



# HISTORY HAPPENINGS

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History at the  
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*Editors: Peter Brand and Caroline Peyton*

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# Letter from the Chair

DR. DANIEL UNOWSKY

As I write these lines, the Fall 2025 semester is coming to a close. This semester, like so many, has been a busy and satisfying one. We welcomed first year students in our general education surveys and worked closely with our majors and minors and those joining us from other departments in our upper-division courses. Our excellent MA and PhD students pursued their research projects, adding their passion and energy to Mitchell Hall. In October, Dr. Caroline Peyton drew a large audience to Mitchell Hall Auditorium for her History Matters talk on “Twisters in the American South: Violent Storms, Science, and History.” In November, Frederick Knight, Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Howard University was our Belle McWilliams Lecturer. He discussed his most recent book, *Black Elders: The Meaning of Age in American Slavery and Freedom*, entered into conversation with Professor Dennis Laumann, and answered questions from a large and lively audience drawn from campus and beyond. We have had many important scholars speak in this series, but this year was particularly meaningful for many of us. Frederick Knight was a member of our faculty in the early 2000s. It was wonderful to have this opportunity to bring him back to Memphis.

Dr. Caroline Peyton and Dr. Peter Brand have compiled a great set of features for this edition of the Newsletter. In her New Faculty Spotlight, Dr. Monet Lewis-Timmons writes about her life and career prior to her arrival in Memphis this fall. Dr. Lewis-Timmons joins us as our Public Historian.



She will offer courses in museum studies, public history, and much more. Her wide experience bringing history to broader audiences complements the University of Memphis’s emphasis on offering our students more opportunities to gain work skills through internships with community organizations, including museums, libraries, and archives.

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## Letter from the Chair (cont'd)

Last Spring, Dr. Beverly Tsacoyianis taught a course on French Empire and the Arab Muslim World on partnership with Dr. Melanie Conroy from the Department of World Languages. The History and Honors students joined Dr. Tsacoyianis on a study trip to France in May. Biology major Abdul Alashmali writes about his experiences in the class and on the trip in our History Abroad feature. This course is only the latest of a long line of study-travel classes our department has offered and will continue to offer in the years ahead.

Dr. Chrystal Goudsouzian, one of our award-winning advisors and a specialist in Ancient Egyptian history, taught a very special course in the Spring 2025 semester. She and her students enriched their study of women, gender, and family in ancient Egypt in partnership with the Art Museum of the University of Memphis by creating high quality replicas of ancient artifacts. The resulting public exhibition can still be seen in a dedicated display case in Mitchell Hall Lobby. Come by to see what our students have been working on!

Our department has been training graduate students in Ancient Egyptian art, archaeology, epigraphy, and history for decades. Dr. Peter Brand took four of our current graduate students with him to Egypt to participate in a nine-week field season at the Great Hypostyle Hall Project at Karnak Temple in Spring 2025. The students offer their thoughts on this amazing experience.

Finally, we are delighted to include a feature on Dr. Ann Mulhearn. Dr. Mulhearn received her PhD in our department in 2012 and currently teaches at Middle Tennessee State University. Dr. Mulhearn's first book, *Social Justice from Outside the Walls: Catholic Women in Memphis, 1915-1970* was published by Lexington Books in November 2023 and is receiving excellent reviews in historical journals.

- Chair and Professor Daniel Unowsky

*Cover Photo: The team and two of our Spanish colleagues visits the great temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel where his four colossal statues loom in the background.*

# New Faculty Spotlight

BY DR. MONET LEWIS-TIMMONS

Born and raised in the Bay Area, California, I grew up surrounded by a rich, but often underacknowledged, legacy of Black history. From the Black Pioneers of the late 1770s to the Black Panther Party of the 1970s, this history has profoundly shaped the cultural and political identity of Black communities in the region, even if it's not always centered in mainstream narratives of African American history. My own family's connection to the Bay Area began during the Great Migration. Like many Black families fleeing the racial terror and economic deprivation of the rural South, my relatives migrated to California in the 1940s. One of the most defining stories in our family—one that my maternal grandmother has told and retold for as long as I can remember—begins in Terrell, Texas, a small town east of Dallas.

