



Viewed Historically

The e-Newsletter of the Department of History
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Looking Back on an Eventful and (Largely) Successful Academic Year

Two weeks ago, final grades were turned in and the academic year 2006-2007 officially came to an end. It was an event-filled year for the history department, one in which the good news very much outweighed the bad.

The department continued its very considerable role in teaching. Undergraduate majors exceeded, for the very first time, 400 students and 90 received their B.A. degrees this year. Graduate students received six M.A.'s and three Ph.D.'s. The total number of students taught in the history department was second largest ever.

Teaching is, of course, not just about quantity, but quality as well. The history department's long roster of faculty receiving teaching awards has received a distinguished addition. [Lois Huneycutt](#), professor of medieval history, was one of the recipients of the [2007 Kemper Teaching Fellowships](#), the University of Missouri's highest teaching award. As Professor Huneycutt's many undergraduate and graduate students can testify, both her devotion to her students and her imagination in devising new and intriguing ways to teach her classes are virtually unlimited.

Mark Geiger, who received his Ph.D. from the history department last spring, was the winner of the University of Missouri's Distinguished Doctoral Dissertation Award for his thesis, "Missouri's Hidden Civil War: Financial Conspiracy and the End of the Planter Elite, 1861-1865." This is a mark of distinction for Geiger, who is now a research fellow at the University of Minnesota, and another indication of the high quality of the history department's graduate program, and of the graduate teaching work of Geiger's adviser Professor [LeeAnn Whites](#).

2006-2007 has been an outstanding year for the department's scholarship, as well as its teaching. The most significant distinction of the department's scholarship was the awarding to [A. Mark Smith](#), professor of medieval history, of a [Guggenheim Foundation grant](#) to fund his research into medieval theories of optics. Awards of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation are generally recognized as the most prestigious of all grants awarded in the humanities, so that Professor Smith's award is a demonstration of the high esteem in which he is held, not just by his fellow medievalists, and historians of science, but by historians and humanists more generally.

Smith is the [second professor in the history department](#) to receive a Guggenheim Foundation grant. Since there have only been some six MU professors ever to have received these awards, the history department all by itself has accounted for one third of them. There is another group distinction emerging from Professor Smith's award, namely that he is married to Professor Huneycutt, so we can say that the history department's medievalists are a power couple, who have cut a thick swathe through the field of teaching and scholarly distinctions this year.

2007 is the year in which the National Research Council is carrying out its once-a-decade survey of graduate programs. Although less well known to the general public than the *U.S. News and World Report* college rankings, the NRC survey is the source higher education insiders use to evaluate the quality of universities and their academic departments. As I was filling out the seemingly endless NRC forms this past winter, I was struck by both the department's many accomplishments

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and distinctions in teaching and research, and the barriers to improving and enhancing its national reputation, in spite of these accomplishments. One of the biggest barriers is the shrinkage of the department, caused by the fiscal exigencies of the early 2000s, in which a number of professors retired or departed, but, for financial reasons, they could not be replaced. This lack of faculty has made it hard for the department to cover whole areas of the past and to teach enough courses to meet student demand.

Happily, we have taken a big step toward resolving this problem in 2006-7, as the department has hired three excellent young scholars, who will be joining us this August: Mark Bednar, a recent University of Texas Ph.D. will be teaching South Asian history; Michelle Morris, a 2005 Harvard Ph.D. will be teaching women's history and early American history, and Ilyana Karthas, who received her Ph.D. from Brown University and comes to us from McGill University, in Montreal, will be teaching European intellectual and cultural history and modern French history. The November issue of the department newsletter will feature profiles of these new members of the department.



We should also note two departures from the department this year.

One is the sad news of the death of Curators' Professor Emeritus [Noble Cunningham](#), who passed away very suddenly this past April. Cunningham, who taught at MU from 1964 until his retirement in

1998, was a specialist in the history of the early American republic and an internationally acclaimed expert on the life and thought of Thomas Jefferson. His biography of Jefferson, *In Pursuit of Reason*, has been translated, among other languages, into Chinese. This fall, there will be a tree-planting and commemoration of Noble Cunningham's life and work here on campus. Details of the

commemoration, as they become available, will be posted on the department's web page.

