

HISTORY HAPPENINGS

A newsletter published by the Department of History at the University of Memphis

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Snapshots from summer research: Dr. Amanda Gaggioli (left) conducted fieldwork in Armenia, where she collected sediments at a Neolithic site. (Right) Dr. Brian Kwoba visited the grave of Hubert H. Harrison, the subject of his forthcoming book, during a trip to St. Croix.

Letter from the Chair

by Professor Daniel Unowsky

This year, like so many, is marked by endings and beginnings. We said our goodbyes to one of our department's most beloved professors, Robert Frankle, who passed in July 2023. Robert's legacy remains very much alive and well in our department and on our campus. Like Robert, our faculty members are committed to contributing to a dynamic and intellectually challenging campus life. By engaging with ideas, with social, cultural, political, environmental change, with the full range of human experience, we can better understand the world we live in. Without a historical grounding, it is far too easy to reject the complicated and contradictory realities of history in favor of simple narratives that distort our understanding of both past and present. Like Robert, we continue to believe that History Matters.

Even as we say goodbye to Robert Frankle, we welcome Dr. Amanda Gaggioli to our campus. Dr. Gaggioli's scholarly work focused on earthquakes in ancient Greece draws on her study of cultural and social history as well as geography and earth



(cont.) science to glean new insights into politics, architecture, human interaction with the environment, and resiliency in the ancient world. We know our students will benefit greatly from her classes on Greek and Roman history.

Letter from the Chair (continued)



Dr. Robert Frankle holding court with his students.

This edition of History Happenings also includes a report of the summer research conducted in St. Croix and New York City by Professor Brian Kwoba. This piece is a rare opportunity to read about what academic historians do to pursue their research projects.

This contribution is a discussion of Dr. Kwoba's nearly completed book project on the important Black intellectual, Hubert Harrison, and Dr. Kwoba's pursuit of sources in New York City and in the Caribbean. Dr. Kwoba also relates the story of his complicated relationship with a recently deceased senior scholar who authored important books on Hubert Harrison.

In this edition, we also put the spotlight on one of our many successful alums. Darius Young came to the University of Memphis from Florida A&M. As a student here, he was very active in the Graduate Association for African American History.

He developed an excellent reputation as a teacher and as a promising student. After earning his PhD here in 2011, he returned to FAMU as a faculty member. There, he has taught a wide variety of courses, published on the civil rights movement in Memphis and other topics, and is now working on a new book on Black power in Detroit in the 1960s. Dr. Young was recently named Full Professor, has won several large grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and other funding agencies. We are overjoyed (though not surprised) at the legacy he is building as a teacher and scholar.

Finally, to our Alumni: please do send us news about your career and life post-U of Memphis. Beginning in the coming spring, we plan to highlight alumni updates in History Happenings. We would love to hear from you!

In Memoriam: Professor Robert Frankle

by Professor Daniel Unowsky

The Department of History joins friends on campus and beyond in mourning the loss of Robert Frankle, who passed away on 4 July 2023.

Robert Frankle taught at Morehouse College and Evergreen State College, earned his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, and joined our faculty in 1970. Robert retired in 2006, though he continued to teach classes for several more years.

I owe a great personal debt to Robert. Robert Frankle was among the faculty members who was most welcoming when my wife and I first visited campus in 1999. I had never been to Memphis and had concerns about relocating to the mid-south. Those concerns faded away when my wife and I went out to dinner with Robert and his wife Barbara and our late colleague Abe Kriegel and his wife Reva—four New Yorkers! If they had come to love Memphis, this native New Jerseyan could (and did) as well.

Robert's warmth toward me and my wife derived in part from our family connection. Barbara's aunt, Ruth Grand, who lived in Livingstone, N.J., was extremely close with my father, his second wife, and my two younger sisters. Barbara's Aunt Ruth was always Aunt Ruth to my sisters.

Once here and working in the department of history, I quickly realized what an amazing colleague Robert truly was. Like so many who came to know Robert, I was greatly influenced by the model of teaching and service that he fully realized during his decades at the university. He was committed to academic service, to the Humanities, to the immense value of an interdisciplinary education, and to excellent teaching.

Robert had a campus-wide reputation as a dedicated university citizen. Robert was a major force behind the development of the University of Memphis General Education Program. Robert remained a tireless advocate for a broad and interdisciplinary education throughout his career at U of M. He served as president of the Association of General and Liberal Studies, of the Academic Senate of our university, and of the Memphis chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

Frankle (continued.)