My great-grandparents, Willie Pearl Cherry and M.C. Cherry, lived there with their nine children. One day, in an effort to feed his own family and others in the community, my great-grandfather killed a white man's cow. He knew the risk: either let his family starve or feed them and potentially face violent repercussions. He chose survival. Fearing for their lives, my great-grandparents fled west in the dead of night. This act of courage and sacrifice not only made my existence possible—it shaped my understanding of Black history, migration, family, and storytelling.



Over the years, I've come to see how these themes—resistance, survival, love, and legacy—are echoed in the stories of so many Black families. Through education and shared conversations with friends about their own histories, I've come to understand how oral history sustains our collective memory.

Storytelling is particularly significant in my family, which is largely matrilineal. While discussing the past can often be painful, my grandmother's willingness to keep this story alive has taught me about the quiet power of remembrance. Her stories, coupled with my mother's scrapbooking practice, have laid the foundation for who I am: a Black feminist public scholar, historian, curator, and memory worker.

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## NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: DR. MONET LEWIS-TIMMONS

My formal interest in African American history, literature, and archives deepened during my undergraduate studies at Emory University, where I had the opportunity to work with the Alice Walker papers at the Rose Library. I'd always known that Black writers and activists had documented their lives, but seeing such a carefully curated, expansive collection was transformative. This experience sparked my passion for Black women's archives.

That passion followed me to the University of Delaware, where I focused my graduate studies on the cross-generational legacy of Black women's archival work, particularly through the papers of Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Again, I was struck by the richness of a Black woman's personal collection—this one curated in the early twentieth century. As I engaged with her letters, diaries, and reflections, I began to read her published work differently, recognizing how her life echoed through her fiction, poetry, and essays. Even more personally, Alice Dunbar-Nelson's writings about mental health, sexuality, relationships, and self-understanding deeply resonated with me. Her honest reflections gave me language and tools to better understand and affirm my own existence as a Black woman.

My work in Black women's archives has led to a wide range of opportunities to share these stories beyond the academy. I've presented at national conferences such as the Modern Language Association (MLA), the Association of Black Women Historians (ABWH), the National Council of Public History (NCPH), and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). These experiences have pushed me to think beyond traditional scholarship—to consider how exhibitions, both digital and in-person, can make Black women's history more accessible. In 2019, I co-curated the digital exhibition "'I Am an American!': The Authorship and Activism of Alice Dunbar-Nelson" with Dr. Jesse Erickson and the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia. That opportunity led to the creation of my dissertation exhibition, "Alice Dunbar-Nelson and the Legacy of Black Women's Archives," at the University of Delaware, and more recently, "Beyond Paul: Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Life and Legacy" at the Paul Laurence Dunbar House in Dayton, Ohio.

These projects are part of a broader mission: to expand the possibilities of Black women's archives beyond the reading room, to bring their lives and stories into public consciousness. Now, as the Public Historian in the Department of History, I aim to provide my students with the tools and confidence to pursue meaningful work in public history. I'm also committed to building partnerships with local museums and organizations, especially in a city like Memphis, where Black history is both vibrant and essential. We need these public conversations, these difficult truths, and these intergenerational stories now more than ever. They remind us of where we come from, what we've survived, and what we continue to build.



# History Abroad

BY ABDUL ALASHMALI

My name is Abdul Alashmali, and I'm a Biology major with minors in Chemistry and Agriculture on the Pre-Dental track at the University of Memphis. Outside the classroom, I serve as a Senator for the Student Government Association, Director of Outreach for the Honors Student Organization, Treasurer for Rising Health Professionals, and a member of the House of Representatives for the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature. In addition, I am also an Honors student with a strong interest in traveling and learning about different cultures. This past spring, I took a course that was cross-listed with the History Department and the Honors College, focusing on the French Empire and the Arab Muslim world. The class met once a week during the semester, and in May, we spent eleven days in France as part of the study abroad portion.

When I first enrolled, I did not know anyone else in the class. At first, this made me a little nervous, but over time, the shared experiences, discussions, and the trip itself brought us all together. By the end of the program, I had formed friendships with people I might not have met otherwise, which made the experience even more special.

