

Job title	Research Assistant
Division	Humanities
Department	Rothermere American Institute
Location	1a South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3UB
Grade and salary	Grade 7: £36,024 – £44,263
Hours	Full time
Contract type	Fixed-term for two years starting 1 September 2024
Reporting to	Director of the Rothermere American Institute and Principal Investigator for the Leverhulme Trust project, Professor Adam Smith
Vacancy reference	172718

The role

We are seeking an experienced researcher, holding a PhD in a relevant subject area, to work on a new Leverhulme Trust project, “Conservativisms in an Age of Revolutions: The United States in an Atlantic World.” The post is funded for two years from 1 September 2024.

This post is intended to provide a promising early career scholar with a congenial environment for the development of their research beyond the doctoral level. The post would especially suit someone who has research expertise in nineteenth-century United States political history or the history of ideas.

Appended to this job description is a full description of the project with details of the role to be played by this Research Assistant.

Responsibilities

- Manage own academic research and administrative activities. This involves small scale project management, to co-ordinate multiple aspects of work to meet deadlines.
- Research and write two publishable article-length pieces of work that will form part of the ‘outputs’ for the project.
- Help the Principal Investigator, Professor Adam Smith, to organise a symposium on the subject of the project.
- Work with the PI on co-editing a book that will emerge from the symposium.



- Act as a source of information and advice to the PI and the other research assistant (Dr Mark Power Smith) as well as to researchers at Oxford and other institutions where relevant to the project.
- Collaborate with the PI and the other RA by sharing research material, reading each other's work, and helping to shape the theoretical and methodological foundations of the project, reviewing and refining theories as appropriate.
- Develop new research methodologies and materials and ideas for further research.
- Present papers at conferences or public meetings.
- Develop ideas for generating research income.
- Participate fully in the intellectual life of the Rothermere American Institute.

Selection criteria

Essential

- A PhD in a relevant subject area.
- Distinguished and imaginative research at doctoral level and plans for future research of a similar or greater quality.
- Sufficient specialist knowledge in the discipline to work within established research programmes.
- Ability to manage own academic research and associated activities.
- Previous experience of contributing to publications/presentations.
- Ability to contribute ideas for new research projects and research income generation.
- Excellent communication skills, including the ability to write for publication, present research proposals and results, and represent the research group at meetings.

Desirable

- Experience of independently managing a discrete area of a research project.
- Experience of actively collaborating in the development of research articles for publication.

About the University of Oxford

Welcome to the University of Oxford. We aim to lead the world in research and education for the benefit of society both in the UK and globally. Oxford's researchers engage with academic, commercial and cultural partners across the world to stimulate high-quality research and enable innovation through a broad range of social, policy and economic impacts.

We believe our strengths lie both in empowering individuals and teams to address fundamental questions of global significance, while providing all our staff with a welcoming and inclusive workplace that enables everyone to develop and do their best work. Recognising that diversity is our strength, vital for innovation and creativity, we aspire to build a truly diverse community which values and respects every individual's unique contribution.

While we have long traditions of scholarship, we are also forward-looking, creative and cutting-edge. Oxford is one of Europe's most entrepreneurial universities and we rank first in the UK for university spin-outs, and in recent years we have spun out 15-20 new companies every year. We are also recognised as leaders in support for social enterprise. Join us and you will find a unique, democratic and international community, a great range of staff benefits and access to a vibrant array of cultural activities in the beautiful city of Oxford. For more information, please visit www.ox.ac.uk/about/organisation.

Rothermere American Institute

The RAI is Oxford's centre for the study of the United States and its place in the world. At our official opening on Friday 25 May 2001, President Bill Clinton posed these questions: "Where has America come from and where does it find itself? What *is* it doing and what *ought* it to do in the world?" Today, these questions remain at the heart of the RAI's mission.

Our mission is twofold:

- We support the world-leading scholarship in this field being undertaken at Oxford;
- and we communicate that research to a wider public.

Every year, we host more than 100 seminars, workshops, conferences and lectures which attract leading scholars, students, policymakers and public figures from across the world. Recent public events with large audiences have included discussions with Michael Chabon, Joy Harjo, Richard Blackett, Elizabeth Cobbs, Tamson Pietsch, and Iwan Morgan, along with a joint conference with the NYU Brademas Center to discuss an inside look at American politics. In addition, we host regular events for our community members, like a weekly coffee morning and a twice-termly women's lunch to foster support networks and a sense of belonging at the RAI. We also have a podcast series, *The Last Best Hope?*, which regularly sits in the UK top 50 podcasts and has recently featured discussions with historians including Elizabeth Varon, Nick Witham, Dan Jackson and Sam Haselby.

