

## Teaching American History: Secondary School Teachers Panel at the 2019 BrANCH Annual Conference

Building relationships with secondary schools has long been an aspiration of the association of British American Nineteenth Century Historians (BrANCH). Thanks to History UK, we have now made an important first step towards realising that goal. This October, funding from History UK enabled teachers from local secondary schools to attend the 2019 Annual BrANCH Conference at the University of Edinburgh to participate in the association's first Teaching American History Panel.

Katie Hunter from St Thomas Aquinas Secondary School Edinburgh opened the session with an overview of American history curriculum currently on offer at Scottish schools, complete with reading lists and exam questions. The following panellists included academics who each proposed ways to translate the latest developments in the field of U.S. history into the classroom. Professor Robert Cook summarised the last half century of Civil War historiography before highlighting several "active debates" to engage students' interest, including ongoing disputes over the removal of Confederate monuments from public spaces in the United States. Dr Elizabeth Clapp then suggested ways to incorporate women into Civil War history lesson plans, from the activities of female abolitionists to concepts of gender in wartime propaganda.

Professor Tim Lockley (Warwick) introduced several databases, including *Documenting the American South*, which hold oral and written testimonies by former slaves in the American South. Dr David Silkenet (Edinburgh) finished with an overview of websites, including *Essential Civil War Curriculum*, which provide lesson plans created by historians that breakdown key topics in U.S. history into digestible segments to be utilised in classrooms.

The room then engaged in a lively plenary discussion regarding structural barriers which inhibit communication and collaboration between historians and teachers in the UK. Among these was a lack of institutional support – both financial and in terms of workload allocation – to enable teachers to participate in academic events. Another was the difficulty of encouraging exam boards to ensure that their questions reflect recent methodological and historiographical developments in the field of American history.

These are formidable challenges. Thanks to suggestions made by speakers and audience members during this panel, however, BrANCH has devised several initiatives to address them. For example, our members are currently creating teaching packs, including reading lists and source materials, which will be made available on the association's website for the use of teachers at all levels of the education system. This December, moreover, the BrANCH committee will attend a follow-up workshop to discuss long-term collaborations with staff at the St Thomas Aquinas Secondary School. Finally, a Teachers' Panel will be a regular fixture at BrANCH's future conferences with a view to enabling the association to develop a network of relationships with secondary schools across the country.

Undoubtedly there is a vast gulf between how American history is studied within the academy, and how it is taught in secondary schools. This panel, however, revealed just how much enthusiasm there is among teachers and historians alike to close this gap. With the help of History UK, BrANCH has laid the foundation of what we anticipate will grow into a dynamic, mutually-beneficent relationship between our members and American history teachers throughout the UK.