I joined the class because I wanted to step outside my usual STEM classes and learn more about culture and history. I believe it is important to travel and see different cultures because, as an aspiring healthcare provider, I will work with people from many different backgrounds.



***Dr. Beverly Tsacoyianis (center), author Abdul Alashmali (right), and fellow students in Paris.***

Having the chance to view other cultures firsthand makes it much more real than simply reading about them in a book.

In Paris, we visited many sites that directly connected to what we studied. The Louvre Museum was one of my favorites because it showcased such a wide array of history, from ancient civilizations to modern art, and I found myself fascinated and awestruck in every gallery I entered. I also got the opportunity to visit the Notre Dame Cathedral outside the itinerary. It was something I had always wanted to see, and standing before it felt surreal.

## HISTORY ABROAD CONT'D

The most powerful experiences for me were visiting the Hôtel National des Invalides, where Napoleon is buried, and the Catacombes de Paris. Both sites centered on the theme of death and remembrance but in completely different ways. The Invalides was filled with beautifully designed rooms and detailed art on the walls that I found myself entranced by. In contrast, the Catacombes were quiet and haunting, deep underground, cold and damp, with the remains of millions of Parisians stacked neatly along the tunnels. Walking through both places made me reflect on the passage of time, how life continues to build upon what came before, and how history preserves the lives of those who came before us. It was truly moving and unforgettable.

After Paris, we traveled to Marseille, which showed a very different side of France than I had ever been aware of. Before this trip, I was ignorant of how diverse and culturally rich the region truly was. Marseille felt more connected to the Mediterranean, and its mix of cultures was easy to notice. At the Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean, I learned how the city had been a meeting point for cultures for thousands of years. Marseille quickly became one of my favorite parts of the trip because of its unique atmosphere and strong sense of identity.



***Dr. Beverly Tsacoyianis (left), author Abdul Alashmali (center), and fellow students in Paris.***

The class itself was amazing, and the trip tied everything together. I learned a great deal about French history that I had not previously known, and seeing it in person provided me with a deeper understanding. I also enjoyed having all the time to explore on my own and experience France outside of class. I truly fell in love with the country. Moreover, this course provided me with knowledge, friendships, and a new perspective. It made me want to travel again soon and inspired me to take more History classes before I graduate. I am already planning another study abroad program for next year, and I am excited to build on what I learned from this experience.



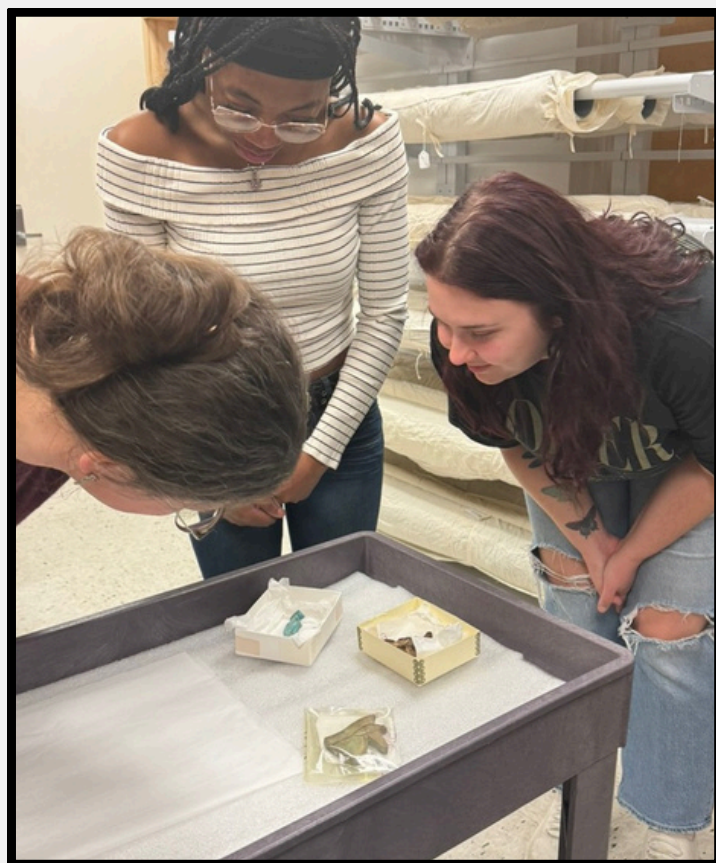
## AmuLET Me Tell You! Amulets of Power and Protection in Ancient Egypt: A 3D Printed Mini-Exhibit

BY DR. CHRYSTAL GOUDSOUZIAN

Mitchell Hall has recently become home to a few Egyptian deities, but no need to worry. They're tiny, approachable, and don't require offerings!

