years ago, we at the University of Helsinki were among the first in the humanities in Finland to employ digital humanities methods in our research and teaching. Now, offering courses in using quantitative data and network analysis, for example, or the development of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and other online teaching methods are standard practice for us. While many people may have been suspicious of digital methods and teaching

ten years ago, the Covid-19 pandemic ignited an unprecedented need for these teaching practices that has continued after the return to contact teaching. Thanks to our early adoption of online teaching, we had a comparatively smooth transition to online teaching, and Rani Andersson was selected "Teacher of the Year" thanks to his engaging Zoom lectures. In the fall of 2023, Andersson and Saara Kekki created and successfully ran the MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) "Sustainable Stewardship of Nature and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge," which thus far has been attended by 250 people from across the world. The MOOC included podcasts, music, and video interviews with Indigenous community members. The MOOC also has several interactive elements, including the possibility to use virtual glasses to explore a place in a 360-degree environment. In developing the MOOCs, we engaged in a thorough review of not only new teaching methods, but also those for assessment. Although the purpose of a MOOC generally is to be as self-grading as possible, we have also participated in discussions on the assessment of cultural studies courses more broadly. While exams in some fields serve a purpose, the courses in Helsinki rarely use tests, quizzes, or exams to measure learning. Instead, we typically use essays, oral presentations, and more recently, blogs and podcasts, to more effectively assess deep learning.[7]

Institutional Building Blocks of Finnish North American Studies

We attribute the success of the North American studies programs at the University of Helsinki to three major institutional building blocks: the Fulbright Bicentennial Chair, the Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference, and the McDonnell Douglas Chair in American studies. The establishment of the Fulbright Bicentennial Chair for American studies at the University of Helsinki in 1976 has proved essential to the vitality of the discipline not only in Helsinki, but in all of Finland. Almost fifty distinguished scholars have held this Bicentennial chair, giving the program depth and scope otherwise impossible to reach. The chairs have represented a variety of fields from Native American studies to environmental history, politics, media, sport, and gender studies.

The second big building block for the American studies program was the organization of the biennial Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference in North American Studies. Initiated by Markku Henriksson in 1986, the conference just saw its twentieth iteration in May 2024. Over the years, the conference has attracted hundreds of scholars and students representing a wide array of topics. This has helped our students to gain more perspectives and broader approaches to the field. The conference is an excellent example of the efforts of the past and current North American studies faculty and researchers and the extensive networks they have created over the years. Both the conference and the Fulbright professorship have helped make the North American studies program in Helsinki strong and distinctive in Finland and in Europe.

Finally, the third success factor in the history of North American studies in Helsinki was the establishment of the McDonnell Douglas Chair in American studies in 1996. Connected to the Finnish purchase of F-18 Hornet fighter jets in 1995, this professorship created a significant degree of stability and continuity for the field. In addition to offering a critically needed permanent professorship—the first in the discipline in Finland—an endowed chair brings along a more solid funding base than a position funded by the university's basic funding.[8] While the discipline has since become a part of Area and Cultural Studies, the professorship has allowed North American Studies to maintain its distinctive character. Being incorporated into Area and Cultural

Studies has allowed new cooperation, and more students are now engaged in North American studies. Meanwhile, the Area and Cultural Studies program offers a variety of classes in methodologies and theoretical frameworks, which help students in understanding the cross-disciplinary approaches of North American studies as well. This collaboration with scholars working on European Cultural studies brings an additional dimension to North American studies in that while we embrace our American studies heritage from Frederic Jackson Turner to Henry Nash Smith to Harold Innis, our students are also introduced to approaches and methods by cultural studies scholars and political theorists like Stuart Hall and Chantal Mouffe.

The University of Turku has a dual role in Finnish North American studies: it hosts the North American Studies (NAMS) minor program that offers teaching, as well as the more research-focused John Morton Center for North American Studies (JMC). Unlike Helsinki, where North America can be selected as the specialization within a master's degree in area and cultural studies, the minor module in Turku is not part of a degree program. Established in the early 1990s, NAMS has always been inter- and cross-disciplinary, with courses primarily in history, society, and literature (sometimes language and other topics). In the past, there were also courses in geography, but the more scientific branch has disappeared.

After two decades of running a successful teaching program, the University of Turku established the JMC in 2014, another milestone for Finnish American studies. The main focus of NAMS, and subsequently the JMC, is the United States and Canada, but Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean are also included. According to JMC Professor Benita Heiskanen,

> [w]hile the United States has always been the focus of the field, the role of other nations within the continent—as well as transnational relations—has become increasingly important over the past few decades. At the John Morton Center for North American Studies, we focus on analyzing historical, societal, and cultural phenomena related to the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean from various transnational perspectives.[9]

At the University of Turku, NAMS is an open minor, and students from all faculties can enroll. Most students come from the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences. NAMS is also open to students of the Åbo Akademi University, as well as exchange students from all fields.

The first American Voices seminar, jointly organized with Fulbright Finland, took place in 1993. The seminar series continues to this day, with 2020 being the only gap year due to the pandemic. The thirtieth seminar was held in the fall of 2023.[10] The program has been coordinated by the University of Turku English department since its inception, with Keith Battarbee as the first coordinator until 2012, followed by Janne Korkka. NAMS was part of the Faculty of Humanities until 2019. Since then, it has been officially offered jointly by the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences, or the JMC, more specifically. The JMC has been successful in attracting research funding, and its researchers, led by Heiskanen, have contributed to the broadening of NAMS teaching. In addition to the extensive minor program and valuable research done at the University of Turku, the University of Tampere offers a module called North American Studies. Their module, however, only covers economics and policy, and is not American studies in the broader sense.

Lines of Research and Teaching for the 2020s

At the core of teaching North American studies in Helsinki is innovative cross-disciplinary research. Our teaching structure offers a basic survey course that begins with regionalist approaches to North America and is followed by a course on history, cultures, and society. These two comprehensive courses provide the students with the necessary knowledge to explore specialized courses offered each year. One challenge in Helsinki is to make more courses focusing on Canada available for students. While Canada is a vital part of our program and most courses seek to incorporate Canadian viewpoints, it has been difficult to encourage students to write their master's or doctoral theses on Canadian questions. In Turku, on the other hand, the expertise of Senior University Lecturer Janne Korkka makes sure that Canadian topics are covered broadly every year. As we explained above, Finnish North American studies has been famous for its engagement with Indigenous studies, immigration history, ethnic minorities, and environmental issues. In the past decade, these fields have remained central, but new scholarship has brought new dimensions and depth to this expertise.

In immigration studies, in what the Finnish American historian Gary Kaunonen termed "Gen 3.0" of Finnish migrant studies, scholars have not only studied the establishment of Finnish communities and the development of a Finnish American identity, but have moved beyond these questions to tackle intercultural and transnational connections, and even Finnish settler colonialism.[11] Settler colonialism provides a new window in teaching Finnish immigration to North America in larger colonial contexts, suggesting that Finns are not only benevolent migrants, but part of an ideological and practical framework aiming at replacing Native populations while creating their own American dreams.[12]

An integral part of this 3.0 teaching—not only when it comes to the Finnish North American experience but to immigration studies more broadly—is the willingness to use truly cross-disciplinary methods and new tools to discover unforeseen strands of migration to America. In today's world, where immigration and mobilities continue to be a major issue in US and Canadian societies as well as globally, courses that help students understand immigration in depth are crucial. Saara Kekki has specialized in dynamic network modeling and GIS (Geographic Information System, a technology that is used to analyze and visualize geographically referenced information) and has taught several courses on these tools and methods. These courses have enabled students not only to learn about the mobilities of various ethnic groups, but they have opened the eyes of cultural studies students to the possibilities of digital humanities.

Teaching North American history and cultures would not be possible without some attention to the continent's Indigenous people. In fact, this has been and continues to be at the very heart of our program in Helsinki. We approach Indigenous studies as a key element to understanding North American experiences, whether of immigration, settler colonialism, or environmental policies. To some degree, US foreign policy was established on its relations with Indigenous nations, and the league of the Iroquois was instrumental in the framing of the US constitution.[13] Our teaching philosophy here is strongly based on decolonizing methods, community-facing research, and collaborative work with and in Native communities. At its core, decolonizing academic teaching deals with issues such as dispossession, identity, indigeneity, and sovereignty. It also requires non-Indigenous people to respect Indigenous worldviews as equal to other views and recognizing Indigenous traditional knowledges and epistemologies as relevant methodological tools, for example, in using oral histories

to understand social structures or appreciating Indigenous agencies in the past and present. The challenge has been for academia to accept Indigenous ways of knowing and doing as legitimate tools and to merge and apply them with "Western" notions of science. Yet merely "merging and applying" is inadequate, as there is a danger of losing crucial aspects of Indigenous perspectives when Indigenous cultural insights are conceptualized and implemented within the theoretical and methodological paradigms of Anglo-European research, reasoning, and interpretation.[14] This approach allows us to employ best practices of ethical Indigenous studies in our teaching as well. For example, by inviting Indigenous community members to join through zoom or using interviews and research fieldnotes in our teaching, we can ensure that when we are teaching specific Indigenous topics, we respect Indigenous ways and impart only such knowledge as they deem appropriate. The faculty's personal networks are of the utmost value in achieving these collaborations.

In addition to our inherent cross-disciplinarity, we work closely with the University of Helsinki Environmental Humanities minor program. The current McDonnell Douglas Professor of American studies, Mikko Saikku, is the head of that program, and is one of the leading environmental historians in Finland. While the University of Helsinki has thus far not collaborated with Turku in terms of teaching, the research done in Turku complements that of Helsinki. Where Helsinki takes pride in its Indigenous, environmental, and ethnic studies research projects and teaching, the JMC in particular has successfully conducted large research projects in media studies, violence, and women's rights, to name a few. While we have highlighted here a few key elements of North American studies teaching at the University of Helsinki and Turku, the overall topics covered in our teaching curriculum go far beyond those themes, aiming at offering our students a bit of everything that is topical in North America.

Notes

1. Henriksson, "Afterword," 199–201. For Finnish immigration to North America see, for example, Kero, *Migration from Finland*; Kostiainen, ed., *Finns in the United States.*

2. Fazzi et al., "Teaching American History," 366–75.

3. Deloria and Olson, *American Studies*, 6. For more on this discussion, see Radway, "What's in a Name?" 41–75; Maddox, ed., *Locating American Studies*; Pease and Wiegman, eds., *The Futures*; Radway et al., eds., *American Studies*.

4. "North American Studies," Disciplines, Faculty of Arts, accessed November 25, 2024, https://www.helsinki.fi/en/faculty-arts/research/disciplines/cultures/north-american-studies.

5. Deloria and Olson, *American Studies*, 20, 83.

6. Fazzi et al., "Teaching American History." See also Hill, "What Is This Thing," 361–65.

7. About assessment, see Bastman et al., "Esseiden arviointimatriisi opetuksen ja oppimisen tukena" ("Essay Assessment Rubrik in Support of Teaching and Learning"), 430–72.

8. The University of Tampere also received its first Professor in American studies in 2007, when Dr Katri Sieberg was appointed as the Erkko Professor of American studies. In 2014, the John Morton Center for North American Studies was established at the University of Turku, Benita Heiskanen being appointed as the first Director of the new center.

9. Fazzi et al., "Teaching American History." The section on the Turku North American studies program is based on the description of its coordinator Senior University Lecturer Janne Korkka.

10. "American Voices Seminar," Fulbright Finland Foundation, https://www.fulbright.fi/about-us/events/american-voices-seminar.

11. Kaunonen, Review of *Finnish Settler Colonialism*, edited by Andersson and Lahti.

12. See Andersson and Lahti, eds., *Finnish Settler Colonialism.*

13. See Andersson, "Yhdysvaltain perustuslaki, federalismi ja irokeesiliitto" ("US Constitution, Federalism and the League of the Iroquois").

14. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 215–26; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Helander-Renvall and Markkula, "On Transfer of Sámi," 112–15; Cote-Meek and Moeke-Pickering, eds., *Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education.*

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American Studies in Norway
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AMERICAN STUDIES IN NORWAY

Historic Ideals and Contemporary Challenges

Abstract: Because of its particular history of institutionalization, American studies in Norway has come to fill a unique role in higher education, one that requires broader recognition to secure the field a stable future. In this article, Falke connects the past of American studies in Norway to its present by focusing on three founding moments. These three are the establishment of the Fulbright Program, which she uses to discuss shifts in funding American studies; the creation of the professorship of American studies in Oslo, which clarifies differences in the goals of British and American studies; and the initiation of the Salzburg Seminar, which reveals the field's interdisciplinary core. The article closes with three generalizations about the landscape of American studies teaching in Norway today related to America as a political imaginary, internationalization within American studies as a discipline, and the presumed relationship between American literature and lived experience of the culture.

Keywords: history of American studies, interdisciplinarity, Fulbright program, Sigmund Skard, Salzburg Seminar, political imaginary

Proper English in Norway is British English. If I submit to our university administration a course description for our master's program, the document returns to me "corrected" to master's "programme." The linguists on my hall teach students that there are many correct Englishes, but in Norwegian education administration, there is only one, and it is British. My administrators are preserving a long tradition. In 1887, when Knud Brekke published his *Lærebog i Engelsk for Begyndere*, he clarified that English, when spoken correctly, sounds like the "unrestrained, cultivated everyday language of Southern England."[1] Norway is not unique in its historical prioritization of British over American language and culture. Until World War II, the teaching of British language, history, literature, and culture so thoroughly dominated international English teaching that the US Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs lamented to Congress that "teaching about American civilization scarcely existed in the universities, colleges, and secondary schools of almost all nations of the world."[2] Following the war, things changed rapidly. Administrators may maintain a preference for "cultivated" British spelling and accents, but my students speak American. Between the close US-Norway cooperation during the war and the subsequent rise of American popular culture among Norway's younger generations, the study of American literature, culture, and history has received top-down and bottom-up support over the last seventy-five years. Immediately after the war ended, there was a recognition, in Norway and Europe as a whole, that the US would play a prominent role in an increasingly interconnected postwar world.

It was in this postwar moment that American studies emerged through a combination of European desire to understand the increasingly powerful US and the US's explicit bid to extend soft power globally through education. In Scandinavia and all of Europe, American studies bears traces of the postwar moment's conflicts—optimism about international cooperation and interdisciplinary methods in tension with concern about cultural imperialism. In his seminal work, *American Studies in Europe*, Sigmund Skard writes that "[t]he United States emerged from the Second World War with overwhelming power and prestige." In contrast, Europe was "completely exhausted," feeling strongly its "dependence and need for help." At just this moment, "[t]o the starved and war-torn people of the Old World poured, in a continuous stream, all the products of the New." On the same page, however, Skard shifts his tone and calls this outpouring "a veritable invasion of Europe by American Civilization."[3]

As the founder of the European Association of American Studies (EAAS) and the University of Oslo's first professor of American studies, Skard was especially well placed to observe universities' reception of this New World bounty in Norway and elsewhere. However, the uncertainty of his tone offers a foretaste of the contradictory interpretations of US involvement in postwar Europe. Viewed from Washington, the new Fulbright program for international scholarly exchange and the establishment of centers of American studies abroad were seen as part of "a new vision of American conversation with the rest of the world"—not a monologue, but a multi-directional, multi-participant conversation.[4] However, Skard's research revealed resistance on Europe's side: "[t]he political and social radicalism of America, its lack of traditional inhibitions and its concern with the needs of the common man in the present-day world served as a permanent protest against the exclusiveness and the conservative complacency of Old Europe."[5] Writing in 1958, Skard blames the resistance to American studies on Old World snobbery. But America's "political and social radicalism" and its concern for common people have not proven as permanent as Skard hoped, nor

has the idea that American studies reached Europe as a product of progressive influence been permanently accepted. In 2018, a group of "leading scholars" charged with assessing American studies in Europe stated flatly that it was "[b]orn as a project of 'cultural imperialism' during the Cold War."[6] American studies in Norway has internalized this history of ambivalence about US influence abroad. Students pursuing any level of English qualification in higher education—one-year certification, BA, MA, or teaching degree—must study American literature at every university in the country. However, within any American studies course, students meet critiques of US class inequality, of racially motivated violence, of border policies, and trends toward commercialization. The rigorous critique of past and present priorities in US politics and society, I would argue, works to counteract any vestiges of cultural imperialism that might have remained. In contemporary American studies classes, the US functions as a social and political imaginary through which professors and students in Norway contemplate not only what America is or has been, but also ethical and political questions important for Norway's future.

In this essay, I want to connect the past of American studies in Norway to its present and to make some general observations about the field's present challenges insofar as these manifest themselves in American studies classrooms. I discuss three founding moments of American studies in Norway and Europe and close with three generalizations about the landscape of American studies teaching in Norway today. On the whole, American studies teaching has retained interdisciplinary characteristics, but because courses focused on the US are now siloed in English literature programs, the insights arising from these courses risk being seen as matters of aesthetics at a moment when aesthetic education in universities is being devalued at national and local levels. Although aesthetics, particularly the history of literary stylistics in different modes of American literature, forms a key part of American studies surveys, debates in the field, both in the scholarly literature and in the classroom, focus much more on American literature as an expression of how the country sees itself. The American imaginaries suggested by literary texts are then refracted through students' perceptions of the US, perceptions which reflect portrayals of America in international media. The United States functions symbolically as a container for "macromappings of social and political space through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world"—an "imaginary," as philosophers and social scientists have come to use the term—and literature becomes a means by which these typically "pre-reflective" assumptions become available for reflection and debate.[7] Whether the best or worst aspects of American history and culture are in focus, the rising generation in Norway studies the US with more than aesthetic interest, contemplating key issues such as environmental degradation, Indigenous rights, immigration policies, and gender nonconformity by means of America's gigantic, messy, diverse past and present. For this reason, American studies serves an important role in many students' development, but one that remains invisible to most administrators and education policy makers. That invisibility endangers the future of American studies; if the important functions that such courses now serve are not recognized, the courses will be cut and hiring discontinued.

Three Founding Moments

American studies in Norway was founded with a great deal of hope. Architects of new international academic staff exchange programs and American studies centers in Europe believed strongly in the power of education-based people-to-people diplomacy to ensure a more

peaceful future. One moment that became significant for American studies in Norway was the founding of the Fulbright Program. In 1945, Senator J. William Fulbright advocated the sale of US war properties, recommending that the profits be invested in a program for scholarly exchange. His advocacy led to the creation of the world's largest educational exchange organization. To date, almost 400,000 scholars from 160 countries have participated in the Fulbright program with the goal of supporting "friendly and peaceful relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries."[8] One may object to the naivete of that goal, but I know of no more democratic program for cultural diplomacy.

Norway joined the Fulbright initiative early; it was the eleventh country to partner with the US in the program. Now, around forty Norwegians and twenty-five Americans benefit from a Fulbright exchange each year—some as students and some as professors. The Norwegian government, via the Ministry of Education and Research and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, now provides 70 percent of the program's funding.[9] In his historical review of scholarly exchange as a foreign policy instrument, Robert Spiller treats the Fulbright program in Norway as exemplary. It achieved the "most substantial and gratifying result of American cultural foreign policy" because by the mid-sixties, Norway housed "one of the best centers for the higher study of American literature and related subjects outside the United States itself," and it was "wholly supported by Norwegian funds."[10] A shift had occurred. Instead of Americans teaching about America abroad, Norwegians had embraced the study of the US as an academic pursuit on par with the study of Great Britain. Now, sixty years later, the focus on American studies that characterized the early years of the program has subsided. Although the special designation of an American Literature and Culture position at the University of Bergen has been preserved and three roving scholars are expected to teach American studies at Norwegian secondary schools, the other sixty-plus annual Fulbrighters research everything from ice engineering to the oboe. The main support for American studies in Norway no longer comes from the Fulbright program, but from the Norwegian university system itself. Being housed in and supported by universities, American studies courses benefit from more continuity of staff and fuller integration with university programs than could be achieved through one-year Fulbright appointments. However, the teaching of American studies in Norway has now become vulnerable to the national government's changing priorities for higher education.

Today, participants in cultural, political, military, technological, and economic spheres stand poised for further Norway-US cooperation, but two factors in the present direction of Norwegian higher education indicate that American studies is no longer valued by educational policy makers as an agent of such cooperation. First, the English language is viewed as a threatening competitor to the Norwegian language. In Norway's most recent long-term plan, the Ministry of Education and Research expresses "concern" that "Norwegian has lost ground to English . . . in both research and higher education."[11] Second, the Norwegian Government increasingly prioritizes vocationally oriented skill sets over broad, democratic education. In her research on neoliberalism in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, Susan Wiborg, writing in 2012, found that Norway and Denmark had adhered to traditional "egalitarian values" associated with Scandinavian societies longer than Sweden, but that pressure to view higher education as a servant to "market forces" was mounting across the political spectrum.[12] Norway has now given in to the same neoliberal pressures threatening the humanities programs in the US and the UK. Whereas the US-Norway

Fulbright Foundation remains, in the words of its most recent director, committed to "promot[ing] further mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and Norway," the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research directs universities to "develop the capacity of their programmes in line with the skills needed in different areas of the labour market."[13] In this vision, the nation is a market first and a democracy second, prioritizing not "people," but "skills." The future of American studies in Norway seems uncertain within the logic of Norway's new national priorities for education.

The second moment significant for the founding of American studies in Norway was the appointment of Sigmund Skard as "Professor of Literature, especially American" at University of Oslo in 1946.[14] Skard had spent the war years in America, but upon committing to the new post in Oslo, he solicited the Rockefeller Foundation for money to spend a year really learning the country "as a physical fact."[15] His request was granted, and in the summer of 1946, he shipped back to New York. Having been given a "free hand" to research the US as he saw fit, Skard toured the Grand Canyon on muleback. He visited a "sugar cane plantation in Louisiana and gambling dens in Las Vegas" studying "the human landscape."[16] The University of Oslo faculty had insisted that the university create the new position because "American literature today is not only of great value in itself, but is one of the most important means, even an indispensable means, for the study of American social and cultural life as a whole."[17] They projected that cooperation between Norway and the US would "become even more intimate and profitable in the future," all the more so if it were "given a foundation in scholarly studies of American civilization."[18] Skard's conviction that he could only teach American Literature after encountering "America itself as a physical fact" presumes that knowing the literature both demanded and produced understanding of the country's cultural reality necessary for intimate and profitable future collaborations between Norway and the US—an assumption apparently shared by the faculty at the University of Oslo and the Rockefeller Foundation.

American studies teaching in Norway continues to juxtapose America's aspirations, often solidified in literary and historical texts, and lived reality, especially as that reality is reported on by historically oppressed groups. Since most American studies students cannot travel into the "human landscape" of the US as Skard did, texts must stand in for direct experience, but instructors ensure that students encounter regional and ethnic diversity. Syllabi also feature texts that circulate beyond the conventional circuits of literary publishing. The use of contemporary texts from cultural spheres other than literature mirrors Skard's and the UiO faculty's early conviction that the goal of studying American literature is to learn about America as such. For example, at the University of Bergen, the American Literature and Culture class includes Alex Rivera's *The Border Trilogy*, a series of short films depicting the free movement of products across borders people are forbidden to cross. Students in the same class read *A Saloonkeeper's Daughter*, an 1887 coming-of-age story about a Norwegian immigrant, and "A Different Mirror," a non-fiction exploration of multicultural America by historian and ethnographer Ronald Takaki from 1993. Filmic and written, fiction and non-fiction, each of these works invites students to contemplate not just the literatures of migration and integration, but the ways different moments in history promote or conceal different views regarding these experiences. Rather than assuming continuity between life and literature as Skard and his hiring committee sometimes did, contemporary American studies courses in Norway ask students to question it. Still, the assumption that American literature should or can be looked *through* more than looked *at* persists in a way it does not for British literature.

