



Viewed Historically

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

A New Academic Year and its Challenges and Accomplishments

New academic years always bring new challenges with them, but the current one has been particularly demanding for the University of Missouri, in view of the rules instituted by the state legislature this past spring, and the plans for the university's future announced by the Board of Curators and MU's chancellor. The history department, though, is in a good position to respond to these challenges. Its present record, distinctions based on past accomplishments, and future prospects all look quite promising.

In the current semester, Fall 2007, now close to its end, the department has taught a record 3,788 students. Most of these students are undergraduates, 3,667 to be precise: that's better than one out of every six undergraduates enrolled at MU. It's an impressive figure, and it shows that the history department, whose professors make up just about one out of every 60 at the university, has been doing more than its share to teach the steadily growing number of students.

This teaching record is just part of a long record of accomplishment - for which current and retired members of the history department have received distinctions over the last few months. Our readers might like to hear some of the details of these distinctions.

Clearly leading the list was the moving ceremony on Friday October 25, to [rename and rededicate the General Classroom Building on the MU campus](#) in honor of professor emeritus [Arvarh Strickland](#). Many of our alumni will remember Strickland, who was professor of history at MU from 1969 until his retirement in 1998. Everyone who knew him as a professor will recall him as a distinguished scholar, an inspiring teacher, an amiable colleague, a no-nonsense administrator - and an individual combining a great personal dignity with a wonderful sense of humor - all characteristics he retains today, in his retirement. Strickland was also the founder of the Black Studies Program at the University and the very first African-American to be a professor at an institution that had been, until a few short years before his appointment, racially segregated and whites only. The word historic is rather overused these days; politicians' latest maneuvers or the new formulations of detergents are labeled that way, but the appointment of Arvarh Strickland as professor of history at the University of Missouri truly was historic - and a historic step toward overcoming the legacy of racial discrimination and oppression that has been a sad part of our country's past. Renaming GCB, at the very center of the campus, Strickland Hall, is a great commemoration of a historic decision and a historic career.

The last issue of the newsletter explained that the department was planning a conference in honor of newly retired Professor Emerita Susan Flader. Conference planning has been preceding apace, with the able and energetic participation of one of Flader's students, Diana Ahmad, now a professor of history at the University of Missouri–Rolla, excuse me, at Missouri Technological University. The conference will be held at MU on Saturday,

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February 23, 2008. The keynote speaker will be Donald Worster of the University of Kansas, one of America's most eminent environmental historians. Other speakers will include David Thelen, whom some of our readers may remember from his time at Missouri, before he left for Indiana University in 1985; Richard Vietor, another former MU history professor, now associate dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration; and Darwin Hindman, mayor of Columbia. We strongly encourage all interested friends and alumni to attend. The conference is free and open to the public, although there will be a charge for attending the luncheon and concluding banquet. [For information on the conference, please click on this link.](#)

Moving on from former to current faculty, I am sure that many of our alumni who have graduated at some point in the last three decades have memories of the fascinating classes they took in Irish or U.S. history from Professor Kerby Miller. Those who did so will remember his brilliant teaching, but they may not have been fully aware of the quality of his scholarship. At their October meeting, the University of Missouri Board of Curators named Kerby Miller a Curators' Professor of History. The curators' professorship is the University of Missouri's highest distinction for scholarship, and the appointment of Kerby Miller to this post is a very apt recognition of his stature as *the* authority on the history of Irish emigration. His trans-Atlantic historical studies have been published in lengthy monographs by the leading university presses, and in an intimidatingly large number of articles and book chapters. For his scholarly projects, Miller has received a number of major grants, most recently from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Miller's scholarship has been acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic, in Ireland and the United States, and also around the world, with plaudits coming from as far afield as Auckland, Buenos Aires and Stockholm.

Kerby Miller joins Mark Smith and me as the third Curators'-Professor in the history department; no other department on campus can claim so many professors with this distinction. This is just another measure of the way that the department excels at both teaching and scholarship, a characteristic of the MU faculty going well beyond our departmental boundaries. At a time when public universities in Missouri are competing ever more vigorously, it might be apt to remember that at MU world-class scholars teach undergraduates.