We host around a dozen visiting fellows each academic year. We support two Junior Research Fellows (early career academics) and each year welcome two distinguished visiting professors, the Harmsworth Professor of American History and the John G. Winant Professor of American Government.

The RAI community includes a large number of graduate students working in the fields of History, Politics, Literature, Art History and related disciplines. It also includes early career researchers, retired colleagues and around twenty of Oxford's Faculty members who work on problems related to America and its place in the world. We collaborate wherever possible with other research institutes in the University.

We are housed in a beautiful award-winning building in the centre of Oxford. At the heart of our building is the magnificent Vere Harmsworth Library, which offers the strongest collection in US history in Europe, including a wide range of digital resources. We work closely with the VHL Librarian, currently Bethan Davies, to ensure that the aims and activities of our two institutions reinforce each other.

The RAI is largely dependent upon the generosity of individual benefactors, trusts and foundations - all of whom share the RAI's commitment to world-class research on the US.

The current RAI Director is the Edward Orsborn Professor of US Politics and Political History, Adam Smith. The RAI has a small but dedicated staff including a full-time Manager, Katy Long, a full-time Academic Programme and Events Assistant, Hannah Greiving, and a part-time Administrative and Operations Assistant, Richard Purkiss.

For more information visit: www.rai.ox.ac.uk.

How to apply

Applications are made through our online recruitment portal. Information about how to apply is available on our Jobs website <https://www.jobs.ox.ac.uk/how-to-apply>.

Your application will be judged solely on the basis of how you demonstrate that you meet the selection criteria stated in the job description.

As part of your application you will be asked to provide details of two referees and indicate whether we can contact them now.

You will be asked to upload a CV and a supporting statement. The supporting statement must explain how you meet each of the selection criteria for the post using examples of your skills and experience. This may include experience gained in employment, education, or during career breaks (such as time out to care for dependants).

Lastly, we ask that you submit a sample of your writing along with your application. Please upload a published or unpublished piece of up to 12,000 words.

Please upload all documents **as PDF files** with your name and the document type (CV, supporting statement) in the filename.

All applications must be received by midday on 20 May 2024.

Queries about the post should be directed to Professor Adam Smith, Director of the Rothermere American Institute (adam.smith@rai.ox.ac.uk).

Pre-employment screening

Standard checks

If you are offered the post, the offer will be subject to standard pre-employment checks. You will be asked to provide: proof of your right-to-work in the UK; proof of your identity; and (if we haven't done so already) we will contact the referees you have nominated. If you have previously worked for the University we will also verify key information such as your dates of employment and reason for leaving your previous role with the department/unit where you worked. You will also be asked to complete a health declaration so that you can tell us about any health conditions or disabilities for which you may need us to make appropriate adjustments.

Please read the candidate notes on the University's pre-employment screening procedures at: <https://www.jobs.ox.ac.uk/pre-employment-checks>.

Information for priority candidates

A priority candidate is a University employee who is seeking redeployment because they have been advised that they are at risk of redundancy, or on grounds of ill-health/disability. Priority candidates are issued with a redeployment letter by their employing departments.

If you are a priority candidate, please ensure that you attach your redeployment letter to your application (or email it to the contact address on the advert if the application form used for the vacancy does not allow attachments).

If you need help

Application FAQs, including technical troubleshooting advice is available at:
<https://staff.web.ox.ac.uk/recruitment-support-faqs>.

Non-technical questions about this job should be addressed to the recruiting department directly
hr@humanities.ox.ac.uk.

To return to the online application at any stage, please go to: www.recruit.ox.ac.uk.

Please note that you will receive an automated email from our online recruitment portal to confirm receipt of your application. **Please check your spam/junk mail** if you do not receive this email.

Important information for candidates

Data Privacy

Please note that any personal data submitted to the University as part of the job application process will be processed in accordance with the GDPR and related UK data protection legislation. For further information, please see the University's Privacy Notice for Job Applicants at: <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/job-applicant-privacy-policy>. The University's Policy on Data Protection is available at: <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/data-protection-policy>.