Many of our alumni will remember Professor [Susan Flader](#), having taken one of her courses on the history of Missouri, the history of the American west, or, especially, the history of the environment. This spring, Professor Flader announced that she is retiring



from her position in the department of history, so that she can devote her energies full-time to the causes of environmental conservation, promotion of state and national parks, and preservation of Missouri's cultural heritage. Citizen activism's gain is the historical profession's and the history department's loss. There are plans under way to sponsor a conference, probably in the spring of 2008, in honor of Professor Flader's long career of teaching and scholarship on environmental history, and her many activities as a concerned citizen. As these plans take further shape, they will be announced in a future newsletter issue and on the department's home page.

The two feature sections of the newsletter continue the theme of department distinctions. The news feature section contains the results of the department's annual reception in honor of faculty who have published books over the past year. Their brief account of the books they have published, with links to relevant web sites, will give our readers a good idea of the extraordinary depth and breadth of the scholarship produced by history department faculty.

The Historical Reflections section is about ways that historians can speak to a broader, public, not just the usual academic audience. One of the department's leaders in approaching a wider audience is [Professor Jeff Pasley](#). Perhaps not surprisingly, given that he's

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the most tech-savvy professor in the history department, he was a regular [blogger](#), until he found the time demands of blogging, holding down a fulltime job, and having a family, a bit too much. The main topic of his blogging was the relationship of his chief scholarly interest, the politics of the early American Republic, the age of the Founding Fathers, to contemporary American politics. In his piece for this newsletter, Pasley discusses an example of this relationship, namely politicians' use of the phrase "cut and run," today and in the 1790s.

As summer approaches, we would like to wish all our alumni and friends a very pleasant season and a refreshing vacation. We will be back with the volume three, issue number one of this newsletter in November. In the meantime, if you would like to get in touch, please send news of yourself and your accomplishments, as well as changes of e-mail address and any other such details to the history department's administrator, Ms. [Melinda Lockwood](#). Suggestions about new features, possible improvements, and comments on the newsletter more generally can be sent to the history department chair, [Jonathan Sperber](#). You can always check out the history department's web site <http://history.missouri.edu> and send comments on it, to the departmental webmaster, Professor [Jeff Pasley](#).

Jonathan Sperber
Chair, Department of History

Considering making a donation to the history department? For information on doing so, click on this [link](#). The department chair and the Advancement Office of the College of Arts and Sciences will be pleased to discuss with you any plans you may have to help the department of history.

BOOKS BY HISTORY FACULTY

Robert Collins

Professor Collins published a history of America during the 1980s, [*Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years* \(New York: Columbia University Press, 2007\)](#), which discusses the main currents in American life during the last quarter of the twentieth century. The combination of a rightward turn in politics and a leftward drift in culture made the legacy of the Reagan era a divisive one, the fruits of which we struggle with today.

Abdullahi Ibrahim

Professor Ibrahim has published two books, in Arabic, whose English language titles are *The Twilight of Marxism: Resistance and Renaissance in the Praxis of the Sudan Communist Party* and *The Decay of Sudanese Political Thought*. Both books are investigations of post-independence Sudanese politics, a critical reckoning with the bankruptcy of the Sudanese political club and an explanation of its failure for over half a century to engage the politics of renaissance. The books characterize the predicament of Sudan as a country running out of steam. They are a wake-up call for re-tanking.

A. Mark Smith

Professor Smith has published two volumes over the past year. [*Alhacen on the Principles of Reflection Vol. 1*](#) and [*Alhaecen's Theory of Reflection Vol. 2*](#) (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2006) completes Professor Smith's edition of the first five of the sevenbooks of Alhacen's "De aspectibus," a central work of the medieval theory of optics.

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Julius Thompson

Professor Thompson published [*Lynchings in Mississippi: A History 1865-1965* \(Jefferson, NC: MacFarland and Company, 2007\)](#). The book deals with the state which had the largest number of lynchings of any in the country—some 500, between 1865 and 1965—and explores the incidence and locations of this racialized terror, the reasons for lynchings and the response of Americans to the lynching crisis over time.

Ian Worthington

Professor Worthington published two books dealing with ancient Greek oratory in the 2006-2007 academic year. The first was [*Demosthenes: Funeral Oration, Erotic Essay, Prologues, Letters* \(Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006\)](#), an English translation of some of the major works of the ancient Greek orator Demosthenes. Because so little literature survives from the 330s and 320s BC, these works provide valuable insights into Athenian culture and politics from that era. The second was a volume he edited, [*The Blackwell Companion to Greek Rhetoric* \(Oxford: Blackwell, 2007\)](#), a collection of essays that offers a comprehensive treatment of Greek rhetoric, providing fresh insights into how the Greeks saw and used rhetoric, and into its far-reaching effects on ancient Greek society.

HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Cut and Run, Then and Now

While the results can sometimes be a little depressing, following current events with the eyes of a historian undoubtedly deepens the experience. Perhaps you, like myself and [*Washington Post* political reporter Dana Milbank](#), have watched a lot of politicians over the last few years accusing each other of wanting to “cut and run” in Iraq (usually Republicans against Democrats) or when facing a tough issue like immigration (recently Democrats against Republicans). As Milbank concluded, “cut

and run” is a silly schoolyard taunt, unworthy even of your better schoolyards: its main function is allowing politicians to, er, cut and run from the need to grapple with thorny issues like how to define victory and defeat in a complex guerilla conflict. Yet the taunt is also remarkably effective at conveying to the home audience the idea that an opponent is cowardly, unworthy, and (if male) possibly a bit of a girly-man, as Hans and Franz on *Saturday Night Live* used to say. The news media abets shifty politicians by mindlessly repeating catch-phrases like “cut and run,” sound bites that help win elections for politicians but make serious political debate and necessary compromises almost impossible. What politician can afford to be identified as an effeminate coward? How many action-movie and football-loving male voters would support him?

Now I happen to study and teach the founding era of U.S. history here at MU and one of my hobbies is keeping track of how the Founders are used and abused in modern culture. No rant about present-day political life seems to be complete unless it invokes the Founders. Our system is broken, both [conservatives](#) and [liberals](#) complain, and what would the Founders say? I often get asked these sorts of questions, and my answer is generally, pretty much the same things that politicians say today, only with more Latin.

Obviously I am being a little facetious here. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and the rest were highly accomplished and versatile men whose erudition and eloquence far exceeded that of most modern politicians. It is hard to imagine Rudy Giuliani or John Edwards translating ancient languages or running around with meteorological instruments and portable models of the solar system (orreries) in their luggage, as Jefferson and Madison did, so they could record scientific observations on their travels.

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Yet politics in the founding era, different as it was with no presidential campaigns or speeches, was still politics, and certain schoolyard taunts were just as good then as now, including, literally, “cut and run.” I discovered this while researching my current book on the presidential election of 1796, the first contested one, pitting Adams against Jefferson. As ideological opponents of democracy, the Federalist supporters of Adams and Hamilton struggled to find ways of appealing to the common voter, who were all (white) men in those days and much less educated than their modern counterparts. Their leisure pursuits were considerably cruder as well, such as cock-fighting, marching around with the rest of the militia, and drinking hard all day every day, especially at work and on Sundays. Federalist strategy against Jefferson was to pillory him for many of the same qualities we celebrate in the Sage of Monticello today. Lampooning his accomplishments as a philosopher and scientist, Federalist pamphleteers did their best to make Jefferson look like a girly man who contrasted poorly with rugged war heroes like Washington and Hamilton: “The characteristic traits of a philosopher, when he turns politician, are, timidity, whimsicalness” and “a wavering of disposition when great and sudden emergencies demand promptness of decision and energy of action.” Satirists aping the style of Jonathan Swift (of *Gulliver* fame) loved to imagine scenes of Jefferson absorbed in frivolous homemade science experiments, “busily engaged in impaling a butterfly” or trying to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, while important men waited.

The Federalists’ favorite concrete evidence of the Democratic-Republican standard bearer’s “timidity” and “wavering” was an often-embroidered tale of Jefferson allegedly abandoning his post as Virginia governor during the British invasion of the state in 1781. Jefferson and the state government did flee Richmond for a time – it was their duty to avoid letting the British capture them and thus end Virginia’s official independence. Despite being

cleared of any misconduct soon after the event, Jefferson had to fight this smear before, during, and even after his presidency. As an observer of 21st century as well as 18th century American politics, I could not help but be struck by the familiar language when I found the following statement in a Federalist newspaper: At “the Appearance of some black Cloud or a sudden Clap of Thunder,” the writer opined, “We may expect Mr. Jefferson to cut and run *as usual*.” Not only was the same phrase being used, it was being used to convey much the same message: liberal, intellectual-seeming politicians are weak, irresolute, and can’t be trusted to defend America.

Jeffrey L. Pasley