Besides its undergraduate teaching, the history department maintains a vigorous graduate program. In the last issue, we reported on one of the department's new Ph.Ds, [Mark Geiger](#), who had received the [University of Missouri's award for the best doctoral dissertation](#). It's a pleasure to report that the quality of Geiger's scholarship has been nationally recognized. The Economic History Association has awarded him the [2007 Allen Nevins Prize](#), given for the best dissertation on U.S. or Canadian economic history.

All these distinctions relate to past accomplishments; in view of the current condition of the University, one has to wonder about the future. Last year, the history department took a big step toward securing its future, when it hired three excellent young scholars: Michael Bednar, who is now teaching South Asian history; Ilyana Karthas, now teaching European intellectual and French history; and Michelle Morris, who is teaching U.S. colonial-era and women's history. Our featured news section this issue contains introductions of the three new faculty members. The broad range of interests among the three new colleagues reflects the department's commitment to studying and teaching about as wide a variety of past human experiences as is possible; the energy, enthusiasm and scholarly acuity which is common to all their biographies is one of many signs that these colleagues will be a source of future distinctions for the history department.

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Unfortunately, there is a colleague who will not be sharing in this future. It is our sad obligation to report that on October 26, as this newsletter was in preparation, Julius Thompson, professor of history and director of the Black Studies Program at MU passed away, from complications arising from injuries that occurred as the result of a fall.



Julius Thompson, 1946–2007

A future issue will have materials from the memorial service for Professor Thompson, held at the University's Black Culture Center on November 9.

The "Historical Reflections" section of this issue is written by the department's new Curators'-Professor Kerby Miller. In it, Miller reflects on the personal and political aspects of the long connection he has had with Ireland as a result of his scholarship. This essay also shows the vigorous, forthright manner of expressing opinions for which Miller is very well known. As is typically the case with such essays, the opinions expressed in it are Miller's personal views and not those of the history department or the University.

If our readers would like to communicate with us, we now have a new address. All e-mail, whether matters of subscribing to the newsletter, or canceling a subscription, sending in alumni information, commenting on one of the stories or making

suggestions about the history department's [website](#) can go to a single destination: history@missouri.edu

In conclusion, we wish our alumni and friends all the best for Thanksgiving, Christmas and the New Year. We'll be back with another issue in February.

Jonathan Sperber
Chair, Department of History Department

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 Sciences will be pleased to discuss with you any plans you may have to help the department of history.

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History Department New Faculty

Michelle Morris



I was born the daughter of a high school history teacher and a mother who had majored in history in college and developed a passion for colonial American history. In a lot of ways, early American history was part of my daily life growing up. My mother was incapable of driving by St. John's church in Richmond, Va., without rolling down her window, sticking her head out and calling, "I know not what course other men may take, but as for me give me liberty or give me death." I am not sure what "normal" families did on the weekends back in the 1970s and 80s, but mine went to Colonial Williamsburg. Over and over again. During my repeated visits to Williamsburg, I developed an interest, not only in Virginia politics leading up to the American Revolution, but, more strongly, in the workings of everyday life. My parents somehow forgot to tell me that all of this was educational; it was their idea of a good time.

College was an eye-opener for me. I attended the College of William and Mary (yes, in Williamsburg, Va.). As I tell my students now, there were no courses in women's history for me to attend back in the "dark ages." Instead, I encountered,

not only political history, but social and cultural interpretations of the past as well. Even more important, I met professors who helped me to understand how history is created and what types of work historians do. One professor in particular took me under his wing, worked one on one with me so that I could do a readings course in early American women's history, helped me to get an internship with colonial Williamsburg and encouraged me to apply to graduate school.

I then spent two years working on a masters degree in early American material culture at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware. I quickly became intrigued by the strange objects used to feed infants in the 17th and 18th centuries: silver nipples, pewter "sucking bottles." and lead-glazed "pap boats." These objects became the subject of my first published article and the core of my master's thesis on the material culture of birth and early childcare in colonial America. After completing my masters degree, I was accepted at Harvard University where I began a study of the social networks involved in policing sexual behavior in late 17th-century Massachusetts. This work took me deep into the Massachusetts court records and, through them, into the homes, barns and back yards of ordinary men and women. I am currently revising my dissertation for publication.

