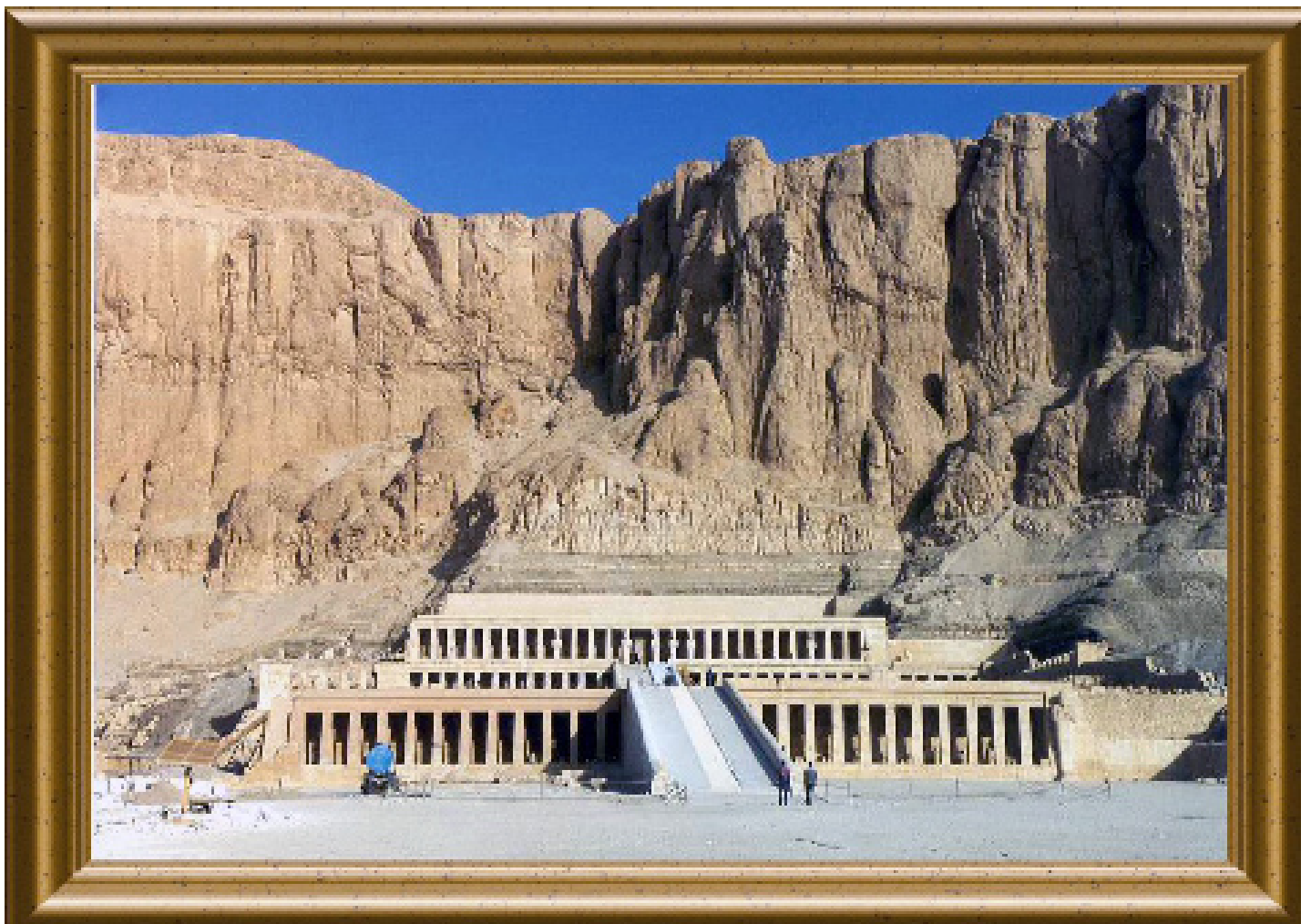


History Happenings

*A newsletter published by the Department of History
The University of Memphis*

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS
Dreamers. Thinkers. Doers.

Greetings from the Chair

We have had another extraordinary year in the History Department. This is a vibrant and active department staffed by professor-scholars engaged in a wide range of exciting work, from merchant capitalism in 19th century New Orleans to Asian borderlands, from African American sports stars to Turkish prisons.