Robert believed deeply in the notion that the university was a unique and special place that offered young people the space and time to engage with big ideas and to grapple with the full range of human experience.

For Robert, campus life and learning contributed to the development of an active and informed citizenry. This belief is one all of us in the Humanities continue to share.

Above all, however, Robert made his mark as a gifted and inspiring teacher. Trained as an early modern historian of England, he offered courses on European intellectual history, the Reformation, the Nature of Historical Inquiry and much more. The university recognized Robert's mastery of the classroom by twice awarding him the Distinguished Teaching Award as well as the Thomas W. Briggs Award for Teaching.

He was a true legend as a teacher. His dynamic and dramatic classroom style - which included playing historical roles, jumping on desks, moving swiftly from one end of the classroom to the other - engaged generations of students, instilling in them a love of history even as he challenged them to hone their critical thinking skills.

Faculty members do not often observe each other teaching, and I was never in Robert's class; nonetheless, I saw him teach quite a few times. We used to invite high school students interested in history to the university, and in my first years on campus I arranged lectures for them by faculty members. Robert along with the late Maurice Crouse would regularly do a session on early modern witch trials—Maurice spoke about the infamous trials in Salem, Massachusetts; Robert talked about parallels in Europe. Maurice, reserved and stationary, was the perfect foil for Robert. Robert ran up and down the aisles of Mitchell Hall Auditorium. He jumped on chairs. He played characters from the history he was exploring. The students were riveted.

In the summer, we posted a tribute to Robert on our Facebook page (Memphis Historians). Many responded with their own memories. Here I quote from a colleague and two students who posted about Robert to give you more insights into his legacy at U of Memphis (*continued*):

Aram Goudsouzian, Bizot Family Professor of History: Before teaching my first class ever at U of M, Dr. Frankle caught me outside the door, and apologized in advance if loud noises emanated from the classroom next door. About twenty minute later, while I was nervously stumbling through teaching, he theatrically screamed, ran out to the hall, then turned around and ran screaming back into his class. That man was a legend.

Rhonda Charnes, former undergrad and PhD student in our department:

Dr. Frankle was my World Civilizations instructor for my very first semester in college. I knew I wanted to be a history major, and we talked some about that. I remember his incredible teaching energy...I went on to take several other courses with him and he along with Dr. Bob Brown were the leads on my doctoral comps. He was incredibly kind even when I was nervous as hell! He taught me how to think... not what to think. He will be remembered by his students. He was truly a great professor and nice man. The loss of Bob Brown and now Frankle will be felt by me for many years to come.



Dr. Robert Frankle

Former undergraduate student:

I vividly remember a visit to his office in search of a handout from a previous semester. A number of piles of paper filled the surfaces of his office. With an uncanny precision, he plunged his hand into one of those stacks and, almost as if by magic, retrieved the exact paper in seconds without even looking. A testament to his generous spirit: on the last day of class, he invited all of us out to Garibaldi's and treated. He was a fun and engaging teacher whose love of history was contagious.

I am honored to have learned from Robert. He was a kind, generous, and passionate person whose legacy of teaching and service continues to shape our department and our university.

New Faculty Profile: Dr. Amanda Gaggioli

By Dr. Amanda Gaggioli

I grew up in Illinois about a half hour drive from Chicago. When I was in grade school, the King Tut exhibit traveled to the Field Museum. I demanded my mom take me. My three siblings and I walked out of the shiny gold and bejeweled exhibit with one set of miniature Egyptian canopic jars from the gift shop. I negotiated for Duamutef, the jackal-headed jar. I always had a curiosity for the ancient world where things seemed scanty and so unusual from my everyday life. In college, I jumped at the chance to take a course on the ancient world. I remember sitting on the edge of my front row seat in a massive auditorium as I learned about Lucy, Otzi the Iceman, Queen Puabi, Hammurabi, the Terracotta Army, Machu Picchu, and countless other peoples and places that I am now introducing to students in my World History survey course.

My first trips abroad were to Israel to join archaeological excavations. I worked at Ashkelon just 13 km north of the Palestinian Gaza Strip. A few weeks into the fieldwork season, conflict at this border erupted, forcing the team to abandon and continue work at another site — Megiddo. Fieldwork carried on as usual despite ongoing fighter jets flying overhead and sirens warning of rockets.