In February, I received the welcome news that the history department at the University of Missouri had offered me a job as an American women's historian specializing in the colonial period. The job seemed tailor-made for my interests (most departments seem to believe that women's history begins a few decades prior to the beginning of the 20th century), and I quickly fell in love with Columbia. Now I am delighted to be teaching the courses I never had the opportunity to take when I was an undergraduate. This semester I am teaching a course on U.S. women's history, and in the spring my students and I will explore the witchcraft crises of colonial New England.

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Michael Bednar



I am very excited to be a faculty member at the University of Missouri, although my route to the MU was anything but direct. I earned a BA from Hanover College in 1992 with a focus on mathematics and a minor study of chemistry. For the next five years I worked as a chemist with a subsidiary of Dow Chemical and then with the Wisconsin Occupational Health Laboratory. During my spare time, I studied Hindi at the University of Chicago. I earned an MA from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 2007 and wrote my thesis on proto-historical burial practices in central and southern India from 1000 B.C. to 300 A.D., which was nominated for the university's outstanding thesis competition later that year.

I became a historian under the guidance of Cynthia Talbot at the University of Texas at Austin. Over the next decade, I continued my study of Hindi, Urdu, and Sanskrit and began studying Persian with a focus on Hindu and Muslim interactions in the Indian subcontinent. I eventually settled on studying the Delhi Sultanate, the first pan-Indian Muslim empire, which ruled from 1206 through 1526. My research was funded through several fellowships at the University of Texas including Title VI (for foreign language and area studies) fellowships to study Hindi, Urdu, Persian and a continuing studies fellowship. I also received

a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad fellowship to conduct research in Delhi and Western India from 2000 to 2002. I completed my dissertation and graduated from the University of Texas in May 2007.

I intend to continue my research and publish three books based on my dissertation. The first book, tentatively titled *The Poetics of History*, examines how 14th and 15th century historical texts conformed to Sanskrit and Persian literary traditions and aesthetic expectations. The second book, *The Aesthetic of Authority*, examines the emergence of Indo-Muslim and Hindu Rajput warrior identities during the 14th and 15th centuries. Both communities respond to conquest and both communities turn toward the social traditions of the Indian subcontinent to find a new source of authority in a post-conquest world. Scholars traditionally study Hindu and Muslim histories as separate fields of inquiry because they fail to distinguish between the event and the interpretation or emplotment of that event. The division between Hindu and Muslim in the Sultanate period begins to collapse when one studies how a historical event is represented according to Sanskrit and Persian literary traditions.

A third book, *A Tale Retold*, analyzes how the concept of history changes when the author shifts from Sanskrit to medieval (Hindi) vernacular languages. This book will contain the first English translation of the *Hammira Mahakavya*, a 15th century Sanskrit poem that narrates the fall of Hammira Chauhan and his Ranthambhor Fort (now a tiger preserve in Rajasthan, India) to the Delhi Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji in 1301. Only a few decades after the Sanskrit *Hammira Mahakavya* was composed, another version in medieval Hindi appeared. This presents an unusual opportunity to examine how the concept of history changed in the early vernacular literature of the 15th century.

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Ilyana Karthas



I am very excited to join the history faculty at the University of Missouri–Columbia. It has been a real pleasure teaching this term. Before arriving in Columbia, I taught for three years at McGill University in both the history department and women’s studies program. There, I taught courses in women’s history and British history and directed an honors thesis students’ research. My research field is modern European intellectual and cultural history, with a specialization in 19th-and 20th-century French cultural production and the arts as well as theories of performance. My primary research interests focus on the relationship between the development of national identity, ideologies of gender, and modern aesthetics.

My interest in the study of art, culture and women’s history was enhanced during my graduate study at Oxford University. There, I examined 19th-century English women art critics and contextualized the visual arts within historical and cultural themes. My masters thesis documented and analyzed the life and work of Merlyn Severn, a pioneer in early dance photography in the 1930s. Severn was the first full-time female employee for the British photojournalistic magazine *Picture Post* (similar to *Life Magazine* in the U.S.). Eventually, she covered stories in the Belgian Congo. In 2004, my article, “Merlyn Severn,” was published in Oxford University Press’ *New Dictionary of National Biography*. I hope to expand my previous

research on Severn and write a biography of her extraordinary life and contributions.