The University's policy on retirement

The University operates an Employer Justified Retirement Age (EJRA) for very senior research posts at **grade RSIV/D35 and clinical equivalents E62 and E82** of 30 September before the 70th birthday. The justification for this is explained at: <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/the-ejra>.

For **existing** employees on these grades, any employment beyond the retirement age is subject to approval through the procedures: <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/the-ejra>.

There is no normal or fixed age at which staff in posts at other grades have to retire. Staff at these grades may elect to retire in accordance with the rules of the applicable pension scheme, as may be amended from time to time.

Equality of Opportunity

Entry into employment with the University and progression within employment will be determined only by personal merit and the application of criteria which are related to the duties of each particular post and the relevant salary structure. In all cases, ability to perform the job will be the primary consideration. No applicant or member of staff shall be discriminated against because of

age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

Benefits of working at the University

Employee benefits

University employees enjoy 38 days' paid holiday, generous pension schemes, travel discounts, and a variety of professional development opportunities. Our range of other employee benefits and discounts also includes free entry to the Botanic Gardens and University colleges, and discounts at University museums. See

<https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/staff-benefits>

University Club and sports facilities

Membership of the University Club is free for all University staff. The University Club offers social, sporting, and hospitality facilities. Staff can also use the University Sports Centre on Iffley Road at discounted rates, including a fitness centre, powerlifting room, and swimming pool. See www.club.ox.ac.uk and <https://www.sport.ox.ac.uk/>.

Information for staff new to Oxford

If you are relocating to Oxfordshire from overseas or elsewhere in the UK, the University's Welcome Service website includes practical information about settling in the area, including advice on relocation, accommodation, and local schools. See <https://welcome.ox.ac.uk/>

There is also a visa loan scheme to cover the costs of UK visa applications for staff and their dependants. See <https://staffimmigration.admin.ox.ac.uk/visa-loan-scheme>

Family-friendly benefits

With one of the most generous family leave schemes in the Higher Education sector, and a range of flexible working options, Oxford aims to be a family-friendly employer. We also subscribe to the Work+Family Space, a service that provides practical advice and support for employees who have caring responsibilities. The service offers a free telephone advice line, and the ability to book emergency back-up care for children, adult dependents and elderly relatives. See <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/my-family-care>

The University has excellent childcare services, including five University nurseries as well as University-supported places at many other private nurseries.

For full details, including how to apply and the costs, see <https://childcare.admin.ox.ac.uk/>

Disabled staff

We are committed to supporting members of staff with disabilities or long-term health conditions. For further details, including information about how to make contact, in confidence, with the University's Staff Disability Advisor, see <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/disability-support>

Staff networks

The University has a number of staff networks including the Oxford Research Staff Society, BME staff network, LGBT+ staff network and a disabled staff network. You can find more information at <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/networks>

The University of Oxford Newcomers' Club

The University of Oxford Newcomers' Club is an organisation run by volunteers that aims to assist the partners of new staff settle into Oxford, and provides them with an opportunity to meet people and make connections in the local area. See www.newcomers.ox.ac.uk.

Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS)

A society run by and for Oxford University research staff. It offers researchers a range of social and professional networking opportunities. Membership is free, and all researchers employed by Oxford University are welcome to join. Subscribe at researchstaff-subscribe@maillist.ox.ac.uk to join the mailing list to find out about upcoming events and other information for researchers, or contact the committee on committee@oxrss.ox.ac.uk. For more information, see www.ox.ac.uk/oxrss, Twitter @ResStaffOxford, and Facebook www.facebook.com/oxrss.

APPENDIX 1

Further information about the Leverhulme Trust-funded Project

TITLE: Conservativisms in an Age of Revolutions: The United States in an Atlantic World

Part 1: PROJECT SUMMARY

Lay Summary

In the United States today “conservatism” is the foe of “liberalism”. But it was not always so. Building on the research of the principal investigator, our project will be the first major effort to recover a far more nuanced and contextualised understanding of the long history of conservatism than has previously been offered. Conservatism, in its many varieties, could induce as well as block change. Our project breaks new ground by taking seriously conservativisms’ popular appeal and by situating US politics firmly within an Atlantic world frame. Conservatism has a history, but it is not just a history of “reaction.”

Context

Labels matter. They are not neutral descriptors but dynamic concepts that help shape politics. A term like conservatism, so potent in the contemporary world, needs to be historicised not only in order to fully understand the present, but also because doing so sheds light on how political actors in the past imagined their world and sought to remake it.