This year we have added two new faculty members: Dr. Sarah Potter, a recent graduate from the University of Chicago and a specialist in the history of childhood, gender and the family, and Dr. Andrei Znamenski, holder of two Ph.D.'s from St. Petersburg, Russia and Toledo, Ohio. His expertise is in modern Russian history, with an emphasis on Russian interaction with the indigenous peoples of Siberia and Alaska.



Dr. Kell Mitchell, who has served the department for over forty years as a professor and undergraduate advisor, is retiring next spring. Fortunately for us, he has opted for the post-retirement program and will continue to advise our students for several more years.

We have initiated a search for a new specialist in the history of the American South, with an emphasis on the early national and antebellum period, a replacement for Dr. Robert Gudmestad, who left us for a position in Colorado a few years ago.

With this issue of the newsletter, we are reaching out to our alums as never before. We are sending notices to over 450 graduates with history degrees for whom we have e-mail addresses. If you are one of these, please respond via e-mail to me: sherman@memphis.edu I would like for you to share information about yourself (degree and date of graduation, current employment, and contact information) so

that we may continue to keep in touch. Also, please pass this along to any other history alums you know.

We believe that our graduates should continue to feel a part of our community. To that end, I plan to host some events on campus to bring you back. If you have any particular requests in that regard, please let me know. I'm also interested in establishing a History Alumni Chapter within the Alumni Association; I think it would be fun to have one that functions as a book club. What do you think?

Be sure to read the news about our alumni and visiting speakers. Our winter issue will highlight our faculty, and the spring issue will celebrate our graduate students. This community of scholars is truly inspiring!

This is your newsletter. Please send us your triumphs, your announcements, your personal stories. We publish several times a year, post it on our website, and send it out via e-mail to everyone we can find with a connection to The University of Memphis Department of History.

We have many more exciting events on the horizon. Please make it a point to periodically check our website at <http://history.memphis.edu/> so that you can join us!

Sincerely,
Janann Sherman

Alumni in the News:

Allie Prescott

Allie Prescott entered The University of Memphis knowing two things: that he wanted to become a professional baseball player and that he wanted to major in history. Both interests have followed him throughout his career.

Although he never became a professional baseball player, Prescott has played a prominent role in the business side of professional and college sports in Memphis. He has been general manager of the Memphis Chicks and the Memphis Redbirds, and he has been involved in a variety of fund-raising campaigns for The University of Memphis.

As for that history major, it has served him well in the storied world of sports management. Before he graduated in 1969, Prescott was told that he was wasting his time taking history and psychology classes and should major in business instead. But he believes that his history major has made him a “clearer thinker” in many areas of his life. He particularly recalls the prodigious amount of required reading in his history courses, which forced him to appreciate the “discipline of reading” and taught him to focus on comprehension. After getting his BA, Prescott went on to earn his law degree at The University of Memphis in 1972. The skills that he learned as a history major proved especially useful in law school and throughout his career.

Dr. Charles Crawford’s courses on Tennessee history and Dr. David Tucker’s courses on United States history stand out in Prescott’s memory as favorites. He recalls that both professors gave very rigorous exams, but that they both laid clear expectations for how to succeed. Prescott was eager to learn everything that he could, and he appreciated all the knowledge that Crawford and Tucker offered their students about state and national history. His relationship with Dr. Crawford came full circle when, later in his career, he practiced law with Dr. Crawford’s son.

Prescott has been intimately involved with Memphis civic life. In addition to his role in minor league baseball, he has been executive director of MIFA and executive director of the City of Memphis Park Commission.

He is also a graduate of Leadership Memphis and Memphis Leadership Academy, and he has worked as a basketball official for the Southeastern Conference and Conference USA. Five times, he has been an official in the NCAA tournament.

Prescott is so busy with his work these days that he does not have a lot of time left over for pursuing his interest in history. He is currently a senior advisor for client development at Waddell and Associates. He also runs a consulting firm with his wife that works with non-profits and, having already worked on a campaign to help move the Cecil C. Humphrey School of Law downtown, is employed as a consultant by The University of Memphis Athletics

Department to bring in more major gifts to the athletics program. He is a former Tiger baseball player himself. According to university athletic director R.C. Johnson, “Allie Prescott is one of the most well-respected and highly-recognized individuals in Memphis athletic circles. He is also a former Tiger athlete and supporter and I could not think of a better individual to assist us with our major gifts campaign.”