The third moment I want to mention is the founding of the Salzburg Seminar in 1947, a moment in which 112 American studies scholars from Europe and the US met at a castle to initiate the conversations that would give rise to the European Association of American Studies (EAAS) in 1953. The American Studies Association of Norway (ASANOR) followed in 1974.[19] Initiative for the Seminar came from three Harvard graduate students, Austrian Clemens Heller, and Americans Richard Cambell, and Scott Elledge. When the first participants gathered at the Schloss Leopoldskron for an immersive, collaborative study of the United Sates, participants included a Czech resistance fighter, an Italian antifascist, a Jewish-Romanian snatched from a gas chamber line at Auschwitz, and an Austrian Nazi who learned English in a prisoner-of-war camp in Kentucky. Sleeping on iron cots donated by the Red Cross, they shared dorms for six weeks and discussed diplomacy, economics, and cultural anthropology.[20] Salzburg Global Seminars in American studies continue annually, and until 2024, ASANOR and the US Embassy of Norway have cooperatively sent a representative. Conversations still address contemporary issues from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and in a spirit of shared inquiry. Participants now come not just from Europe, but from around the world.

Although the Salzburg Seminar is only tangentially related to the history of American studies in Norway, the faith in searching, interdisciplinary dialogue legible there reveals the mood in which American studies was founded throughout Europe, and Norway was involved in that founding from the beginning. Skard, a Salzburg Fellow in 1953, found the form of academic interchange there utterly unique and even claimed that the "tendency to break the bonds of specialization and embrace all aspects of civilization in an integrated and structural 'Kulturkunde'. . . originated in Europe."[21] He attributes this robust interdisciplinarity not to an abstract commitment to an academic principle, but to the need to find "a neutral field of investigation which at the same time would be of immediate relevance to present-day problems."[22] Reporting on the first Salzburg gathering, Alfred Kazin similarly recalled that they discussed "America not as a country but a particular sector of modern society."[23] Other historians of American studies might dispute Skard's attribution of the field's interdisciplinarity to Europe. Gene Wise, for example, discusses interdisciplinary American studies work underway at Yale, George Washington University, Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and Western Reserve already in the 1930s.[24] Even so, the motive for interdisciplinary collaboration in Europe—the treatment of US culture as "neutral" ground for the investigation of present-day problems—distinguishes early American studies in Europe from the field's early US history.

The topics currently covered in American studies courses suggest that America still functions as a political imaginary through which students and professors in Norway can contemplate contemporary issues, regardless of whether the US serves as inspiration or a cautionary tale. Courses explore refugee narratives, legal histories of gender oppression, the social construction of race, multicultural approaches to ecological preservation, and media representations of technological advancement. The US is hardly neutral ground for approaching these topics since political priorities in Norway and the US have differed significantly. That does not lessen student or scholarly interest in the topics; it might increase it. What does decrease when the US moves away from Norway politically is national investment in American studies programs. For example, Ole Moen has noted that American studies became "politically incorrect" in Norwegian universities in the late sixties "mainly be-

cause of the Vietnam War." He suggests that disapproval of America's actions negatively impacted hiring in American studies in Norway even into the 1990s. Hiring for American studies in Norway has never returned to its pre-Vietnam pace. Disciplinary diversity has also been lost.[25] Between 1946 and 1956, the University of Oslo offered forty-five courses on American subjects: "23 were on literature, 5 on civilization generally, 4 each on Geography, History, and Political Science, 3 on education, and 2 on law."[26] In contrast to the broad disciplinary spread of the forties and fifties, the study of the US is now carried out almost exclusively as part of a literary component in English programs. In the last two years, ten American studies courses were taught at UiO, and nine were subjects in English.

Although upper-division courses continue to be taught on topics like American environmentalism or Indigenous studies, the bulk of the American studies teaching that happens in Norway, in terms of frequency of course offerings and number of students, is the first-year survey of American literature and culture. Almost all students studying English in higher education in Norway take some version of this class, and teaching clearly invites students to approach American culture using multiple disciplinary methodologies. My colleague at UiT, Justin Parks, teaches work by Harvard historian Jill Lepore. The Universities of Oslo and Bergen include "history of ideas" (ENG 1304: UiO) and "historical, social, and aesthetic perspectives" (ENG 122: UiB) in the course descriptions. The interdisciplinary inquiry foregrounded in American studies at the Salzburg Seminar and through the EAAS reaches students through these survey courses. Still, regardless of how interdisciplinary the course content is, because the study credits earned in these courses count toward English degrees, hiring priorities follow the needs of English literature sections rather than a research-driven agenda for American studies as such. The idea of America continues to facilitate inquiry into issues that exceed any one nation's boundaries, but the institutional space given for this inquiry has shrunk.

American Studies in Norway Today

Looking at the scene in Norway today, one sees American studies courses driven by critique more than in the post-War moment. The interdisciplinarity that characterized American studies from the start is still there, but there are fewer Americanist positions outside of English sections. In concluding, I offer three generalizations connected to these circumstances, each of which comes with benefits and challenges.

Following World War II, scholars in Norway and the US-based organizations that supported them seemed confident that works of American literature provided lenses through which the world's problems could be productively examined. American literature continues to provide these lenses, but the ways literature colors and sometimes biases perception remain more constantly in focus. This leads me to my first generalization. There might be a tendency to see American literature less as a space to which scholars from many nations and disciplines can come to work through basic problems of being human together—the way it functioned in Salzburg in 1947—and more as a political imaginary through which differences can be clarified. This is a challenge in that discovering differences does not lead to building new courses, programs, or research projects as often as the discovery of similarities. Coupled with America's ongoing political disfavor and the Norwegian government's increasingly neoliberal priorities for higher education, the fragmentation of American studies as a field has contributed to a decrease in cooperation, hiring, and visibility. But the constant questioning of what the value of studying America might be is also positive.

Any American studies scholarly community outside of the US needs to question why it privileges the US as an object of inquiry, not just in order to justify its existence to students and funding bodies, but because rigorous scholarship in the field demands it. Contradictory positions keep such inquiry alive.

Second, American studies, always interested in its own national as well as disciplinary boundaries, has become more transnational. A "transnational turn" has occurred in American studies at large as the idea of America is understood to be an international construct, and as the role of cultural inflows and outflows is increasingly appreciated. Additionally, Anglophone literature, as a discipline, is more anxious than ever about the historical overlap between English and colonialism, English and capitalism, and English and military intervention abroad. Both the interdiscipline of American studies and the discipline of English literature now press toward international perspectives within and about the US. This is a benefit insofar as it challenges nationalistic narratives of isolationism, but a challenge insofar as it further expands an already diffuse field. Course offerings in American studies have been reduced. Each semester has a limited number of weeks. As the field becomes more inclusive, it becomes even more challenging to cover it well in a short period.

Third, and finally, I have saved my favorite story about Skard to the end. After his travels, he accepted the job in Oslo, and he was still reading furiously in trying to prepare. In a letter to his wife, he recalls reading Emily Dickinson for the first time:

> [m]any years have passed since a poet moved me so deeply. And it's blissful . . . I sang and conducted all of Mendelssohn's violin concerto afterwards, while dressing . . . and I am still in a general state of exaltation. To find myself still capable of such an experience . . . as the direct result of the new reading of a new author from far away, strengthens my self-confidence and determination: this is going to be my real job, to experience such things, and to make others do the same. What a challenge![27]

Although Skard would go on to translate and publish analyses of Dickinson, at this stage, her work was brand new to him. Being taught mostly at the first-year level, and with literature, culture, civilization, history, and economy all packed into a class, American studies surveys still demand that instructors teach material we know comparatively little about. In many ways, this is a challenge. We would not do research that way. But in some ways, not knowing can be a strength in teaching. To find ourselves exalting at discovering something new, we have to be teaching something new. No one can be an authority on the breadth of material an American studies survey demands, so the subject requires constant learning. Furthermore, since American studies has functioned in Norway as a space in which pressing social and political questions can be asked, syllabi tend to change from year-to-year as the urgency of social and political issues changes. This makes it a difficult subject to teach but an exhilarating one.

However correct or cultivated my administration may find British English, Norway as a whole remains troubled by and interested in the United States. A quick Google Trends search of the nation's names or the names of their politicians, their musicians, their wars, reveals how much more interested the Norwegian populace is in America than Great Britain. Regardless of how one accounts for that, it suggests that the American imaginary continues to loom large in Norwegian thinking. American studies may have begun in Norway as an arm of soft power policy,

but it consolidated interest in the US around ideals that still belong in Norwegian higher education—promotion of mutual understanding, cross-disciplinary inquiry, confidence in the connectedness of art and life, and enthusiasm for a new discovery. As national policymaking lowers the country's historical prioritization of these values, American studies courses still strive to promote them.

Notes

1. Brekke, *Lærebog i Engelsk.* Original phrasing is "den utvungne, dannede dagligtale i det sydengelske." Translated in Ragnhild Lund's "A Hundred Years," footnote 4.
2. W. Johnson, "A Special Report."
3. Skard, *American Studies*, vol. I, 39.
4. W. Johnson, "A Special Report," 3.
5. Skard, *American Studies,* vol. II, 640.
6. Costaguta and Pignagnoli, "Introduction," 162, 161.
7. Steger, *The Rise*, 6.
8. Fulbright Scholar Program, "A Foundation of Excellence."
9. Næss, "Looking Back."
10. Spiller, "American Studies," 1, 9.
11. Norwegian Ministry, "Long-term plan," 78.
12. Wiborg, "Neo-Liberalism."
13. Næss, "Looking Back," 25; Norwegian Ministry, "Long-term Plan," 70.
14. Skard, *The Study,* title page; Moen, "American studies," 1.
15. Skard, *Trans-Atlantica,* 72.
16. Skard, *Trans-Atlantica*, 71, 73.
17. Quoted in Skard, *Trans-Atlantica*, 61.
18. Quoted in Skard, *Trans-Atlantica*, 61.
19. Moen, "American Studies," 3.
20. Salyer, "President's Report," 23.
21. Skard, *American Studies*, vol. I, 36.
22. Skard, *American Studies,* vol. II, 635.
23. Kazin, "Salzburg: Seminar in the Ruins."
24. Wise, "Paradigm Dramas," 305.
25. Moen, "American Studies," 2.
26. Skard, *American Studies,* vol. II, 436.
27. Skard, *Trans-Atlantica,* 68.

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Teaching American Studies in Sweden
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TEACHING AMERICAN STUDIES IN SWEDEN:

Navigating an Archipelagic Field

Abstract: This article sets out to map the teaching of American studies in Sweden. Since American studies is not a degree-awarding discipline in Sweden, this is not a straightforward task. The first part of the essay discusses American studies as it looks at the only center of higher education in Sweden that identifies it as a subject, the Swedish Institute for North American Studies at Uppsala University. In the second part we look at the field in a broader sense, identifying courses about North America currently available at Swedish universities and surveying their subjects and topics. Together, the two parts outline the contours of a field of teaching that, we suggest, is best described as archipelagic. The article concludes with a discussion of the possibilities and challenges for American studies teaching in Sweden and offers some thoughts and suggestions for the future, arguing for increased teacher and institutional cooperation and the need to establish American studies as a degree-awarding discipline.

Keywords: higher education, teaching, North American studies, area studies, Sweden

Since American studies is not an established discipline in Swedish higher education, an exploration of the teaching of American studies in Sweden is not simply a matter of compiling a list of existing degrees or courses offered at American studies departments—neither of which exist in the country. In the first part of this essay, we will discuss American studies as it looks at the only center of higher education in Sweden that identifies it as a subject—the Swedish Institute for North American Studies (SINAS) at Uppsala University, which offers a minor in American studies. But to assume that this means that teaching about the United States or North America cannot be found in other places in Swedish higher education would be a mistake. Consequently, the second section of this essay sets out to map the field in a broader sense, identifying courses about North America currently available in Sweden. Together, the two parts outline the contours of a field of teaching that, we suggest, is best described as archipelagic, consisting of several small actors. We end the essay with some reflections on the possibilities and challenges for American studies teaching in Sweden and offer a few thoughts and suggestions for the future.

The Subject of American Studies in Sweden

As early as 1946, undergraduate courses with a partial focus on American literature have been offered within the Faculty of Arts at Uppsala University. The main content of these courses, however, was focused on developing students' broad knowledge of English language and literature through teaching oral and written language skills, the history of the English language, and British and American literature. By the early 1970s, content on the history of and societal conditions in Great Britain and the United States was slowly incorporated into the curriculum in the form of course units or stand-alone courses at the Department of English.

One example was a course unit at the basic level (first cycle entry-level) offered in the fall term of 1974 called "British and American Society and History" as part of a survey course aimed at developing written and oral language skills in English, including Business English and broad knowledge of English and American literature.[1] This particular course unit surveyed non-fiction works on the political, social, economic, and cultural conditions of Great Britain and the United States.[2] There were similar courses offered in various forms from the early 1970s to the mid 1990s at the Department of English that aimed to broaden and/or deepen students' knowledge of American society, covering the social, political, economic, and historical conditions in the United States. These were commonly offered as one course unit within a growing number of survey courses in American literature at the department.[3]

In the early 1990s, discussions began about creating a large survey course in North American studies at UU, partially prompted by the establishment of the Swedish Institute of North American Studies in 1985. By the fall term of 1996, these discussions were made reality when the first survey course in North American studies at the basic level (first cycle entry-level) was offered by SINAS. The course was taught in English and consisted of four course units: Introduction to North American Society and Culture; American History; American Politics; and American and Canadian Literature in the Twentieth Century.[4] Because of the course's interdisciplinary character, it was jointly financed by the Languages section and the History, Philosophy and Arts section of the Faculty of Arts, as well as by the Faculty of Social Sciences.[5]

While SINAS initially had been a stand-alone research center at UU, it was made a section of the Department of English in 2003. At this point, the survey course, as well as other courses in American studies, were incorporated into the course

offerings at the Department of English, within the newly formed Faculty of Languages.[6] Today, SINAS, and UU, is the only place in Sweden for the interdisciplinary study of North America.

Currently, UU offers American studies courses at the BA and MA levels. The full term "American Studies A" (first cycle entry-level) course of 30 ECTS[7] is offered during fall terms and consists of four modules: "Introduction to American History," "Introduction to American Politics," "Race and Ethnicity in the United States," and "American Media Cultures." Two of these courses—on history and politics—are offered as both on-campus and online options. The full term "American Studies B" (first cycle continuation-level) course of 30 ECTS runs during spring terms and requires previous studies of 30 ECTS in the humanities or social sciences. It can, in other words, either be studied as a continuation of "American Studies A" or as a free-standing course. The B-level course—which, together with the A-level course, can become a minor field of study ("biämne") in a BA degree—consists of the modules "Global American History," "Current Issues in American Politics," "Heritage and Memory in American Culture," and "Current Research in American Studies." At the MA level (second cycle), UU offers two 7.5 ECTS courses: the advanced survey course "Understanding the United States" and "Swedish-American Relations in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives." SINAS has also developed a 7.5 ECTS online course together with Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, called "Collaborating on Crisis Studies in Sweden and the United States: Problem Solving via Digital Technologies," which since 2022 has been offered during fall terms. All of these courses were either revised or created in 2022–23.

Some observations can be made about the nature of the SINAS courses. First, the number of courses has recently grown. For many years, students were only provided the eight modules existing within the previous versions of the A- and B-level terms. Those older courses had an emphasis on history, politics, and mass media—these three themes made up six out of eight modules. There was also a literature module in the B-level course for several years. Although attention to media is reduced in the current versions of the courses, the focus on history and politics has remained strong. To some degree, this is a holdover from previous course designs. It does, however, also reflect student demand. The modules in history and politics, and especially the introductory A-level modules, attract a steady number of students.

A third observation concerns the geographic focus of the courses. Even though SINAS is a center for "North American studies" and the courses are labeled in English as "American studies," the official Swedish name for these courses is *USA-kunskap*, which literally translates to "knowledge about the United States." This is indeed the more accurate description of the scope of the courses. None of the courses deal with Canada or Mexico or apply hemispheric perspectives on the study of North America. Rather, the focus is very much on historical and contemporary issues relating specifically to the United States. While this is clearly limiting, there are several explanations for this. One is institutional and historical: SINAS has always had a US focus, largely due to the academic interest of previous staff. Another reason is the expertise of its current staff, who have worked specifically on the United States and on American-Swedish relations. Lastly, there is an outsize interest among media, the general public, and students in the United States, and the Department of English and SINAS staff have for many years sought to lean into this interest.

There are a few challenges related to the current course structure in American studies at UU and we want to highlight three of them. First, it has

never been possible to obtain a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in American studies in Sweden. The lack of a degree option—especially at the BA level—probably makes it difficult to retain students across terms. Many students take either a full term of American studies or individual 7.5 ECTS courses as part of other degree programs, in, for example, history, law, business, or political science. The lack of a bachelor's thesis and a bachelor's degree in American studies means that there is little incentive for ambitious students to continue their studies within the subject. Since student retention is a challenge, it has been necessary to allow for students without previous knowledge in American studies to also enroll in the B-level course (and its individual 7.5 ECTS courses). While some students in, for example, "Global American Politics" will have studied the full term of "American Studies A," other students will not have any previous knowledge of US history or society. This creates a challenge of progression. In essence, it is not currently possible to ensure that students who complete the B-level course have an equal understanding of the subject at hand. Without the prospect of a degree in American studies, student retention and knowledge progression will remain a problem.[8]

The second challenge is one of staffing. SINAS currently consists of two permanent teaching staff members. This naturally creates a constraint since the existing expertise and research focus will affect the content of the course offerings. Finally, and related to the above, the third challenge concerns the decentralized nature of educational funding at UU. The decisions regarding which courses to offer are made by individual departments. This means that the Department of English at UU is the gatekeeper of American studies as a higher education subject in Sweden. All course offerings are subject to the head of the English department—who is responsible for the educational budget and staffing—and its department board—which decides on curriculum and course offerings. At the moment, each 7.5 ECTS module in American studies is granted eight two-hour seminars. This makes it practically impossible to include exhaustive coverage of important themes and topics. Some issues that would be beneficial to cover more extensively include environmentalism, poverty, popular culture, and commercialism. Most significantly, Native American history and Indigenous perspectives are currently devoted rather little space in the A- and B-level courses. With more seminars per course, or with more courses offered as part of a coherent and degree-awarding package of courses, that problem could more easily be rectified.

North America in Swedish Higher Education

We have chosen to do the broader mapping of the field by looking at what first and second cycle courses are available on North American culture, history, society, and politics at Swedish universities. Our discussion then examines these options, looking at where these courses are offered, at what level and with what progression, what disciplines they are in, and what topics they deal with.

In our search for courses, we took advantage of the fact that Swedish university admissions is mainly a centralized process, where applications to all courses and degree programs at both first- and second-cycle levels are submitted via the website antagning.se. This site thus collects all available courses and has a good search function. Our search was conducted on April 16, 2024, and included courses and degree programs that were currently, or had been, advertised for the spring and fall term of 2024. The search terms used were "USA," "Amerika" ("America"), and "Nordamerika" ("North America"). We also used "Kanada" ("Canada"), but this term did not yield any hits. In addition to course or degree program names, the search engine

also uses keywords that each higher education institute submits for their courses.

Two things should be noted about this method of collecting material. First, if we had gone through all courses and degree programs on offer at Swedish HEIs ourselves, we would likely have identified a few courses that the search engine has not included. Such an approach was not practicable, however, nor do we have reason to believe that differences would have been more than marginal. Furthermore, a prospective student would be unlikely to go beyond the results of the search engine. Second, this method means that shorter modules that are part of 30-ECTS (one term) courses or degree programs with a focus on American studies content that are not offered as individual courses do not show up in our material. One important example of such modules is the components focusing on American literature and culture in degree programs for future teachers of English, as well as in English degree courses generally. Modules focusing wholly or partly on the US or North America more broadly are, in our experience, also likely to be found in disciplines such as history, media studies, and political science.

After an initial review of the search results, in which duplicates and courses that did not have a significant focus on the US or North America were removed, we were left with a collection of thirty-one individual search results. Only one of these was a degree program, a two-year master's program in English with a specialization in American literature and culture, offered by the Department of English at Uppsala University. In addition to this program, the results thus included thirty courses; thirteen of these were offered by SINAS and have been discussed above.

Of the approximately fifty institutions of higher education in Sweden, only seven appear in our material: Gothenburg University (GU), Jönköping University (JU), Karlstad University (KAU), Linköping University (LiU), Mälardalen University (MdU), Södertörn University (SH), and Uppsala University (UU). Unsurprisingly, of these seven universities, Uppsala University stands out; in addition to the thirteen courses offered by SINAS, an additional five courses and the only degree program are found at UU. The other twelve courses are divided as follows: GU and SH offer three courses each, JU and KAU two each, and LiU and MdU one each. The dominance of Uppsala University in our material is partly explained by its being the home of SINAS, but also by the fact that its Department of English is home to the only chair in American literature in Sweden, as well as a doctoral program with a specialization in American literature. It is worth noting that many universities that are not found in our material are large or midsize institutions where research in a broadly defined American studies field is indeed conducted. The most notable absence is perhaps Stockholm University (SU), especially since there are centers for both Latin American studies and Canadian studies at SU. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Linneaus University—which has a strong profile in research and teaching on postcoloniality, indigeneity, and global history—does not offer courses tagged with any of our search terms.

Looking at the courses offered outside of SINAS from the point of view of their level and whether they are part of a progression, we find that Uppsala University's offerings likewise stand out. The master's program in English with a specialization in American literature and culture entails progression within the two-year course of study. However, the degree program builds on a bachelor's degree in English with a literature specialization, rather than requiring a bachelor in American literature (which does not exist as a degree in Sweden) or allowing an American studies degree to count towards eligibility. Nine courses of the seventeen not offered by SINAS in our material are offered at the advanced level. As with the

master's degree program at UU, the eligibility requirements for these nine courses are either a bachelor's degree or specific courses in the subject within which the course is offered. In other words, the progression is not in the form of more in-depth knowledge of the United States or North America as such. Rather, the area-specific content mainly appears to serve as case studies for processes, concepts, or ideas central to the discipline in question. The courses at first cycle level rarely have eligibility requirements other than general university eligibility, and when they do, they specify courses within the subject in question.

To find out which disciplines these courses are offered in, we have looked at the subjects that are specified for each course at the centralized university admissions portal in Sweden, antagning.se. These are mainly the same as the main field of study, as stated in the official course documents, except for USA-kunskap (American studies)—the official field of study for the courses offered by SINAS—which are labeled "English" and "civics" ("Samhällskunskap") or "English" and "history" (and in one case "civics" and "languages"). This discrepancy reflects the fact that American studies is not generally recognized as a discipline in Sweden. Nine of the seventeen courses in our material not offered by SINAS are specified as courses in "English," sometimes in combination with "literary studies" ("Litteraturvetenskap"), highlighting the close connection between the subject of English and the study of American literature and culture in Sweden. All these courses are also offered with English language instruction. A tenth course, "Creative Writing for Teachers, with a Focus on the US," is unique in its material since it has the label "English" in combination with "pedagogy" and "educational sciences," and it is given in the official main field "curriculum studies" ("Didaktik"). The course is on the teaching of creative writing, includes a focus on creative writing in the US context, and is aimed at Swedish school teachers. Of the remaining seven courses, three are offered in "religious studies" and "theology," two in "history," one in "intellectual history" ("Idé- och lärdomshistoria"), and the final one is labeled "civics" ("Samhällskunskap") and "political science" ("Statsvetenskap"). If we look at subject labels and universities in combination, we find that courses offered in the English subject can be found at four of the seven universities in our material (UU, KAU, MdU, and SH), whereas courses in religion are offered at three universities (GU, LiU, and JU), with one course each. Courses in history are offered at GU and UU, and the one course in political science is offered by JU. The dominance of English is thus also reflected in the number of universities that offer courses in the subject.

