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## Featured Piece

Scott Hancock  
*Gettysburg College*

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### Abstract

This year's feature piece was written by Professor Scott Hancock, who is Chair of the History Department. He focuses on African American experiences before the Civil War, especially in law.

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### Professor Scott Hancock

In today's covid-19 United States we need people who will do great work. Gettysburg College's motto perhaps isn't the most inspirational, but it is definitely appropriate. Though the mechanism through which we now teach has changed markedly, the mission is the same.

I'm guessing that like me, most students deal in some fashion with constant streams of information and opinions about the coronavirus pandemic. Teaching during the pandemic requires we professors to keep perspective—millions of people worldwide are experiencing realities far worse than most professors. Most of us, at least now, are relatively healthy and economically secure, as our paychecks continue to arrive. Nevertheless, keeping perspective means we keep challenging students to think critically, evaluate sources, and produce work that rigorously relies on facts, expertise, reason and consideration of different perspectives. The tendencies toward anti-intellectualism, selective choosing of facts, and disdain for opposing opinions (though some opinions,

untethered to facts in order to deceive, should be disdained) shape much of the information that daily bombards us. Critics of Donald Trump and his Republicans at times drive public fear by too quickly pointing to high fatality rates of worst-case scenarios. Trump and his supporters eclipse their opponents' use of fear by orders of magnitude, along with unprecedented levels of distortion of facts, lying, and castigating anyone who presents clear evidence of their deceptions.

For me and my colleagues, therefore, the main story about teaching during the covid-19 pandemic, then, isn't so much about learning to use new online tools. It's about being effective in assisting and challenging our fellow human beings who are now students and will be drivers of society to do great work, to do better work. It's about doing better work than many who currently drive our societies by fear and not fact. Doing great and better work means thinking carefully, being willing to embrace complexity, checking your facts, and developing theory and practices that will make a tangible difference in people's lives. Because those who use fear hope we won't do great work.