Footnotes

Spring 2014

Footnotes (Spring 2014)

Department of History

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What could unite such disparate topics: German Protestant missionaries establishing model settlements in Ottoman Palestine in the late nineteenth century; Eastern European Jews negotiating with German military officials in devastated Poland during the First World War; one Latvian interwar dictator who got many of his ideas while living as an exile in Nebraska; Nazi race examiners in search of mythical “lost Germanic blood” in occupied Europe; and the Gestapo’s manhunts in the Rhineland at the end of World War II?

Besides the obvious fact that they are fascinating, the common denominator is that these topics are being researched by UT modern European history graduate students who have won major international and national fellowships. Professor Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius is very proud of his students, who since 2008 have won nine major fellowships, including two Fulbrights (Tracey Hayes Norrell to Poland, Jordan Kuck to Latvia), three DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) fellowships (Jacob Hamric, Tracey Hayes Norrell, and Michael McConnell), two US Holocaust Memorial Museum fellowships (Michael McConnell and Bradley Nichols), a Berlin Program fellowship (Bradley Nichols), and a University of Tennessee Humanities Center fellowship (Bradley Nichols). In addition, Geoff Krempa, working on interwar ultranationalist plots, attended the Junior Scholars Training Seminar of the Woodrow Wilson International Center and won a US Army Military History Institute grant. Josh Sander, investigating Nazi plans for the Netherlands, won places in two summer seminars, hosted by the Center for Jewish History in New York and the Holocaust Education Foundation Summer Institute at DePaul University.

From the department head

The faculty of the Department of History is grateful for Tom Burman’s leadership as department head over the past six years. Taking over that role just when the world economy—and UT—faced a paralyzing recession, he led the department through some major challenges, the proverbial curse of “interesting times.” We have emerged stronger than ever, with a vibrant faculty recognized nationally for its track record in winning competitive fellowships. In this issue, you can see a sample of the fascinating and award-winning research we have recently published.

We are fine teachers, too, mentoring some outstanding graduate students, staying abreast of the latest thinking about effective undergraduate education, and helping a new generation of Tennessee students remember all that came before them. As the department’s new head, I am particularly thankful for all that Tom Burman did to make us one of the strongest humanities departments at the university, and I look forward to building on this legacy. Thanks for spending some time reading this newsletter and catching up on what we are doing. You will see why I am optimistic about the future of our Department of History.

Ernest Freeberg
Tore Olsson is a historian of the twentieth-century United States, and he is delighted to join the Department. He is particularly interested in the impact of the United States on the larger world surrounding it, and he explores that impact through the lens of food and agriculture. Food has always been a key vehicle of globalization. Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of Indian spices. Olsson looks at the exchange of plants and animals as a window to how the United States exercised power on the global stage during the last 100 years. Olsson’s current book project looks at the global campaign known as the Green Revolution—the US-led, post–WWII attempt to teach so-called “scientific agriculture” to poor farmers in the Third World. The book will examine the circuitous path of plant scientists and agricultural experts from underdeveloped regions in the United States into Mexico, a country long understood as the birthplace of the Green Revolution. In Mexico, the application of US agricultural science followed and led, in the short term, to a year abroad as part of a reciprocal exchange between his university and Nankai University in Tianjin and, in the longer term, to an obsession that continues today. He went on to earn a master’s degree in Chinese language and ended up at the University of Muenster, Germany. There he studied the underappreciated second-century BCE political philosopher Jia Yi, under Professor Reinhard Rennert, with support from the Heinrich Hertz-Stiftung, a fellowship for non-Germans studying in Germany. After earning a PhD, Sanft held a two-year post-doctoral position at Kyoto University supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. He then returned to teach for several years at the University of Muenster, where he completed the Habilitation review in 2011 (a process in German universities that requires the submission of a second dissertation and rigorous review of a candidate’s scholarship and teaching). He returned to the United States and spent a semester at the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), followed by a semester teaching and doing research at the University of Minnesota. Last year he taught at the University of South Carolina. In his debut lecture at UT (fall 2013), he taught History of China: China to 1600 and Studies in Asian History: The Death Penalty in a Cross-Cultural Context. Sanft is interested in how political and government processes worked in China during the time when the Chinese empire was first taking shape. He makes use of transmitted historical and philosophical texts, as well as legal and bureaucratic texts that archaeologists in China have recovered in recent decades. Charles’ first book, Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China: Publicizing the Qin Dynasty, was published in January 2014. When he’s not working, you may find him riding through Knoxville on a bicycle or turning the compost heap in his backyard.