The dominance of courses in English, particularly those with a literary focus—effectively being courses in American literature—is further emphasized by the fact that the sole degree program in our material is in English with a specialization in American literature and culture, offered at the Department of English at UU. It is worth noting that the information about the master's program emphasizes that the American literature and culture specialization includes courses on "literature, theory and contemporary critical debates" that "include elements of American literature, allowing you to study this literature transnationally and comparatively."[9] A transnational perspective is certainly motivated by current dominant research trends. However, nine of the eleven courses offered (not counting the final master's thesis) are identical to the ones offered by the master's program with a specialization in English literature at the same department. Student numbers and economic concerns surely play a role in such decisions, but this also reflects an academic tradition in Sweden of seeing American literature as part of English-language literature rather than as a component of area studies.

The dominance of the English subject is not unexpected; however, it is somewhat surprising that more disciplines were not represented in our material. In particular, the absence of courses in film studies and media studies is surprising, given the importance of the US in these subjects and the amount of research conducted in these areas at Swedish universities. While degree programs within these disciplines certainly include modules on the US or North America, it seems a shame that there are no courses on offer for students interested in American film or media, except for the one 7.5-credit course offered by SINAS (which, however, carries the subject label "civics," perhaps making it harder to find for prospective students).

While we have not analyzed course syllabi, the course names and course descriptions tell us something about their foci. Courses in English with a focus on American literature (nine) are mainly at the second cycle level (six) and focus on either a genre (autobiography in two cases), a period (modernism or colonial and early republic, respectively), or the writings of a particular group (African American women writers). Of the three courses offered with a focus on American literature at first cycle level, one is an overview course while the other two focus on multiethnic literature and ecocriticism, respectively. Of the seven courses in disciplines other than English, only one is offered at the advanced level. An interesting contrast is that while all three courses in religious studies deal with religion and politics, the three courses in history/intellectual history have different foci: "The US in the World: From Colonial Periphery to Superpower" and "The Road to the White House: Modern US Political History" at GU and "Diversity and Democracy: The Philosophical Tradition of Cultural Pluralism in the USA" at SH. The course in political science at JU picks up two themes from the other courses but adds class: "American Politics: Race, Class, Religion." Even across disciplines we can thus identify certain recurring themes in questions of social identity and diversity (ethnicity, race, class, gender) and the roles of and connections between religion and politics in US society. With knowledge of ongoing research in American studies in Sweden, it is also possible to identify the research expertise of individual researchers in these courses.

Challenges and Possibilities

As has become clear from the discussion above, how we understand American studies teaching in Sweden depends on several factors, including the boundaries of the subject area and the institutional nature of the research field. If American studies teaching includes the development of incremental knowledge about North America, the materials and sources adopted in teaching—the subject matter itself—become significant. This kind of teaching about the United States is done in several different disciplinary contexts in Sweden today. If American studies teaching is defined by the development of coherent and complex knowledge about North America, there are relatively few courses in Sweden that aim to do this today, most of which—unsurprisingly—are offered by SINAS, yet even there the complexity of knowledge is stymied by the challenge of enabling a clear progression. Another way of thinking about teaching in the field entails making central the understanding of key concepts and perspectives in international American studies such as race, settler colonialism, Indigeneity, slavery, imperialism, frontier, capitalism, and freedom in the context of North America. These concepts and their relevance to America are clearly grappled with in courses across several disciplines, both within and outside the American studies subject.

Alongside the teaching of key critical concepts, it has been argued that American studies is defined by its "capaciousness" and interdiscipli-

narity.[10] While interdisciplinarity could be a reasonable definition of what would constitute American studies teaching in Sweden, that too raises additional questions. Although several of the courses offered at SINAS are interdisciplinary in their structure and content—in terms of problems addressed, sources studied, and scholarship used—the lack of a bachelor's thesis course or a master's program with dedicated theory and methods instruction means that interdisciplinarity is not itself explicitly taught as content matter. In addition, making interdisciplinarity a defining characteristic also raises the question of which disciplines should be included. Looking at the current situation in Sweden, the study of American literature and culture is mainly located in English departments across Sweden, whereas the study of its history, politics, and media cultures is the main focus of the courses offered at SINAS. From an international perspective, where a cultural studies approach that draws heavily on literary studies is an important component of American studies, this division emphasizes that even the more interdisciplinary approaches of SINAS are shaped by its institutional context.

American studies teaching in Sweden, then, is perhaps best described as archipelagic, consisting of a number of differently sized islands that together constitute the territory. Since teaching and research are closely related, it is important to acknowledge the nature of the American studies research field in Sweden. This field involves a relatively limited number of scholars who are scattered across universities, departments, and disciplines, many of whom are engaged in the Swedish Association for American Studies (SAAS). Despite the massive interest in the United States in Sweden, the academic study of North America is limited, and American studies is not widely recognized as a research field—either within or outside academia. Scholars researching North American topics mainly influence teaching locally at their home departments, in subjects such as English, political science, or religion. They do not have institutional capacity or support to build more complex American studies training, but they have an American studies research competency that they can bring to their teaching.

The situation as we have described it has apparent problems. Even though coherent American studies education exists at UU, the prospect of fostering complex knowledge about North America is limited by the lack of a subject degree. While it is a strength that individuals at various departments and within various fields can contribute to teaching about North America in Sweden, this means that knowledge about North America is largely taught in isolated, small pieces. Thus, the archipelagic nature of American studies teaching as it currently works does not support a sustainably interdisciplinary approach. In addition, since American studies teaching is carried out by a small number of individuals and only exists as a dedicated subject at a single institution in Sweden, it is worryingly vulnerable.

The archipelagic character of American studies research and teaching in Sweden will likely remain in the foreseeable future, but we remain hopeful for some incremental but important changes that could have a significant impact. In fact, its archipelagic nature can become a strength given the right approach. First, we need to foster an awareness that American studies is a teaching subject in Sweden, grounded in a vibrant and international research field. In other words, we need to make visible and tangible the existence of the archipelago and supporting an understanding of the individual institutions not as separate islands, but as linked. Second, it would be greatly beneficial for the subject nationally if American studies becomes a degree-awarding subject at UU. Such a change would elevate the status of the subject in Sweden and

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create better conditions for student retention and knowledge progression. In terms of our extended metaphor, we think of this as establishing a main island—a hub that gathers competencies and drives development but also provides support to smaller islands. This vision should not be understood as establishing a neo-colonial-style cosmopolitan center. Instead, the teaching landscape would be characterized by exchanges in multiple directions and a recognition of the interdependence of all its actors. It necessitates increasing communication and collaboration between teachers across subjects and disciplines, as well as within American studies at SINAS, to enable more sustained exchanges of ideas, knowledge, and experiences. Put differently, we need to establish regular ferry links and bridges between our islands. This is the work not only of individuals, but also of institutions.

Notes

1. “Uppsala universitet. Engelska. Lokala studieplaner ht 1974.,” F1.2: Studieplaner och litteraturlistor 1957–1976, Engelska institutionen (Ei), Uppsala University Archives (UUA).

2. “Uppsala universitet. Engelska. Lokala studieplaner ht 1974.,” F1.2: Studieplaner och litteraturlistor 1957–1976, in Ei, UUA.

3. F1.1: Studieplaner och litteraturlistor 1965–1977; F1.2: Studieplaner och litteraturlistor 1957–1976; F1.3: Studieplaner och litteraturlistor 1977–1980; F1.4: Studieplaner 1981–1989; and F1.5: Studieplaner och litteraturlistor 1990–1995, in Ei, UUA.

4. “Kursplan Baskurs i Nordamerikakunskap, 20 poäng, Läsåret 1996/97,” F1: Undervisningsdokumentation 1986–1996 Arkivlistor, UPPDOK, Svenska institutet för nordamerikastudier (SINAS), UUA.

5. “Remissvar ang. Förslag till ny baskurs i Nordamerikakunskap – SINAS,” December 5, 1995, F1: Undervisningsdokumentation 1986–1996 Arkivlistor, UPPDOK, in SINAS, UUA and “Uppsala universitet, Språkvetenskaliga sektionsnämnden. Utdrag Protokoll,” December 14, 1995, F1: Undervisningsdokumentation 1986–1996 Arkivlistor, UPPDOK, in SINAS, UUA.

6. F1.7: Kurs-/Utbildnings-planer 1996–2004; and F1.11: Kurs-/Utbildnings-planer. Praktisk engelska, USA-kunskap, fackspråkliga kurser, keltiska kurser 2005–2016, in Ei, UUA.

7. ECTS stands for European Credit Transfer System. All courses at Swedish universities comprise a specified number of ECTS credits, where one-week full time study equals 1.5 credits and one term equals 30 credits. A BA degree is thus 180 ECTS credits.

8. Hjorthén, “Curriculum Development,” 76–87.

9. “Master’s Programme in English.”

10. Sze, “Introduction: Engaging Contradictions,” 341–45; Cohen and Wang, “Teaching the Introduction,” 347–54.

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SECTION II:

Institutional and Disciplinary Contexts

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCATION

Practicing American History in Sweden

Abstract: This article deals with the teaching of American history in Sweden. It focuses on developments at Uppsala University, where a course in American history has been taught since 1996, as a part of our American studies sequence. Placing it within the larger context of doing American studies in Sweden, it traces the development of the course discusses important topics taught and the challenges of finding suitable reading materials for students enrolled in the course.

Keywords: teaching, American history, curricula, textbooks, Sweden

In October 1996, the Swedish Institute for North American Studies (SINAS) at Uppsala University introduced a five-week module in American history at the undergraduate level. It was part of a semester-long course called "Basic course in North American studies," where the other three courses included "Introduction to the societies and cultures of North America," "American politics," and "American and Canadian literature of the 20th Century." I had the privilege of being a part of the planning and establishment of this course, and for over a quarter of a century I have taught the course in American history. This article provides some reflections on the experiences of teaching the course and on the challenges of doing American history in Uppsala and in Sweden.

The course in 1996 was not the first time that American history was taught at Uppsala University. It had been part of the history curriculum since the 1960s in the general survey courses of Western/world history for undergraduate students. It was, however, most likely the first separate course in American history offered at Uppsala University. The course plan that was adopted describes the course in the following way:

> [t]he course gives an overview of American history from colonial times to the present day. Special emphasis is placed on aspects related to American exceptionalism and ethnicity. The goal is to give students a better understanding of contemporary American society by deepening their understanding of important events and forces that have helped shape its history.[1]

The short paragraph captures some of the challenges of teaching American history in Sweden. One the one hand, the great majority of Swedish undergraduate university students in an introductory course in American history come to the classroom with often fairly sketchy notions of American history from their secondary-school training. Thus, an American history course at the introductory level needs to give an overview of American history.

Furthermore, the course took into account the significance of location—the fact that it was taught outside the United States. We included aspects that students could be assumed to have some familiarity with, or dimensions of American history that lent themselves to comparisons with other countries. In this case, ethnicity (and the experience of American immigration) was assumed to be familiar to the Swedish students, while the discussion of exceptionalism gave the students an opportunity to think of American history from a comparative and contrastive perspective.

The experiences of the first group of students were positive overall. A few quotes from the course evaluation include "incredibly good," "I am very happy with this course," and "I learned a great deal." Negative comments pointed to the compressed time frame (the course was taught twice a week over a five-week period), and, as one student pointed out, "it seems impossible to cover more than two hundred years in five weeks." No students addressed the issue of prior knowledge or preparation for American history, while a few commented positively on the special emphasis on ethnicity and exceptionalism.[2]

The course has continued to be taught for almost three decades. It has remained popular, with robust enrollment numbers. It also exists as an online distance course. The basic elements have remained the same—an overview with a special emphasis on topics that resonate with the domestic, Swedish context. The current course description reads:

> The course gives an overview of the historical developments in that geographic area

> which is today the United States. The emphasis is on the period from colonial times to the present. There is special focus on social, political, and cultural dimensions and on the role of diversity in American history.[3]

It can be noted that the emphasis on ethnicity has been replaced by "diversity," and that "exceptionalism" as an explicit theme has been removed. However, the question "how different is the United States?" is still introduced and discussed during the course. As a number of international students take the course (it is one of the English-language courses available to non-Swedish speaking students at Uppsala University), the comparative element is used as both an academic and a pedagogical tool.

The phrase "that geographic area which is today the United States" should also be noted. It is a way of recognizing that the geographic configuration of the United States has changed over the years. It provides an opportunity to problematize westward expansion and manifest destiny, as students all too often are bound by what Daniel Immerwahr calls the "logo map" of the United States.[4] It also reflects an increasing awareness of the conflict between the Eurocentric and Indigenous view of the history of what became the United States, something which has increasingly become a topic of discussion in the American studies community in the Nordic countries.[5]

Of course, the development away from exceptionalism and the questioning of Eurocentrism mirrors developments in American historiography. With regard to exceptionalism, our location in Sweden lends itself to fruitful discussions with our Swedish and international students that are different than if the course had been taught in the United States. The political or ideological aspects of American exceptionalism so noticeable in American academic milieus work in different ways here. Even though we discuss the consequences of an argument that says that the United States is not only different but also better, the geographic, cultural, and political distances between the two countries mean that contexts are less ideologically charged. The discussions take on a more distanced and academic meaning. The challenge to the Eurocentric seems to be more natural for our students. One explanation can be many years of discussion of postcolonialism in the humanities and social sciences in Sweden. Another factor is a growing awareness of Swedish colonialism and Indigeneity, both in North America and in Sweden itself.

Course Literature

The significance of location is particularly noticeable when it comes to the course literature, which is a special challenge when teaching American history outside of the United States. There is a plethora of textbooks on American history. The sleek, pedagogically designed, nicely illustrated books, these days often linked to extensive online resources, are clearly produced with the large American market for undergraduate US history survey courses in mind. Although the requirements vary from state to state, and although the quality of instruction is often bemoaned, it is still safe to assume that the majority of American first-year university students have taken one or two courses in American history in high school. This means that almost all of the American textbooks are intended for students with an American education who have already taken courses in American history. The books can thus not immediately be used in a Swedish classroom. In addition, our courses are usually shorter than their often semester-long equivalents in the United States.

We have had to seek other course books. For many years we used *The Free and the Unfree* by

Peter Carroll and David Noble. Originally published in 1977, it has undergone revisions and appeared in several editions. As the title suggests, the book is structured around freedom and unfreedom in American history, a theme many of the Swedish students were familiar with. Its length also made it possible to teach in five weeks. When *The Free and the Unfree* finally went out of print, we opted for Philip Jenkins's *A History of the United States,* now in its fifth edition. The book is a highly readable survey of American history, pointing to several important lines of development in American history.

In recent years, we have added Jill Lepore's *This America: The Case for the Nation* (2019), which explicitly deals with American nationhood and the question of who has been included or excluded in the American nation. She wrote it while working on *These Truths*—a massive one-volume history of the United States—partly to reflect on the nature of writing a national history.[6] Students have responded well to Lepore. The book is analytical and thesis driven, and complements Jenkins's textbook, which is more of a traditional textbook survey. It gives us a good opportunity to raise theoretical and methodological aspects of nationality and the issues of selection involved in writing a national history. It helps the students understand the contentious nature of history, both American and of other countries. We read Lepore at the end of the course, and it works very well as a conclusion to the course.

There are also shorter pieces in the course, such as an article by Ta-Nehisi Coates and excerpts from Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror*. The internet also provides excellent online resources that resonate with today's technologically oriented students. We ask them to watch and consider lectures by American historians Daniel Immerwahr, Matthew Frye Jacobson, and Gordon Wood, to listen to an episode from the public radio show *BackStory* with Ed Ayers, Brian Balogh, and Peter Onuf, and to watch Barack Obama's speech in Selma, Alabama, from 2015.

The Larger Context

Our history course is also related to the wider position of American studies in Sweden. The country has had close cultural and social relations with the United States for two centuries, partly due to the long migration history between the two countries since the early nineteenth century, and to a common sense of modernity since the early twentieth century.[7] Still, the academic fields of American studies and American history have been weakly developed. In two overviews from 1958 and 1985, respectively, Norwegian Americanist Sigmund Skard and Swedish historian Harald Runblom point to the paucity of Swedish academic work on American history and note the unwillingness of Swedish historians to go beyond their country for topics.[8] In a recent discussion, furthermore, Adam Hjorthén has noted the contrast between the very strong general interest in the United States in Sweden and the weakly developed Swedish academic interest, calling it a "Swedish-American paradox."[9] It is a paradox that also influences the teaching of American history in Sweden.

A large research project on trans-Atlantic migration in Uppsala during the 1960s and 1970s is a major exception. Scores of dissertations, books, and articles were written, in which the United States played an important role.[10] Still, most of the emphasis remained on the Swedish side of the migration, and few studies focused on the United States proper.[11] As a part of the cultural Cold War, there was also an American interest in US governmental and non-governmental organizations to promote American studies and American studies in Sweden. Plans existed to create a special chair in American history at Uppsala University, which would have been the only one in the country, building on the migration project

and with support from, for example, the American Council of Learned Societies.

A separate library for American history was established and a Swedish language textbook on American history—*Förenta Staternas Historia* by Håkan Berggren—was published in in 1966 in anticipation of such a decision. Eventually, however, the University opted for a separate professorship in American literature in the Department of English, where this field of study had been growing since the early 1950s, with significant support from the Rockefeller Foundation. The decision not to establish a chair in American history meant that Swedish historians did not take the step from Swedish-American history to "regular" American history. The strong interest in trans-Atlantic migration and in mobility was instead channeled into social and geographical mobility studies dealing with Sweden itself. In addition, demography became emphasized, and eventually a special chair in demographic history—instead of American history—was established, at Umeå University.

How different is Sweden from other countries in its approach to American history? Answering that question requires yet-to-be-made systematic comparisons, but the contributions to *Historians Across Borders* from 2014[12] suggest that the situation for American history is better in, for example, the UK, Germany, and France. In 1985, Magnus Mörner, one of the few Swedish historians who made his entire career on non-Swedish topics, suggested that a country's size could be one factor that explains the degree to which its national historiographies pay attention to other countries. Although he saw the strong national paradigm among his Swedish colleagues, he noted that they did not deviate significantly in their interest patterns from historians of "other smaller countries in Europe" in this respect.[13]

Mörner's observations are corroborated by a bibliographic analysis of the subject matters of Swedish doctoral dissertations in history from 1976 to 2005. It concluded that of the 600 dissertations presented during the period, almost three-fourths dealt with Sweden, and that the share focusing on national Swedish topics increased during the period.[14] The author comments that the disinterest in "international history" among Swedish historians seems "remarkable" given the growing fields of global and international history in recent decades.[15] Similar observations were made in 2003, when another Swedish historian noted that the "national paradigm" remained strong in the country. The 2003 report specifically lists the geographic focuses of all dissertations from 1997 to 2001. Close to 80 percent dealt with Swedish conditions. The US was the focus of 1 percent.[16]

Conclusion: Does Location Matter Among Swedish Historians of the US?

The teaching of American history must take location into account. Swedish students lack the educational and cultural contexts that most American students in an introductory course in American history have. This affects the textbooks that can be used, and also influences which aspects of American history can receive special attention. We have also seen that comparative discussions become important. Susanna Delfino and Marcus Gräser have noted that since late colonial times, Europeans have looked at North America with "an instinctively comparative eye."[17] This has been true in the way our teaching of American history has been structured, and when a second course in American history was added on the intermediate level in the 2010s, it focused on global aspects of American history.

The significance of location is also clear in terms of topics for research in American history. The dominant set of questions that Swedish histori-

ans have studied have dealt with Swedish-American relations broadly conceived, with trans-Atlantic migration occupying a prominent position. It is also worth repeating that for a long time the migration was studied from a Swedish vantage point, and it is telling that strong American interests in questions of assimilation, identity, and ethnicity did not enter Swedish historiography until the 1990s. Location has also been important for several Swedish historians who have made contributions to American history in other areas, such as Native American history, early American history, and American ethnic history, in that they have had significant experiences outside Sweden, including time spent pursuing academic degrees.[18]

As internationalization of higher education continues to increase, and as the strong American orientation of young persons in Sweden remains strong, it may be that the significance of location will diminish. English is rapidly becoming a *lingua franca*, even in the humanities in Uppsala. Some fear that the Swedish language is in jeopardy as an academic language, whereas others claim (or hope) that the challenges to the national paradigm in Swedish historiography will increase, and that scholars will look beyond Sweden even more for their inquiries. The degree to which this benefits the study of American history in Sweden is unclear. Ultimately, however, we know from the many studies of American influences in and on the world that these processes are rarely unilinear. Local contexts and locations will thus most likely continue to matter.

Notes

1. "Baskurs i Nordamerikastudier."
2. "Baskurs i Nordamerikastudier."
3. https://www.uu.se/utbildning/kurs?query=5EN742.
4. Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire.* It should be noted that *How to Hide an Empire* is used in course in "Global American History," offered in the American studies sequence on the intermediate level at SINAS.
5. Fur, "The US of America," 1–2.
6. Lepore, *These Truths.*
7. Blanck, "Migration and Modernity."
8. Runblom, "United States History," 390.
9. Hjorthén, "Curriculum Development."
10. Runblom and Norman, eds., *From Sweden to America.*
11. Blanck, "Five Decades."
12. Barreyre et al., eds., *Historians Across Borders.*
13. Mörner, "De svenska historikerna," 441.
14. Amirell, *Svenska doktorsavhandlingar,* 22.
15. Amirell, *Svenska doktorsavhandlingar*, 21.
16. Aronsson, "Bilaga," 189–94.
17. Delfino and Gräser, "Writing American History," 97.
18. Blanck, *The Creation*; Edling, *A Revolution*; Fur, *A Nation of Women.*

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TEACHING FOR PROSPERITY?

Preparing American Studies Students for the Job Market

Abstract: This article explores the challenges faced by American studies faculty and students in Denmark, specifically those preparing for careers in Danish-American relations outside academia. It discusses the evolution of American studies programs at Danish universities, particularly the University of Southern Denmark, in response to criticism regarding the applicability of humanities degrees in the private sector. The article highlights curricular changes that emphasize practical skills, such as the inclusion of business courses and internships, while maintaining the interdisciplinary foundation of the program. Additionally, it examines the cultural and academic benefits that American studies students bring to business and diplomatic sectors, especially in understanding US-Danish transnational relations. The article also addresses the broader dilemma faced by humanities programs in balancing traditional academic virtues with practical job skills. Finally, it reflects on the shifting global influence of the US and its implications for future American studies faculty and students in Denmark.

Keywords: American studies, Danish-American relations, humanities, academic job skills, transnational understanding

But what can you do with an American studies degree? All students in Danish American studies (and likely beyond) have probably been asked this genuine but often slightly disapproving question. While the job skills of humanities graduates are frequently questioned in the media and by politicians, one would think that American studies graduates should be highly sought after. The US remains Denmark's largest export market, the two countries have a historically strong bond through NATO, and just last year (2023), a new agreement allowed for the establishment of an American military presence on mainland Denmark (Greenland already houses US troops). Besides, there is the overwhelming American cultural presence in Western Europe in terms of popular culture and brands (e.g., iPhones and Coca-Cola). In short, the US is arguably the most important foreign nation in Danish daily life. Fascinated by the American presence in Danish society, I was an American studies student myself in the graduate program at the University of Southern Denmark, where I later joined the faculty. In my fifteen years at the American studies program, I witnessed firsthand the challenges of preparing for a career in Danish-American relations, and later, I faced those challenges from a different angle as I tried to prepare students for the very same journey. In those years, the curricular changes to the American studies programs (BA and MA) reflected major developments in job prospects for American studies graduates. The focus of this essay will be on these changes and their impact.

Adapting to the Market

Like most other humanities programs in Denmark, American studies is struggling with criticism from politicians and the media for having high unemployment among recent graduates and not training students in skills immediately applicable to the private sector. As an interdisciplinary program, American studies at the University of Southern Denmark emphasizes both historical and cultural approaches, and after the BA program was established, business and politics were given additional attention in the curriculum. In addition to the traditional skills of humanities students—critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural literacy—the program also focuses on language skills and transnational communication. While mandatory courses comprise the majority of the program, students are encouraged to analyze the US from a variety of perspectives through electives and their choice of a third-year program beyond American studies. This allows students to cultivate their own particular interest in the US and their future career. Yet the path to a US-focused career has not always been as easy as many students might have hoped.