In spring 2025, students in the class Women and Power in Ancient Egypt embarked on a semester-long digital humanities project in partnership with the Art Museum of the University of Memphis (AMUM). With guidance from Ancient Egyptian Collection Curator Dr. Darcy Hackly and AMUM Assistant Director Adriana Dunn, students didn't just study the ancient past - they held it, replicated it, and presented it to the public.

After an in-depth exploration of women, gender, and family in ancient Egypt, each student selected a museum object connected to course themes and their own personal interests. With support from the AMUM staff, they were able to handle, examine, 3D scan, and photograph their chosen artifacts. Following 3D printer training in the University of Memphis Sandbox, students produced high-quality replicas, which they then brought to life through a painting workshop led by UofM art students.



*Left to Right: Meeting the Objects; Scanning Isis and Horus*



## AMULET ME TELL YOU! (CONT'D)

To prepare their work for the public, students created professional museum labels and wrote short, public-facing interpretive essays for the [class website](#). With Prof. Dunn's expert assistance, they installed their object labels and 3D artifact models in a dedicated display case in the Mitchell Hall Lobby.

The course culminated in a public research presentation and exhibit unveiling. In front of family, friends, faculty, and peers, students introduced their artifacts and reflected on how handling and recreating them deepened their connection to and understanding of the ancient world. If you find yourself in Mitchell Hall, be sure to take a look at their work!



*Top Left to Bottom Center: Painting Party; 3D Printing; the Class*



## EGYPTOLOGY GRAD STUDENTS' SPRING 2025 "WORK-STUDY" IN THE LAND OF THE PHARAOHS

BY BROOKE HUGHES, ANDREW KENNEDY & PAUL COOPER PHILLIPS

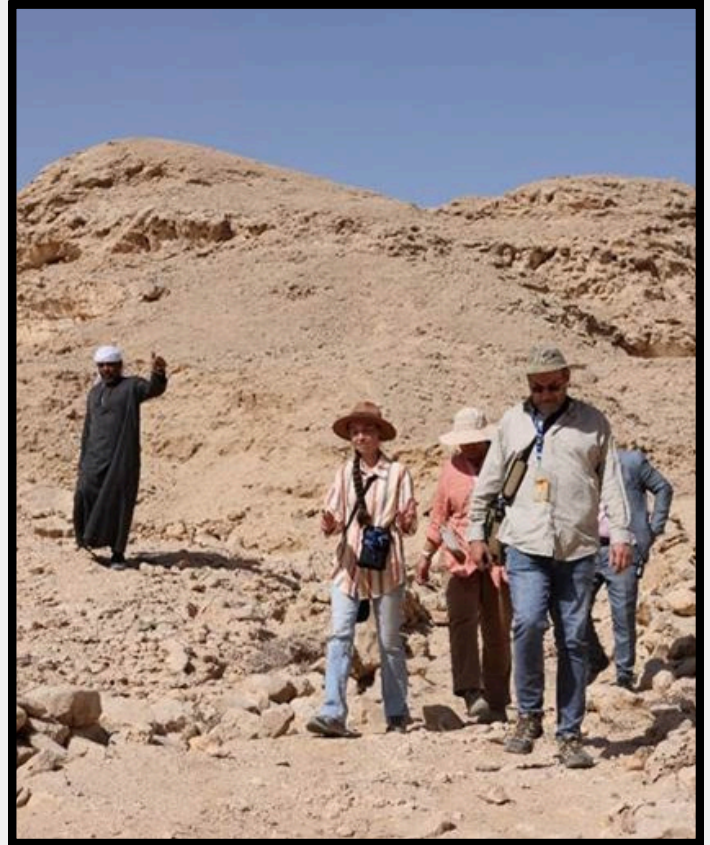
This Spring, a team of four history graduate students — Andrew Kennedy, Brooke Hughes, Cooper Phillips, and Tasha Hamilton — accompanied Dr. Peter Brand for a 9-week field season, working on the Great Hypostyle Hall Project at Karnak Temple in Luxor, Egypt. From mid-March to late May, our team worked on scaffolds along the southern wall of the colossal Hypostyle Hall, recording epigraphic data on the war inscriptions of Ramesses II carved on this vast stone canvas. Work, however, was not all that our team got up to. We spent several weekends taking trips up and down the length of the Nile visiting important pharaonic sites that we had only read about in books. Here, three of our team members would like to share with you some of their favorite recollections of our amazing experience.