I completed my PhD in history at Brown University where my research fields included French cultural history, modern European intellectual & cultural history, women’s & gender history and modern European art history. I was able to combine all these fields into my dissertation, which traces the revival of ballet in France (via the Russian ballet) in the early 20th century. Currently, I am revising the dissertation into a book manuscript titled, “Nation, Modernism, Gender and the Cultural Politics of Ballet in France, 1909–1938”. Interdisciplinary and transnational in its approach, this project will be the first book-length study that highlights some of the cultural factors that enabled ballet to regain its position as a “primary cultural institution” after a long period of decline. The book will offer a new approach to the cultural resurgence of ballet in relation to three key themes of early 20th-century European history: the development of nationalism, modern aesthetics, and changing configurations of gender.

At MU, I am offering courses on modern European intellectual and cultural history (17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries), revolutionary France, French politics and the visual and performing arts, as well as graduate seminars such as gender & the politics of the body in historical perspective. I have really enjoyed living in Columbia and look forward to running my first “capstone seminar” next term.

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Historical Reflections

*Note: the following is adapted from the Introduction to my forthcoming book, **Ireland and Irish America: Essays on Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration** (Dublin, 2008):*

For 35 years, I've studied the histories of modern Ireland, of Irish emigration, and of the Irish in America. I'm often asked, "Why?" I am not "Irish," as conventionally defined. In graduate school I received no training in these subjects. Yet one answer seems obvious. Between the early 1600s and the early 1900s, Irish emigration comprised one of the largest global movements of men and women in modern times, one that had profound effects on Ireland and the United States alike. A second, broader response is that the importance of past Irish migrations is further magnified in view of the enormous contemporary rural-to-urban migrations from and within the so-called - developing world. Like Irish migrations in previous centuries, these are driven and shaped by the march of imperial capitalism, by its socio-economic and political systems and inequities. Put starkly, in Ireland from the 1500s to the Great Famine of 1845-50 and beyond, and internationally from Fallujah to post-Katrina New Orleans today, "accumulation by dispossession" of the poor and the defeated is the iron thread that weaves Ireland's past and the global present into a seamless, bloody tapestry. The result is that we now inhabit a "planet of slums" and of refugees from imperial-capitalist "re-structurings" — a world ravaged by armed and unfettered greed and corruption, poised on the edge of ecological catastrophe. Thus, a final answer is that, if resistance to, even rebellion against, the powers that impose such tyrannies and inequities is inevitable and even necessary, then it is at least fascinating that, however inadequately or transiently, in both the distant and recent pasts, the Irish — sometimes Protestants as well as Catholics — were often in the forefront of such resistance and rebellion, both at home and abroad. Their country's history had prepared them to recognize all too clearly, as one Irish Protestant

put it, that "the rich always betray the poor," and, in the words of a Catholic contemporary, that "society" was in essence "a combination of those who *have* against those who *have not*." As Elizabeth Gurley Flynn wrote, an Irish or an Irish-immigrant heritage should always have been excellent preparation for militant radicalism, for "[when one understood British imperialism, it was an open window to all imperialism."

These are the aspects of Irish and of Irish diasporan history that, to me, are most important and worthy of study and of remembering. Somewhat unusually, I have studied Irish Protestants as well as Catholics, because Ireland's conquest and colonization determined that their histories and identities would unfold in dialectical (and oft-maligned) relationships on both sides of the ocean. For evidence, I have turned primarily to the documentation of Irish and Irish emigrants' experiences and attitudes found in thousands of their letters, memoirs, petitions, songs, and other personal writings. These documents provided rich information on the causes, methods, and results of Irish migration, and, equally important, on the perceptions of the emigrants, and their Irish correspondents, as to the "meanings" of their homeland, their departures and their lives overseas. The letters, etc., enabled me to examine both the commonalities and the conflicts among the Irish and Irish-American communities; and, combined with other research (in Irish religious demography, for example), they enabled me to challenge conventional interpretations of Irish and Irish-American history. The result is a body of work that has focused, in different but complementary ways, on mass migration as the key factor in shaping — and understanding — modern Ireland, Irish America and the "world systems" in which their histories unfolded.

Kerby Miller



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