While many, including myself, have argued that the interdisciplinary approach provides the best comprehensive understanding of the US, and while many students would agree, there have been voices of criticism from some students who wished for further opportunities for specialization. These might not represent the majority, but these types of comments have been presented frequently enough and for long enough to be taken seriously. Students have courses on American politics but lack the theoretical knowledge and administrative experience to compete with political science graduates for jobs in ministries and embassies. They are taught business history but cannot compete with business majors. They are required to read, study, and take exams in English but lack the linguistic specialization of students in the English program. Due to reforms in the Danish educational system, American studies graduates can no longer qualify as high school teachers of English, which was a common career choice for graduates just a decade ago. The negative responses that many graduates experienced in their job search also reveal that the problem lies not just

with the students or the university but with the perception of employers. Some private companies would rather hire a business major with a minor interest in the US than an American studies graduate with a flair for business.

However, this is one area where action has been taken in recent years with considerable success. Within a few years, the curriculum in the American studies program has expanded to include more business courses, such as "American Studies in Perspectives," a project-based course in which students collaborate with a local private company. Furthermore, after pressure from students and the administration alike, the program has significantly expanded its internship opportunities. Today, most students in the MA program complete internships as part of their study, giving them practical experience that helps them translate their academic skills into potential jobs. While humanities faculties struggle to make their graduates more attractive to the job market, they have also tried to make the private sector more aware of the benefits of hiring graduates from the humanities. While universities and specific programs have had to adapt, sectors of the job market have also developed their view of humanities graduates. In recent years, various organizations and government institutions have focused on marketing the skills of recent graduates to small and mid-sized businesses in Denmark. The variety of skills and interdisciplinary approaches taught in the humanities have proven to be beneficial to companies that had previously overlooked the advantages of hiring graduates proficient in communication, cultural awareness, dissemination, and critical thinking. American economic and cultural power and its impact on the Nordic countries highlight the importance of understanding cultural differences. Research conducted by students on behalf of Danish businesses revealed that many Danes and Danish businesses incorrectly assume that Nordic cultural norms can easily be translated into beneficial partnerships across the Atlantic. This assumption is likely due to the dominance of American popular culture in Western Europe, the extensive media coverage of American politics, and the high level of English proficiency among the general population. While American studies students might not be explicitly trained in business theory, they can provide valuable insights into the challenges of cultural translation, which play a crucial part in business and diplomatic cooperation.

Academic or Practical Skills?

This leads to an age-old dilemma for the humanities. How far should programs go in cutting out traditional academic skills in exchange for practical skills? And who should teach them? For faculty members, it can be challenging to go from teaching the eighteenth-century social history of New England one day to teaching how to conduct market analyses the next. The increased focus on practical skills has forced some faculty away from their core topics. Furthermore, in a small nation like Denmark, scholars are sometimes torn between conducting research into the US itself and studying its transnational relationship with their home country. Researching Danish-American relations and history will arguably attract more funding and immediate public interest at home but runs the risk of being relevant only to Danish audiences, leading to a lack of opportunity to highlight the great international potential among scholars at Danish universities. On the other hand, by focusing on the Danish or Nordic angle, scholars are in a unique position to provide insights into American power and influence abroad. The increased demand for 'applicable' research in the humanities and immediate economic benefits for the private sector in Denmark risks forcing scholars away from their main academic interests and, therefore, their best work.

The demands of the university administration and the political pressure to develop new courses emphasizing job skills impact not just faculty but also students. Reports and public debates emphasize the importance of working while studying in order to secure post-graduation employment, and students increasingly rely on jobs outside the university not just to pay the bills but also to provide the best possible transition into life after graduation. This focus on employability can come into conflict with important learning opportunities. Experiencing American society firsthand remains a crucial element of understanding Danish-American relations, and students are encouraged to take advantage of exchange opportunities at American universities. But studying abroad, even if only for a semester, can seem overwhelming for students who are expected to earn top grades, compete for student jobs, and succeed in life in general. The Danish job market encourages young American studies students to focus on non-academic student jobs rather than dedicating themselves to their studies—a discouraging but understandable development from the students' perspective. It is in the nature of interdisciplinary programs like American studies to lack a clear career path. Currently, graduates from the program at the University of Southern Denmark work at embassies, international offices at institutions of higher education, and communication departments, and hold a variety of teaching positions, as well as follow many other career paths. The variety of careers for American studies graduates can be seen as an advantage for many but a disadvantage for the job-conscious student. In this context, role models and older graduates sharing their stories are powerful tools of reassurance. Student organizations such as the Danish Student Association for American Studies (DSAAS) also play a crucial role in providing networking opportunities through events and social media. These provide valuable knowledge-sharing forums for students and graduates, as well as a sense of community.

The Decline of US Influence

While the history of American studies is rife with debates over theoretical trends, departmental loyalties, and the very question of how America itself is defined, American studies in Denmark faces another fundamental challenge: what if potential students lose interest? The decline of American hegemony and the rise of China as an (the?) economic and military power of the future has already begun, but it remains unclear how long the process will take. The US remains of crucial influence to Denmark and the other Nordic countries due to its military, political, economic, and cultural might, but the tides are shifting. If the twentieth century was the American Century, it is still unclear what the twenty-first century will be, but it will not be another one dominated by the US. This is already visible in the application numbers for American studies programs. This is likely due to a combination of factors, many of which are completely unrelated to the US (e.g., demographic developments in Denmark mean that there are generally fewer potential students). For American studies scholars, the dismantling of American power is a topic of intense interest, but it can be difficult to convince students to dedicate their future to understanding a culture that seems to be lessening in impact. We must not underestimate the significance of the current political chaos in the US and the reality of a second Trump presidency. For many American studies students, the US is a topic of not just academic interest but also emotional impact. Admiring the US is not a requirement for studying it (in fact, it can be detrimental to understanding it), but many students who choose the program have a generally positive view of the US.

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Despite the central role of the US in the Danish economy and popular culture, many Danish graduates of American studies have struggled to find a clear career path. The American studies program at the University of Southern Denmark was used here as an example of how that challenge has been addressed by the university and its faculty members. While improvements have occurred and practical skills are more emphasized, the academic core of the program—an interdisciplinary understanding of the US—must continue to be acknowledged for the benefits it provides its students.

Teaching American Studies
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TEACHING AMERICAN STUDIES WITHIN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY (*IDÉHISTORIA*)

Abstract: This article reflects on the author's experience of creating and teaching a set of courses with North American themes within the academic discipline of *idéhistoria*, intellectual history, at a Swedish university. It stresses the value of an *area studies* approach for training students in "a researcher's way to see and work" within this discipline. The more courses with themes from the US (and Canada) become "American studies," the better they contribute to prepare students to think about past thought in a way that defines the task of *idéhistoria* (in the author's opinion), namely a strictly contextualist approach. The article offers some examples of this. The fact that much about the US is familiar to Swedish students creates opportunities to understand past thought historically by exploring contexts that gradually make apparently familiar things less familiar, thus allowing them to be understood in unfamiliar ways. The courses have also become exercises in linguistic and cultural *translation* from American English, as a language that is fairly familiar to most Swedish students becomes more complex in their perception, with meanings and bearings shifting in time and space.

Keywords: contextualism, linguistic and cultural translation, area studies, Marshall McLuhan, W. E. B. Du Bois

An Americanist's special insights are rarely activated in teaching the basic course in intellectual history—*idéhistoria*—at Swedish universities, although the opportunities gradually increase as telescopic depictions of the "history of Western thought" approach our own time. Special courses at semi-advanced and advanced levels offer richer options in this regard. This article mirrors my experience of creating and teaching a whole set of such courses dealing with themes in North American thought. An underlying question is the following: can an *area studies* approach such as American studies add educational value in terms of training students in *particular* skills and perceptive habits that are essential to scholarly thinking within a discipline such as *idéhistoria*? Can it help students to learn "to think like a researcher" in such a field? My answer is yes, and I will try to show why. But first a few words about *idéhistoria*, which is an independent discipline with its own departments in Nordic academia, in contrast to most countries, including the US.

The term "history of ideas," the literal counterpart of "idéhistoria" in English, happened to become the label of a scholarly field with its own research agenda in the US soon after the discipline was established in Sweden in the early 1930s. The Baltimore philosopher Arthur Lovejoy crowned that process with founding the *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1940. In 1932, the literary history scholar Johan Nordström received a chair in *idé- och lärdomshistoria* at Uppsala University, immediately founding an organization and its yearbook, *Lychnos* (1936), the new discipline's counterpart of a journal. But "idéhistoria" in Sweden differed from "history of ideas," American style. Lovejoy's key approach was to follow supposedly eternal "unit ideas" through their successive combinations in the heads of thinkers through centuries, mainly by reading their texts. Nordström and his disciples were, on the contrary, strict *contextualists* in a non-theoretical way—at least in their approach to the "learned cultures" *in Sweden* which they focused on (in the first decades primarily by doing history of science). Past thought was supposed to be understood with empathy (*inlevelse*), by means of vivid descriptions of mundane situations in which intellectual activities took place.[1]

In certain ways, the Swedish tradition thus anticipated reactions against Lovejoy—and approaches similar to his—which, during the 1960s and 70s, turned "intellectual history" into a preferred label among most anglophone scholars doing *idéhistoria*. This alternative term had occurred among American historians and literary scholars at least since the turn of the century. In studying "ideas," many of them applied philosophical premises opposed to those of Lovejoy, who started as a critic of philosophical pragmatism. Often, they focused on intellectual traditions back home in the US rather than in Europe. The task of exploring "the American Mind" turned into a key part of the postwar field of American studies, aimed at cultural mobilization in the setting of the Cold War. Inspired by more critical ways to contextualize past thought in the 1960s (including Marxism), *US intellectual history* later took form as an academic field with networks of scholars in several disciplines.[2]

In my opinion, *all* academic teaching should help initiate students in the researcher's way of perceiving and interrogating a discipline's objects of study. Many of us who teach *idéhistoria* are eager to convey contextualist attitudes already at the basic level, despite the difficulties of doing so in broad overviews of "Western thought from ancient Greece to postmodernism." But in teaching more specific topics in courses at semi-advanced or advanced levels, it becomes easier to cultivate the students' sensitivity to the fundamentally *historical* nature of human thought.[3] At Södertörn University, Stockholm, I have had the opportunity to design a set of courses, taught in Swedish, but with reading assignments mainly

or exclusively in English—all of them exercises in American studies within *idéhistoria*.

Initially, a series of semi-advanced courses titled "Reading Classics" opened opportunities to offer courses concerning specific key thinkers—twice each on Marshall McLuhan and W. E. B. Du Bois as well as on the "double classic" Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. Whether or not *Canadian studies*—or area studies targeting other parts of *the Americas*—should be included in American studies may be a moot question. But the case of McLuhan clearly illustrates the futility of guarding such borders strictly, in particular when it comes to an area's intellectual history. Crossing borders enriched my McLuhan courses, as we dealt with contrasts and interactions between two parts of North America, two contexts, in a way, that proved to be mutually instructive.[4] For example, McLuhan began the kind of intellectual "probing" he would become known for while teaching literature in St. Louis, Missouri, in the 1940s. As his students showed no interest in high-brow novels and poetry, he began to apply his tools of literary analysis to stuff that did catch their interest: popular culture such as comics and advertising. The target of *The Mechanical Bride,* his pioneering high-brow analysis of popular culture published in New York 1951, was very much *American* culture, in the sense of commercialized expressions mainly formed and spread around the world by US society specifically. When he soon switched focus from *contents* of media culture to the human effects of shifting *technological forms* of media, he kept stressing that the strange new world he diagnosed was formed by US dominance, economically, technologically, and culturally. Thus, Canadians such as himself, geographically lumped along their southern border, were uniquely positioned to analyze a "Global Village" stunned by the "implosion" of electric media:

> Nature and history seem to have agreed to designate us in Canada for a corporate, artistic role. As the U.S.A. becomes a world environment through its resources, technology, and enterprises, Canada takes on the function of making that world environment perceptible to those who occupy it. Any environment tends to be imperceptible to its users and occupants except to the degree that counter-environments are created by the artist. A *New Yorker* cartoon a few months ago showed two fish that had climbed out on the shore. One said to the other, "This is where the action is." A wit has said we don't know who discovered water, but we're pretty sure it wasn't a fish.[5]

An aspect pushing my other courses into a field within American studies that is comparatively central (by any definition) is that they have dealt with US thinkers and debates that consciously and explicitly grappled with questions concerning *the United States of America as such*—as either a contemporary social, cultural, and political reality, as a cluster of ideals, principles, promises, or visions for the future, or as a collective subject in history, deserving praise for its virtues and (perhaps more often) blame for its vices. Even more than McLuhan, these actors were *diagnosing* America, their own national context, as such.

Mead and Benedict offer a case in point. They purposefully challenged assumptions which in their day dominated the US completely. Their research provided ammunition for their roles as public intellectuals. Their mentor, Franz Boas, had turned anthropology from a branch of "racial science" into the foremost provider of scientific arguments *against* racism during the first half of the twentieth century. He had also shown a way to understand supposedly "primitive" societies by their own premises, without condescension—denying all claims by Anglo-Americans to leading any evolution of civilization or

being the standard of universally valid values. Expounding such a cultural relativism, Mead and Benedict phrased their studies of contrasting "patterns of culture" in a way that held up a mirror to their own society's face: assumptions and ways of living taken for granted among dominant groups were shown to be accidental products of history. Such patterns were possible to change. They *had to* be changed in order to cultivate all that was best in US society—in particular, if visions of democratic equality and individual freedom would in earnest be brought to include more than white, Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual men. Thus, in my students' hands, texts of Mead and Benedict tended to form a mirror of what was important and sensitive to people in the US of their day—and of controversies that would continue to be activated in peculiarly American ways later, for instance within the 1960s' countercultures and today's culture wars.

Something similar can be said about the other courses I have designed, also with source texts as the core part of the reading assignments, supposed to attain more of an historical meaning by means of context, provided by additional readings and classroom teaching. They do all to some extent deal with African American experience and "race problems" in the wake of racialized slavery. Few thinkers' intellectual efforts are better suited to mirror *America*—as a phenomenon, as an intellectual problem, and as a force in the world—than those of W. E. B. Du Bois. His "case" mirrors a uniquely long period as well, in a way that demanded selectivity in my courses. Through seven decades up to his death in 1963, he was the foremost intellectual exponent of Black America, and one of the most influential civil rights leaders ever.

But pedagogically, in *idéhistoria*, Du Bois has the paradoxical virtue of not being easy to pinpoint or to turn into simply a hero (or villain). This is partly due to the fact that he continually revised his positions and questions, in his personal manner. But his texts do also continuously remind readers of the presence of a historically *foreign* context, as it made him suddenly say things that don't fit with expectations among modern admirers. Students need to think in terms of initially confusing contexts. Another asset is Du Bois's unique way of shifting perspective and style in his writings, as he switched from the historian's and sociologist's analyses to the philosopher's and poet's attempts to catch abstract essentials, and to a very personal, often autobiographical way of approaching the issues he dealt with.

For example, Du Bois forced my students to see the so-called "Negro problem"—and problems with that notion—from different angles in a couple of texts written about the same time: the final chapter of the landmark social study *The Philadelphia Negro*, published 1899, and the essay from 1897 that would become the opening chapter in Du Bois's major classic *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. The first text summarized a host of empirical evidence and numbers, basically showing "the problem" to be a problem which Black people had with America—in different ways in different social strata within the Black community—rather than a problem that America had with people who happened to be Black. The other began a discussion that soon turned philosophical and historiographic (including the famous paragraph in which he passingly uses the term "double consciousness") on a very personal note, opening with Du Bois telling his readers what white people always seemed to have on the tip of their tongues but never dared to ask: "How does it feel to be a problem?" Students need to think: what could have been hoped to be achieved in the historical context by such different means?

In another intermediate-level course, titled "Black Thinkers in the Era of Legislated Segregation in the USA" (which will be taught again the

fall of 2025), Du Bois's "case" was compared with a set of other Black voices from before the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s including Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Alain Locke, Zora Neale Hurston, E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche. Some of those thinkers were addressed as "context" in the Du Bois courses as well. But by being treated as study objects in their own right, they mirror the Jim Crow era—and America as a problem—with increased complexity. On the other hand, what was gained in multiplicity of perspectives tended to be lost in depth. Bringing further factors into the picture made the contents harder to handle without richer background knowledge. Thanks to the corona pandemic, I was able to compensate for this with a whole set of prerecorded lectures, which would have been impossible in normal times.

Thus, it was interesting to compare pedagogical challenges, as I got the opportunity to simultaneously teach more or less the same course to doctoral students, through *Forskarskolan i historia*, based at Lund University. Their version extended the chronological range (including Black experience in the world of colonialism up to the Reconstruction era in the US) and individualized the reading assignments. The difficulties for PhD students were of course different, mainly due to richer background knowledge and study experience. But in one respect *the challenge* seemed surprisingly similar—and thus also the course's usefulness in terms of training students to perceive past thought as researchers in *idéhistoria*. There is a general pattern here.

On the surface, so much is familiar to Swedish students. The main chronology of US history is well known, mainly through the popular culture McLuhan attempted to probe. For ethnic Swedes, the US has also for generations been a relatively "close" country, especially due to the legacy of Swedish emigration.[6] The role of Black people in US history is also something that most students have a rough idea about: slavery, Civil War, segregation in the South, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s—as a background to the situation in recent years, with clashes around police violence targeting Blacks, etc. Added to such familiarity is the English language, which young Swedes today master better than previous generations. In my courses we are reading in the language of the historical actors we study, and the texts are rarely hard to comprehend linguistically. The task would have been radically different if my students had studied past eras in relatively unknown social worlds, where people were speaking Portuguese or Swahili, turning *all* course content into translations in several senses of the word.

But to a substantial degree, such familiarity is inadequate. More content than expected demands intellectual *work* in order to be understood in earnest. In intellectual history, the challenge is quite often to realize how much an apparently familiar context is actually strange and foreign. The challenge for Swedish students who are trying to understand Swedish contexts distanced in *time* is somewhat similar to attempts to understand contexts across the Atlantic from only a generation ago, or in our time. But superficial familiarity is also an asset, something to start with, a *Vorverstehen*. The task will then be to "get" how foreign the intellectual landscape actually is. In this sense, courses in US intellectual history provide better training in *idéhistoria* skills to the degree that they form exercises in *area studies*. This is particularly obvious concerning language. So many expressions and terms familiar to Swedes have a slightly but *significantly* different meaning in American English. In this respect, it has probably been useful in my courses to combine readings in English with seminar discussions in Swedish.

The seminars have often become exercises in translation. What does, e.g., the term "liberal"

mean in discussions among Progressive Era reformers, and how is that related to the non-European everyday meaning of the word in the US today? How can the word "race" be understood—in source texts and historiography—independently of what the term "ras" means in Swedish, both historically and in contemporary debates? In my most recent course, "Diversity and Democracy: The Philosophical Tradition of Cultural Pluralism in the USA," we discussed the African American philosopher Alain Locke's lectures on the meaning of "race" from 1915–16.[7] Taking his cue in particular from Franz Boas, he phrased what appears to be the first consistently modern, social-constructivist understanding of what "race" is—dismissing every vestige of biological content as sheer mythology. On the other hand, he embraced the *word* "race" (deploying a nuance in its semantic field strictly foreign to Swedish readers), expounding the value of creating self-assertive race-consciousness among Black Americans—thus outlining his agenda for the Harlem Renaissance (for which that agenda set the tone a decade later) in a surprisingly clear way. This offered a tough exercise in historical thinking for my students, but an eye-opening one as well, I believe.

Occasionally, though, ready-made translations are good, as they lower the threshold in reading assignments. While teaching this set of courses, I have produced a Swedish translation of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (soon to be published). The motive was my own experience: how hard this classic is to understand *in earnest* for non-native speakers. Using the result in teaching has offered an experiment. Students who read *Souls* only in English tended not to admit, or see, how much they actually missed. But the contents of our seminar discussions revealed it mercilessly. Reading in Swedish made a difference, as did the opportunity to discuss aspects of my translation work in the classroom.

The translated version was also useful for the master's level students in a course named "Historiography as Politics: Black Experience and the Truth about USA, 1619 until today" (which will be taught again in the spring of 2025). In this course, which applied a telescopic look at US history and the role of African Americans within it, with Trump-era wars concerning American identity and images of the past as a point of departure, Du Bois was not the main focus. (His analyses of the Reconstruction, confronting the "Lost Cause" mythologies both in their popular and scholarly versions, were important, but were just parts of the theme). But intellectual motives that lingered through his career—viewing US history in a global perspective, understanding slavery and its legacies as a part of more general patterns of colonial exploitation—have echoed between the lines in many of the recent discussions. Reading Du Bois's meditations on history in the first two chapters of *Souls* in Swedish, not needing to bother much about language, may thus have been useful in this context. But equally useful was probably the opportunity to discuss the charged nature of words, as we compared a Swedish rendition of the text with a long quote in English. A passage from the final pages of *Souls* is namely used to indicate a core message by Nikole Hannah-Jones at the end of the book version of the *1619 Project*, the *New York Times* initiative that was officially gainsaid by the first Trump administration in the *1776 Report* during its final days in January 2021.[8]

Finally: working with students to explore meanings by means of context in US intellectual history has offered rich opportunities of "learning by teaching." As the courses discussed here originated in my research interests—and were intended to train students in thinking like *idéhistoria* researchers—the interplay between teaching and research has become intense. At the start of the course on "Diversity and Democracy" in January 2024, the students were told that I just had

received funding for a three-year research project with the contents of the course as a core theme. (Even the main title was the same. Other courses mentioned above also covered crucial parts of the research project's theme).[9] Thus, we got the chance to begin my project's explorations together, and I got the chance to ask my students for advice, as they became more fully initiated commentators than most. We explored the possibilities inherent in seeing things at a distance, helped by the fact that things are not extremely unfamiliar, but purposefully trying to make many things less familiar by means of particularly American contexts. Perhaps Canadians do understand the US better than most people, as McLuhan suggested. But with some effort, Swedes may also be suited to discover a bit of water across the Atlantic.

Notes

1. *Locus classicus* for Lovejoy's approach is the introduction to *The Great Chain of Being*, originally published in 1936 and based on lectures from 1933. Concerning the Swedish discipline, see Andersson and Björck, eds., *Idéhistoria i tiden.*

2. For early "intellectual history" in the US (including Lovejoy, who used the term in the subtitle of his journal) see Higham, "The Rise of American." For the context of early American studies, see Blaustein, *Nightmare Envy*. A main forum today is the Society for US Intellectual History: https://s-usih.org. For manifestations of the field, see e.g., Fox and Kloppenberg, eds., *A Companion to American Thought* and Isaac et al., *The Worlds of American*.

3. My own brand of militant contextualism has been elaborated in several publications, see in particular Östlund, "Ett manifest" and "Ludwik Fleck."

4. For my take on McLuhan, developed in teaching, see Östlund, "Tillbaka till framtiden?"

5. McLuhan, "Canada, the Borderline Case," 106. I used this quote as an epigraph in the course curriculum.

6. Blanck and Hjorthén, eds., *Swedish-American Borderlands.*

7. Locke, *Race Contacts.*

8. Hannah-Jones et al., eds., *The 1619 Project*; The President's 1776 Advisory Commission, *The 1776 Report.*

9. https://maw.wallenberg.org/en/contentious-ideas-about-diversity-and-democracy-us-1915-1958

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LET THE STUDENTS MAP CANADIAN STUDIES

Exploring Stereotypes of Canada

Abstract: This article investigates the perceptions and stereotypes of Canada held by students in Nordic, Scandinavian, and Baltic countries participating in Canadian studies courses. Drawing upon eighty-seven papers submitted between 2021 and 2023, the study employs lexicometric analysis to discern recurring "othering" strategies employed by students. The interdisciplinary nature of the Canadian studies course, blending literature, history, and political science, aims to equip students with the knowledge necessary to examine the nuances of the Canadian social model. By examining cultural stereotypes, the study redefines Canadian studies as an integral component of (North) American studies, highlighting the importance of challenging initial representations and fostering critical thinking. Findings reveal students' engagement in the process of othering, reflecting on Canadian identity, multiculturalism, and the integration of First Nations. The study underscores the significance of pedagogical interventions in creating spaces for transformation and critical reflection. Ultimately, it demonstrates the potential of area studies to assist students in structuring academic texts and encourages further exploration of themes related to memorial policies and reconciliation in courses on Canadian studies.