*The team poses for a photo on the south side of the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak Temple. Behind them are the battle scenes of Ramesses II we are recording. From left to right: Brooke Hughes, Cooper Phillips, Tasha Hamilton, Dr. Peter Brand, Forman Mahmoud Faruk, Andrew Kennedy, & Hassan, our Egyptian workman.*



## EGYPTOLOGY GRAD STUDENTS' SPRING 2025 "WORK-STUDY" IN THE LAND OF THE PHARAOHS (CONT'D)



*Left to Right: The team pretends to work at Karnak Temple. Our main effort was to correct earlier copies of inscriptions for accuracy by closely inspecting the wall carvings, all while trying not to cook in temperatures that sometimes reached well above 100 degrees!; The team takes a stroll through a desert wadi (valley), visiting the unfinished royal tombs near Tell el-Amarna.*

**Andrew Kennedy:** The confluence of history and monumental wonder has always made the huge statues of Ramesses II carved into the cliffs of his temples at Abu Simbel stand out for me as a place of fascination. There is, of course, its ancient past as shrines devoted to the deified Ramesses II and his primary wife, Nefertari. Each temple is imposing, incredible, and heavy with iconic symbolism, such as a statue of the Sun-God Re flanked by three-dimensional hieroglyphic signs spelling out his coronation name, User-Ma'at-Re, as a clever "word picture" called a rebus. Then there is the omnipresent graffiti covering the giant statues, providing a real sense of continuous exploration and historical tourism; the names scrawled in multiple languages across the rock face date from the ancient Greeks to nineteenth century European travelers!

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## EGYPTOLOGY GRAD STUDENTS' SPRING 2025

### "WORK-STUDY" IN THE LAND OF THE PHARAOHS

#### (CONT'D)

**Andrew Kennedy:** Also visible are signs that these temples were literally cut into pieces and moved by UNESCO to save them from the waters of Lake Nasser after the Aswan High Dam was built in the 1960s. If one looks carefully the seams between the sliced-up blocks are visible, but only on the rocky backdrop of cliffs surrounding the shrine. On the temple, an international team of engineers and conservationists carefully hid traces of this dramatic international cooperation and solidarity done in the name of historical preservation. Altogether, this site is truly an epitome of both Ancient Egypt and Egyptology.

**Brooke Hughes:** A couple of places that were incredible for me to experience firsthand were the tombs in the ancient city of the Pharaoh Akhenaten at Tell el-Amarna in Middle Egypt and the nobles' tombs of ancient Thebes in modern Luxor. One rather mundane feature that struck me were workmen's fingerprints preserved in the plaster of the tomb for the Amarna royal family. Seeing this made me feel as if I were glimpsing the behind-the-scenes work of the ancient tomb builders. While in Luxor, it was particularly exciting for me to visit the nobles' tombs of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties (1539–1191 BCE). An essential aspect of my dissertation is to investigate funerary scenes in these tombs to study how mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters actively participated in burial ceremonies. I was able to explore several of the tombs open to the public and document them for my personal research. Before visiting Egypt, these were places I had only ever read about, and my feelings of wonder and admiration were, at times, overwhelming.