Many historians writing about conservatism in the past have done so in a genealogical spirit. Their aim has been to identify a coherent tradition or “ideology”. This project will do something different. We want to understand how Americans thought about “conservatism” during the periods in which they lived. For example, supporters of the short-lived American Whig Party, for example, are sometimes thought of as “conservative” because (relatively speaking, by American republican standards), they were believers in hierarchy and tradition. Yet, their opponents, the Democrats, also called themselves “conservative,” and used the concept to describe a very different worldview, which embraced many more of the trappings of “modernity.”

Objectives

Our project will recover the different meanings of “conservatism” in all their rich and varied detail. We will extend our focus to a range of actors who have not been sufficiently covered in the existing scholarship, including African Americans, women and working-class whites. We will also explore a greater number of regions, going beyond a tendency among existing historians to focus on the American South. We will shine a light on the Northern United States, and ask how Americans shaped their ideas about “conservatism” in response to events overseas. How, for example, did the revolutions breaking out in Europe and Latin America in the 1830s and 1848 affect how Americans framed what it meant to be a “conservative”?

Methodology

Our methods for this project are based on the analysis of “political culture.” Roughly speaking, this term refers to the ideas and assumptions found in political texts, analyzed through the contexts in which they were written. The term “conservatism,” for example, had very different meanings in the 1840s than it did in the 1870s. It meant something very different to a working-class white woman from South Carolina than it did to a Northeastern merchant. Everything depended on the time period and region where the term was used. An analysis of political culture reveals how people understood key concepts within these varied settings.

Political culture does not cause to occur. What people meant by the term “progress,” for example, did not dictate how Americans voted on issues like the tariff. But it did shape the meanings people attached to these policies, and what was at stake in their enactment. For example, ideas about progress in the nineteenth century – when examined in the context of

prevailing religious and social trends – suggest that many free traders saw the abolition of tariffs as a gateway to peace and prosperity within the international order.

Our sources consist of digitalized books, pamphlets and newspapers. We will first analyze these texts to identify patterns in the use of conservative language. The next stage will be to contextualize these patterns, thinking through the meanings attached to “conservatism.” On an individual level, we will examine the private papers of key political figures. For example, to analyze Black conservatives, we will focus on sources related to Charleston’s “Brown” elite in South Carolina: a group of wealthy families who described themselves as “brown” to set them apart from the state’s Black population. The inventory of the Brown Fellowship Society is held at the College of Charleston in South Carolina containing minutes from their meetings. We will also examine self-appointed “conservative leaders” in African American communities such as William Holloway –particularly his newspaper, the *New Era*, held in Charleston (SC) –and Martin Delany, a prominent supporter of the Democrat Party politician Wade Hampton III, who led a backlash against Reconstruction in South Carolina. To analyze how women thought about “conservatism,” we will analyze their private writings and diaries of key female political figures, including the wives of congressmen and editors.

To place “conservatism” within an international perspective, we will adopt both transnational and comparative approaches. By transnational, we refer to an approach that foregrounds how people thought about “conservatism” in relation to events happening beyond the borders of the United States. Notably, political upheavals in Europe shaped how Americans defined “conservatism.” The Democrats of the 1850s, for example, constructed an ideology to defend against the impact of radical French thinkers like Charles Fourier, even as they exaggerated and distorted his influence. Our monograph and articles (Outputs 1, 2, & 3) will adopt this transnational perspective. Simultaneously, our collaborative volume (Output 4) will compare and contrast the meanings of “conservatism” in the United States, Britain and Latin America.

Significance and Originality

Our project will augment our understanding of the nineteenth-century United States by examining the concept of “conservatism” across more regions and among a larger range of actors, than ever before. But we will also transform how people think about the United States’ place in the world. So far, scholars interested in Americans’ response to the “Age of Revolutions” have almost exclusively focused on radical figures. To some extent, this approach is understandable: popular sovereignty, women’s rights and the empowerment of the individual were exciting and unfamiliar ideas. But in our rush to understand the eye-catching transformations of this era, we miss the great majority of people who yearned for stability and order. This group is also larger than we might have first thought. African Americans and women were, for example, marginalized groups during the mid-nineteenth century. But they, too, had things to conserve even while they pushed for transformation; many used “conservative” strategies to bring about social change. Our project, therefore, draws attention to a less familiar dimension of the Age of Revolutions: asking how a wide variety of Americans tried to guide this era of upheaval to a more stable conclusion.