Keywords: Canadian studies, stereotypes, othering, intercultural education, critical thinking

Since the summer of 2021, Stockholm University has offered an introductory course in Canadian studies, supported by Nordplus funding, fostering collaboration among Canadian studies specialists from Scandinavian, Nordic, and Baltic countries.[1] This interdisciplinary online bachelor-level course, which blends literature, history, and political science, consists of lectures and discussion seminars centered around course literature. The overarching objective is to empower students with the knowledge necessary to undertake a final paper examining the nuances of Canadian identity and its social model. Students reflected on a quote by Justin Trudeau, celebrating the characteristics of the "Canadian model," as the foundation for their final papers.

The article seeks to explore how students from the same course, residing in Nordic, Scandinavian, and Baltic countries, respectively, perceive the "Canadian model" and the recurring word associations that shape their perceptions. By examining cultural stereotypes, this contribution aims to redefine Canadian studies as an integral component of (North) American studies. Stereotypes, as general representations of Canada, offer insight into students' expectations.[2] These stereotypes are recognizable because students have previously encountered images, symbols, and narratives about Canada.[3] Pedagogically, the course aimed to use these stereotypes as starting points to guide students toward a more nuanced understanding of Canada, with the help of critical readings such as Sunera Thobani's work on Canadian identity.[4] By encouraging students to articulate their initial stereotypes, the course allowed them to reflect on their perceptions of Canada before engaging in deeper critical analysis. In this case, even "positive stereotypes" have some costs in interpersonal and social relations as they are always activated in a comparative perspective.[5] The aim of the article is to view pedagogical intervention as a way of creating a space of transformation where students engage in stereotyping before reflecting on the production of these first images of Canada. Pedagogy empowers critical thinking when students reflect on their own cultural framework; as Ruth England points out,

> we all view the world through our own "cultural spectacles," tinted by our background, education, experience, beliefs and—possibly—privilege. True objectivity may not be achievable—we may not be able to view the world through others' spectacles—but we can be aware that our own world view is just one amongst many. This may enable us to avoid imposing our cultural biases on our students and to encourage them to be aware of their own.[6]

This echoes the positioning of the book by Bédard-Goulet and Premat on Canadian studies from Nordic and Baltic perspectives, where the idea is to focus on a "relational ontology of becoming," and where space is reconfigured as a projection of discourses.[7] In other words, the introductory course gave an opportunity to students to address their first perceptions of Canada before deepening their reflection on Canada. How do they perceive Canada? How do they relate the image of Canada to their own situation?

Drawing upon eighty-seven papers submitted by summer-school students from 2021 to 2023, this quantitative study employs lexicometric analysis to discern the 'othering' strategies employed.[8] 'Othering' strategies encompass the recurring use of pronouns, verbs, substantives, and adjectives, shedding light on Swedish stereotypes of Canada. This study endeavors to elucidate how these 'othering' strategies encapsulate the content of refined Nordic and Baltic stereotypes regarding Canada.

Background

The summer course on Canadian Studies is the only course in the Nordic and Scandinavian countries that grants credits to students upon successful completion. In Norway, an introductory course was given between Spring 2007 and Spring 2017.[9] The course offered at Stockholm University was initially a 3-credit summer course with four three-hour seminars in 2021, but it was expanded to a 7.5-credit course in 2022 with six three-hour seminars. Despite these changes, the course objectives and descriptions remained consistent, emphasizing the history, culture, and literature of Canadian society, with particular focus on immigration, multiculturalism, First Nations, gender equality, and Quebec.[10] The course is a bachelor-level course aimed at enhancing critical thinking about Canadian identity. Students developed expertise on Canadian culture while also acquiring transferable critical thinking skills applicable to other academic and social contexts.[11]

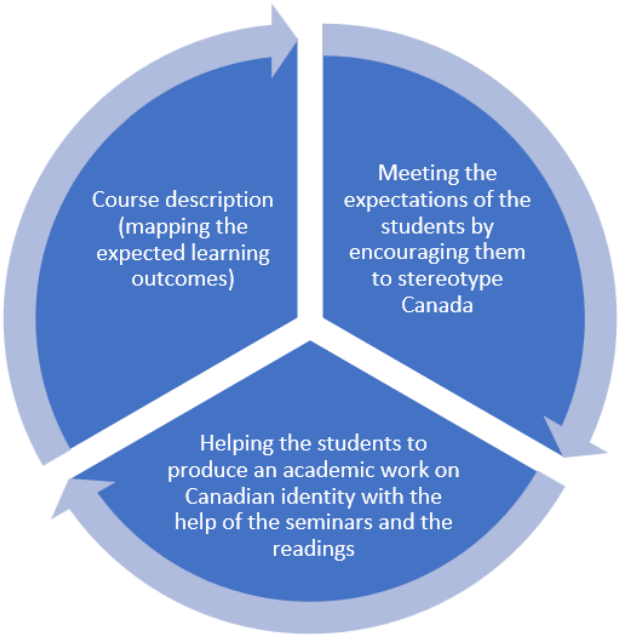

Figure 1. Main objectives of the course on Canadian studies.

Methodology

The course was designed with "constructive alignment" in mind, ensuring that the course objectives and assessments aligned with the desired learning outcomes. The authors of this article, who were also the course instructors, analyzed student papers on the notion of the "Canadian model" using Tropes, a lexicometry software that evaluates pronouns, verbs, nouns, adverbs, and themes within texts. Figure 1 shows the three sequences that structured our approach.

Mapping the course description is important as it offers a series of general statements about Canadian identity that need to be analyzed in a systematic way. The course description was the same for the three different years even though the course was modified in 2022. This change did not affect the course description that was given to students beyond the new organization of seminars. Each summer course was based upon open lectures from different experts on Canada and seminars where some specific texts of the course literature were discussed.

The second phase was the comparison of the papers produced by students in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Table 1 describes the background of the students who took this introductory course. Table 2 provides a detailed overview of student productions.[12] Following the curriculum update in 2022, it's notable that the required paper length was shorter in 2021, coinciding with a smaller cohort size compared to the years of 2022 and 2023.

Year	National students	International students	Total
2021	10	5 (33.3%)	15
2022	27	3 (11.1%)	30
2023	38	4 (10.5%)	42
2021–2023	75	12 (16%)	87

Table 1. Profile of the students from the different editions of the summer course who wrote a paper on the Canadian model. Source: data retrieved from the learning platform (Stockholm University).

Year	Total number of words for the papers on Canada
2021	22,825
2022	65,772
2023	67,095
Total 2021–2023	155,692

Table 2. Number of words for the papers produced by students of the summer introductory course on Canadian studies (2021–2023). Source: data retrieved from the learning platform (Stockholm University).

We used the software Tropes to analyze both the detailed course description (not to be confused with the legal document presenting the course objectives and exams) and the students' productions. These productions were anonymized and compiled into a single document to facilitate the analyses. Tropes is a lexicometry software specialized in analyzing collocations and frequency of associations. It evaluates pronouns, verbs, nouns, adverbs, and themes within texts. This software is in a bilingual French/English version and is therefore suitable for a course on Canadian studies.[13] It should be noted that the summer course is exclusively taught in English with English materials and papers to be written in English. Regarding the instructional part for the papers, the question was based on a quote by Justin Trudeau:

> "[w]e have created a society where individual rights and freedoms, compassion and diversity are core to our citizenship. But underlying that idea of Canada is the promise that we all have a chance to build a better life for ourselves and our children."[14] With the help of the course literature (art, literature . . .), reflect on that quote. Take specific examples from the different lectures to analyze the Canadian cultural model (1.500 words).

The interest of a lexicometric analysis is that it highlights common words and categories and

allows mapping the landscape of mental representations of Canada expressed by students primarily residing in Nordic and Baltic societies, as shown in Table 1. While the proportion of international students has increased (including some Canadian and American students), they are predominantly students residing in Northern Europe, including the Baltic countries.

Findings and Discussion

The initial analysis of the themes in the course description reveals intercultural relations, as shown in Table 3. The aim is to discuss Canada as a North American country from a European perspective, hence the occurrences identified (education, North America, communication, language, Europe, society, time, control, science, and politics). Students are asked to use concepts from the humanities and social sciences; this is why the topics "education" and "control" appear.

At this stage, the course description conveys the notions of "multiculturalism" and bilingual identity while also addressing the issues of First Nations and immigration. In a way, students expect the seminars to deal with these themes. Regarding the students' papers, Table 4 shows the frequencies of occurrence of the nouns used. Besides the terms "Canada" and "Canadian," which are used extensively, the triad "people, society, culture" is widely discussed. Next comes "right, identity, and nation," where students' inquiries have primarily focused on the identity of Canada based on the populations considered. Lastly, aspects related to Canada's openness have been mentioned, suggested by "country, diversity, immigrant, model."

When it comes to adjectives, one can see that cultural representations are dominant, with comparison in the background, as highlighted by Table 5: 681 occurrences for "cultural," 478 for "Indigenous," 275 for "different," and 261 mentions of the term "other."

Table 6 confirms the process of othering: students have a natural tendency to use the pronoun "they" to describe and comment on aspects related to Canadian history and society. The second pronoun used is "we" (14.4 percent), which actually demonstrates the intercultural work that students engage in by describing the Canadian social model through an inquiry linked to the original model (the Nordic, Scandinavian, and Baltic countries).

Figure 2 explores the frequent associations with the pronoun "they," showing the attempt to define a social identity ("Canada," "people," "country," "group," "migrant," "Canadian"). In figure 2, the references linked in blue represent antecedent associations whereas the references linked in pink refer to consecutive collocations.

Some student quotes illustrate this process of othering where there is an active questioning of the Canadian model. The following one appeared at the beginning of a paper submitted in 2021: "[i]f Canada is a mosaic made up of different unique subgroups that come together to make a whole, then what will explain the spaces in which one or more cultures fuse and come out different than they once were? These transnational ties have remained due to state policies which allow for the conservation of such cultures."[15] It echoes the goal of the course, which was to capture the nation as a system of narratives as it is presented in the course literature: "Canada is considered as a cultural area that is built by discourses as well as by the direct experiences that can be made of this place."[16]

Favorite topic	Occurrences
Education	106
North America	66
Communication	38
Language	33
Europe	28
Society	23
Time	23
Control	18
Science	17
Politics	14

Table 3. Reference fields in the course description. Source: results from the Tropes software.

Noun	Occurrences
Canada	2226
Canadian	1195
People	733
Society	686
Culture	578
Right	484
Identity	459
Nation	445
Country	431
Diversity	411
Immigrant	369
Model	365

Table 4. Frequent substantives in the student papers (2021–2023). Source: results from the Tropes software.

Adjective	Occurrences
Canadian	786
Cultural	681
Indigenous	478
Different	275
Other	261
All	244
Individual	244
Many	242
Better	186
Politic	149

Table 5. Frequent adjectives in the papers (2021–2023). Source: results from the Tropes software.

Pronouns	Frequency of occurrences
I	339 (11.1%)
He/She	265 (8.6%)
We	443 (14.4%)
You	78 (2.5%)
They	674 (22%)
Somebody	115 (3.7%)

Table 6. Frequent pronouns in the papers (2021–2023). Source: results from the Tropes software.

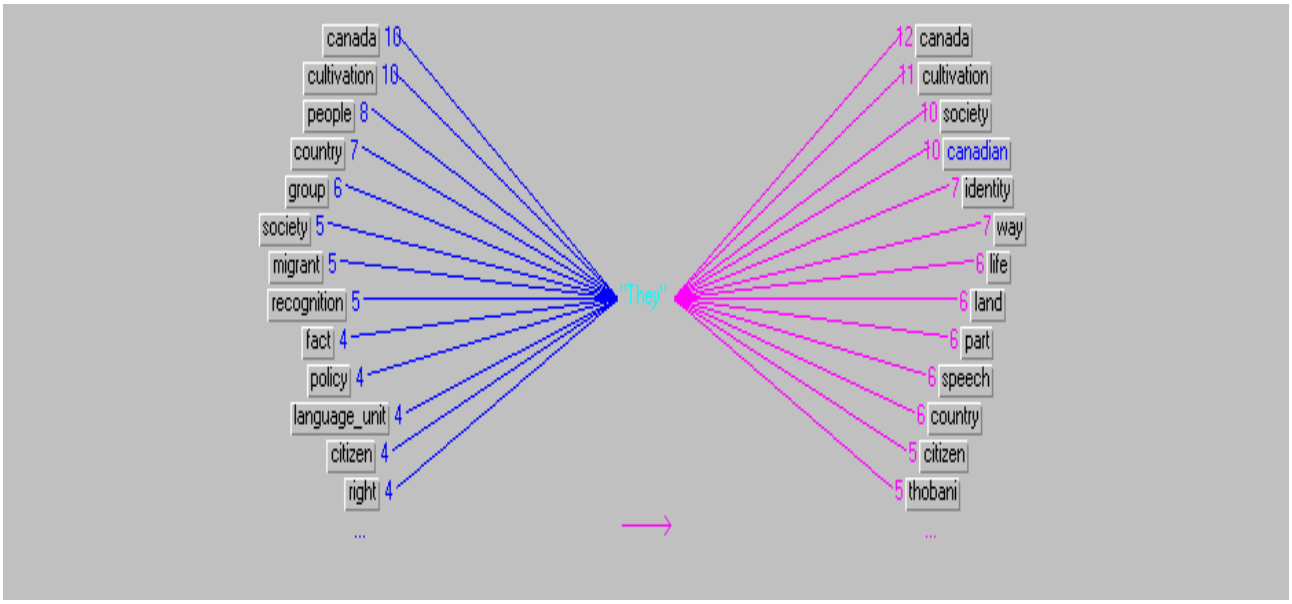

Figure 2. Frequent associations with the pronoun "they." Source: results from the Tropes software.

The pronoun "they" is used to question migration policies in the student papers as it is shown in figure 2. Other student quotes even had normative assumptions regarding the contrast between the discourse on Canadian multiculturalism and the challenge of integrating the First Nations: "[i]t is possible to see how Canada is contradicting itself and failing at being a truly fair multicultural society, regardless of how proud of that claim they are."[17] Another quote illustrates the active othering process when it comes to First Nations: "[t]hey are called First Nations since they were the first to populate Canada, and maybe this is also why they don't portray their own history as a separate enclave in the mosaic."[18] Many students have projected an ideal type, enabling them to judge Canadian society based on several factors: integration, acceptance of minorities, and social mobility. This intercultural work was echoed in the course evaluation, where one student commented on the lectures in the following way in 2021: "[b]efore starting the course, I wondered how one would define Canadian culture and manage it in only 4x3 hours, but you did. It was not only interesting and fun, it was also useful knowledge I'd say, especially discussing the 'multicultural mosaic' that is Canada in contrast to the blending process in USA."[19] Other comments verified the importance of "situated knowledges"[20] with the active process of relating Canada to the experience of the student: "the best thing was learning about the cultural habits of [*sic*] and the way a society is built that it [*sic*] not that different from our societies but still a bit different";[21] "being able to participate in lectures with students and lecturers from Northern countries";[22] and "insights and the possibility to use my experiences of Canada."[23]

By using course literature, particularly Sunera Thobani's work (the name appears in figure 2, showing the centrality of the reference), students have often challenged the stereotype (in their view) of an open society. Some radical

quotes from Thobani were even commented on, such as the following one on Canadian identity: "[t]he suppression of Native Peoples, and of their social-political orders remains [*sic*] the necessary conditions of Canadian sovereignty."[24] In Thobani's view, Canada was created on the erasure of the First Nations and cultural appropriation by the two founding nations, Britain and France. The intercultural relationship shaped by the process of othering (representations of Native Peoples) became possible through this critical literature, enabling students to move beyond the official political discourse of an open and multicultural society. Critical references allowed them to engage in a dynamic evaluation of Canadian identity. However, while moving beyond the initial stereotype, they uncovered a more complex stereotype: a nation striving to reconcile the conflicting memories and perspectives of its diverse social groups. This contrast was dealt with in the course literature:

> the notion of idea of a place thus appears particularly relevant within the scope of cultural studies and formulated from a geographically distant perspective such as the Nordic and Baltic countries one on Canada. Being aware of this discursive construction allows to examine how it is elaborated, sometimes to the point of forming a stereotypical image, especially when there is no direct experience of the place. Conversely, the discursive construction of a distant place generates a reflective posture on the comparable construction of the local and deconstructs the commonplace of the granted.[25]

In fact, beyond understanding certain aspects of Canadian culture, students were able to start reflecting on more generic concepts such as coloniality (the adjective "colonial" was used one hundred times by students, "settler" seventy-three times, and "settlement" twenty-seven times).

This analysis of exams produced by students underscores the significance of challenging their initial representations of Canada from their own perspective. This intercultural approach fosters critical thinking and enables students to refine their initial stereotypes, thereby energizing their learning through the creation of new categories. Othering strategies employed in the papers highlight the relevance of comparison in area studies, as well as the importance of encouraging students to reflect on their own situation. Furthermore, a close examination of the results of lexicometric analysis reveals that an interest in another country activates general skills associated with critical thinking.[26] This underscores the potential of area studies in assisting students in structuring academic texts by applying them to different contexts. Notably, students' willingness to understand Canada's history through the lens of First Nations' issues opens avenues for exploring themes related to memorial policies and reconciliation. These insights are reinforced by course evaluations, affirming the validity of the findings of this analysis.

Notes

1. Bédard-Goulet and Premat, *Nordic and Baltic Perspectives*; Project "Enhancing Canadian Studies in the Nordic Countries", grant number NPHE-2020/10138, 2020–2022.
2. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*; Oustinoff, "The Avatars," 48–53.
3. Bodenhausen and Macrae, "Stereotype Activation and Inhibition," 1–52; Beeghly, "What is a Stereotype?" 675–91.
4. Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*.
5. Czopp et al., "Positive Stereotypes," 458.
6. England, "Countering Stereotypes," 64–66.
7. Bédard-Goulet and Premat, *Nordic and Baltic Perspectives*, 8.
8. Dervin, "Discourses of Othering," 43–55.
9. University of Oslo, "NORAM1504."
10. Stockholm University, "Introduction to Canadian Studies." The course description is a document sent to enrolled students.
11. Spencer et al., "Curriculum Mapping," 217–31.
12. Premat, "Dataset on the Expression."
13. http://www.tropes.fr/. Accessed April 29, 2024.
14. Trudeau, "Canadian Middle Class."
15. Quote 1 from a paper submitted in 2021.
16. Bédard-Goulet and Premat, *Nordic and Baltic Perspectives*, 7.
17. Quote 2 from a paper submitted in 2021.
18. Quote 3 from a paper submitted in 2022.
19. Comment 1 from the course evaluation of 2021.
20. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 577–99.
21. Comment 2 from the course evaluation of 2021.
22. Comment 3 from the course evaluation of 2021.
23. Comment 4 from the course evaluation of 2021.
24. Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 39.
25. Bédard-Goulet and Premat, *Nordic and Baltic Perspectives*, 7.
26. Davies, "Critical Thinking," 529–44.

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SECTION III:

Methods and Subject Matter

Teaching American Media and Popular Culture
10.22439/asca.v56i2.7379

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TEACHING AMERICAN MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE

Expansion, Inclusion, Interdisciplinarity

Abstract: This article is a reflection on its author's experiences in teaching American media at the Swedish Institute for American studies from 2015 to 2021. By way of concrete descriptions of classes taught and topics raised, Frykholm makes a case for an approach to popular media that looks beyond both an all-too-limited focus on "mass media" and the text-centric, hermeneutically based discussions about media representations that have otherwise been the most common way of engaging with media in American studies. The article also discusses challenges of interdisciplinarity that are a key concern not only when teaching media, but for the field of American studies more broadly.

Keywords: American media, popular culture, media spectacle, media and everyday life, globalization, media and politics, interdisciplinarity

For masses of people around the world, American media and popular culture are a constant presence in everyday life. This makes media and popular culture important areas of inquiry for American studies scholars, and it should be a priority to develop teaching methods that help our students think critically about their own media practices, as well as larger issues concerning the intersections of American media, politics, culture, and society. But how exactly can this be accomplished? And what are the prospects for doing this within the context of American studies in Sweden specifically?

The following pages offer a personal reflection on these questions. I start with an account of some of my own experiences in teaching American film, TV, and digital media at the Swedish Institute for North American Studies (SINAS) at Uppsala University.[1] I give examples of course design and topics, and I discuss strategies for meeting the challenges presented by the object of study on the one hand (ever-expanding, ever-ubiquitous) and the institutional-disciplinary context on the other (American studies at a Swedish university). Call it a double challenge of interdisciplinarity. I end with a general observation regarding the place of media and popular culture in American studies in Sweden.

In my day job I teach cinema studies at Stockholm University. But I have also been a guest teacher at SINAS on different occasions from 2015 to 2021, twice as course coordinator and main teacher for "American Mass Media I" (one of four 7.5 ECTS modules in American studies A [30 ECTS]), twice in the same role for "American Mass Media II" (one of four 7.5 ECTS modules in American studies B [30 ECTS]), once as one half of a co-teaching duo in "American Mass Media II," and once as a one-off guest lecturer.[2]

As their names indicate, these course modules were constructed with a notion of "mass media" in mind. This was especially the case for "American Mass Media I," evident in its then-current syllabus and reading list.[3] The syllabus did not spell out a clear definition, but it strongly implied an understanding of mass media as equivalent to print and broadcasting news media. Television was singled out as particularly important, as in the declaration that the course "takes up the question of how various media, primarily television, convey knowledge about politics and social issues in today's US." One of the learning outcomes mentioned, "knowledge of how news reporting in the US has changed since the advent of television," suggests that the main interest was perhaps not so much television as *TV news*. In any event, the syllabus was a relic from a pre-internet era. Further, its interpretation of the term "mass media" seemed biased against mediated forms of commercial mass culture—say, television soaps or video games—as if only the forms of media that themselves made a claim for sobriety and seriousness were worthy of taking seriously. Finally, the emphasis on the study of how media "convey knowledge" was puzzling. It was probably not meant to imply that the media was somehow neutral, but rather that it was important to think critically about the media's specific ways and means of "conveying" things—yet it posited media as a force external to, and separate from, those individuals and institutions it influences.

All of these assumptions about the media align with research traditions that should not be discarded, but that have always had problems and limitations, and that have diminishing explanatory power in the current media landscape. Media today is not so much an external institution that produces certain "effects" as an integrated feature of everyday life. And notwithstanding the significant role that the newspaper press and the broadcasting news media still play, they are part of an increasingly diverse and hybridized media landscape, in which "old" analog and

"new" digital media coexist, and in which the infrastructures of 24/7 digital connectivity allow for a wide range of social practices and media experiences. This makes it all the more interesting to study American media, but there are also challenges. The objects of study are everywhere and nowhere at once; they seem increasingly ephemeral and elusive. And it is not obvious how to hold them in place in a way that best serves the advancement of American studies.

