



Viewed Historically

The e-Newsletter of the Department of History
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In This Issue

February is usually a pretty depressing month, certainly in Missouri, and probably in most places in the northern hemisphere. Yet this issue has some encouraging and cheering news about the history department that we would like to share with our friends and alumni.

February 16 was a particularly cheerless day, with a sharp north wind, rapidly falling temperatures, and ice covering much of the northern half of the state. But it was also the day of the department's first annual undergraduate recognition ceremony. Held in conjunction with Arts & Sciences Week, Feb. 13-20, at which the university celebrates its humanities, social sciences and basic science departments, the event honored the very best students among the history majors: the six who received scholarships from the College of Arts and Sciences this year, and the twenty recipients of departmental scholarships. Three undergraduates writing honors theses reported on their historical research. For a copy of the program, containing the names of the students who were recognized, [please click here](#).

Moving on from undergraduates to the history department's graduate students, every two years, they organize a scholarly conference, here at MU. The fifth of these biennial conferences will be taking place April 7-8. The conference has grown in size and esteem over the ten years in which the graduate students have been doing it. This year's conference will include participants, both graduate students and faculty members, from all across the country and from Canada as well. The conference's keynote speaker will be Professor Alonzo Hamby from Ohio University, well known for his writing on the life and career of Harry Truman. Hamby's speech and all the other sessions of the conference are open to the public, and the history department would like to invite, most cordially, its friends and alumni who are in the vicinity to attend. Kyle Miller, the graduate student who has led the work of organizing the conference, has a piece in the news about the history department section, giving a closer and more detailed look at this forthcoming event.

Reaching the faculty, a lot of you no doubt remember Kerby Milller, who teaches Irish and U.S. immigration history in the department. Kerby is a prize-winning scholar, an award-winning teacher, and someone who has worked long and hard to bring the results of his scholarship to the view of the general public. He has just capped his highly successful scholarly career with the receipt of a fellowship from the John Henry Frank Guggenheim Foundation for the academic year 2006–2007. In the news about the history department section of this newsletter Professor Miller will explain the project for which he has received this very impressive grant.

Most of us historians, whether just starting out in the field as graduate students, or veteran professors, direct the bulk of our writing to our fellow scholars. Yet it would be fair to say that historians have a strong interest in reaching the general public with their work, noticeably more so than professors in most other academic fields. A number of history department faculty have authored textbooks, or general-interest works, meeting with greater and lesser success in their efforts.

Certainly the champion of this group is Steve Watts, the department's specialist in the intellectual and cultural history of the United States. Following up on his critically acclaimed biography of Walt Disney, *[The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life](#)*, Watts has just published another well-received biography of a prominent twentieth century American entrepreneur, Henry Ford: *[The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century](#)*, brought out by the major commercial publisher Alfred A. Knopf.

Knopf's executives sent Watts on a nationwide book tour, in the course of which he had occasion to appear on NPR, PBS, C-SPAN, and to give numerous talks at book-signing events. In the newsletter's "Historical Reflections" section, devoted to the practice of history and the relations between historians and the general

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public, Watts has a piece about his experiences on the book tour circuit, and what these experiences suggest about the public interest in historical writing and matters historical.

As always, we would be pleased to hear from you. 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



A few of our scholarship winners & internship participants

News from the History Department

The Graduate Student Conference

On April 7-8, 2006, the History Graduate Student Association (HGSA) will host the Fifth Biennial University of Missouri Graduate History Conference. Entitled, "Interaction and Reaction: Society, Culture, and the Making of Political Identity," this year's conference has attracted national participation, with submissions coming from all over the country, including the University of California, Berkeley, North Dakota State University, the University of Kansas, Washington University in St. Louis and the Universities of Virginia, North Carolina, and Southern Florida.