Part 2: DETAILED RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Research questions

This project is premised on the empirical observation that the term “conservatism” emerged simultaneously in the 1830s and 40s, not only in the United States but also in Britain and Latin America. In the US, in the context of revolutionary movements abroad and massive political instability at home, “conservatism” became a broad term of legitimation, invoked even by political actors advocating radical change.

This project asks why that was so and what it reveals. What different “conservative” traditions existed in the United States and how were these groups influenced by “conservatives” in Europe and Latin America? How and with what effects did “conservative” ideas cross national borders? How and why did conceptions of “conservatism” change over time? How popular was “conservatism” among different social classes in the United States? How did women engage with “conservative” politics and what did they try to “conserve” and how did non-white actors engage with the concept of “conservatism”? We hypothesise that the languages of “conservatism” across the Atlantic world were a vital response to a world in turmoil – paradoxically this was especially so in the US, a society founded in revolution.

Background

In the contemporary US, “conservatism” has been captured by the Republican Party and its media allies, but the associations and implications of the term have shifted even in the last twenty years and will, presumably continue to do so. Our project historicises the insight that conservatism is a malleable and relational concept. And it is clear from the research we have already done in this field that, whatever may be the case today, nineteenth-century “conservatism” in the United States cannot satisfactorily be understood as the antonym of “liberalism”. We are at least as interested in how self-described “conservatives” used “conservative” language to advance change as in the ways they defended the status quo. Rather than tracing one linear tradition or group, we are interested in “conservatisms,” analysing how a wide range of political actors invested this concept with different meanings. Our investigation will include white women in the North, African Americans, working-class Southern whites and patrician New England elites. Existing studies of “conservatism” focus mostly on elite political actors, often in the Democratic Party, vastly underestimating the range of people who engaged with the term. Our initial research suggests that self-defined “conservatives” in the Age of Revolutions all drew on some combination of liberal principles, which were universalist and progressive, on the one hand, and coercive practices, which were particularist and exclusionary, on the other. Our project will ask why certain policies and political practices were defined as “conservative,” and how these interacted with liberal ideas and ambitions.

Despite their differences, all the political actors we will examine invoked the term “conservative” to navigate the same phenomenon: what we call the mid-nineteenth-century revolutionary crisis. This term links the revolutionary upheaval of Civil War and Reconstruction in the US to the uprisings across Europe and the Americas in the 1830s and 1840s. The language of “conservatism” emerged simultaneously in these seemingly quite different national contexts to navigate a series of revolutions that were inherently internationalist. Across this period, revolutionary societies and reform movements believed they were engaged in a common project that transcended national borders. Similarly, established political and religious authorities argued that a coordinated response was necessary to maintain their control over the global order. In short, politics was framed in terms of broad historical forces that transcended national domains. We will investigate how people labelled certain policies and principles “conservative” to legitimise their efforts to manage these global transformations.

Our project has the following overarching **objectives**:

1. To investigate how, by whom, when, and why “conservatism” emerged as a political concept in the United States. We believe this inquiry can only be done within a transnational frame. The key decade, from our initial research, appears to be the 1830s -- a generation after the convulsions of the French and American Revolutions – when the term emerged not only in the US but also in Britain and elsewhere in Western Europe, and in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. Our project will be the first to systematically examine the popular appeal of “conservative” ideas and language beyond a narrow range of elite political actors in the United States. For example, we will ask how women and African Americans used the concept to describe their politics and took on partisan roles to prop up social orthodoxies. We will also trace how working-class white men and women participated in “conservative clubs” in the Southern United States to mobilize a backlash towards Reconstruction. Clearly, these groups all invoked

the term "conservatism" in very different ways. Southern whites, for example, wanted to "conserve" the U.S. Constitution "as it was." For them, only white Americans could govern according to liberal principles. By contrast, Black "conservatives" often advocated economic integration within white society as a means of improvement for African Americans, with racial equality as the ultimate goal.