Rephrased as a local challenge at SINAS circa 2015: how should a reconfigured concept of media be taken into account in a course constructed from a different—and arguably antiquated—point of view? I did not have to start from scratch. People who had previously taught the course had begun to address the issue, and I followed in their tracks, retaining a relatively strong emphasis on the study of American television news while also making room for other perspectives and topics. The introductory seminar was designed to let students familiarize themselves with different approaches to a scholarly study of media and how various methods and approaches in, e.g., media studies, cultural studies, mass communication studies, film studies, and television studies could be utilized in the context of American studies. This was followed by three seminars that dealt with American media history, mostly focusing on film and television. Media histories can be of great relevance in American studies, but they should be drawn differently compared to what we might do in a more discipline-specific framework. For example, familiarity with notable works within and outside the canon is not necessarily a priority in American studies classes. But giving those students a sense of how various media technological platforms and their associated social protocols have engendered certain patterns of collectivity and connectivity over time can be an essential element in their development of a more general understanding of American culture, politics, and society writ large.[4] Histories of cinema and television can be extremely useful to explore for that purpose. The media historical seminars were followed by two sessions on TV news and one that dealt with representations of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in American media, with serial TV drama as the example of choice. The course concluded with group presentations, for which the students were asked to carry out their own analyses drawing on knowledge and skills acquired in previous sessions.

In spring 2016, I returned to SINAS to co-teach American Mass Media II with Dag Blanck. The syllabus left more wiggle room than the one for the A-level module; we could either aim for a wide scope and lots of variety or identify a more limited thematic focus.[5] We chose the latter. Since the 2016 presidential election was only about six months away, we found this an opportune moment to explore the intersections of American media and politics, more specifically those relating to the presidency and the campaign for office. Hence the course, "Presidential Images and American Politics as Media Spectacle—The Election 2016 Version." We wanted to give students an opportunity to critically analyze the mediatization of American politics and the amalgamation of news, entertainment, popular culture, and celebrity culture that informs the media logic of contemporary American politics, and we wanted them to engage with methods, theories, and conceptual frameworks from a variety of academic fields, including media studies, political science, and mass communication studies. The notions of "media spectacle" and "image" were used as a conceptual and analytical starting point that we could reconnect with throughout the course. The first two class meetings served as introductions—the opening session discussed the presidential election as media spectacle and the second seminar explored the crafting and mediated circulation of presidential images from McKinley to Obama. The sessions that followed zoomed in on a selection

of media forms and modes of representation and address, including narrative feature films ("Running for Office—Hollywood Style"); documentaries ("Political Documentaries and Presidential Elections"); political advertising ("Campaign Ads, Candidate Image, and the Politics of Authenticity"); serial TV drama ("Projecting the Presidency as Political Romance and Shakespearean Tragedy: *The West Wing* vs. *House of Cards*"); news coverage of presidential debates ("American Politics and the News: Focus on the Presidential Debates"); and satire ("Political Comedy and the Presidency"). I recall lively discussions about Donald J. Trump, about the role of digital media—social media in particular—in American politics, and about an intensification of media spectacle that seemed to be reaching the point of a complete untethering of the presidency from reality (notwithstanding the many historical continuities that the course also brought into view).

Two years later I taught the same module, this time without a co-teacher. The issue of media spectacle and presidential politics was partly retained, but now subsumed under a different overall theme: "media, politics, and everyday life." The idea behind this course was to try to grapple seriously with the expansion of media that I described earlier. In other words, the aim was to explore the ways in which media has become ubiquitous in virtually all spheres of life, and how media use has become second nature for most of us. For this type of course, it is useful to start with an assignment that requires the students to keep a detailed log of their own media practices and use these logbooks as a basis for in-class discussions (within ethically appropriate boundaries). Precisely because media interactions tend to take the form of effortless habits that do not require much thought, we need to retrieve them from the murky corners of consciousness before we can start thinking critically about them. This was our point of departure. The next stop involved an effort to connect our media habits to a critical analysis of the American media and culture industries, and to establish the relevance of global media networks for American global power more broadly. Clearly, this type of engagement with media has interdisciplinary potential—students can carry it over to courses and modules that are geared toward, e.g., political science or history, or to American studies classes that are more conceptually oriented ("American Empire," "The American Century," etc.). For this to work, though, the logbook assignment should be designed to emphasize *American* media specifically. Accordingly, I asked the students to make special note of any "American element" in the media interactions they were logging. I also asked them to be on the lookout for any attempt at monetization of media interactions. Both of these prompts can stimulate something akin to ideological critique. Students may discover their place and complicity in the so-called attention economy, and they may become more critical of the ideologies of "free" choice, individual customization, and unlimited access that permeate industrial-commercial as well as popular imaginaries of digital media. With regard to "American elements," they may realize that in many instances, what is in fact an experience of American media is not tagged as such, but as just "media" pure and simple—similar to how Hollywood films are "odorless" compared to the local fragrance that films of other national origin are assumed and expected to give off.[6] This, by the way, is an example of how the study of histories of "old" media can have pay-offs in the analysis of "new" media later on.

The collaborative work on habituated media practices, as sketched above, made up the core of two introductory sessions that were meant to offer a framework for thinking about American media, politics, and everyday life. After this, we made our way through a series of more or less specific themes and media forms. One seminar focused on the news media, another on politics

and popular culture, a third on media and national identity, a fourth on media as material technology and cultural form, a fifth on social media, a sixth on media spectacle, and a seventh on the media and the truth. While the topics as such were not particularly new compared to those of the previous media courses I had been involved in at SINAS, they were at least partly recharged, updated, and rethought. One difference was a slight but significant shift away from questions of media representations—significant also because I believe that this was the clearest break from how media has usually been approached in American studies. Here I follow Uricchio, who notes that a "text-centric" approach "concerned above all with media as representation" has dominated, overshadowing other aspects of media that are equally or more relevant to explore.[7] One reason could be that much of this scholarship has been carried out not by media scholars, but by literary scholars who have reapplied certain modes of literary criticism to representations in other media. For example, "[f]ilm texts have regularly been interpreted, much as literature, deploying hermeneutic operations for insights into whatever the dominant interest of the moment happens to be—multi-culturalism, self-representation, the encounter with the Other."[8] In contrast, the aim of the course I have been describing here was to entertain a definition of media as a complex assembly of technological forms and social practices that can only be partly understood from interpretations of the products, and to try to figure out how media in this sense can be a key area of inquiry in American studies.

Briefly, a fourth example (from spring 2021): "Globalization and American Popular Culture." Here the idea was to build the core of the course around an interdisciplinary concept—"globalization"—rather than around a general concept of media or one specific medium. This allowed for the inclusion of a wide range of media objects and examples of mediated popular culture, some of which have long been part of American studies curricula and some of which are less frequently attended to. Having first covered a selection of theories of and approaches to globalization as a general concept, we made our way through sessions on film (e.g., Hollywood cinema as global cinema), television (e.g., the international trade in television formats), music (e.g., globalized cultures of hip-hop), sports, fast food and fashion, and social media and gaming. Two concluding class meetings dealt with local responses to globalized American mass culture and the future of globalized America.

The descriptions above represent idealized, on-paper versions of the courses. Whether they worked as intended is a much more complicated story. But I hope they are useful to readers as a catalog of things you *can* do if you want to teach media in an American studies program. They might also highlight how an expanded concept of media and an inclusivity in terms of objects of study require a mixed bag of theories, methods, and approaches. This brings us back to what I referred to earlier as a double challenge of interdisciplinarity. The object itself calls for a degree of interdisciplinarity or multidisciplinary eclecticism. On another level, the entire course module needs to make sense with respect to the interdisciplinarity that should characterize an American studies program as a whole. Debates about the disciplinary identity of American studies and how boundaries with regard to methods, approaches, and objects of study should—or should not—be drawn are as old as the field itself and cannot be rehashed here. But Hjorthén makes an important point about the conditions that apply to Sweden: the problems of interdisciplinarity are particularly acute here, since you cannot get a degree in American studies in Sweden, which means that Swedish American studies scholars usually have their training in other disciplines.[9] You could argue that the result is multidisciplinary exchange rather than interdisciplinary synthesis. As Lundén once argued,

American studies in Sweden is carried out by literary scholars, historians, and political scientists who happen to be studying the United States, and who primarily rely on their respective discipline-specific methods.[10] Even so, as Hjorthén points out, in a teaching context, the challenge of interdisciplinarity must be met.[11] Teachers clearly need to stay open to bringing in methods, approaches, and research traditions from a variety of fields. Teacher collaboration can also be key.[12]

As a cinema scholar who happened to be studying the United States, and who only quite belatedly came to associate this with the field of American studies, I also connect the challenge of interdisciplinarity to the question of where the study of film, media, and popular culture belongs in American studies. Internationally, the field has been described as "capacious" and as defined by its "refusal to exclude."[13] Yet it is often believed to be de facto dominated by literary scholars, historians, and political scientists.[14] Perhaps there is some truth to this in the Swedish context, and perhaps many scholars with those disciplinary affiliations are not particularly interested in the study of American movies, TV, video games, and other forms of mass culture and digital media. But this is only half the story. As Uricchio notes, a quick look at the American studies literature shows that there has been no obvious prejudice against the study of popular media.[15] This seems valid for American studies in Sweden, too. In preparation for writing this text, I surveyed the backlog of *American Studies in Scandinavia* issues and was intrigued to find a long and varied history of engagement with different kinds of media.[16] I also detected a small but significant uptick in those types of articles and book reviews after ca. 2009. The 2023 NAAS conference in Uppsala points in a similar direction: of the 117 presentations that are listed by title in the program, fifteen have titles that clearly indicate that they deal with various media, including popular forms such as video games (two papers), cinema (eight papers), and television (two papers) as well as the newspaper press (two papers) and podcasting (one paper).[17] In fact, I believe there is much more to say with regard to the Swedish (or Nordic) example of what Uricchio refers to as "the largely unacknowledged role [of media] in the field [of American studies]."[18] But that is for another time. Meanwhile, I will conclude by emphasizing that even in the light of a more nuanced view, there is still much to rethink with respect to the study of media and popular culture in American studies, and with respect to the pedagogical challenges that come with teaching American media in that particular intellectual and interdisciplinary tradition. As I have indicated, approaching the media not primarily as content and representation, but as assemblages of platforms and practices, seems crucial. Relatedly, and again with a nod to Uricchio, we could entertain the notion that current developments in digital media are not "merely" about a reconfiguration of the media landscape, but amount to a reorganization of culture in a much broader sense.[19] If this is so, the question about the place of media in American studies is a concern not just for a small (but growing) clique of media-oriented scholars—we would *all* do well to become more media curious.

Notes

1. Please note that the examples I will be discussing are no longer part of SINAS course offerings. See also note 2.

2. The course structure at SINAS has since been revised and courses and modules renamed. See "Teaching American Studies in Sweden: Navigating an Archipelagic Field" in this issue.

3. Uppsala University, "Syllabus for American Mass Media, Valid from Spring 2013"; and Uppsala University, "Reading List."

4. Media as "platform" and "protocol" here draws on Gitelman's oft-cited definition of media as "socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols." Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 7.

5. Uppsala University, "Syllabus for American Mass Media II, Valid from Autumn 2015."

6. Koichi Iwabuchi, qtd. in Uricchio, "Things to Come," 367.

7. Uricchio, "Things to Come," 381.

8. Uricchio, "Things to Come," 369.

9. Hjorthén, "Curriculum Development," 79.

10. Lundén, "The Eternal," 25–26.

11. Hjorthén, "Curriculum Development," 79.

12. Hjorthén, "Curriculum Development," 79–80.

13. Julie Sze, qtd. in Hjorthén, "Curriculum Development," 78; Deloria and Olson, *American Studies*, 3.

14. Uricchio, "Things to Come," 369; Olsson and Bolton, "Mediated America," 9–10.

15. Uricchio, "Things to Come," 369.

16. Nordic Association for American Studies, "Archives."

17. Nordic Association for American Studies, "NAAS 2023 Conference Program."

18. Uricchio, "Things to Come," 369.

19. Uricchio, "Things to Come," 380–81.

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UTILIZING GAME-BASED AMERICAN SIMULATION PEDAGOGY TO TEACH NORWEGIAN STUDENTS AMERICAN STUDIES

Abstract: In Scandinavian countries, the teaching of American studies has traditionally taken place within the discipline of English. In recent years, English has moved away from the predominantly Anglo-American approach to include perspectives from a wider range of English-speaking countries. American studies is devoted less class time than it used to get, and consequently, new methods of teaching and learning need to be adopted. This article argues that the American immersion pedagogy *Reacting to the Past* (RTTP), an in-class game method that takes students to historical moments through characters acting out American historical twists, is an excellent high-impact teaching method. RTTP is a student-centered pedagogy that offers engagement and active learning of American history to Norwegian students. Through collected data from English students at the University of Agder, the article aims to discuss how this methodology can enhance learning and integration of American studies.

Keywords: simulation, Reacting to the Past, active learning, flipped classroom, American studies

In higher education in Norway, the instruction of American studies takes place within the subject of English. Historically, American studies has been one of the main pillars of the subject of English as most Norwegian universities and colleges have used an Anglo-American approach in scholarly instruction. However, English, both as a school subject and as a discipline, has changed immensely in recent decades and has become more interdisciplinary than ever before. With the vast diversity currently embedded into English, more and more material of sub-disciplines like grammar, literature, culture, society, phonetics, sociolinguistics, and history, to mention but a few, is being included in course outlines and curricula. Moreover, a larger spread of readings from other English-speaking countries than the US and the UK is, much more than before, also appended to the subject.

Hence, American studies receives less class time and instruction attention than before, leading instructors to contemplate new and innovative teaching and learning methods. As more content should be covered in reduced time, we argue that high-impact teaching and learning strategies should be adopted to a larger degree in the future than we as authors witness at the moment of writing. Still, too much instruction in the subject of English in Norwegian higher education occurs through the delivery-of-information mode that leaves students passive in their own learning.

Consequently, we contend in this article that the American immersion pedagogy of *Reacting to the Past* (RTTP) is a rewarding high-impact learning method to utilize in the teaching of American studies within the subject of English. Under the strained circumstances American studies and other fields of English find themselves in currently, active learning and student participation are called for to cover as much content as possible in an effective and shorter period of class time.[1]

***Reacting to the Past*: High-Impact Teaching and Active Learning**

RTTP is a student-centered pedagogy that offers engagement, participation, and active learning of history.[2] The in-class simulation method takes students to critical historical moments through characters who act out American historical twists in the classroom. The game pedagogy, through the allocated roles/characters, allows students to immerse themselves in these moments and critically debate questions and perspectives built into the different games. This pedagogy invites students into the historical moments and asks them to make a claim, to involve themselves deeply in the different perspectives. In doing so, the historical moments come to life and are more engaging as the pedagogy fosters students' deeper sense of commitment with historical events and the ethical questions associated with those moments.

The simulations vary in length and in the time required to complete them. The instructor's manual often provides multiple models for how the game play can happen. The games often start with an opening plenary session where the characters outline the issues under debate. The structure from then on can vary; characters may host a faction meeting with others who hold similar ideals, or there may be meetings between specific characters. The final session of the simulation usually ends in a vote, or votes, on the key issues at stake. The indeterminant characters have the power to sway the final result of the simulation, even though most RTTP simulations tend to be formed to favor the historical outcome. It is the following discussion, in what is referred to as the post-mortem, where students are able to extend their analysis to *why* and *how* the outcome of the simulation either varied from or mirrored the historical outcome. Throughout the simulation, teachers can integrate the main game questions in a multitude of ways, making it interdisciplinary, just like American studies.

The Benefits of Using *Reacting to the Past* in Teaching American Studies in Norway

In this section we will provide arguments for why RTTP is a suitable high-impact teaching method tailor-made to enhance the learning outcomes of American studies in more effective and concentrated ways. It is worth noting that this paper discusses the benefits of using RTTP and does not extensively focus on negative aspects. RTTP may not be the solution for all instructors as it can be seen as time-consuming in focusing on particular historical moments rather than giving a cursory review of American history. Moreover, RTTP may, from instructors' point of view, leave the learning to the students, making teachers redundant in the classroom.

However, with less class time on instructors' hands, teaching efficiency has become more of an issue in recent years. Still, too many instructors rely on information delivery through lecturing to a generation of students who seem unfit to depend on only this traditional form of learning. With an expanding subject like English, instructors' fears of giving up control in the auditorium, and a bias toward an attitude of teaching your own students in the way you as an instructor were taught, lead to a larger gap between students and teachers.

In fact, in a binary system of delivering and receiving information, students reproduce this information in the exam in some shape or form, but this "teaching-to-the-exam" format has limited usefulness for longer in-depth learning. Delivering information through the lecture format is a form of educational control where instructors impart information and students take notes and too frequently reproduce the notes at the exam. In such a system, instructors believe that learning has occurred if the grades are good. However, if grades are poor, teachers often blame students for not being up to standards and not mastering the higher education format rather than being self-reflective, evaluating their own teaching methods. If the aim of education is to equip students with strategies to use and reuse their knowledge and skills, this one-sided learning has little merit and restricted effectiveness. Anecdotal conversations with students as well as more formal surveys in both the US and Norway show that students quickly forget most of what they learned after a lecture, and even more so after an examination.

Hence, we would argue, in the light of how English as a subject and American studies as a discipline develop, that adopting an innovative pedagogy like RTTP transcends students' perceptions of being recipients of instructors' selected information, often provided on the instructors' terms. RTTP offers a way for students to engage in multiple modalities of active learning and knowledge production, for example research, reading, writing, arguing and developing skill sets such as critical thinking, public speaking, and student collaboration learning. Moreover, RTTP challenges the typical transactional expositional approach to education by fostering personal and intellectual development in the creation of complex, reflective participation in cultural themes and issues rather than the mundane discourse often favored by American studies textbooks or antiquated forms of teaching.

The founder of RTTP—Mark Carnes of Barnard College, Columbia University—claims in his book *Minds of Fire* (2014) that disengaged students, poor retention, and poor academic performance made him bring gaming into the classroom.[3] Carnes recognized student engagement with the "subversive play worlds" (gaming) and constructed a pedagogy that could actively engage the college community.[4] As he notes, play is central to learning and learning often happens outside of classrooms, in residential halls, on sports teams, and through ensembles.[5] Bringing back learning, as is Carnes's central argument for using a pedagogy like RTTP, is a building block in

the college community, and RTTP offers an opportunity to take this extended learning concept into the classroom.

It is precisely this argument and this emphasis on skills-based learning through playing that we promote to further utilize as an excellent learning strategy for the teaching of American studies in the future. Ultimately, American studies, as one of the traditional cornerstones of the subject of English, is under pressure from other area studies in the broadening subject. Thus, we believe that English as a subject finds itself in a time of transition where instructors and students alike will need to locate new high-impact practices of teaching and learning to facilitate education in American studies for future generations of students.

For the last several years, we have worked with bringing this high-impact learning strategy of the RTTP experience to Norwegian university and middle-school classrooms. In order to try to convince future teachers to introduce game playing in their own classrooms, we decided to place the pedagogy primarily in teacher training programs. Based on the surveys we have conducted after playing, student responses clearly indicate that they enjoyed that the lecture-controlled classroom was supplanted with a truly active learning space. In a postgame survey, thirty-five Norwegian students in two classes were asked how they experienced participating in RTTP and how their involvement differed from a typical Norwegian classroom.

Interestingly, each of the thirty-five responses highlighted an active learning component of the games to illustrate the differences between traditional classrooms and RTTP classrooms. This representative feedback illustrates how these future teachers perceived the game-playing experience: "I love how it promotes and requires active participation, discussion, critical thinking and argumentative skills on the fly. Compare this to the 'typical' classroom where pupils are passive, and you get a whole different learning outcome."[6] The emphasis on skills-based learning in this comment is important, as it illustrates the different types of learning present in an RTTP classroom.

By far the most intriguing data point of our surveys comes from the fall 2022 survey, where 100 percent of the students (seventeen) either agreed (18 percent; three students) or strongly agreed (82 percent; fourteen students) with the statement "[r]eacting encourages a sense of cooperation among students and fosters a 'learning community.'"[7] This point emphasizes the communal nature of RTTP in the classroom and the interdependent nature of all students learning and participating so their faction will win the game. The result is that students master the content of the given classroom because they are responsible for their own learning and held accountable for that information by their peers—if you are not prepared for class, you let your side down, not the professor.

Moreover, RTTP also teaches students how to present the material through discussion, argumentation, speaking, and critical thinking. Another student noted, "[a]n RTTP classroom demands way more preparation, and we are much more responsible for our own learning. The game allows us to be creative and do something different" by tapping into student creativity in the active learning process.[8] And in the field of active learning, Hagood, Watson and Williams note, "[a]ctive learning means that students are required to engage in cognitive processing, and the best active learning strategies are structured in a way so all students in a class are compelled to be part of the learning process. Therefore, a key trait of impactful active learning strategies is that it is difficult for all students to opt out of participation."[9]

Learning communities foster inspiration for group work, allowing students to discuss, engage, and together agree on ways forward while encouraging each other to perform at their best. When asked about positive game experiences, students noted, "I think the class had a lot of fun doing this, everyone had to engage in discussion, ask questions. This way everyone could be involved," and "I learned a lot and I think it was fun. It also brought [me] closer to my fellow students."[10] As this feedback suggests, learning to work together also promotes yet another learning outcome, namely increased critical thinking skills. When asked in the survey what skills they adopted from playing, 95 percent identified critical thinking as a central skill.[11]

After observing multiple university classes in American studies at Minnesota State University-Moorhead, Luther College, and the University of Agder, we claim that Norwegian students tend to be generally less prepared compared to American students when it comes to reading and interpreting primary texts. This is arguably the case in American studies, as topics in this field are usually reading-intensive. However, reading changed significantly in our RTTP classes. When asked in the survey if the game enhanced their abilities to understand the ideas and historical context presented in the game, 94 percent answered "yes." At first, students struggled to learn the material required to play the game on their own but using it in the game helped them understand the material much more readily. Ultimately, this feedback suggested that reading about American immigration, slavery, the removal of Native Americans, and the Civil Rights Movement produced more holistic learning among students when placed in the context of a competitive RTTP game. Being able to utilize the knowledge in playing proved a wider purpose of reading the sources.[12]

Another important aspect of RTTP is the liberation of playing the game "as your character." Understanding and arguing positions they might not support as their 2024 selves was much easier when students played characters in the game and understood the period from their character's point of view. Some students reflected on how the game helped raise their understanding to a "new level" by giving them an opportunity to be part of history.[13] Playing a game and the amusement of collaboration and being someone other than themselves shifts the focus away from instrumental learning to something that is fun to be part of. Students seem to forget that they are in a learning situation as they become immersed in their characters and their characters' historical moments. To echo Carnes, "true learning happens when students are engaged and immersed in a game without realizing that learning is going on. That is when they learn the most."[14]

As we have noted, critical thinking is central to RTTP and high-impact learning practices. The benefits of using role-playing to help students understand and reflect on the historical past and link those reflections to today's world are perhaps best illustrated by this student response: "[i]t helped me to see that we somehow did the same to the Sami people as well. We forced them to change and move—forced them to be something they are not."[15] This student was part of the class who played the RTTP game *Red Clay, 1835: Cherokee Removal and the Meaning of Sovereignty.*[16] This viewpoint underlines one of our desired goals for RTTP, namely that students realize that learning history, and more specifically in this context American history, is a dynamic process of acquiring insights into the past to better understand societies of today.

As we noted above, time is increasingly limited in Scandinavian American studies classrooms. The question really becomes how we can make certain that students learn the material we think

is important at a time when ideas about effective teaching and learning are changing. Teaching in a traditional lecture-based format can be problematic today as it is not clear if students are willing, or able, to learn from this fashion anymore. One of our missions with RTTP is to enlighten instructors on the huge gap that exists between what they believe constitutes learning and what actually does. Clearly, it is in this intersection that we vouch for RTTP as a good teaching tool for future instructors of American studies. Being willing to take a calculated risk by introducing simulation pedagogy will hopefully result in deepened learning and bring past events, decisions, and actions into current perspectives.

Notes

1. In conversations with colleagues around Norway over many years, it is still a widespread impression that lecture-based teaching is the dominating mode of instruction. This impression is also carried out by survey responses in 2019, 2022 and 2023.

