

History Happenings

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Greetings from the Chair



My semester as acting chair (Dr. Sherman will be flying in and out of Memphis for the next few months, researching and writing a biography of Pheobe Fairgrave Omlie, a pioneering woman aviator) has already seen major changes.

Three scholars have joined the department:

Dr. Scott Marler completed his PhD at Rice University. His dissertation, a study of economic development in Louisiana in the nineteenth century, received the M. E. Bradford Dissertation Prize for 2007 from the St. George Tucker Society and was one of three finalists for the Allan Nevins Prize, awarded annually by the Economic History Association. Dr. Marler has signed a contract with Cambridge University Press for the publication of a book based on his prize-winning dissertation.

Dr. Kent Schull just completed his dissertation at UCLA. Dr. Schull's area of specialization is the Modern Middle East, with a focus on the late Ottoman Empire and the Arab-Israeli conflict. His dissertation examines the Ottoman prison system as a "laboratory of modernity."

Dr. Elton Weaver, a specialist in twentieth-century African American history, wrote and defended his dissertation in our department under the guidance of Dr. Beverly Bond. His dissertation examined the life and career of Bishop Charles Mason, the founder of the Church of God in Christ, the largest black Pentecostal church in America. He joins us as a full-time instructor.

During the summer, Dr. Peter Brand and Dr. Guiomar Duenas-Vargas received final confirmation of their tenure and promotion. Congratulations to both on their new status as associate professors.

Dr. Joseph Hawes will retire in December. Dr. Hawes has been an active participant in the department since joining the faculty as chair in 1984. A noted scholar of

family history, Dr. Hawes is well-known for his courses on World War II and on Native American history. His work with graduate students and teaching assistants will be sorely missed.

This academic year we are conducting two searches: Late Imperial Russia/Soviet History and US Gender and Family. Also, Dr. Robert Gudmestad accepted a position at Colorado State. We plan to search for a replacement for Dr. Gudmestad next year.

Over the summer, the department welcomed two new members of the office staff. Latasha Parrish is our new office assistant, and Gerry Russo now serves as secretary of the Oral History Office.

Dr. Sherman will return in the spring. In the meantime, I will do my best to keep things moving in the right direction.

This year, we are trying something new with our newsletter. Rather than publish a single massive tome, we will publish four editions throughout the year. This edition welcomes the new semester, recaps some key events from last year, and includes our annual alumni profile. This year, we celebrate Dr. Gail Murray, who chairs the history department at Rhodes College. Our next edition will focus on the faculty, and the third will focus on our graduate students. We'll publish a final wrap-up edition at the end of the academic year.

We have many exciting events and speakers on the schedule for this academic year. Please remember to send us news of your scholarly adventures and personal achievements. We publish these items in the newsletter, post them on our website, send them out via e-mail, and promote our good news to the university community and beyond.

Sincerely,
Dan Unowksy

Alumni Profile:

Gail S. Murray (Ph.D., 1991)

Gail Murray claims that she chose the graduate program at The University of Memphis “for all the wrong reasons,” but that decision began a successful intellectual and professional journey. Now an associate professor and chair of the history department at Rhodes College, she teaches a variety of innovative courses and has become an accomplished scholar.

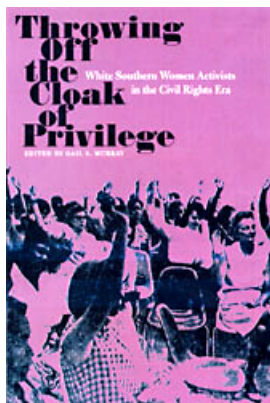
Murray had wanted to study for a Ph.D. since she was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan. She loved history and sociology. But her professors, reflecting some of the era’s gender bias, had dissuaded her from majoring in either subject, because they had no direct employment potential. Instead she got a masters degree in education from the University of Central Arkansas, and later she began teaching courses in World Civilizations at Arkansas Tech and then at Arkansas State. But that yen to pursue the Ph.D never disappeared. As a 45-year-old mother of three, she needed an institution within commuting distance, and Memphis was only two hours away. The University of Memphis was simply a practical choice.