Tore Olsson

Charles Sanft

New faculty
Tore Olsson

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Happy man

Steve Ash on writing, teaching, life, and retirement

By Catherine Higgs

Steve Ash is a historian of the American Revolution, and he is certainly one of the great teachers of the history department. As evidenced by the recent book award in UT’s EuReca competition. The center’s AfterWars research seminar meets regularly. To receive the center newsletter and e-mail updates on events, please call 865-974-0218 or e-mail cws@utk.edu.

Charles Sanft

The University of Tennessee Humanities Center Fellowships for 2013–2014 include three historians: Thomas E. Burman (see “Faculty fellowships,” page 4), Jacob Latham, and Christopher Magra. Jacob Latham is completing a manuscript, The Pompei cirensis and the Urban Image of Rome: Ritual, Performance, and Urban Space from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity, which examines the procession that preceded the immensely popular chariot races in the Circus Maximus—one of Rome’s three great piazzas—together with the triumph and the funeral procession. This spectacle attracted enormous crowds, offering an unparalleled opportunity for public merriment, political patronage, and religious devotion as it conducted the gods from the temple of Jupiter to the circus where the wild contents entertained one and all.

Humansities Center fellowships, 2013-2014

Chris Magra’s second book is Poseidon’s Curse: Naval Impression and the Atlantic Origins of the American Revolution, in which he argues that the British navy’s policy of press-ganging men and ships into service around the Atlantic to support commerce threatened merchants’ property and profits. Labourers also resented the navy’s uncompetitive wages and limited employment options. Both groups viewed British actions as a danger to economic freedom, and merchants and workers around the Atlantic signaled their resentment toward British imperialism. The British government encouraged the slave and sugar trades by regulating impressment in these enterprises. Elsewhere, American signals went unanswered, which is reason impressment is listed as a grievance in the Declaration of Independence.
Steve Ash’s most recent book is A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War (2013). It is the first book-length study of the horrible, three-day-long Memphis riot of 1866 during which racist white mobs murdered forty-six black men, women, and children; assaulted, robbed, and raped many others; and burned down every black church and school in the city, along with many dwellings. One of the most sensational events of the post-Civil War era, the riot spurred Congress to take action to protect the South’s ex-slaves and helped launch Radical Reconstruction.

In spring 2013, Ernest Freeberg published The Age of Edison: Electric Light and the Invention of Modern America, a history of the social and cultural impact of electric light. The Washington Post has called the book “a captivating intellectual adventure that offers long-forgotten stories of the birth pangs of the electrical age that are amazing, surprising, and tragic.” Freeberg has been sharing his findings with audiences across the country, appearing on National Public Radio and C-Span.

Catherine Higgs is the author of Chocolate Islands: Cacao, Slavery, and Colonial Practice (2012), which traces the early-twentieth-century journey of the Englishman Joseph Burtt to the Portuguese colony of São Tomé and Príncipe—the chocolate islands—through Angola and Mozambique, and finally to British Southern Africa. The English chocolateier Cadbury Brothers had hired Burtt to determine if the cocoa it was buying from the islands had been impoverished by slave laborers forcibly recruited from Angola—an allegation that became one of the grand scandals of the early colonial era and which echoes still in the early twenty-first century.