2. RTTP is an American pedagogy that came out of Barnard College, Columbia University. Games are mostly written by American colleagues, but the authors of this article have developed a simulation game on Norwegian immigration to the American Midwest. For more information on RTTP, see https://reactingconsortium.org/.

3. Carnes, *Minds on Fire.*

4. Carnes, *Minds on Fire*, 64.

5. Carnes, *Minds on Fire*, 64.

6. Data from an in-class anonymous survey given autumn 2019.

7. Data from an in-class anonymous survey given autumn 2022.

8. Survey 2022.

9. Hagood et al., "Reacting to the Past," 3.

10. Data from an in-class anonymous survey given autumn 2023.

11. Surveys 2019, 2022, 2023.

12. Surveys 2019, 2022, 2023.

13. Survey 2023.

14. Carnes, lecture at the Annual Institute, RTTP, June 2017, Barnard College, New York.

15. Survey 2023.

16. Weaver and Weaver, *Red Clay.*

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"HELT TEXAS, MORGAN KANE!"

Notes on the Pedagogies of Finding, Documenting, and Teaching the American West in Norwegian Backyards

Abstract: Applying transnational/global Wests methodologies, this article is predicated on an admittedly polemic claim: the American West can be found on many (if not all) foreign shores. This article showcases the pedagogies employed in teaching graduate-level cultural studies seminars on the American West in a Norwegian context. American studies students were tasked with locating and retrieving traces/echoes/spores of the American West in their proverbial backyards. They conducted cultural geography fieldwork with a view to generating generation-specific content in the form of short video reels. The resultant documentary archive gestures at clear patterns. For example, the students' findings included, but were not limited to, country-specific (re)imaginings of the mythic West in different media, heterotopic spaces of performance, play, consumption and the hyperreal, instances of 'playing Indian,' iconographic scatterings, cowboy/Western poetics in music, and more. Ultimately, this article illustrates how that which we study from afar may be found in more local(ized) Norwegian contexts, imaginaries, and cultural practices.

Keywords: American West, cultural geography, rhizomatic Wests, postwest, guerilla academic

In mid-June 2024, *Aftenposten*, Norway's largest newspaper, published an article titled "Yee-ha! Cowboy-Stilen Er Tilbake" in its lifestyle supplement, *A-magasinet*.[1] The piece engages with what is perhaps best understood as a kind of 'renaissance' of all things West(ern) in certain quarters of the mainstream that is not limited to style and aesthetics. When they tackle this ongoing phenomenon, journalists in the US, Europe, and elsewhere have affixed the label cowboy/Westerncore to it; another gateway that leads down this particular rabbit hole is marked with signs that read the '*Yellowstone* effect' and/or the 'Taylor Sheridan effect.' While mapping the origin and growth of this phenomenon would go beyond the scope of this article, it should be clear that this 'renaissance' has been coming since the turn of the millennium. Having repeatedly served as a psycho-socio-cultural canvas for the US in the past, the contemporary resurgence of the West has been driven primarily by a perceptible increase in popular culture/mass media output that offers mostly postwestern[2] narratives across the transmedia landscape,[3] and—supercharged by Black Lives Matter sensibilities—the 'Yeehaw' agenda.[4]

The *Aftenposten* article centers on Western enthusiast and firearms afficionado Anne-Lise Neskvern. Known as "Rosie Sunset" on the Scandinavian Western shooting circuit, she grew up watching genre Westerns and listening to country music. During the Covid-19 pandemic, she converted her home's basement in the Tåsen neighborhood of Oslo into an opulently decorated Western lounge, reminiscent of a movie-Western saloon at a theme park. When she is not on the shooting range, she line dances with members of the Skedsmo Western Club, which is based just outside of Oslo, in Lillestrøm, and attends country music festivals around the country. Of the surprisingly abundant country music events in Norway, the Norsk Countrytreff is the country's largest, taking place in Breim, in Vestland, every year in early July. The *Aftenposten* article stresses that organizers expect a boost in what have historically been large audience numbers due to this renewed mainstreaming of the cowboy aesthetic and country music. All of this goes to show that *Aftenposten* is not wrong in declaring that cowboy aesthetics and, by extension, the West are back in style.

It is clear that these transnational traces of this quintessentially American geo-cultural region have regained more attention, as well as popular cachet. More often than not, they are still filtered through a precritical, Turnerian lens of myth and romance. However, from an American studies point of view, and specifically from a vantage point of "doing" the discipline in non-American environments, it is not as if these traces of the West—the pedagogical efficacy of which is the principal subject of this article—have ever truly disappeared in spite of the paradigm-shifting labors of New Western historians and their postwestern scions. As a matter of fact, it is especially the latter who initiated and continue to nurture a transnational/global turn of and in Western studies. Undergirded by this *worlding* of the discipline,[5] this article takes the shape of a pedagogical conspectus for finding, teaching, and documenting the West in transnational backyards.

An example like Anne-Lise Neskvern's makes for an effective entry point; her identity, embodied cultural practices and their attendant im/material spaces, is enmeshed in a lattice of traces that point to what Krista Comer has delineated as "global West circuits,"[6] upon which we can track the "traffic of multiple, popular Wests."[7] These traces, or, more precisely, rhizomatic spores, coalesce into what Neil Campbell injected into the discipline as "the presence of westness . . . a complex, unending palimpsest" that is "a system of westness."[8] They then lend themselves well to being leveraged in student-friendly and age-/generation-based tasks that are geared toward

teaching the American West as transnational/global Wests in a European American studies setting. One specific task—an exercise in cultural geography fieldwork and documentation—will serve as a showcase for how the transnational/global turn in Western studies, led by scholars such as Campbell, Comer, David Wrobel, and Janne Lahti, among others, can reinvigorate a much-needed critical interest in the popular West among students and scholars alike. After all, the American West is the fastest-growing geo-cultural region in North America across most metrics. Consequently, the West *matters* to the future of the United States, the global community, and American studies in particular.

Appreciating Global Wests by De-Exceptionalizing the Region: A Mini Primer

Generally, when we think about the American West entering the popular global consciousness, we tend to locate it vis-à-vis the US, making its hard and soft power felt around the globe in the lead-up to World War II, and then more forcefully during the ideological showdown with the Soviet Union afterwards. However, the efforts of global Wests scholars to de-exceptionalize the American West have aimed at historical periods and their popular culture output that preceded the 'American Century.' In seminar sessions, students are introduced to these 'deeper' historical roots of global Wests, which then become the basis for them to engage in the necessary "*transmotional* route work"[9] as they are tasked with finding echoes/traces/spores of the West in their proverbial backyards. Their findings have since become the seedstock for an evolving, peer-generated archive that gestures at rather clear patterns; they include but are not limited to country-specific (re)imaginings of the mythic West in different media, heterotopic spaces of performance, play, consumption and the hyperreal, instances of 'Playing Indian,'[10] iconographic scatterings, cowboy/Western poetics in music, and more.

Whenever students encounter spores of the West outside of the United States, they appear to be firmly lodged in an all-too-familiar mesh of national exceptionalism—and they usually are, at least in part. However, since the spores, as well as the region itself, are always-already encased in a transnational frame of reference, deploying the global Wests paradigm in the American studies classroom is not only rewarding, but also essential. Consequently, there is a need to identify what students have to know about the transnational turn in Western studies and the global Wests paradigm in order to find, appreciate, and document spores of the West in Norwegian lifeworlds.

Strictly speaking, global Wests are hardly anything new, but their copresences have been obfuscated by "the well-known narrative of the West as the lodestone of national exceptionalism."[11] Yet, despite spawning a powerful mythos of exceptionalism that also entered a reciprocal exchange with scholarship from the turn of the twentieth century (chiefly by Frederick Jackson Turner and the sizable cohort of historians he influenced), the West as tripartite entity in geography, history, and the imagination[12] has always-already been transnational/global. Conceptualizing, understanding, and teaching the American West as global Wests is essentially predicated on "a new architecture for area studies"[13] indebted to critical and comparative regionalism. This is the type of area studies Neil Campbell envisions, which Krista Comer has pegged as both "a critical perspective that opens the regional West, beyond its Turnerian limits, to the world," and "a critical knowledge project able to intervene upon American cultural imperialism."[14] In short, global Wests scholars have answered the call Walter Nugent made already in the 1990s, i.e., a call to do away with exceptionalist teaching of the region.

Fueled by poststructuralist vigor and rigor, teaching the West as global Wests in American studies then becomes an exercise in de-exceptionalizing, i.e., globalizing, and indeed *worlding* the region. Students can be eased into Campbell's new architecture for area studies by coming to terms with the simple fact that the cardinal directions of East and West are predicated on what Paul Giles has called "a chimerical line of longitude."[15] Consequently, we can shift what we denote as 'West' by way of a 'simple' turn of the globe; by foregrounding its constructedness in cartographic terms and using that to accentuate the imaginaries that have been (re)imagining the West ad nauseam, the longitudinal coordinates that locate the West become loose, uprooted, fungible, and transposable to other longitudes that include, but are not limited to, Nordic meridians.

It is relatively easy to explicate the rather abstract scaffold of the global Wests paradigm to students by way of concrete historical examples—usually of the popular kind—that scholars have placed front and center in their work. Critical and comparative regionalists such as Aaron Nyerges and Golnar Nabizadeh have firmly concluded that "in pop form, geography travels."[16] I would hasten to add that not only does it travel, but it also excites because, as Krista Comer reminds us, "pop Wests [are] migrating locations, not static hemispheric or conceptual structures."[17] In order to help students cultivate a global Wests mode of thinking and engaging, three categories of examples—all of which are rooted in, or, perhaps better, *routed* through the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century—serve as a testbed for (re)worlding the West of the past: a) European travelers such as Friedrich Gerstäcker and their all-too-often sensationalist travel writing; b) contemporary mass attractions like George Catlin's travelling 'Indian Gallery,' Buffalo Bill's Wild West and its imitators; and, what is perhaps best described as c) comparative imperialism. Even though the late-nineteenth-century West became frozen in time as an exceptionalist narrative Neverland, David Wrobel has stressed that it was *also* "a century of global contextualization of the American West by Europeans and Americans."[18] Different imperial 'frontiers' were in dialogue with each other not least because those who set, influenced, and carried out expansionist policies took a keen interest in their rivals' ventures. From these excursive forays into global Wests of the past form a knowledge/methods packet students need to move to the next stage: engaging in cultural geography fieldwork. Equipped with these deep global Wests roots and routes, they are then let loose on Norwegian backyards in pursuit of a deceivingly simple goal: find the West in their own here and now.

"Hvor Er Den Neste Ville Vest Byen?"[19]

The deeper historical roots and routes of global Wests are the substrate upon which, according to Nyerges and Nabizadeh, "the rise of the culture industry in the twentieth century" took place, "tracking the mass proliferation of ideas, forms, and images that continue to shape the struggle over globalizing space."[20] The task students are asked to complete opens with the admittedly polemic claim that the American West can be found on many (if not all) foreign shores, including the Nordics. These cohorts of American studies students have to carry out cultural geography fieldwork within approximately two weeks. They are directed to discover echoes/traces/spores of the American West in their immediate everyday lifeworlds in Norway.[21] Campbell's observations serve to remind them that "all the 'routes' by which we might travel are, of course, no longer tied to physical movement . . . since every billboard, every commodity purchased, every radio, iPod, CD player, TV, and PC permits 'travel' to some extent, however virtual, creating a movement that affects the local and

interferes with perceptions of where and what we are."[22] Thus, students arguably know that what they are looking for can take many forms (e.g., symbols, narratives, performances, spaces/locations, bodies, objects, etc.). These forms then transpose and/or remediate (elements of) the mythical West, the historical West, and/or the contemporary West. Not only do they have to identify and travel on these global Wests routes in their own lifeworlds, they also have to document one specific example by way of recording and posting a video reel (e.g., on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or similar). The reel has to include a short comment—voiceover or text overlay—on their specific example, explaining what it 'says' about and/or how it 'makes use' of the American West in its specific/local(ized) context(s). Their videos should be no longer than two to three minutes and they subsequently share them on an electronic learning platform (Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, or similar). Prior to the next seminar session, students are tasked with watching each other's reels before they are then showcased and further dissected in class. Taken together, the students' slice-of-life reels contribute to a work-in-progress documentary archive of global Wests in Norway (as well as in other places). The student-generated seedstock of the archive has since gestured at certain patterns or categories of global Wests that map closely onto the concerns of critical and comparative regionalism; they speak to "issues of place, bodies in place, and knowledges derived via textuality and discourse," as well as to "place as a critical location, an orientation, and material structure."[23]

Most of the examples that have been gathered so far can be grouped into a category that encompasses heterotopic spaces of performance, play, consumption, and the hyperreal. There, Campbell asserts, the West is "in a state of constant 'becoming,' the idea of the West . . . is put under question, its authenticity interrogated, the more it is performed and 'virtualized.'"[24] Students have documented a number of 'Wild West' towns and clubs, despite the fact that these have arguably become less popular and numerous over the past two decades. For example, Deadwood City is located in Vikersund about ninety minutes east of Oslo. It is operated by a club that offers entertainment and social programming during the summer. Among other things, Deadwood City stages narrated train robberies and gunfights. Club members appear to be into historical reenactment, too. Inspired by the long-running TV series *Gunsmoke* (1955–75), Dodge City, another Western town, has been erected just outside of Svarstad, about an hour-and-a-half south of the nation's capital. Also run by a club, Dodge City's erstwhile 'mayor,' Erik Thorbjørnsen, stressed that apart from indulging in playing cowboys and Indians, their club aims to promote outdoor activities and nature education.[25] A little bit further afield and across the Swedish border, we find Rock River City and the regionally rather well-known Western-themed amusement park High Chaparral. There are also quite a number of bars and restaurants in and around Oslo that incorporate Western iconography in their decor. More often than not, they lean into Western Americana, especially road and diner culture that is steeped in the Route 66 mythos. Examples range from the Palace Bar and Grill and the Johnny Rockets franchise to the burger joint Lille Amerika and the BFF Diner.

Figure 1. The 'Wild West' in rural Norway.

Play and playacting are common features in the traces of the West that students have collated. For example, Oslo's The Escape Games offers a *Ville Vest Ekspressen* escape room adventure. Donning faux western wear, players 'wake up' as travelers on a steam train and then try to solve and ultimately foil a sinister plot. There are at least two larger festivals—one in Halden and one in Vanse—where Americanophiles gather every year, and where one can delight in a hodgepodge mix of American car and road culture, Americana, and Western-style reenactments. In spring 2023, the University of Oslo's on-campus student pub Kjeller'n organized a Western-themed *Cowboyfest*, which featured, among other things, a costume contest with prizes (Figure 2).

The carnivalesque reenactments and, more generally, the playing with and/or on the West that one may encounter in these spaces are anything but unproblematic from a racial justice/equality point of view. Student observations have been in line with those of the author when it comes to the general popularity of (still) allowing children to play 'cowboys and Indians' at Halloween. Even though the mainstream might not place too much weight on such seemingly 'harmless' practices, Indigenous studies scholars and post-/decolonial activists have been working hard to make clear that Indigenous cultures and their knowledge traditions are not 'playthings.' One particular incident drew the attention of a number of students. In October 2017, the then-finance minister of Norway, Siv Jensen, was met with harsh criticism from the media and the Nordics' own Indigenous Samí population after having shared a picture on social media that showed her dressed in an Indian 'costume' she wore to

a theme party at the Ministry of Finance (Figure 3). The irony of this tasteless act of appropriation and racialized harm is rather self-evident in a cultural context where the nation state continues to wrestle with the latent impact that its own settler colonial legacy has on the Samí people. Students have shown solid comparative thinking and racial sensitivity in setting this particular spore of global Wests into dialogue with local concerns and wider post-/decolonial studies.

Another rather sizable category of examples encompasses global Wests in narrative form (broadly conceived). On the one hand, there are variants of and variations on genre Westerns while, on the other, there are narratives rooted in Norway's emigration history. The long-running *Morgan Kane* series occupies a prominent position. Created as a pulp-style Western hero by Kjell Hallbing in 1966, the book series comprises eighty-three titles that remain in print and have by now become available in electronic form. *Morgan Kane* has reached a predominately male readership that spans different generational cohorts. Hallbing, who wrote under the pseudonym Louis Masterson, sold more than ten million copies in Norway and another ten million abroad. His oeuvre was also adapted into an equally successful comic book series by Norwegian illustrator and cartoonist Ernst Olsen Meister. Swedish singer Benny Borg, who represented Norway at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1972, has been an avid fan of *Morgan Kane* since the launch of the series. Very reminiscent of Marty Robbins's signature style, Borg collaborated with Hallbing to produce "Balladen Om Morgan Kane," which stormed the Norwegian charts in 1973. He followed up with two ballads about two other figures in the Kane universe—"Legenden Om Metzgar" (1973) and "Sangen Om Jesse Rawlins" (1974), respectively—but they did not perform as well. Morgan Kane has

Figure 2. Partying like cowboys at UiO.

Figure 3. *Spiller indianer i Norge.*

also lent his name to a Western-themed section—Morgan Kane City—in the Tusenfryd amusement park on the southern outskirts of Oslo; it is another heterotopic space where global Wests are performed and consumed. Students also documented the presence of other European print-genre Westerns that have been published in translation and have gained popularity in Norway. After submitting

Figure 4. Tex Willer and his companions in the retail wilds of Norway.

Figure 5. *Hva synger den norske cowboyen?*

their video reel, one student brought to class their father's collection of the Belgian comic book series *Zilverspijl* (published as *Sølvspilen* in Norway). While the series went out of print in 1986, the long-running, Italian-produced comic book series *Tex*, which has been telling the exploits of fictional Texas Ranger Tex Willer since 1948, is readily available in translation; it can be found in the newspaper/magazine section of almost every major grocery and/or bookstore in Norway (Figure 4).

Norway has a relatively long and rich emigration history. Generally, Norwegian Americans are located in the Upper Midwest, especially in Wisconsin and Minnesota. However, there is a sizable presence of people who claim Norwegian descent in the Dakotas, Montana, and Washington State, as well. Bergen-based director Frode Fimland produced the award-winning documentary *John: Den Siste Norske Cowboy* (2021), in which he spotlights the life of one rather unique Norwegian American: John Hoiland. The late Hoiland was a nonagenarian rancher who lived all by himself on a small spread outside of Big Timber, Montana. The film offers a delightful portrait of aging and masculinity in the rural West, and it sets the Norwegian agricultural heritage into dialogue with Western livestock raising economies.

Last but not least, as the example that provided the anecdotal entry point in the introduction has already shown, the all-too-popular and common intersection of cowboy/Western aesthetics and country music is alive and well in Norway. Lindesness-based singer-songwriter John Erik Loland released the aptly named single "Norwegian Cowboy" along with a music video in 2012.[26] Alternating between English and Norwegian, the song lyrics and imagery of the music video juxtapose the coastal working class of Southern Norway with Western rural romance and nostalgia (Figure 5). Even though this student-centered, extramural task of cultural geography fieldwork has been conducted over a relatively short period of time, its rich and diverse results point to a promising start for excavating more global Wests as a rhizomatic presence in Norway and the Nordics in general.

The West is Everywhere—Everywhere is the West

By way of a brief conclusion-cum-outlook, it makes sense to revisit Paul Giles's assertion that any West is contingent on chimerical longitudinal coordinates. In other words, we can turn the globe by a few or more degrees, and new global Wests spores are likely to come into view. The student-centered task that has been

showcased in this article emerged from a conscious effort to respond both critically and creatively to what are often unrealistic and outright contradictory demands placed on the humanities in a neoliberalized, necrotic education 'market.' On the one hand, teaching in higher education, individual class tasks, and student engagement should always be geared toward instilling high degrees of scholarly rigor, conduct, and accountability; and they should always be research-informed/research-driven at that. Yet on the other hand, effectiveness is measured, and on rare occasions rewarded, only if student graduation rates are maximized and the teaching of transferable/marketable skills is apparent. Consequently, the student-centered task of finding and documenting global Wests in Norwegian backyards is part and parcel of pedagogical principles that are geared toward cultivating a student-scholar peer culture of co-creation and co-ownership. In other words, such tasks are designed to serve as a kind of *guerilla academics* with a view to subverting dubious new public management policies. The task cross-fertilizes engagement with and understanding of somewhat challenging theories and methods with critical media literacies that call for and foster (new) media production, dissection, and presentation skills.

The pilot stage of this task took place within an American studies context in Poland in 2021. What began as a one-off experiment later took the shape of something that could, and indeed has, become a transferable and replicable teaching format. It was also during the pilot phase that the first contours of the different categories within which one could place spores of global Wests quickly coalesced—there is no shortage of 'Wild West' towns and Western-themed amusement parks, as well as localized variants of genre Westerns, in Poland and beyond. The presence of exchange students from both Europe and further afield added even more to the rhizomatic "system of westness"[27] that scholars like Neil Campbell invite us to explore. Consequently, the seedstock of global Wests spores in Norway will be expanded in future iterations of seminars that are geared toward teaching the American West. It is also within the realm of the possible that the task could become an anchor point for conducting collaborative work with scholars and their students in other Nordic countries. Similarly, American studies scholars specializing in other topic areas and their attendant popular imaginaries might want to consider having their students take the classroom outside the classroom and into their everyday lifeworlds. On that note: *ri videre, Morgan Kane, ri videre!*[28]

Notes

1. Holtvedt, "Yee-Ha! Cowboy-Stilen Er Tilbake," 48.

2. For entry-level postwestern scholarship, see Campbell, *Post-Westerns*; and Kollin, *Postwestern Cultures*.

3. For example, on television, the number of shows that are either set in the West and/or feature distinctively Western 'types' has noticeably and steadily increased since HBO's *Deadwood* (2004–06). These titles often but not always cross-fertilize with crime drama. Not only is the West(ern) alive and well in the movies, but best-selling video games such as the *Red Dead Redemption* series also point to the popularity of the West across all media.

4. The term was coined in a tweet by Internet archivist Bri Malandro in 2018, labeling a certain Western aesthetic in contemporary African American fashion, art, and music (see Reese).

5. For a more comprehensive take on worlding the West(ern), see Campbell, *Worlding the Western*.

6. Comer, "The Problem," 208.

7. Nyerges and Nabizadeh, "The Transmigration of West," 1.

8. Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West,* 1, 37.

9. Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West*, 37.

10. For a foundational text on the concept of 'playing Indian,' see Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

11. Wrobel, "Prologue," 4.

12. For an easy-to-use introduction to and working definition of the West in these terms, see Mogen, "The Frontier Archetype," 18; and McMurtry, *Sacagawea's Nickname*, 9.

13. Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West*, 37.

14. Comer, "The Problem," 205–7.

15. Giles, "Afterword," 5.

16. Nyerges and Nabizadeh, "The Transmigration of West," 2.

17. Comer, "The Problem," 208.

18. Wrobel, "Prologue," 10.

19. Translated by author: "Where is the next Wild West town?"

20. Nyerges and Nabizadeh, "The Transmigration of West," 1.

21. If Norway is not their home country, they may also trace routes of global Wests in their country of origin.

22. Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West*, 5.

23. Comer, "The Problem," 210.

24. Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West*, 26.

25. Kvasjord, "'Ville Vesten' i Lardals."

26. Loland, "Norwegian Cowboy."

27. Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West*, 37.

28. Translated by author: "Ride on, Morgan Kane, ride on!"

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Mapping American Literature
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MAPPING AMERICAN LITERATURE WITH *THE GREAT GATSBY*

Abstract: Taking The Great Gatsby as its central case study, this article discusses my method of teaching regional American literature in Nordic classrooms through a liberal use of maps. It argues that closely attending to the cities, states, and regions to which literary texts refer helps students better understand and scrutinize their larger claims.