Murray’s first class was the Philosophy of History, taught by Major Wilson. That course profoundly influenced her thinking, as she quickly grew enthralled by the competing claims of empiricists, intellectual historians, and the new race/class/gender social historians. She was further influenced by a British history class taught by Abe Kriegel, which suggested a concept about the “idea of poverty” and its amelioration. She sought to bring this concept into a dissertation on early U.S. history, supervised by Dr. Wilson. As she had limited finances along with child responsibilities, she concentrated on exploring poverty and poor relief in three southern cities.



Dr. Gail Murray

Near the end of her graduate career, Rhodes College needed someone to teach one extra section of the U.S. survey. Kell Mitchell recommended her for the adjunct position. Murray’s daughter had just graduated from Rhodes, so she was familiar with the small, prestigious liberal arts school, and her success flowered. After she completed her dissertation in 1991, she joined the Rhodes faculty on a one-year appointment. A tenure-track job then opened, and she had already established a reputation as a teacher and a scholar. She now teaches courses such as the History of Poverty in the United States, Black & White Women of the South, and the History of Childhood in America. She has also taught various courses in early American history and a survey in the college’s “Great Books” program. She became chair of the department in 2005.



Her first book, *American Children’s Literature and the Construction of Childhood*, was published by Twayne in 1998. This interpretive work placed popular children’s books in the context of the social and cultural milieu of their day. Richard Flynn of Georgia Southern University called it “a deft survey of the history of American children’s literature seen through the lens of the cultural historian.” Joel Taxel of the University of Georgia wrote that the book was “a skillful demonstration of ways that literature for children can illuminate the changing beliefs, values, principles, and assumptions that structure and give meaning to the visions of life and living powerful groups in our society hope children will affirm and make their own.”

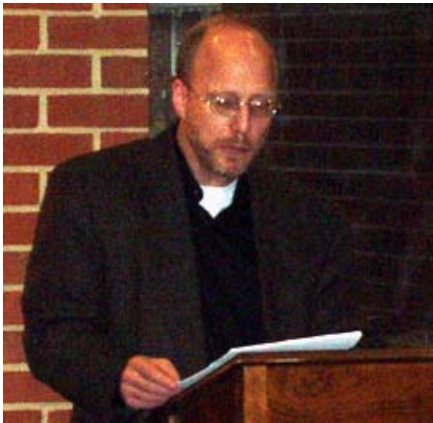
In the last ten years, Murray has left the nineteenth century for the twentieth. Her research has been on women’s biracial organizations in the 1960s and 1970s and on the Memphis Sanitation Workers’ Strike. Currently she is designing a web-based document project that uses African American women’s words to describe their empowerment, organizing strategies, and personal costs of their anti-discrimination work. She edited and contributed an essay to *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Women in the Civil Rights Era*, published by the University Press of Florida in 2004. The essay collection reveals how thousands of

mostly middle-class, middle-aged, married white women played “the southern lady” for the white political establishment, but also became grassroots activists in America’s civil rights movement, sometimes at the cost of friendships, status, economic security, and family support. Nancy Hewitt of Rutgers University wrote that the book contains “rich and insightful assessments of southern white women of privilege who chose to throw off the mantle of protection provided by race in order to address critical issues in southern society and politics.”

Murray has enjoyed her academic career in Memphis. After a childhood spent in rural Ohio and early adult years in various small cities in Arkansas, she enjoys the breadth of activities that Memphis offers, including the theater, opera, blues, river walks, and arts exhibits. When not working or going out, she enjoys reading nonfiction, working out at the downtown YMCA, and cooking. Four grandchildren keep her weekends lively.