HGSA is proud to present Distinguished Professor of History at Ohio University and Ph.D. graduate of the University of Missouri, Alonzo L. Hamby. As one of the foremost authorities on President Harry S. Truman, Professor Hamby will deliver an open keynote address beginning at 7:00, April 7, 2006, entitled "Who are the People? The Political Evolution of Harry S. Truman." The lecture will be held in the Middlebush Auditorium, and naturally there will be a reception to follow in Memorial Union. If funds are available, HGSA will hold its first banquet, to precede the lecture. At 10 a.m.

the next day, Hamby will offer a seminar discussion, so that conference participants can interact with him. Hamby has written two well-received books on Truman, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (1973), and *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (1995), winner of the Harry S. Truman and Herbert Hoover book prizes.

Conference sessions will be held on April 8, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. in Middlebush Hall, at the corner of Ninth Street and University Avenue, on the MU campus. Presentations will emphasize the fluid development and construction of political and cultural identity in the modern world. Following up on Professor Hamby's address, we will emphasize the Cold War and the Truman era, with a panel on the wide ranging influence of Truman on domestic politics and two panels on self-identity in divided Central Europe. We will also feature numerous presentations on the shaping of self-consciousness by African Americans, immigrants, women and other minorities, through economy, environment, and religion. Self-perception on the frontier and in the Borderlands is often ambiguous and uncertain, and we will explore this theme in Ancient

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Rome and in Imperial and Colonial Britain. In all, there will be about twenty visiting panelists and another fifteen presenters from the University. We expect to fifteen visiting commentators and session chairs.

The conference is free and attendance is open to the public. We would especially like to invite our friends and alumni to attend. Details on the panels and a precise schedule are available on our web site, <http://students.missouri.edu/~muhgsa/conference.html>, or you may contact conference co-chair, [Kyle Miller](#). We encourage those who wish to attend, to get in touch with Kyle, so that we may have a more accurate count of participants.

Kyle Miller

Kerby Miller's Project

I received a Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation grant in 2006-07, with a likely extension in 2007-08, for a research project titled, "Irish Religious Demography and Conflict, 1659-1926." I will carry out this work in collaboration with Professor Liam Kennedy of Queen's University, Belfast, one of Ireland's leading social historians.

The struggle between Northern Ireland's Unionists and Nationalists appears to be an intractable political and religious conflict. Contemporaries interpret events by reference to acts of conquest, colonization, and rebellion that occurred centuries earlier, and many scholars portray the conflict as between two enduring communal "traditions": one Protestant and "British"; the other Catholic and "Irish." In that view, Ireland's Partition in 1920, the "Troubles" of 1968-98, and today's political and religious strife seem "natural" or "inevitable" results of an historical polarization that began with the Ulster Plantation of the early 1600s. Our research will demonstrate that the history of Ireland--and especially of Ulster, Ireland's northern province (most of which is now in Northern Ireland)--is infinitely more complex than the "two traditions" model suggests. Our research will revolutionize scholarly and, we hope, popular understanding of Ireland past and therefore will suggest the possibility of a less polarized, more hopeful future.

Our project interrogates the most fundamental aspects of Protestant-Catholic and intra-communal relationships in Ireland, especially in Ulster, between the Plantation

and the island's Partition. These are revealed by the changing patterns of Irish religious demography, as recorded in official and unofficial "censuses" between 1659 and 1926. We will collect, compare, and analyze the religious census data and correlate them with social and economic information. The results will be the first measurements of the absolute and proportional changes in the numbers of Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians that occurred on local, regional, and national levels, and, most important, the first scholarly analyses of precisely how and why the changes occurred.

Irish demographic changes were directly related to patterns of migration and its causes (plus other factors, such as famine and religious conversion). Migration includes the 16th-, 17th-, and 18th-century immigrations of British and other Protestants to Ireland, and the 18th-, 19th-, and early 20th-century emigrations of both Protestants and Catholics from Ireland, as well as internal migrations.

Most historians posit that Irish migration patterns largely reflected and resulted from continual conflicts over territory and employment between Protestants and Catholics--conflicts that obliged the "losers" to migrate elsewhere. However, our findings indicate that the primary factors driving migration and religious demographic change were *not* sectarian conflicts. Instead, throughout Ireland they were broad social developments that transcended sectarian boundaries, and, most important, in Ulster they included denominational and political strife *among Protestants themselves*--strife that was dramatically reflected in the marked contrast between the very low levels of Ulster Anglican emigration and the very high levels of Ulster Presbyterian emigration that prevailed from the 1700s through the Great Famine of 1845-50 and beyond. This in turn had complex and crucial political consequences, for it was the Anglicans, since 1795 mobilized in the Orange Order, who were traditionally loyal to the Crown and to the Protestant landlord class, whereas by contrast the Presbyterians' political culture was much more diverse, with liberal and even radical-republican and nationalist tendencies.

Thus, the 19th-century development of Protestant Ulster Unionism and the island's subsequent Partition were not simply the "inevitable" results of "perpetual" sectarian conflict between the Irish Catholic and Protestant

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“communities.” Rather, it was competition *among Protestants* and its demographic consequences that were crucial in shaping Ulster Protestant society, its religious and political culture, and its relationships with the island’s Catholics.

Kerby Miller

Historical Reflections

History Matters: Reaching a Public Audience

“Professor,” asked the sixty-something man who had risen in the audience, “is it true that Henry Ford was a Nazi spy who conspired with Adolf Hitler to have Franklin Roosevelt murdered?” Trying not to blanch and mustering a smile, I explained gently that while Ford was an anti-Semite and certainly no fan of FDR, he had never met Hitler, did not work as a secret agent, and definitely had no role in the death of the President, who had expired of natural causes.

But such were the fruits of my new life. *The People’s Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century* had appeared in August 2005. It told the story of the enormously influential Detroit automaker who put our society on wheels and assessed his impact on our national life by focusing on his ideas about consumerism, his veneration of common people, and his growing role as a mass-culture celebrity. With a popular topic and a trade publisher, Knopf, I experienced something unaccustomed to most university historians: a book that found a large body of readers beyond the ivy-covered walls of academe.

My schedule quickly became frantic. It filled with radio interviews, such as the Diane Rehm Show on NPR, and television appearances, including Ben Wattenberg’s “Think Tank” on PBS and C-Span’s “Book Talk.” It became packed with talks and book signings at bookstores, lectures series, and clubs throughout the country. It saw book reviews appearing in venues such as the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Miami Herald*, and the *Washington Post*. But most importantly, it brought me into contact with hundreds of ordinary citizens who called into radio interviews, sent me letters, or attended the book signings to chat about Ford and American history. What lessons emerged from these

encounters? First, it became clear that there is a large audience of ordinary readers who love history if it is well-written – engaging style, clear analysis, a flowing narrative spiced with anecdotes and humor. Academics who complain most about declining public audiences are often those addicted to prose filled with esoteric jargon that proclaims “for specialists only.” As a woman asked during a talk at a club in New York City, “Are you really a professor? I understood just about everything you were saying this evening!”

It also struck me that many non-academic readers are keen political and cultural observers. While they remain interested in the complex issues such as Ford’s anti-Semitism, pacifism, or battles with labor unions, they immediately sense ideological axe-grinding at work. Political propagandizing masked as scholarship turns them off; fairness and balance draws them in. During the Q&A period following a bookstore talk in Washington DC, for example, a listener noted that his Jewish family had refused to buy Ford cars for as long as he could remember. “But I’ve really learned something tonight about the background of Ford’s views,” he added, “and also a lot about his importance in American history. Nobody’s completely a villain or hero, I guess.”

Finally, my recent experiences have underlined the fact that younger people are reading less than ever. Audiences at every talk I gave were, overwhelmingly, over forty years old. An older attendee once even joked about wandering into a seminar on Social Security. During an appearance at Ford’s Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, a curator told me that they were steadily removing written explanations for their displays in favor of video snippets and aural guides through headphones. Such evidence suggests a pressing need to encourage youth to read, or books threaten to go the way of the dinosaur within a couple more generations.

But overall, these encounters with the public were exhilarating. If my experience is an accurate guide, a popular audience exists for serious works of history if academic authors will just attempt to reach them. I plan to continue doing so.

Steven Watts



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