In Bloody Breathitt: Politics and Violence in Colonial Latin America (2013), Robert Hutton offers an account of the interaction of power and brutality between the Civil War and the Progressive era in one tumultuous community. In the late 1860s, Breathitt County, Kentucky, seemed to be the quintessential “feud” locale, a remote mountain anomaly bereft of New South progress. In fact, Breathitt County’s violent history reflected events far beyond its borders. “Feed,” and all it entailed, was only one of many descriptive names for killing that continue to distort the causes of violent death all over the globe.

Anna Jefferson is co-author of Daily Life in Colonial Latin America (2011), a book in the Greenwood Press daily life series. Chapters explore people’s daily activities in the areas of work, school, affluent life, home life, religious practice, celebrations, and resistance and rebellion. The book summarises recent monographs on the colonial experience, supporting them with anecdotes from the authors’ archival research in Guatemala. Preference is given to the experience of Africans and their descendants, the least-studied of the peoples of three continents who came together to create Latin America.

Robert (Jeff) Norrell has published a novel, Eden Rise (2013), in which Tom McKay, a white college freshman, returns to his Alabama home in 1965 and here encounters the travail of refugees from Vietnam, China, and Italy, marched east with the goal of reclaiming the city of Jerusalem for Christendom. Their mission, later known as the First Crusade, reached its culmination four years later and in the process inaugurated a new kind of warfare: holy, unenlightened, and apocalyptic.

Communication and Cooperation in Imperial China challenges longstanding notions of the Dynasties, China’s first imperial dynasty (221–206 BCE). Using new information afforded by the expansion of Chinese archaeology in recent decades, Charles Sault concentrates on cooperative aspects of early imperial government, and especially on the communication necessary for it. Sun links together events and actions that past scholars have viewed as separate and explains them as comprising a set of early media for mass communication over the whole of the realm, toward the goal of successful governance.

Freedom at Midnight is the working title of Cynthia Griggs Fleming’s fourth book, one of several projects she plans to pursue when she retires from the university this spring.

Funded by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Thomas E. Burman will spend 2013-2014 writing a draft of his third book, The Hounds of the Lord and the House of Islam: Dominicans, Islam, and the Scholastic Project, 1220-1230, a study of seven members of the Alta Dominica Order who sometimes joked that in their religious zeal they were not so much Dominicans, but Domini canes, “hounds of the lord” and their interactions with Islamic science, Arab science and philosophy, and the immensely powerful and alluring Islamic empire. This work examines the role of social services institutions as a means to deliver social services traditionally administered by clans and extended families. In addition to serving individual Cherokee needs, the Cherokee nation used these institutions to protect Cherokee sovereignty when threatened. Shellen Wu has been awarded a Luce/ACLF fellowship for 2013-2014 and will spend time in China researching her second book, Geography and the Fate of Chinese Civilization: The Rise of Geopolitical Discourse in China’s Tang and Sui Dynasties (581–907), which examines the era of greatest political unity in Chinese history and how the Chinese saw their country as a world power. At UT, Fleming served as chair of the African and African-American studies program from 1997 to 1999. She lectured widely throughout the country on civil rights, past and present, and wrote a dozen journal articles and three books. Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson (1998) examined the history of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s. In the Shaping the Contingent Struggle for Civil Rights in the Rural South (2004) and Yes We Did? From King’s Dream to Obama’s Promise (2009) explored the development of the relationship between King’s death and President Obama’s election. Researching and writing Freedom at Midnight is but one passion for this Renaissance woman, a talented teacher, scholar, and devotee of fine cars and the art of dressage. We look forward to celebrating its publication as we celebrate her three decades of service to the Department of History.
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The UT history faculty: (front row) Monica Black, Dan Feller, Chad Black, Margaret Cook Andersen, Laura Nenzi, Ernest Freeberg, (second row) J. P. Dessel, Tore Olsson, Lynn Sacco, (back row) Luke Harlow, Jay Rubenstein, Charles Sanft, Jacob Latham, Bob Bast, Catherine Higgs, and Vejas Liulevicius