I was constantly reminded of Israel's elaborate defense system and, hence, our overall safety. A sense of uneasiness troubled me, though, specifically with regard to how, alarmingly, we remained critically detached from a crisis that played out right in front of our eyes. The moral quandaries stemming from this experience initially had me reconsidering whether I should continue pursuing historical subjects.

Gaggioli cont.

In reflecting on this experience, I was disturbed to learn how historical methods and practice and my own involvement in them can have the power to influence distorted perceptions of the past that in effect could harm groups in the present. It made me realize the effects of knowledge production and dissemination about the human past on the political present. Remaining critically detached could inevitably perpetuate a blind spot towards peoples in both the present and also the historical narrative. Fortunately, doing history also empowered me to think critically, to grapple with the difficult problems, and to express myself. Diverse, globally engaged and cross-cultural understanding and learning provide the tools to discuss and address complex social and political issues operating in multiscalar webs of interaction. The remoteness of the ancient world offers a particular advantageous 'outsider' vantage point. Through ancient writings and materials depicting past places and peoples, I can speak directly about cruel leaders, the dynamics of small and big players in a geopolitical chess game, social and environmental crises, and inequality and injustice to reflect on current issues.

When it's difficult to articulate the different angles of current issues or emotionally burdensome to do so, I can lean on an ancient lens to discuss the issues from a distance and with more ease. The ancient world is useful to think with.

In a class on Alexander the Great, the ancient accounts describing Alexander's life captivated me. While he was off conquering the world (the eastern Mediterranean and Asia), ancient writers tell us he kept a dagger and the Iliad under his pillow every night. I was left wondering how this book of songs, which was already several hundred years old at the time, could inspire someone to lead an army of people so far from home, expecting to reach the ends of the earth, in such a short amount of time — about 12 years. Alexander died at only 32. I needed to start learning ancient Greek to understand how the Iliad could fuel such incredible pothos (passion). Alongside Greek, I also started taking other ancient languages — Sumerian and Akkadian. This deep dive into languages coincided with me switching my double major from math to classics — the study of peoples of the Mediterranean basin from about the third millennium BC to the fifth century AD.

My environmental interests came from an early-onset dissatisfaction with the treatment of the environment in history. It's often presented as the backdrop to, rather than an intrinsic part of historical developments. I noticed for the ancient Mediterranean that modern scholarship would mention earthquakes briefly in historical introductions or in archaeological reports as a convenient explanation of material destruction...or for a full-fledged region-wide societal 'collapse.' This seemed misaligned with the Mediterranean's high seismic setting that could imply people's familiarity and resilience. Moreover, observations of Greeks and Romans as gleaned from ancient texts describe varied experiences of earthquakes beyond disaster and destruction and into the realms of politics, economics, technology, and cultural beliefs and values.

My thinking on how to go about doing environmental history, especially as it relates to earthquakes, was greatly informed by my experience working in a dendrochronology lab for two years.



Dr. Gaggioli conducting field work in Eleon, Greece.

The hours I spent measuring and counting rings through a microscope allowed me to meditate on how I might go about investigating past traces of earthquakes in relation to and at a temporal scale relevant to human developments. I even briefly toyed with dendroseismology. Did you know that earthquakes can leave stunted growth rings in trees? However, dendroseismology alongside several other scientific techniques I had explored only led me to dead ends.

When I happened upon earthquake history in Japan, an essential door opened. Studies in Japan looked at earthquake-deformed soils and sediments in direct association with past human settlement remains. In searching for the geological methods behind their approaches, I discovered the technique had actually been developed in the United States with USGS and of all places in the New Madrid Seismic Zone – not too far from here! In the Mediterranean, where the topic of earthquakes and archaeology has been around since the 1970s, studies relied on architecture and deformed geological features elsewhere in the landscape. Transporting perspectives from outside the Mediterranean – particularly Japan and the New Madrid Seismic Zone – proved essential.

My current book project titled ‘Earthquakes and the Structuring of Greco-Roman Society’ is the culmination of my academic curiosities, obsessions, and frustrations. It’s a long-term environmental history of Helike in Greece – infamous victim of the 373 BC earthquake – that spans the third millennium BC to fifth century AD.



Earthquakes traditionally perceived as ‘natural’ disasters implicated in collapse and catastrophe were not ‘natural’ but social phenomena persistently implicated in political and economic decision-making and cultural values.

In addition to my academic interests, I enjoy most forms of physical activity, especially running and soccer, but I’ll give any sport a try. I also have a fuzzy bunny. His name is Chewy.

Summer Research Report: Dr. Brian Kwoba

by Dr. Brian W. Kwoba

I had a wonderfully enriching set of research experiences this summer, first in New York City and then in St. Croix. Both were crucial final-stage research trips for my forthcoming book on the unsung hero of Black radical tradition, Hubert Henry Harrison(1883-1927).

In New York City, I spent two weeks at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library to sift through the Jeffrey B. Perry Collection of Research Materials. Jeff Perry was a European-American of Irish descent who has done more work than anyone to restore Hubert Harrison to his rightful place in history. As one example: I also took time during this trip to visit (for the first time in my life) Harrison's final resting place, in the Bronx's Woodlawn cemetery, including the headstone that Perry worked to secure on what had previously been an unmarked(!) grave.

Perry's collection of research materials was transferred to Columbia after Perry's passing in September of 2022 and I only found out about it a few months after that but knew instantly I had to see it.



Dr. Kwoba giving the keynote lecture at the Caribbean Studies Association(CSA) annual conference.

In the early 1980s, Perry wrote a PhD dissertation on Harrison and built a relationship with Harrison's descendants. They eventually gave to him the vast, room-sized trove of Harrison's diaries, scrapbooks, letters of correspondence, and hundreds of writings, which had been languishing incognito in a Harlem apartment for decades. In 2001, Perry edited and published a book of Harrison's writings (*A Hubert Harrison Reader*).

Then Perry sorted, organized, catalogued, and donated a large trove of Harrison's archive to Columbia University, much of which is accessible online as the Hubert Harrison Papers. Perry has published the only book-length studies of Harrison to date.

When I first considered doing research on Harrison, Perry and I started off with a great relationship. Perry supported my initial interest in Harrison, even writing a letter of recommendation for my PhD application to the University Oxford. After my first semester of research in grad school, having read mostly Perry's work and what little else I could find on Harrison, I sent him a rough outline of what I was thinking of writing about in my dissertation in order to get his input and feedback.

Suddenly, he thought I was out to plagiarize him and from that moment forward, he became cold and uninterested in any further communication or collaboration. I was devastated, having cultivated a relationship with him as my unofficial advisor and mentor, who was effectively now ghosting me.

Therefore, going through Perry's research files this summer—some ten years after our falling out—was an experience that conjured a range of mixed feelings for me. On the one hand, I was reminded of how eternally grateful I am to Perry for his decades of work because without it I would never have started down this intellectual journey of my own studying Hubert Harrison.



Yvette Richardson and Dr. Brian Kwoba

I also came to appreciate his closeness with Harrison's descendants, when for example I would find funeral programs for Harrison's children that Perry had clearly attended or letters of communication between him and Harrison's grandchildren.

On the other hand, I was constantly struck by feelings of anger and frustration that we couldn't have had a better relationship and discussed any number of issues relating to Harrison before Perry transitioned to join the ancestors. Sifting through multiple boxes of his research files felt like a kind of non-verbal conversation between us that I really wished could have been had verbally and in person.



Over the years I had tried multiple times to demonstrate to him that I was not looking to steal his work, and to heal and reconcile our relationship. But he never came around, even after I published a glowing review of his two-volume biography of Harrison.

I also met with Yvette Richardson (see photo), a great grand-daughter of Harrison's who was able to offer her blessing to my work and my book too over a nice meal in Brooklyn.

After the two weeks in NYC, I then traveled to St. Croix, one of the US Virgin Islands in the Caribbean. Hubert Harrison was born in St. Croix in 1883, and migrated to New York at the turn of the century as part of a larger wave of Caribbean migration to the US.

Therefore, I've wanted to travel to St. Croix ever since I started researching Harrison in earnest as a grad student at Oxford. I finally got the chance thanks largely to Dr. Carole Boyce Davies, one of my mentors, who invited me to speak at the annual Caribbean Studies Association (CSA) conference because of the fact that the CSA was taking place this year in the land of Harrison's birth and childhood. Prof. CBD (as I call her) insisted that I come to present on Harrison, and I whole-heartedly agreed.



Dr. Kwoba giving the keynote address at the annual Caribbean Studies Association conference.

It's a subject that was hard to study and present to an unfamiliar audience, both because of the dearth of archival materials on Harrison's free love politics, and also because of the taboo nature of the subject. But they received it well and I got a lot of positive feedback on my presentation. Finally, I also got to travel to the compound and area where Harrison was born and raised, near the salt river which bisects the island.