Historical Honors

On April 14, 2007, the Department of History held its second annual History Honors Gala at the Alumni Center, with



Dr David Ambaras

Dennis Laumann, Associate Professor and faculty advisor to Phi Alpha Theta, presiding. After a welcome by Chair Janann Sherman, David Ambaras, Associate Professor of History at North Carolina State University, a specialist in Japanese history, spoke on “Living with the Japanese Empire.” Dr. Ambaras is the author

of *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan* (University of California Press, 2006). His book shows how the policing of urban youth constituted a central arena for the development of new state structures and new forms of disciplinary power, the articulation of new class, gender, and family relations, and the regulation of popular culture during the years 1895 to 1945. He has published related articles in *The Journal of Japanese Studies* (1998) and *The Journal of Asian Studies* (2004). His current project, *Empire of Drifters*, uses case studies of hawkers and itinerant performers, founding murders, Tokyo’s Asakusa district, and colonial social work to explore the relationships among diverse forms of marginality, the production of space, and the structures of modernity in what he calls “Japan and its Asia.”

After Dr. Ambaras’s remarks, Dr Sherman presented the following awards:

Phi Alpha Theta initiates:

Undergraduates: Jordan Arnett, Jennifer Cates, Parker Culver, Cameron Harvey, Jeremy Smith

Graduates: Le’Trice Donaldson, Michael Keller, Catherine Norvell, Laura Perry

Major L. Wilson Paper Prize:

Undergraduate: Barbara R. Thomas, “Historical Approaches to the Internment of Japanese Aliens and Japanese Americans During World War II”

Graduate: Keith D. Hall, “The Great Indian Mutiny of 1857 and Change”

Tennessee Historical Commission Prize: Melissa M. Joy

Ruth and Harry Woodbury Graduate Fellowship in Southern History: Carl E. Brown

Congratulations to all the award recipients!



Dr. Sherman and Carl Brown

Hitler, Hate, and History

On March 26, 2007, Dr. Claudia Koonz, Professor of History at Duke University and a leading scholar of German history, lectured on “Making Racism Respectable: Mainstreaming Anti-Semitism in Nazi Culture” in the Memphis Sesquicentennial Lecture series. Using documentary film, popular racial science, textbooks, cartoon humor, advertisements, art work, magazine covers, postcards, and posters from the 1930s, she explained how even before the outbreak of war, the German people were trained to think some people were better than others and that those others did not deserve to live.



Dr. Claudis Koonz

Most theories of conscience, Dr. Koonz said, are variations on Kant’s “categorical imperative” which insists that we must treat others as we would wish to be treated by them and that persons must never be treated as things. Adolf Hitler’s regime created a different conscience. It treated certain “others” as things, following the dictum “Not everything with a human face is human.”

After reviewing Hitler’s rise to power, Dr. Koonz explained how Hitler depended upon fear on the part of the German people and used certain principles to guarantee that his tactics would be acceptable, such as ridiculing victims and justifying pre-emptive strikes as self-defense. The Nazis struck primarily against Jews, who constituted less than 1 percent of the German population, but also against other

minorities such as Gypsies and those who were physically and mentally “unfit,” picturing them as repulsive, unworthy non-contributors who were burdens to society or parasites on it. Dr. Koonz used visual images of German propaganda to illustrate such points.

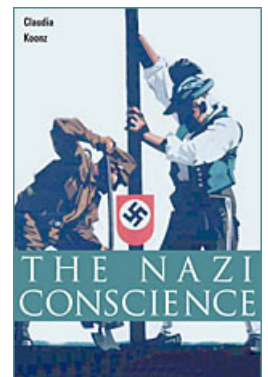
Dr. Koonz stressed that Hitler’s regime also cultivated a consumerist German public, lulling it into a feeling that things were going well for them. The tactics were numerous: marriage loans to encourage a high birth rate among Aryans (25% of the loan was forgiven for each child produced); paid vacations for workers (Germany was the first to provide them); subsidized purchases for radios that tuned only to the frequencies of German stations; vinyl recordings of Hitler’s speeches; slide shows; literature for children; and spectacular events such as the 1934 Nazi gathering (which Leni Riefelstahl filmed as *Triumph of the Will*) and the 1936 Olympics (which Riefelstahl filmed as *Olympia*).