Despite his busy professional life, Prescott still recalls what he loves about history. As a lifelong resident of Memphis, he is especially interested in local history. He also remembers his particular fondness as an undergraduate for anything having to do with Andrew Jackson, and he still occasionally manages to read books about military and civil war history. History, for Prescott, is a joy to learn about because of “the people you meet along the way—people who were important in the state, the nation, and the world.”



Allie Prescott

Unleash Knowledge!

We are all familiar with Roman blood sports. Remember *Ben Hur*? We all know *Gladiator*, right? We have seen Maximus “unleash hell!!!,” and we have developed stereotypes and misconceptions about the spectacle of classical sport. On November 14, 2007, Donald Kyle, Professor of History at the University of Texas-Arlington, began the 2007-2008 Memphis Sesquicentennial Lecture with a caution about taking movie depictions of gladiators too seriously.



Dr. Donald Kyle lecturing

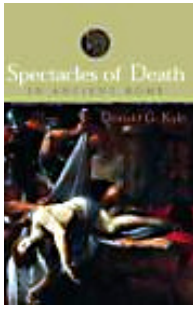
The movie *Gladiator* provided many pop culture references, and Dr. Kyle ably used its inaccuracies to clear up many misconceptions about gladiatorial combat and explain what actually went on in the coliseum. Games were held for several reasons. One of the most common was the *Munera*, or a spectacle held for the community as a remembrance of an important member of society. A family would sponsor a gladiatorial combat as part of the funerary rites. Dr. Kyle alluded to the importance of the games in Roman politics, stating that the provision of great spectacles symbolized power, leadership, and empire.

Dr. Kyle titled his talk “Roman Blood Sports: Gladiators, Beasts and Christians in the Arena.” His work as a classicist has focused on sports and spectacles in Greece and Rome, and it was from his research on ancient Roman spectacles of death that the lecture was drawn.

There were three main types of combatants in the arena: gladiators, beasts, and criminals. Gladiators were slaves, who were owned by a manager but often had somewhat elevated status based on their popularity. They were an expensive resource, so the sponsorship of gladiatorial games by prominent Romans was a prestigious act. The exotic animals used were also expensive and represented the extent of the empire in Europe, Asia, and Africa. In order to get double duty out of them (in addition to the entertainment factor), the meat of the arena animals was probably distributed to the poor citizens of Rome after the fights. (It was a question about the disposal of dead arena victims or animals that actually started Dr. Kyle on his research specifically about death spectacles in ancient Rome.) The execution of criminals was the least prestigious of the spectacles. Christians convicted of heresy were not a good show in the area — they accepted their martyrdom placidly and in some cases Christians from the audience leapt into the arena to their death as well. The famous persecutions of Nero were a short-lived phenomenon with respect to arena combat.

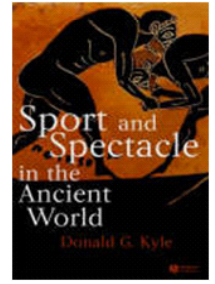


Dr. Kyle conversing at the pre-session reception



A lively question-and-answer period followed the lecture, giving Dr Kyle a chance to expand on the themes of Christian persecutions and gladiatorial sex scandals with elite women (another of Hollywood's exaggerated themes).

Dr Kyle has written and lectured extensively about ancient sport and spectacle. His books include *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (Blackwell, 2006), *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (Routledge, 1998), and *Athletics in Ancient Athens* (Brill, 1987; revised edition 1993).



The Memphis Sesquicentennial Lecture Series is one of two lecture series sponsored by the Department of History. It began in the late 1980s with the bequest to the department of some medallions made in honor of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Memphis. Because the Belle McWilliams Lecture Series, the other series sponsored by the department, was dedicated to the subject of American history, the Memphis Sesquicentennial Lecture Series has concentrated on other areas.

Battling Misconceptions

Six years ago, while at The University of Memphis on a Rockefeller grant, Laurie Green researched the causes of the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers' strike. She saw two misconceptions about Memphis history. First, many believed that Memphis was a harmonious city, exempt from the turmoil that had struck Little Rock and Birmingham. Second, many believed that the tight control of Mayor Edward Crump's organization had terrified black workers, so the NAACP was dying a slow death. Together, these misconceptions led to the feeling that the strike had "come out of nowhere."

On March 26, 2008, Dr. Green, now an Associate Professor of History at the University of Texas-Austin, spoke on the topic "Finding the Roots of the Sanitation Strike: Battles Against the 'Plantation Mentality' in Memphis, 1940-1968." Her lecture, part of the Belle McWilliams Lecture Series, centered on her book *Battling the 'Plantation Mentality': Race, Gender and Freedom in Memphis during the Civil Rights Era*, published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2007 in the John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture.

The book had grown out of Dr. Green's battling of these misconceptions about Memphis history. Working in the city's archival records during the day and conducting oral interviews with women workers at night, she began understanding that the strike had roots, and they reached deep into the past. Many of the workers had come



Dr. Laurie Green lecturing

to Memphis from surrounding rural areas and often compared conditions in Memphis to the plantations they had left behind. There were two aspects to the plantation mentality - that of the bosses and that of the workers, both of them shaped by expectations of deference and discipline. One worker in particular objected to the way black workers had been treated in their request for drinking water. Instead of installing a water fountain, the foreman bought a tin bucket and a dipper. "I left that behind in Mississippi," the worker said.

Dr Green said she had been surprised by the role that popular culture played. Memphis was known throughout the nation for its censorship of the movies, led by the notorious Lloyd Binford. Memphis censorship went beyond concerns over violence and religion to include racial matters. The city prohibited by ordinance any

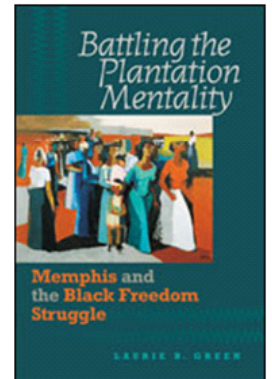


Dr. Green at the reception in her honor

films that showed blacks outside their traditional roles as servants or which had all-black casts. Many blacks nevertheless saw those films when they were shown in West Memphis. Radio station WDIA, with its black-oriented programming and DJs, could not be censored in quite the same way, though it was subject to pressures.

According to Dr Green, the period 1964-1968 was a particularly intense period of attempts to organize black workers in the Memphis area. Black workers flooded the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with complaints. In addition to the expected issues of hours and wages, the complaints often addressed the dignity and respect for workers. The South Memphis area, where many of the sanitation workers lived, saw numerous neighborhood clubs whose goals were very similar to those expressed by the signs the sanitation workers carried in the famous photograph by Dr. Ernest Withers: I AM A MAN. Far from “coming out of nowhere” in 1968, Dr Green maintained, the strike had roots that extended well into the past.

Dr. Green received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1999. At UT-Austin, she teaches courses in modern United States history, with concentrations on women and gender in twentieth-century America, the Civil Rights Movement, the South, African-American history, and comparative race and ethnicity. *Battling the Plantation Mentality* was a 2008 Finalist for the Liberty Legacy Foundation Award, given by the Organization of American Historians, and won the 2008 Philip Taft Labor History Award, given by the ILR School of Cornell University and the Labor and Working Class History Association. “This is an important and engaging study of race relations in one of the key battleground cities of the civil rights movement,” comments Jacqueline Dowd-Hall of the University of North Carolina. “Green offers a fresh and moving story of the movement as well as a highly textured and original examination of race, gender, class, and the public sphere in the South.”



History Happenings is produced by the department's committee for alumni relations. This year, editor Aram Goudsouzian and designer Maurice Crouse are joined by Sarah Potter and James Conway, who contributed heavily to this issue.

ATTENTION, HISTORY ALUMS !

As Dr. Sherman said in her greeting, the department wants to hear from you.

Send information about yourself (degree, date of graduation, current employment, and contact information) to sherman@memphis.edu and visit our website at <http://history.memphis.edu/> often.

Spread the word to all the alums you know!