



Jun 20, 2014 00:00 BST

US presidents take centre stage ahead of Civil Rights anniversary

One week before the USA celebrates the 50th anniversary of President Lyndon Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act, an international conference at Northumbria University, Newcastle will place American presidents under the spotlight.

On June 27, Northumbria is playing host to 'A Presidential Nation: The Presidency in US History', the inaugural conference of the Presidential History Network – a new network of American History and Politics scholars.

From George Washington to Barack Obama, the conference will focus on the office of the presidency, the policies of America's chief executives, and their personalities. Academics from UK and US universities, including the universities of Oxford, Nottingham, Missouri, and Mississippi State will share their expertise.

Attendees at the conference will hear from leading experts in the field of American Studies, including a keynote address from Sidney Milkis, White Burkett Miller Professor of Politics at the University of Virginia, entitled, 'Osawatomie Then and Now: Theodore Roosevelt, Barack Obama and the Rise of the Executive-Centred Party'.

The timing of the one-day conference is appropriate as it falls just five days before the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. The Act outlawed discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, religion and origin and marked a climax in the Civil Rights Movement for equal rights for African Americans.

Northumbria – which launched a new American Studies programme last September – is a major partner in the Presidential History Network. Dr Michael Cullinane, a Senior Lecturer in History at Northumbria, is one of the key organizers.

Dr Cullinane said: "The Presidential History Network is designed to encourage the study of the US presidency as an institution and the role of US presidents in a national and international context. Northumbria University is well placed to be a major player in the network because we have a wide range of academics who research and teach on presidential history."

Professor of International History at Northumbria, Sylvia Ellis, has recently published a book focused on the president who signed the historical act. *Freedom's Pragmatist: Lyndon Johnson and Civil Rights*, explores the president's life and career leading up to that pivotal political action.

During the conference Professor Ellis will chair a session focusing on presidents during the Cold War.

She said: "US presidents have always had enormous influence on international relations and global politics, as well on domestic issues. The conference allows us to look at their impact at home and abroad." Choosing Newcastle as the host city for the inaugural conference is

particularly poignant and timely. It was Brian Ward, Professor in American Studies at Northumbria, who discovered the previously forgotten footage of Dr Martin Luther King receiving an honorary degree in the city that featured recently on the BBC's One Show and in A King's Speech – a documentary narrated by Lenny Henry.

Professor Ward said, "The story of King and the civil rights movement is inextricably linked to the story of the presidency. You can't really understand King's career, or the Movement's successes and failures, without understanding the roles played by Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson."

Northumbria's American Studies programme has already become internationally recognised as a leading centre for research and teaching on US history, culture, literature and politics. The programme boasts world-class research-led teaching and embraces a wide range of disciplines, including American film, history, literature and politics.

In 2013, the first cohort of students were able to put questions to US Ambassador Matthew W. Barzun, who spent time at Northumbria during his first official UK visit outside of the capital.

Northumbria's strength in American Studies will continue to grow when Tony Badger, an expert on Franklin Delano Roosevelt who is currently the Paul Mellon Professor of American History at Cambridge, joins the team in September 2014.

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focussed, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

If you have a media enquiry please contact our Media and Communications team at media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk or call [0191 227 4571](tel:01912274571).

Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences

rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk

07923 382339



Andrea Slowey

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences

andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk

07708 509436



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk

07377422415



James Fox

Press Contact

Student Communications Manager

james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk



Kelly Elliott

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Gemma Brown

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk