



Viewed Historically

The e-Newsletter of the Department of History
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Moving On

As the 2009–10 academic year comes to a close, a lot of people connected with the history department are moving on—beginning a new phase in their lives. One group moving on are the undergraduate majors, 95 of them, who graduated this year. Some are continuing their studies—working toward a law degree here at MU, getting an MBA at Loyola in Chicago, or a masters in museum studies at IUPUI (Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis, pronounced “ooie-pooie”). One graduate will be an intern at the *Kansas City Star*, another a research assistant at the MU Working Memory Lab, and a third will participate in the World Partners Fellowship of the American Jewish World Service: he will work with an Indian NGO in either the state of Gujarat or Maharashtra for 10 months.

Seven graduate students received their master’s degrees: some are working as high school teachers and one as a museum curator. Others continue on to receive their doctorates, here at MU or at other institutions such as the University of Wisconsin. There were two doctorates awarded this year, both medieval historians and both students of Professor Lois Huneycutt. One of them, Tiffany Ziegler, is moving on to a tenure-track assistant professorship at Minot State University, in Minot, N.D.. Tiffany is the fourth of the department’s doctoral students/candidates to obtain a tenure track position in the last two years—a very impressive record, especially in view of the economic crisis and the drastic decline in university hiring. Our congratulations to Professor Huneycutt and to her excellent student. We hope that the new Professor Ziegler, when she moves on, will take her long underwear with her for those winters

at the far northern edge of the forty-eight contiguous states.

It is a pleasure to announce that a new faculty member will join the department’s ranks beginning in the fall semester. Our new environmental historian will be Jerritt Frank, formerly of Western Colorado College, who received his doctorate from the University of Kansas. I know, he’s a Jayhawk—but the University of Kansas has one of the nation’s very best environmental history programs, and Jerry Frank is one of their very best graduates. As a condition of employment, Frank has promised to root for Mizzou teams on the appropriate occasions. Our next newsletter will contain a profile of this newest faculty member.

The May issue of this newsletter is the book issue; our readers will find an account of the books faculty members have published in the last 12 months. Every year at the end of April the department holds a reception honoring its faculty authors. In recent years, we have expanded the recognition at this reception to include other members of the history department to have received distinctions and honors.

Many of our readers will remember the department’s wonderful director of undergraduate advising and curriculum, Jenny Morton. This year, she received the university’s Excellence in Education award, given to individuals who have created out-of-class learning experiences. There is no question that being advised by Jenny Morton about classes,

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requirements or career plans is indeed an extraordinary learning experience. [Ilyana Karthas](#), professor of French history and intellectual history was distinguished as the recipient of the first Scholars Chair in Women's and Gender Studies.

We would particularly like to mention the distinctions of the department's graduate students. Ten of them were recipients of 14 different fellowships, scholarly prizes and teaching awards. I hope none of them will be offended if I mention just three.

Rebecca Jacobs-Pollez received the university's D.K. Anderson Graduate Teaching Assistant Award, thus officially designating her as the very best TA at the university. Autumn Dolan, a student of Lois Huneycutt like Jacobs-Pollez, a student of Professor Lois Huneycutt, received the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship's best graduate student paper award. Will Mountz, a student of Professor Robert Collins, received three different research grants: from the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, and the University of Missouri Graduate School.

Let me conclude this introduction on a personal note. After five years as department chair and editor of the newsletter, I am moving on, returning to the full-time teaching and scholarship of a history department faculty member. This issue's "Historical Reflections" section titled, "What is the Future of the Past?" contains some meditations about the current state of the study of history, drawing on my experiences as chair.

Starting this August, the department's chair will be an experienced veteran of many years at the University of Missouri, [Professor Russell Zguta](#).

Remember that you can always access the history

department's Web site, history.missouri.edu, as well as the department's new [Facebook page](#). Send your communications to history@missouri.edu.

Jonathan Sperber
Chair, Department of History

Books by the History Faculty

John Frymire



[Associate Professor Frymire](#) has written, *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. Based on an analysis of over 400 standard sermon collections (postils) produced

by Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists (1520–1620), this study offers the first comprehensive, systematic presentation of these works from a cross-confessional perspective. It lays to rest the notion that preaching was somehow distinctively Protestant while tracing the creation, production, use, and censorship of postils. These sermon collections were nothing less than the applied distillation of Christianity delivered on a regular basis by the clergy to the laity and, as such, the most important vehicle for the dissemination of ideas in early modern Germany.

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LeeAnn Whites

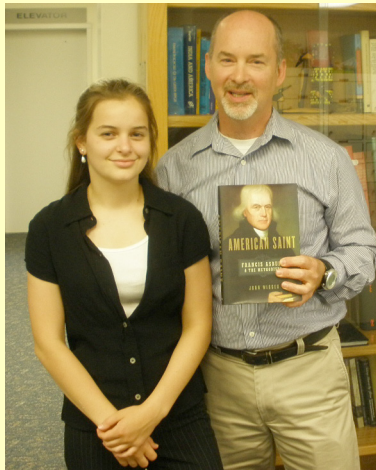


Professor Whites has co-edited, with Alecia Long of Louisiana State University, *Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation and the American Civil War*

(Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2009). In this anthology thirteen distinguished historians of the Civil War, women, and gender relations, consider the role that women played as a direct military factor in the conduct and outcome of the American Civil War. Much as historians of the war have come to recognize the importance that slaves and free blacks played in the way in which the war was fought and won, the contributors to this volume suggest ways in which the agency of women and the structural limits posed by gender conventions came to make critical contributions to the conduct and outcome of the war as well.

John Wigger

Professor Wigger, shown here with his daughter Allison, has written *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. This is a biography of Francis Asbury, one of the most important religious figures in American history.



As American Methodism's first bishop, Asbury created a new model of religious leadership that is still with us today. Though never a great

preacher, he could inspire lasting loyalty in others and had an instinctive feel for the currents of American culture. When Asbury arrived from England in 1771, there were only a few hundred Methodists in America. By 1850 Methodism was the largest institution in the U.S. other than the federal government. Eventually there were more Methodist churches than post offices. Pentecostalism, the fastest growing religious movement in the world, comes directly from Methodism. To understand all of this, Asbury is a good place to start.

Professor Wigger's book was just distinguished with the 2010 book prize of the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church, awarded to the author of the best book on the history of Methodism.

Historical Reflections

What is the Future of the Past?

A common theme in writing on the current status of historical scholarship in this country, and also a frequent topic of conversation among historians, is the disjunction between the popular view of history and the academic discipline of historical studies. On the one hand, the public has a seemingly insatiable appetite for the past. Books on the Founding Fathers, the Civil War or the world wars are constantly on bestseller lists. The History Channel attracts large numbers of viewers. Historical memorials, battle sites, and historical museums, such as Kansas City's recently opened, [National World War I Museum](#), enjoy a steadily growing attendance. Genealogists, professional and amateur, are everywhere and people are fascinated by the idea of tracking down their roots. But all of this seems to proceed with little participation from academically trained

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historians, who are frequently very skeptical of much popular history. Its authors and readers often do not think much of academic historians, either. The considerable public interest in history certainly does not translate to the university scene, where some departments of history are hard-pressed to maintain their positions. How can we explain this state of affairs?

One way to look at the lack of contact between university historians and the history-loving public would be to suggest that academics do not have much interest in a general public. They avoid the venues the public frequents, or they write in a difficult and opaque style that may be hard to for people outside the rarefied realm of academia to understand. I am not entirely sure that I would agree with this assertion.

There are plenty of scholarly disciplines whose practitioners have an arcane style, writing in jargon-filled and obscure language. But history is generally not among them. If one looks at historical monographs published by university presses or at the articles in historical journals, they often—not always, I'll admit—appear surprisingly approachable. Historians, as a group, certainly aspire to a broad, public audience. The problem, more often, is that the gatekeepers to a wider public—commercial publishers, or film and video producers—are skeptical of the work of academic historians.

Today, of course, in an age of online disintermediation, there are ways for people to reach a large audience directly on the Internet. There are quite a few historians who blog; the History News Network's [History Blogroll](#) is immense. My impression of these blogs—and I will just mention my personal favorite, titled [Edge of the American West](#)—is that either academic historians are there by themselves, or they and commenters from the general public talk right

past each other.

The problem, I think, lies deeper, in two very different understandings of how and why to study the past. For much of the general public, the interest of the past is in how it is like the present. History becomes a store of examples, all illustrating ostensibly universal truths of human nature. Historians, by contrast, tend to be interested in the past for its differences from the present. They like to emphasize the alien character of past ideas, lifestyles, social, economic and political institutions or gender arrangements. There are political ramifications of such fundamentally different viewpoints when considering, for instance, America's founding fathers. But the differences go deeper than politics: the past and its significance are often viewed in fundamentally different ways by academically trained historians and the general public.

If this observation is correct, or even on the right track, then a lot of the usual prescriptions for university historians to gain public attention will have the opposite effect. Writing in clear language, without scholarly jargon, so they are easily understandable will just bring the differences to the fore. I think those gatekeepers in publishing and media companies, have something of an understanding of this basic issue, which is why it is difficult for university historians to get past them to approach the public. I am not entirely sure how to address the problem, besides, having historians write clear, compelling examples of their view of the past and being willing to explain as best they can; explaining the way they approach the issues and problems they do; and answering questions—even somewhat hostile ones—about it. Looking back over the five years of this newsletter, it seems clear that its "Historical Reflections" section, although perhaps not originally designed

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for that purpose, has been one possible venue for academic historians to make this point about their conceptions of the past.

The problems with the study of history in the university are of a different nature. Here, I would say the problem lies with those people who run institutions of higher learning. All too many of them are convinced that the public wants for themselves or their children an education that is practical and career-oriented. Attending college has gotten steadily more expensive; the burden of debt for graduates has become ever more burdensome. Students, therefore, need to study something practical such as physical therapy, let's say, or marketing or chemical engineering—with which they can get a job, not a discipline like history with seemingly few direct connections to paid employment.

I will concede that I believed something like this myself, until I became department chair and got to see how many young people want to know about the past, to observe the career paths of our undergraduate majors, and to talk with our alumni. What I found out was that many students want to major in history—we have some 400 undergraduate majors, at last count. Their parents are quite proud of their accomplishments. And when they graduate, the training they receive in the study of the past—whether it was learning to analyze and compare various sources, write clearly and accurately, or think about the differences between the past and the present, and the process by which the former turns into the latter—turns out to be quite useful for them in a wide variety of occupations.

Historians have nothing to be ashamed of in this respect, and they need to make this point to university administrators, students' parents, alumni, state legislators and any other members

of the general public willing to listen. Enlisting such support was very much a conscious purpose of this newsletter and, I hope, a theme of my term as chair. I suspect that our readers will hear more about it in the future.

Jonathan Sperber

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