2. To gain a clearer understanding of why, and with what implications, the language of "conservatism" was so salient between the 1830s and the end of the nineteenth-century in the United States. We want to understand what "conservatism" meant to the people who invoked it and how it was embedded in everyday political thinking, rather than assuming that it constituted a coherent ideology. We will trace how the language of "conservatism" legitimised political objectives and regimes, and how it interacted with other key concepts in the nineteenth-century world. For example, we will focus on the relationship between "conservatism" and "revolution". In the United States, a republic born in revolution, we ask how "conservatism" worked not only as a means to resist revolutionary changes but also to channel their emancipatory potential into durable political regimes. We will also explore how "conservatism" reinforced, as well as challenged, aspects of liberalism. Which aspects of the revolutionary agenda was it possible and desirable to "conserve" in order to embed liberal ideals within a stable political order?

3. Thus generate a better understanding of the origins of the conservative regimes that coalesced in the late nineteenth century, including their origins in liberal and radical movements. By placing the consolidation of the post-Reconstruction United States in a transnational frame, our research will contribute to a wider understanding of how "conservatism" enabled political actors to navigate the revolutions that broke out across Europe and the Americas between the 1830s and the 1870s. Just as "conservatism" emerged simultaneously in the 1820s and 30s in different polities, so in the 1870s and 80s, regimes used "conservative" ideas to consolidate their position. By telling this story, and situating the United States in a transnational context, we can see this latter period, not as a mere counter-revolution or era of reaction, but one that built upon powerful "conservative" impulses within the Age of Revolutions itself.

Research Context and Significance

This project will have a significant impact on political and transnational historians of the United States and, more broadly, scholars working on the Age of Revolutions.

There is a tradition of writing about US conservatism which attempts to reconstruct a genealogy of pre-twentieth century "conservatives," identifying a more-or-less coherent ideological tradition (Kirk, 1954; Rossiter, 1955; Allitt, 2009; Dunn and Woodward, 2003). We take a different approach. Our project seeks to understand the multiple, and often contradictory, ways in which conservative language and ideas were used in practice. We are not alone in recognising the intellectual value of evaluating the meaning of conservatism in this way (Conlin, 2014; Mason, 2020; Lynn, 2019). Other scholars have stressed the power of conservative ideology in the 1850s to buttress the independence and authority of white men against a host of reform movements that would empower dependent populations of women and enslaved people. But this historiography is new and would benefit from two main innovations: i. a transnational focus and ii. range of actors.

(i) Our project will widen the lens through which we study the idea of "conservatism" from the United States alone to the wider Atlantic world of Europe and Latin America from which, and to where, ideas and political movements circulated. We will not only analyse how US actors responded to events overseas, but also examine the flow of conservative ideas and personnel between the US and other places, especially Britain, which was the polity that, for most of our period, was still most important in shaping American political culture. This is a necessary addition to the historiography since conservative political actors defined themselves in relation to larger historical forces that transcended the nation state. Currently, historical scholarship on the Age of Revolutions focuses overwhelmingly on radical and liberal movements, which crossed

national borders, at the expense of those who sought to preserve stability and order (E.g. Polasky, 2016; Morgan, 2021; though also, as a partial exception, see Eichhorn, 2019; Clark, 2023). Our project will draw attention to the relationship between the Age of Revolution and “conservative” people and ideas, not only groups who were resistant to change but also the liberal and radical movements that exhibited conservative impulses. Using our research, scholars will be able to look past the simple dichotomies between “democracy” and “despotism” that characterize much political thought in this period, and view conservatism as a dynamic concept that operated within an international context.

(ii) Other than the very recent scholarship, already cited, the most extensive work on conservatism in the US has focused on the South, especially on elite intellectuals (E.g. Fox-Genovese and Genovese, 2005; O’Brien, 2010). We will investigate how conservatism mattered to a much broader range of white political actors in the South -- for example by tracing the uses of conservatism by those resisting Reconstruction, including through creating “conservatives clubs” which spread across the South in the 1870s. Our project will also look at women’s engagement with conservative ideas and practices. Did the wives of Democratic politicians, for example, simply accept their husbands’ “conservatism,” or subscribe to a different definition of the term? Our project will analyse how women used their place within the household to actively further “conservative” interests –for example, by educating children in the politics of the Democratic Party in the 1850s and organizing private reading groups. In a similar vein, we will draw on, and extend, existing scholarship on Black politics. Most recently, historians have stressed the radical nature of abolition, and emphasised the close connections between white and Black campaigners (E.g. Sinha, 2016; Oakes, 2013). But there is another side to Black political action which sheds new light on the anti-slavery movement. In our investigation into how Black Americans engaged with the concept of conservatism, we will build on the implications of recent work by Iliff (2021) that explores how Black theologians drew on conservative interpretations of the Bible in service of the anti-slavery cause. Like Iliff, we will not assume that an embrace of conservatism transformed Black figures into reactionaries, but analyse how the concept could, in fact, be used in service of reform.