Keywords: pedagogy, American literature, *The Great Gatsby*, place, maps

When I taught in the United States, I offered a regional literature survey course to undergraduates that featured early twentieth-century fiction set in the American South, West, Midwest, and Northeast. Such a course depended on students having visceral associations with these regions and knowledge of their distinctive histories and traits, or at least some awareness of regional stereotypes. I could count on their knowing something about the colonies of New England, the South and slavery, the West and the frontier. But for the programs I've contributed to in Europe, such a course has felt too specialized. When teaching in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, therefore, I adapted it into a course that is equally place-based but framed in a different way: "Place and Movement in American Literature." The readings vary, but among other texts usually include *A Lost Lady* or *O Pioneers!*; *Passing* or *Quicksand*; *Cane*; *A Streetcar Named Desire*; and *The Great Gatsby*. The latter serves as this short essay's central case study.

On the first day of class, as a coda to their self-introductions, I ask students to choose a state to say a few things about—because they have a personal connection to it, find it appealing, or just think it weird or humorous. Often, they choose high-profile states such as New York and California, but many others, like Iowa and Rhode Island, make the cut. When references to one of these states crop up in our reading, we refer to it as that particular student's state—they always remember their choice. This exercise plays into my personal obsession as someone who has lived in fourteen states, spent time in all of them, and recently lived in the least known and least visited state in the country, North Dakota—and that is how I conclude my own introduction. Afterwards I hand out blank outline maps and ask them to write in the states that they know. These blank maps usually remain mostly blank. Minnesota and the Dakotas do, however, make a showing, due to their histories of Scandinavian settlement.

Over the course of the term, whenever one of our texts refers to a state, we write its title in the appropriate place on the map. I ask them to do this at home to prepare for class, and the keener oblige. We start each session by discussing which states are represented in the day's reading. These include not only the states where plot events occur, but also those that serve as future destinations or points of origin or are just referenced in passing. This starting point naturally segues into larger discussions. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for example, yields Illinois, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and identifying these key locations mandates that we talk about the histories of each, including the surge of European immigrants to industrial Chicago, the racial caste system of Mississippi, and the unique social composition of New Orleans. This context in turn helps us better assess the motives and acts of Blanche, Stanley, and the people they live among in their cramped city apartment, along with the extra-personal significance of the events that unfold there. While undergraduate discussions of literary texts usually begin with characters before leaving them, reluctantly, to assess theme and setting, this exercise causes us to begin with places, dislodging characters from their privileged conversational space and driving home the truth that texts are formed by more than just plot and people.

This reorientation alone makes the map worth it. A secondary, less literary benefit is that the method works well in American studies programs that enroll students who may be less interested in studying literature than politics and history but are required to do so. This practice makes them realize that literature courses can deepen their understanding of US history—including the Civil War, western settlement, immigration, industrialization, urban development, and the Great Migration—and the roots of contemporary social movements and political debates.

As the weeks pass and the map thickens, we look for patterns: which states play lead roles, which recur as bit players, which are invoked but remain offstage. We also look at the portions of the map that remain blank, those areas that are underrepresented in our set of texts, and consider the reasons why. At first, I was worried that filling in the map would make our discussions of literary texts too literal, reducing aesthetic artifacts to records. Sometimes this is indeed the case, as we rack our collective brain to recall an incidental disclosure that somebody's mother's cousin is said to have passed through Arkansas—or was it Missouri? But if anything, our discussion of places is too readily unmoored from actual geographic locations. The very first line of the novel that often launches the course, Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady,* confounds the enterprise from the start: "Thirty or forty years ago, in one of those grey towns along the Burlington railroad, which are so much greyer to-day than they were then, there was a house well known from Omaha to Denver for its hospitality and for a certain charm of atmosphere."[1] Are we in Nebraska? In Colorado? Somewhere else? Does it matter?

Ideally, at the end of the term our map would look something like Geoff Sawers's inviting "Literary Map of the USA." Our maps, though, are nowhere near as beautiful, complete, or informative as his. In fact, usually the exercise falls apart. The map becomes too crowded and messy—especially in the oft-referenced and mini-stated Northeast—and over a long semester, I start to forget to set time aside for it. Other conversations become more urgent. But the map remains a useful reference point, reminding us that texts are set in places, usually more than one, and that characters, events, and allusions shift between them. A student once told me that it had never occurred to her that books have to be *somewhere*.

Contrary to what this map exercise may suggest, as nodes of intellectual exploration I am not particularly invested in students learning about states. Even as we inventory those we encounter, really what I care about are regions—the symbolic and emotional resonances of West, Northeast, Midwest, and South—in line with the course's origins as a survey of regional literary traditions. While states are geographical, political, and legal entities, bounded and defined, regions are cultural ones that cross borders and confound categorization. Starting out with states leads us to investigate more subjective regional identities and the ways they get formed and imagined.

Students in the course also become more alert to what happens outside the continental United States, in locations such as Alaska, Mexico, Brazil, or France—to which male characters, at least, are regularly dispatched. (So many of the men in early twentieth-century American fiction venture to South America to become an engineer or manage a mine, returning some chapters later with gold and new skills.) Diligent mapping can also attune students to political, historical, and literary allusions entirely outside the realm of plot. This practice is of course useful for non-fiction, too. At first glance, *Walden* and its tiny cabin in the woods can appear so narrowly local, yet the text produces a dense transnational geography: invoking, to use Thoreau's nomenclature, Indians and Irish at home, Laplanders across the sea, and the ancient "Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek" philosophers who helped form his cabin philosophy.[2]

The course title, "Place and Movement," refers to this expanding, unbounded multiplicity of places and the way not only the characters but also we as readers are repeatedly and often dizzily shifted between them. *A Streetcar Named Desire* begins with Blanche's new arrival from Laurel, Mississippi, ferried to the New Orleans street of "Elysian Fields" by "a streetcar named Desire"

and then another named "Cemeteries," as she, with astonishment, recounts.[3] The protagonist of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* seeks a meaningful life in rural Alabama, Chicago, Harlem, Copenhagen, and then Alabama again. Cather's books are suffused with histories of how her "pioneers" came to inhabit the places they do. The characters in Jean Toomer's *Cane*, especially the women, are embedded in their small Georgia town, visited by male outsiders—including the narrator—who arrive from remote cities by train. The midsection of *Cane* sees a northern urban exodus, but the migrants' home ties remain unsevered. Of a southern transplant observed at a city theater, Toomer declares, "[h]er strong roots sink down and spread under the river and disappear in blood-lines that waver south. Her roots shoot down."[4]

The Great Gatsby is likewise a deeply geographic text. Its originating events, which occur prior to its main ones, are all tied to place. The narrator, Nick Caraway, introduces himself as hailing from an unidentified "Middle Western city," a gesture that replicates the vagueness of the setting in *A Lost Lady*, "one of those grey towns" in the Great Plains. (Indeed, Fitzgerald was so influenced by *A Lost Lady* in writing this book that he wrote to Cather "to explain an instance of apparent plagiarism."[5]) Nick studied at Yale, coyly denoted by "New Haven," fought in the First World War, and then relocated, momentously, to New York. Jay Gatsby grew up in North Dakota, and as a youth he was taken in by a man described as "a product of the Nevada silver fields, of the Yukon, of every rush for metal since seventy-five."[6] Gatsby, too, served in Europe and eventually made his way to New York. The main women characters, Daisy and Jordan, are from Louisville, Kentucky, on whose racialized character the latter insists in stating, "our white girlhood was passed together there."[7] The unfathomably wealthy Tom and Daisy Buchanan honeymoon in Hawaii, settle briefly in Santa Barbara, and live large in the suburbs outside Chicago before moving to Long Island, where they pass their days across the bay from Nick and Gatsby.

The contemporary events of *The Great Gatsby* are structured by small journeys. The characters move back and forth by automobile or train between West Egg and East Egg and between Long Island and Manhattan, sometimes stopping off at the ghostly no-place, the Valley of the Ashes. Erasing actual physical journeys, the distant cities where Gatsby's nefarious business deals play out are brought right into the living rooms of Long Island mansions by the new technology that so fascinates this text, the telephone. The book ends with Nick's disillusioned return to the Midwest.

In discussing *The Great Gatsby*, we move from thinking about states to thinking about the meanings of East, West, South, and Midwest and those of the country, the suburb, and the city. Again, mapping the novel thus coaxes students away from their attachment to character development and plot events. I don't want them to write about whether Daisy loves Gatsby, or even about the SparkNotes binary of old money/new money as signified by East Egg and West Egg. Rather, I would like them to write about a topic such as the novel's representation of the city and its haunting effects. This encourages attending to passages like this one: "I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye."[8] The city is shown to be a place where men and women make intense, fleeting connections with a host of strangers, even as they remain resolutely solitary.

By the time our class reaches the extended geographical argument of the final chapter, with its invocation of "that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night," they are more attuned to

spatial claims and more ready to interrogate them. I reserve ample time to discuss this long, resonant passage:

> One of my most vivid memories is of coming back West from prep school and later from college at Christmas time. Those who went farther than Chicago would gather in the old dim Union Station at six o'clock of a December evening. . . .
>
> When we pulled out into the winter night and the real snow, *our* snow, began to stretch out beside us and twinkle against the windows, and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild brace came suddenly into the air. We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour, before we melted indistinguishably into it again.
>
> That's my Middle West—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. . . .
>
> I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all. Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.[9]

Of course, this is powerful writing, which makes Nick's place-based explanation, justification, rationale all the easier to accept. Yet really, it should blindside us. *The Great Gatsby* is "a story of the West, after all"? How so? And they are "all Westerners"? Jordan and Daisy are from Kentucky!

Perhaps the logic is that their many restless moves—from Louisville to Chicago to Santa Barbara to New York—make them "Westerners." This rather generous reading might be supported by the way in which place becomes process here. The West is not "the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns," not land or settlements, but rather trains, bells, lights, and shadows, as experienced by highly mobile, upper-class young people. But regardless, the sudden assertion that the novel's disastrous climax—manslaughter, homicide, and suicide—is the outcome of a regional "deficiency" seems to come from nowhere (to echo, perhaps not incidentally, Tom's accusation of Gatsby). The text has made very clear that the problem is ethical. This collection of people are all "careless," the charge that Nick makes against the Buchanans and that Jordan makes against him, importing their moral flaws to New York.

The book does in fact prepare us for this geographic sleight of hand, but it is easy to miss. At its midpoint, Gatsby informs Nick:

> "I am the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West—all dead now. I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition."
>
> He looked at me sideways—and I knew why Jordan Baker had believed he was lying.

Nick tries to catch him out:

> "What part of the Middle West?" I inquired casually.
>
> "San Francisco."
>
> "I see."[10]

Identifying the coastal city of San Francisco as his "Middle West" home, Gatsby renders regional categories nonsensical. This detail, while eclipsed by the far more fabulous stories he tells, matters. Gatsby's geographical flexibility is a symptom of not only this particular character's dishonesty but also the text's own tendency to play wildly with regional categories. The Midwest becomes the West and the West becomes the Midwest. Southerners are declared to be Westerners, and, most important, the narrative is declared to be "a story of the West." That Gatsby lies about geography encourages us to see the text—or at least Nick, its famously unreliable narrator—as lying about it, too. *The Great Gatsby*'s seductive yet vexed place logic both mirrors and exposes its seductive yet vexed emotional logic, the irrationality of its main premise, as well as that of its enduring reputation. Nick reads Gatsby as the fantastic embodiment of American essence, despite his being a gangster and conman. *The Great Gatsby* is popularly received as the ultimate "American Dream" narrative, despite it being a tale of failure and fraud.

I do not know if my students follow all that. Perhaps only a few do. I taught *The Great Gatsby* in Sweden quite recently, in September 2024, as part of a "Place and Movement" course. Throughout the term we used the mapping method I've described and kept a steady focus on American regions and how they signify in the texts we read. Yet to my dismay, when asked to do some in-class writing about *The Great Gatsby* and place, most chose the overworked West Egg-new money, East Egg-old money dichotomy. (I suggested some examples—it was not among them.) Hopefully, though, some seeds have been planted to germinate as they continue to think about place and literature.

In the meantime, this attention to geography prompts different kinds of classroom conversations that range outside the strictly literary. In our last *Gatsby* seminar, a student remarked that she had recently driven from Stockholm to Gothenburg, and that it had been a most long, exhausting trip. Why, she asked, do Americans make all these epic journeys and endure so many cross-regional moves? I had thought it self-evident that different places in the United States have such different identities, opportunities, and symbolic resonances—and therefore prompt such relentless journeys—but it was a mystery to her. Attending in very material ways to places in the United States helps me as a teacher as much as it helps my students, in giving me greater insight into how they map America.

Notes

1. Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 5.
2. Thoreau, *Walden*, 15.
3. Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 3.
4. Toomer, *Cane*, 119.
5. Bruccoli, "An Instance," 171.
6. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 106.
7. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby,* 26.
8. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby,* 63.
9. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 182–83.
10. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 71.

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The Dream House of American Culture
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THE DREAM HOUSE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

Archives of the Self, Visions of the Future

Abstract: This article argues that American literature and culture help students draw more expansive geographies of their selves and more articulate narratives of their experiences. Using Carmen Maria Machado's memoir *In the Dream House* as an example, it shows how students are empowered to make meaningful connections between the personal and the political, and how they are encouraged to reflect on their "home" identities, especially with regard to race, class, sexuality, and gender. This text—graphic, raw, and challenging to read—fosters courageous conversations that illustrate what American studies can offer, namely an archive of struggle, a context of representation, and a space of community for our students.

Keywords: Carmen Maria Machado*, In the Dream House*, memoir, archive, community, identity

In her critically acclaimed memoir *In the Dream House* (2019), Carmen Maria Machado compares the process of collecting her memories to the act of constructing an archive. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's discussion of power in *Archive Fever*, Machado uses the house as a metaphor for the archive. As Derrida points out, the word "archive" is derived from the Greek *arkheion*, the embodiment of *arkhē*, "initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates," referring to those who have the power to make and to speak the law.[1] To build an archive, then, is to grapple with the power of the law; in other words, to question what is placed in (or left out of) the archive. As Machado stresses, this is a political act, which entails illuminating the "[g]aps where people never see themselves or find information about themselves. Holes that make it impossible to give oneself a context. Crevices people fall into. Impenetrable silence."[2] As teachers, we empower our students to break this silence, and, to this end, we offer them contexts—literary, cultural, and social—where they can see and find information about themselves, helping them weave their stories into individual and collective archives.

American studies can (and should) offer these contexts, as the history of the United States is a collective archive of struggle for social and racial justice. While some of these struggles might seem geographically remote to our students, they express a remarkable diversity of voices. To make this diversity relatable and meaningful to the Nordic context is, to a large extent, our vocation as teachers and scholars of American studies. In our classes, we foster a cross-cultural perspective that helps our students articulate their stories and draw more expansive geographies of their selves. In what follows, I show how a contemporary American text such as Machado's memoir *In the Dream House* offers the language to express—and the space to imagine—a self across genders, races, and cultures.

The memoir as a genre reveals the ties between the personal and the political and carves a space where readers can see their own struggles. Machado notes that "[t]he memoir is, at its core, an act of resurrection. Memoirists re-create the past, reconstruct dialogue. . . . [T]hey braid the clays of memory and essay and fact and perception together . . . [and] put themselves, and others, into necessary context."[3] In her own memoir, Machado reconstructs the traumatic experience of an abusive relationship with another woman and creates a context for timely and courageous conversations about gender and difference, queerness and desire, and identity and justice.

Machado's text is challenging for undergraduate students: her prose is raw, her imagery is graphic, and her story is horrific. Yet the central conceit, namely the analogy between the memoir as a house of memories and the Dream House as the symbolic (and material) space of the author's past relationship, facilitates the connection between her own experience and the reader's. The form is highly experimental, with chapters of varying length simulating a labyrinthine space with a Gothic feel, which reflects the blurry boundaries between entrapment and desire. The claustrophobic effect of entrapment is counterbalanced by the impressive array of intertextual—popular, literary, and mythic—references and folk motifs, which helps the narrative radiate toward broader themes and cultural contexts. Thus, formal experimentation and cultural scope allow Machado to "braid the clays" of personal story and collective narrative, opening up a space of community for (and with) her readership.[4]

I recently had the chance to teach this text in a transatlantic Women's Literature course at Nord University in Norway. The syllabus featured some canonical British and postcolonial texts, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), yet mainly

focused on American texts, from Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) to realist and naturalist novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905). Using feminist, gender, and queer theory as our primary critical lenses, the students and I debated the meaning of women's literature and expanded the grounds of women's identities. To frame such a broad discussion and a purposefully diverse range of texts—with Machado's memoir as the final text of the semester—we used Adrienne Rich's definition of writing as a revision of personal and collective narratives. As Rich argues in her seminal essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1972), "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering the old text from a new critical direction . . . is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves."[5] The course encouraged students to see themselves in new contexts by exploring representations of women rewriting their identities, reconstructing their narratives, and recreating the archives of their stories in the form of literal and symbolic spaces of community and love.

The students represented a varied disciplinary, social, and cultural demographic. The majority were in the second year of completing their bachelor's degrees in English while others were exchange students in teacher education from overseas. Some students had grown up in regional communities in Northern Norway, whereas others had emigrated from other parts of the world; some of them had fled war, poverty, and oppression, while others had grown up in more stable and secure surroundings. Far from homogenous, the student demographic brought a wide range of perspectives to the class and enriched our discussions, particularly with regard to American culture. I could see that some of the students regarded the United States from a bemused distance, while others confronted it with a critical eye and earnest interest, or merely from a neutral stance. When we started reading *In the Dream House*, we were close to the end of the semester, a time that usually marks the ebb of a course in terms of student engagement and class participation. Contrary to my expectations, the text became a platform for animated discussions on gender, race, sexuality, and identity.

Machado's struggle to find her voice is set in the context of the contemporary United States, yet it raises questions that reverberate across cultural, temporal, and spatial boundaries. In this sense, the memoir creates a transcultural space of individual and collective growth, which resonates strongly with students. Reflecting on her own identity as a queer writer, for example, Machado notes that she is defined by an "eternal liminality," whereby "[y]ou are two things, maybe even more; and you are neither."[6] While this sense of liminality is clearly set at the intersection of her own sexual and racial identities—and, by extension, the liminal position of a contemporary US-Latinx queer individual—it is also contextualized in a larger narrative of domestic abuse. The narrative zooms out to a long history of legal cases as well as documentaries and popular films, such as the 1940s film *Gaslight*, before returning to Machado's own experience as a naïve teenager with her first crush on another girl. This archive of desire and abuse—both individual and collective—is, again, the context that each young individual needs to build in order to make sense of their growing pains.

In a painfully humorous way, Machado notes how her younger self wanted to rise out of her seat, grab her friend's hand, and yell "[t]o hell with Hemingway!" yet had no context or language to understand this impulse as an early bud of sexual desire.[7] Machado's intuitive association of Hemingway with normative masculin-

ity aside—a topic that I leave for Hemingway critics to debate—the scene nicely illustrates the young girl's amorphous and inarticulate desire. Her older self can acknowledge that "it was the early 2000s and [she] was just a baby in the suburbs without a reliable internet connection. [She] didn't know any queers. [She] didn't understand [herself]. [She] didn't know what it meant to want to kiss another woman."[8] The struggle for self-awareness and self-acceptance, especially at the intersection of liminal identities, gave rise to interesting perspectives in class discussions and allowed for self-reflection on the students' sexual orientations, socioeconomic backgrounds, and sense of cultural belonging. Machado's memoir became a mirror of the self and a platform of conversation; in other words, a context where students could *see* themselves and draw connections to their own experiences.

These experiences might differ from the ones that Machado is describing, yet they might also be readily relatable. For instance, Machado describes the difficulty of coming to terms with her physical appearance and the wish to look different so that she could be loved. She notes how the difficulty of seeing herself as worthy of love is rooted in an experience of sexual assault early in her college studies as well as the difficulty of setting boundaries, especially in romantic relationships. These issues are socially relevant and affectively charged; they affect a great many of our students in often traumatic ways that go deeper than they might be able to acknowledge. What is more, the students might lack the language to do them justice even when they try. As Machado reflects, "[p]utting language to something for which you have no language is no easy feat."[9] The language of American studies, just like Walt Whitman's verse, is large and can contain multitudes; built around the values of equity, diversity, and tolerance, it becomes the fabric with which students can stitch together their experiences and weave narratives of their lives.

This language can take various forms but always includes a process of archival reconstruction, a rewriting or "re-vision" of the self in Rich's terms. Machado shows us how this revision also entails an understanding of the other. Part of her memoir was written during a residency in a barn on the property of American poet and playwright Edna St. Vincent Millay. At that point, Machado's memoir was more of a fragmented assemblage of memories, of notes and scenes, the result of her own "mental excavation."[10] It was not until she came across an enormous pile of broken bottles of gin and morphine that she caught a glimpse into the poet's private life, the "measure of her pain," the "proportion of her problems," which, in turn, revealed a different view of Millay than the well-known persona of the brilliant, if arrogant, poet.[11] The "stab of sympathy" triggered by this unusual archive worked therapeutically for Machado as she was trying to make sense of her own painful, fragmented memories. What bound these memories together was a sense of sympathy for her self, triggered by the understanding of the other—a connection to a larger community in a context of healing and growth.

This context is beautifully rendered through natural imagery. There is a moment of mindfulness and redemption when Machado sits on the grass after a harrowing road trip and enjoys the peace of the early morning while thinking of Allen Ginsberg's apostrophe to Whitman in "A Supermarket to California." The ending scene in her memoir finds her in rural Oregon, where she stays in a cabin by a dry lake. The imagery she evokes reveals the traces of time, pain, and memory on nature and the human body, from a series of bloody stains on the floor (her nose bleeding as a result of the dry air) to the crusty pieces of an alien landscape that Machado compares to the universe of *Star Trek*. The imagery culminates in the apocalyptic imagery of "a nearly full moon illuminating fast-moving clouds, and the distant, golden pulse of fire over

the mountain, glowing like a second sunrise."[12] The crucible of fire gives way to the light of a peaceful silvery moon on the "dark and deep" crevices of dried soil that she can now see with clarity and understanding. The traumatic past she has evoked is palpably there—just like the damp soil under the cracked surfaces, the "memory of the lake"—but is molded into love for and reconciliation with the different parts of herself.[13] This reconciliation is evident in the narrative voice as well. Throughout the text, Machado's voice has been split into the older, more mature self who is looking back on the past and addresses her younger, scared, insecure self in the second person. By the end, the second person has not so much assimilated into the "I" Machado confidently uses but has become a silvery shadow that follows her along and, in a sense, illuminates her way.

As humanities teachers in an American studies context, we like to think that we illuminate our students' lives. This is indeed a tall order, one that can be rewritten as the humbler task of helping our students see their shadows and ghosts, tying the fragments of their memories into meaningful contexts. To teach a text such as Machado's memoir to our students in the Nordic context—which might be both geographically and culturally removed from the high desert landscapes of the West, the Midwestern setting of Iowa City, the fashionable milieu of New York, or the lower middle class setting of Pennsylvania—is challenging but rewarding. The rewards are, in fact, greater than the challenges, largely thanks to Machado's honest rendering of her desire to dream and to *be*. Machado's Dream House evokes the dream house of American culture, the "constant, roving hunger" of desire that urges us to reconcile our fragmented, incomplete, yet beautiful lives.[14] It invites us to create contexts that matter, lives that count, and archives that include not only who we are but also who we aspire to be. If American identities are born out of historically specific forms of displacement and exile, desire and strife, they also poignantly translate to other cultural, social, and historical contexts, helping our students dive into the crevices, find their voices, and grow articulate and strong.

Notes

1. Derrida, *Archive Fever,* 2.
2. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 3.
3. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 4.
4. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 4.
5. Rich, "When We Dead Awaken," 18.
6. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 157.
7. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 162.
8. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 162.
9. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 156.
10. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 183.
11. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 183.
12. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 277.
13. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 278.
14. Machado, *In the Dream House*, 11.

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Book Reviews

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