Thanks to this trip to St. Croix, I got to develop a deeper appreciation of life on the US Virgin Islands, and the kinds of sights and sounds and beaches that Harrison would have experienced in towns like Christiansted in the east and Frederiksted on the west side of the island.

I'm grateful to the department for supporting my research and travel and I look forward to putting out a book that will hopefully make a big splash by offering a fresh political interpretation of the most important, influential, and radical historical figures in African-American history and world history more broadly.

Alumni Spotlight: Dr. Darius Young

By Dr. Darius Young

This summer, Department of History Alumni Darius Young (Ph.D., 2011) received a promotion to Full Professor of History at Florida A&M University (FAMU). At FAMU, Darius has taught and created several classes for the history and African American Studies program, including a course on the Civil Rights Movement and the Evolution of Hip Hop. Since 2019, he has also served as the Quality Enhancement Plan Director, where he leads the university's five-year SACSCOC improvement plan to create a culture of writing on campus.

Darius' research focuses on Black political activism in the 20th Century. His first book, *Robert R. Church Jr. and the African American Political Struggle*, was published by the University Press of Florida in 2019 and won the C. Calvin Smith Book Award from the Southern Conference on African American Studies, Inc. The book is a revision of his dissertation at the University of Memphis, "The Gentleman from Memphis: Robert R. Church Jr. and the Early Civil Rights Movement." He learned about Robert Church Jr. while writing a paper on lynching for Dr. Aram Goudsouzian's research seminar. Goudsouzian and Dr. Beverly Bond teamed up and strongly suggested that he pursue Church as a dissertation and topic. Darius credits them, as well as his other committee members, Drs. Charles Crawford and Sarah Potter for helping him craft a dissertation that could be published and respected in the field.

His current book project is tentatively entitled *Detroit and The Revolutionary Year of 1963*. This book will explore the social and political movements that led to the emergence of Black Power Politics in Detroit.

Young cont.

In addition to scholarly works, Darius has won several grant awards, including a National Trust for Historic Preservation Grant for \$150,000 (2021) and The Florida Department of State African American Cultural and Historical Grant for \$495,000 (2022). This past summer, Darius served as PI of A National Endowment for the Humanities K-12 Teacher Institute, which he co-directed with the National Director of the Children's Defense Funds Freedom School. Their Institute, "Centering Youth Agency in the Civil Rights Movement," was held at Alex Haley's Farm in Clinton, Tennessee, and served twenty-three teachers from across the nation and featured sessions led by renowned scholars, such as Charles Payne, Crystal Sanders, Jon Hale, Derrick Alridge, Dara Walker, William Sturkey, and Memphis native, Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons.

Finally, Darius was an active member of the Graduate Association for African American History (GAAAH) while on campus. He still maintains relationships with many of the past participants. This experience taught him the value of working in the field and building a network of scholars.

He most recently served as Vice-Chair of the past two Association for the Study of African American Life and History Conferences in Montgomery, Alabama, and Jacksonville, Florida. He serves on the editorial board for the Journal of African American and History. He also served on the development committee for the College Board's AP African American Studies course since 2021.

Darius values his time spent at the University of Memphis. He is thankful for the mentorship he received from members of his dissertation committee, as well as his other professors, especially Dr. Dennis Laumann, Dr. Arwin Smallwood, Dr. Janann Sherman, and Dr. D'Ann Penner. He remains lifelong friends with several classmates, Reginald Ellis, Shirletta Kinchen, KT Ewing, Le'Trice Donaldson, Sheena Harris, James Conway, and Armanthia Duncan. However, he is most proud of his former students who have followed the FAMU to the University of Memphis pipeline, soon-to-be Drs. Evelyn Jackson and Brianna Harrison.

Calling All History Alumni!

Beginning in the spring of 2024, *History Happenings* will publish a new feature highlighting alumni updates and accomplishments. From academic achievements, to professional accomplishments, or life events, we would love to hear from you. To share your good news, please send your updates via one of the following ways:

1. Print out this page (with form completed), and mail to the Department of History, The University of Memphis, Memphis TN 38152-3450.
2. Complete the online form (managed by the editors):
<https://form.jotform.com/233164366461153>
3. Or simply email co-editor, Dr. Caroline Peyton, with your update, graduation year, and name: cpeyton1@memphis.edu.

Alumni Update

Name: _____

Graduation Year: _____

Update: _____