Much of the Nazi conscience actually reflected similar ideas elsewhere. Ideas of racial superiority and inferiority were common in other nations. Germany even maintained that the Nazi system was much better than the Jim Crow system in the United States. Anti-semitism was not restricted to Germany – many others believed that Jews were intent on world domination, and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion were believed by many to be authentic.

Dr. Koonz concluded that conscience is not innate but rather socially acquired. Nazi Germany was no freak state. It had been created by a very sophisticated campaign which drilled certain ideas into the minds of the German people. Already before the outbreak of war, they had been

trained to think that they were better than others and justified in putting down those others. The outbreak of war only made things worse. The “moral exceptionalism” that war generates made atrocities seem quite justifiable, so that the tightly-drilled German soldiers could descend to looting the Babi Yar Massacre victims of their jewelry and other valuables after their slaughter.

Koonz’s book *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (St. Martin’s, 1987) received several awards. She has also edited, with others, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Her most recent book is *The Nazi Conscience* (Belknap, 2005). Her recent research has been on the controversy in European countries over the wearing of the headscarf by Muslim women.



Conserving History

On March 23, 2007, Dr. Char Miller, Professor and Director of Urban Studies at Trinity University, delivered the Belle McWilliams Lecture for 2006–2007, speaking on the topic “The Greatest Good: 100 Years of Conservation in America.” He spoke without notes and often engaged the audience in dialogue.



Dr. Char Miller

lumber for construction and fuel for fireplaces and steam engines. Railroads alone used enormous quantities of wood for railroad ties.

Through the industrialization of wood, the United States, by 1920, had become the world’s greatest power but at the expense of its virgin forests, which by then had largely disappeared. The turnaround in thinking began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the efforts of people like George Perkins Marsh, who wrote *Man and Nature* in 1864. George Bird Grinnell, editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine, began enlisting hunters and fishers in the drive to conserve and restore natural resources, and political leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot soon followed with strong executive-branch leadership. Western states resisted the efforts, claiming that the federal government was usurping the lands that properly belonged to them, but the courts upheld the federal government.

Dr. Miller noted that Marsh had ended *Man and Nature* on an apocalyptic note, urging that action be taken immediately to ward off the disaster that he saw in the making if the United States did not act quickly to conserve its remaining

resources. Toward the end of his lecture, Dr Miller himself set an apocalyptic tone. By the 1940s and 1950s, the federal government was undermining efforts to preserve wilderness areas by permitting lumbering activity to build housing for a rapidly urbanizing population. The Wilderness Act of 1964 and later acts had to warn the Forest Service to stop destroying the forests.

Currently the United States imports most of its wood from Canada and the rest of the world, which Miller called “outsourcing” its requirements for wood. He noted that the American public is well aware of the country’s constantly increasing use of a greater percentage of the world’s oil supplies, but oblivious to the same trend in the use of the world’s wood supplies. America’s population in recent decades has shifted heavily toward western and southern states, which have most of the nation’s natural areas, endangering those areas by increasing public demand for use of them for recreation. Climate change threatens to change or destroy the natural habitat for all living things. In light of all these problems, can private spaces be saved? Dr. Miller said that we are faced with a stronger challenge than Marsh and Grinnell faced, and he insisted that we must tackle these problems.

A specialist in American environmental and urban history, Dr. Miller is a Senior Fellow of the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, a contributing writer to the *Texas Observer*, Associate Editor of *Environmental History* and the *Journal of Forestry*. He is on the editorial board of the *Pacific Historical Review* and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Forest History Society. He has served on the editorial board of the Trinity University Press and on the City of San Antonio’s Open Space Advisory Board and its Tree Preservation Ordinance Panel. He wrote *Gifford Pinchot and The Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Island Press, 2001) and *Deep in the Heart of San Antonio: Land and Life in South Texas* (Trinity, 2004). He is co-author of *The Greatest Good: 100 Years of Forestry in America* (Society of American Foresters, 1999), and he has edited *Fluid Arguments: Five Centuries of Western Water Conflict* (Arizona, 2001) and *On the Border: An Environmental History of San Antonio* (Trinity, 2005).