**Cooper Phillips:** If I had to pick my two favorite excursions, they would be our trips to Tell el-Amarna and to Abydos. First, Tell el-Amarna is, for me, a very special site. On the one hand, it is a place of extreme historical significance, as it was the one-time capital of the Pharaoh Akhenaten. On a more personal level, this site and its ancient inhabitants were topics which I had researched extensively in past coursework. Seeing the object of all my research contextualized in the actual in-situ remains of this ancient city and its necropolis was a powerful experience. Our visit to Abydos, home of the god Osiris, looms large in my memory, as we were afforded the unexpected privilege of visiting the giant mud brick funerary enclosure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty King Khasekhemwy, one of the oldest preserved monuments in all of Egypt. Although the Early Dynastic period (3100–2700 BCE) is beyond my own research specialization, being allowed to walk around one of Egypt's earliest large royal monuments was an awe-inspiring moment for me.



# The Book Report: *Social Justice From Outside The Walls*

*For the fall semester's Book Report, Dr. Caroline Peyton and alumna Dr. Ann Mulhearn (MTSU) discuss her new book *Social Justice Outside the Walls: Catholic Women in Memphis, 1950–1970* (Lexington Books, 2024).*

***Within the preface, you discuss your motivations for researching Catholic women in Memphis. Could you tell us a little more about your background, and its connection to the book's topic?***

I was raised in a devoutly Catholic family in north Louisiana – which is predominately Protestant (as opposed to south Louisiana which is overwhelmingly Catholic.) We were not exactly outsiders, but definitely a distinct minority like Catholics in Memphis. The balancing act between being Catholic – which has its own unique expectations – and being “regular” was something I experienced daily, particularly after we transferred from parochial to public school. My family were (are, still!) social justice Catholics who place(d) service over self – much like the women in the book. My parents worked within the local civil rights movement and were some of the first teachers at Head Start in the mid-60s. Their activism made us even more different than our neighbors than did our Catholicism – but it gave us an awareness of how local events are connected to the greater sweep of history, how one person can make a true difference in their small corner of the world. Which, I think, is what my book is about: Being the pebble that causes the ripple that builds into a wave that changes the world, to paraphrase Robert F. Kennedy, Sr.



***As you note, the research process prompted reflection upon your relationship to Catholicism and navigating certain complexities. Could you tell us more about this process? How did this shape you as a historian?***

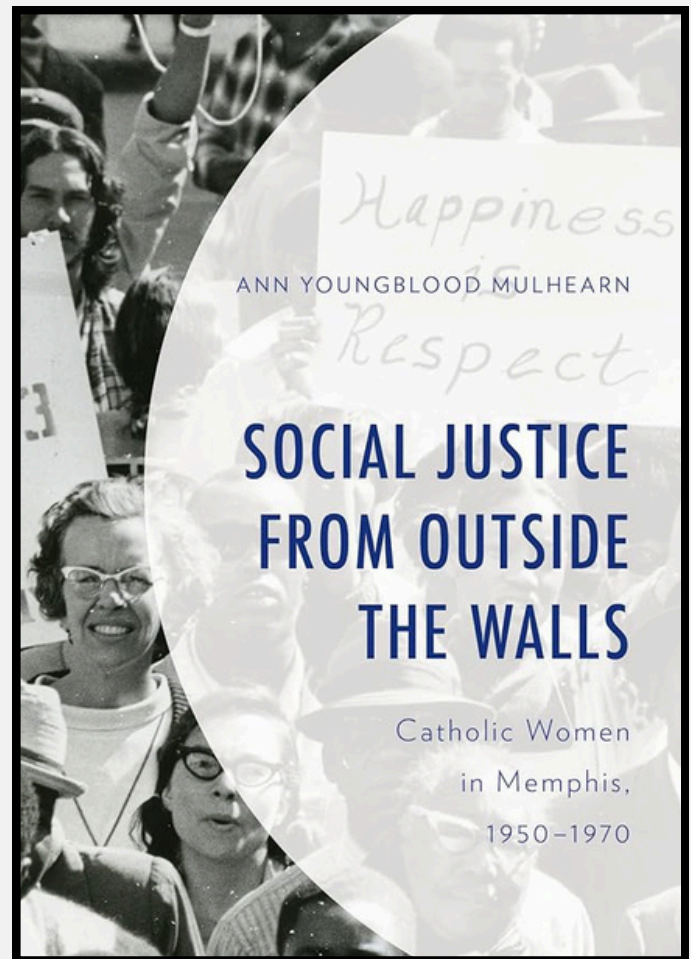
Wow. This one made me think. Even though I have not been a practicing Catholic for over 35 years, the Church's teaching profoundly influenced my worldview. Many people think that the Catholic Church is inherently conservative and in many ways, anti-intellectual – but that's not accurate.