Research that frames US politics before the Civil War as a response to the revolutionary crisis in the Atlantic world oscillates between a focus on radicals who sought to bring about change and those who tried to resist it. By contrast, this project will illuminate the wide variety of Americans who employed the term “conservative” in an effort to define and occupy the political centre ground. This approach will transform our understanding of US politics by taking seriously the remarkable popularity of a worldview that prized moderation and compromise, albeit one mired in conflict and contestation. Ultimately, we will show the “Age of Revolutions” was not a brief period of social transformation followed by a reactionary backlash, but a much longer period, extending into the 1860s and 70s, when many who had previously sought radical change tried to bring this era of upheaval to an end.

Methodology

Conceptually, the project is committed to understanding what political ideas and concepts meant in practice to those who used them. We are less interested in establishing a genealogy of “conservatism” as an ideology than we are in understanding how conservatism and its associated ideas helped Americans across the demographic and political spectrum to understand their world. Methodologically, the starting point for our research will be a large-scale search of digitised books, pamphlets and newspapers published across the Atlantic world to identify patterns in the use of conservative language. The next stage will be to contextualise these patterns, thinking through the meanings attached to conservatism.

In our analysis of sources, we will adopt a political culture approach, by which we mean an analysis of the structures of thought, articulated through language, that shape the context in which political action is taken (Gendzel, 1997; Formisano, 2001). The concept of political culture allows us to compare how people used the term “conservative” in different regional settings and

time periods, and to ask what this reveals about their values and assumptions about politics. As Formisano (2001) has noted, “the logic of political culture is always comparative.” Studying underlying political values within a particular social context implicitly raises the question of how these values would function elsewhere. As such, an analysis of political culture will enhance Output 4, our comparative volume which traces the uses of “conservatism” in the United States, Britain and Latin America. We will employ similar sources from each region which provide examples of political language, such as newspapers, pamphlets, and congressional speeches.

To place “conservatism” within an international perspective, we will adopt both transnational and comparative approaches. Our monograph and articles (Outputs 1, 2, & 3) will examine how American “conservatives” situated themselves in relation to larger forces within the Atlantic world. Simultaneously, our collaborative volume (Output 4) will compare and contrast the meanings of “conservatism” in the United States, Britain and Latin America.

Because a transnational frame is critical to our approach, we will draw on the expertise of historians of Britain and Latin America to supplement the expertise of the Principal Applicant and Research Associate. We have already built a network of scholars interested in this kind of collaboration through a symposium at the Rothermere American Institute in Oxford held in June 2022 entitled “Conservatism in the Atlantic World.”

We will hold two intensive workshops around a dozen scholars with expertise in conservatism outside the US. At the workshops, participants will share pieces of writing in which they will address the research questions set out above. From this, the Principal Investigator will edit Output 4, our book on “conservatisms” in the Atlantic world. The research assistant, Mark Power Smith, responsible for Outputs 1, 2 and 3, will also benefit from these workshops. By interacting with scholars of British and Latin American history, he will be able to place conservatism in the United States within a proper transnational context.

Sources

Archival research will be overseen by the Principal Applicant, and conducted in large part by two research assistants (on specific aspects, detailed below). Much of the material we need, especially printed sources such as newspapers and government documents, is now available online via databases such as those published by Readex and the Library of Congress. Other material is only available in archives in the United States. Our research will operate on two levels. On the macro level, we will search as many sources as we can find for references to conservatism which we will track across space and time. We will investigate where newspapers were printed that used the term conservative regularly, and where political associations describing themselves as conservative were founded. We will also examine the papers of congressmen who used the term regularly – for example, Nathaniel P. Banks from Massachusetts who was urged by a colleague in 1868 to start a new political party on “a new practical and conservative basis.”

