

Alum Spotlight

Alex Zamalin is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and the Director of the African American studies program at University of Detroit Mercy. He is the author of *African American Political Thought and American Culture: The Nation's Struggle for Racial Justice* ([Palgrave Macmillan](#) 2015), *Struggle on Their Minds: The Political Thought of African American Resistance* ([Columbia University Press](#) 2017) and co-editor of *American Political Thought: An Alternative View* ([Routledge](#) 2017).



By Caroline Sigler

Caroline Sigler: You defended your dissertation in 2014. You published your first book in 2015. How did you manage to move from dissertation to book so quickly?

Alex Zamalin: There are three main reasons. The first is that, after defending, I decided to trust myself as an expert on my topic. The second is that I just wrote, and revised, without much internal censorship. In grad school, not only is it sometimes hard to feel that you understand your topic more so than your advisor, but your internal censors often preclude you from saying what it is you want to say. The third reason is that, after defending, I didn't have a tenure-track job and had just moved with my partner and child to a new city. And so, I thought, I might as well write something in a way that I enjoy and would ultimately like to read, rather than playing to some external audience that I'd never met and probably didn't exist anyway.

CS: What advice do you have for students about to enter the academic job market?

AZ: I found my current position by chance on the Chronicle job site. My advice is to apply widely rather than selectively, because, you don't always know who is on the job search committee, what they are looking for and what they might see in you. Also, committees love the fact that CUNY Ph.D.'s teach so much. For interviews, the biggest thing is to be yourself. Be prepared to look over the website, department, school etc., but keep in mind that faculty—in many places, though not all—want to see how you communicate, as a way to gauge how you'll be as a teacher and colleague. Most will only remember parts of your research, but they'll remember a great deal about your personality.

CS: As a parent, do you have advice on how to manage the pressures of professional academia with those of raising a family?

AZ: That's a hard question. I had my first child in grad school with my partner (also a Ph.D. student at the GC) and it was hard: managing schedules, adjuncting, commuting, dissertating—all, of course, with very, very, very little sleep. When our kid was born, he just became part of the family—which is to say, so much of the anxiety about being a parent sorted itself out. My own professional anxieties remained—but after becoming a parent, I was immersed in so many things and, knowing I could not do them all well, I relaxed a bit and tried to stay focused on the task at hand.

CS: What do you miss most about being a student at the Graduate Center?

AZ: No doubt, being a student at a commuter school like the GC was hard. And I definitely don't miss the windowless seminar rooms. But it is a really unique place. I miss my professors, the interdisciplinary environment, and the cool grad students. I also miss the quirk, the characters in the library, and looking out the second floor window to see all the traffic and people. And I miss the camaraderie and community that comes from a sense of not knowing what the future holds, watching some make it and others make it elsewhere.