## The Book Report: Social Justice From Outside The Walls (cont'd)

The nuns and priests at my school encouraged us to push ourselves – to learn, to explore, to question. My parents did as well. No book was off limits if we could actually read and understand the words. They also reminded us that we live in a community, that we have a responsibility to each other, that our actions and words impact those around us, so we must always strive for justice and truth. That love of learning for learning's sake – constantly reading, questioning, searching for answers, for truth, to understand the world and our place in it – definitely led me into history. I feel those lessons still guide my life and my historical scholarship in positive ways, so the process of writing this book became a delicate balance: a respect for the Church's commitment to social justice and scholarship versus an objective analysis of its shortcomings – particularly in regard to race and gender. I'd often stop and re-read what I'd written – and go, nope, too hagiographic. Start over. Which is what Sr. Imelda would've told me to do.

***Your book profiles a number of Catholic women, including Allegra Turner and Ann Shafer. What stood out about their stories and the others detailed in the book?***

I think it was their ordinariness. They were unassuming women who you could pass on the street, see in the grocery store, sit next to in mass – and you would never suspect that they were doing these extraordinary things.



I think they are more emblematic of a larger movement than singularities, although each is extraordinary in her own right. These six were members of a larger network of women active in Memphis in this era – from all faiths and backgrounds – who committed themselves to change. They didn't advertise it; they just did it. Sometimes at great personal risk. As I interviewed and researched – each always shifted the conversation from herself to someone more important, more consequential. It was never about them, in their minds, which made their stories more compelling to me.



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## The Book Report: Social Justice From Outside The Walls

***Why did Vatican II serve as an important catalyst for activism? What else inspired the actions of the women profiled in the book?***

It's hard for non-Catholics to appreciate the seismic event that was Vatican II. Seemingly overnight almost a millennium of tradition was swept aside: Latin mass – gone. Mantillas (the lace head coverings for women during mass) – gone. Fasting during Lent – almost gone. The greater inclusion of laity and women was especially consequential. The Church was (and is) very hierarchical and patriarchal. There were (and are) pockets that see the Church as unchanging and find comfort in the certainty that a rigid structure and ritual provides. The outward manifestations of their faith defined them, and the changes of Vatican II was like a loss of identity, of self. They resented giving up that power, that certainty that patriarchy and hierarchy provided. For these women, though, it was the opposite. Their faith was as central to their identity as those who opposed Vatican II, but its changes freed them to live their faith as they interpreted it. Before – doing so sometimes put them at odds with the Church administration – but Vatican II encouraged them. It gave them space to voice their concerns, contribute meaningfully to their parishes, the greater Church community, as well as society as a whole. While other forces certainly influenced them – the larger civil rights movement, the growing women's movement, perhaps even personal ambition – their identities were so intertwined with their Catholic faith, I'd argue that from their perspective – it was all part of the implementation of their faith.

***Your book details a lesser-known chapter of Memphis history. Why is understanding the role Catholicism and Catholic activists played in Memphis important for understanding the city's history? The US South's?***

Often popular tellings of history deal in generalizations and stereotypes that gloss over the complicated bits in favor of a heroic narrative or convenient one-dimensional foil, particularly when it comes to the South. It's easy to assign certain groups certain roles and motivations. It provides a shorthand for dealing with really messy, inconvenient historical currents. Earlier I talked about how Catholic teachings emphasize the search for the truth, for an understanding of the totality of life. I think that the more we know of a story, a place, the more we can truly understand it, to learn from its example. That's why it's important to explore and acknowledge the contributions of smaller players in events like the civil rights era in Memphis. Not necessarily to complicate the story or diminish the achievements of others, but to see a more complete picture so we can better understand the nuances of history and to appreciate the complexities of the human story.