As a way of engaging with the impact, popular reach, and context within which “conservatism” had meaning in the nineteenth century United States, we want to explore the ways in which the term emerged and was used by African Americans. To study Black conservative figures, we will focus on sources related to Charleston’s “Brown” elite in South Carolina: a group of wealthy families who described themselves as “brown” to set them apart from the state’s Black population. The inventory of the Brown Fellowship Society is held at the College of Charleston in South Carolina containing minutes from their meetings. We will also examine self-appointed “conservative leaders” in African American communities such as William Holloway –particularly his newspaper, the New Era, held in Charleston (SC) –and Martin Delany, a prominent supporter of Democrat, Wade Hampton III, who led a backlash against Reconstruction in South Carolina. The online Colored Conventions Project details Black political meetings from 1830 – 1890 and is an invaluable source on Black political thought especially proposals for new constitutions.

Further exploring the reach of “conservatism”, we will study the scope and intent of white Southern men’s embrace of conservative politics, specifically by tracking the spread of “conservative clubs”. The evidence base is newspapers and in archival accounts of the Clubs’ “political actions” held at various repositories including the South Carolina Historical Society. This work will form the basis of Output 3 - the article on post-Civil War conservatism in the US. We will compile a database of women’s private writings – letters and diaries –for our own research purposes and analyse to identify how the authors are articulating their “conservatism”. This group will include the wives of American politicians from 1830 to 1877, as well as evidence of their participation at rallies which can be found in newspapers. Diaries—many held only in manuscript form in archives in the US, but others published and available digitally.

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Part 3: OUTPUTS AND TIMETABLE

There will be five principal outputs.

1. Monograph: US Conservatism in the Age of Revolutions, 1830 - 1877

AUTHOR: Mark Power Smith

The project’s principal RA, Mark Power Smith, will be the lead author on an academic monograph on the history of US conservatism from 1830 – when it first emerged –to the end of

Reconstruction in 1877. This was a period in which the constitutional order was fundamentally remade in the United States, Europe and Latin America. Our book will investigate how Americans, including African Americans and other marginalised groups, invoked the term “conservative” to sustain their way of life amid these global transformations. The aim is to understand the United States in the Age of Revolutions not simply as “the cause of all nations,” but as a country based on a self-conscious impulse to preserve traditions and social hierarchies –at times, borrowing ideas and practices from abroad to maintain order, and at other points, rejecting them.

2. Article: Women and the conservative “turn” in the mid-century US

AUTHOR: Mark Power Smith

The project’s principal RA will publish an article examining the involvement of women in the Democratic Party of the 1850s. Recent scholars have successfully demonstrated that the Democrats came to uphold a conservative ideology before the Civil War, defending the sovereignty of the white male patriarch in both the home and the public realm of politics.¹⁵ But despite this focus on racial and gender politics, no scholar has looked at the role played by women in reinforcing the Democrats’ worldview. This article will analyse the ways in which women acted through the Democratic Party to protect a conservative vision of the American household from the threats posed by new radical movements.

3. Article: Popular Conservatism in the post-Civil War US

AUTHOR: Second Research Assistant

The second RA will write an article on popular support for conservatism after the American Civil War. The focus will be “conservative clubs”: popular organizations designed to rally the Southern public against the enforcement of Reconstruction by the federal government. These clubs employed the term “conservative” to unite Southerners from different parties behind the destruction of civil and political rights for Black people through the control of the states by white majorities, even as they claimed African Americans among their members. The article will investigate how conservative clubs legitimized their political authority and analyse the composition of their membership in terms of class, age and region.

4. Collaborative Volume: Conservatism in the Atlantic World: The United States, Britain and Latin America

EDITORS: Adam Smith and Second Research Assistant

A volume edited by the PI that examines nineteenth-century conservatism in comparative perspective, building on the network we have already built of Latin Americanists and British scholars. The chapters in this book will be workshopped at symposia held in Oxford. Up to eight scholars, with expertise on different countries will meet in two intensive symposia in summer of Year 1 and summer of Year 2 to workshop drafts of chapters. Each chapter will have a single principal author but will incorporate evidence and argument from the other participants and reflect the research collaboration made possible by this kind of intensive exchange. The book will include national case studies and thematic chapters that explore key ideas such as monarchy, religious authority, centralisation, and the family. This project will sustain a collaborative research network enabling the people who participated in our 2022 symposium at the RAI to develop their work together through a series of in-person and online meetings.

5. Article: Conservatism in a transnational frame/methodological piece

AUTHOR: Second Research Assistant

The Second RA will write a peer-reviewed article that will reflect on the challenges of understanding the transmission of ideas across national borders in the nineteenth century. The article will draw on discussions among the PI, the two RAs and the contributors to Output 4 about the substantive and methodological challenges.