

FALL 2020

HISTORY MATTERS



FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends of U-M History,

I hope this annual letter finds you safe and healthy. At this point, all of us have our personal stories about living through COVID-19. Mine goes something like this ...

On the last day of February, my wife and I flew to Los Angeles. When we left Ann Arbor for the U-M midterm break, there were no recorded cases of COVID-19 in Southern California. But when we returned six days later, the total was up to 26 (and climbing). Within about a week, the numbers began to rise in Southeastern Michigan, as well—most dramatically and tragically in Detroit.

As the pandemic's scope became clearer, our department soon found itself forced to cancel our annual recruiting visit for History PhD students, along with all of our spring conferences, symposia, and other live events. Two days later, the university told us to convert all of our winter 2020 courses to 100 percent online teaching. At this point (mid-March), we were teaching more than 2,000 U-M students in dozens of different formats—from first-year seminars to large lecture courses with multiple discussion sections. And we had approximately 48 hours to get it done.

Many other COVID-related challenges quickly followed. For much of April, I worked with our History Administrative Team to ensure that every one of our 140 PhD students would receive guaranteed summer funding at or above our usual ceilings. We did this because so many conventional funding streams—paid internships, part-time jobs, and language and research programs around the world—had evaporated overnight. I'm proud to say that one of our largest contributions to



this emergency fund came directly from our faculty (who collectively donated close to \$30,000 from their personal research accounts).

In late April, we scrambled to assemble three different virtual commencements (undergraduate, graduate, and honors) for our amazing students and their families. And in May, we began to assemble a fifteen-person "online teaching support team" comprised of eleven talented PhD students working in collaboration with some of our most tech-savvy faculty and staff. Since early summer, this team has been pushing hard to develop custom resources for every future contingency—online teaching, residential teaching, and everything in between—all with the broader goal of delivering the strongest possible U-M History curricula in fall 2020. We were among the first U-M departments to move in these directions, and our program has since become a model for many others around the country.

As you know, this past summer has also been one of exceptional moral and political challenges. I would thus like to use this opportunity to affirm our strongest collective support for the burgeoning national movements for racial justice. Our U-M History

faculty, students, staff, and alumni have been deeply outraged by the recent killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many other unarmed people of color. As we noted in a public statement from early July, these senseless murders of US citizens cannot be understood in isolation. What happened in each of these localized contexts stands well within our national tradition of systemic, racialized violence. This sordid history stretches back many centuries, from Columbus's arrival and Virginia's first slavery legislation through the end of the Civil War, reconstruction, and on to our present moment. As a nation, we have shown a reluctance not only to learn the basic tenets of our own history, but also to learn from this history, which helps to explain why we continue to witness—and set aside as exceptional—egregious forms of human-rights abuses in so many different cases. Even as we mourn and denounce these recent murders, we must learn from our nation's past. We must also do far more to address these challenges in our department and university. In the weeks and months to come, U-M History will be tested by our ability to rise to the urgency of the current crisis and work collectively to make real change possible both inside and outside of the academy.

I also want to pass along some good news. In recent months, we have celebrated the promotions to full professor of two esteemed U-M History colleagues: Professor Kathryn Babayan (who works on early modern Iran) and Professor Michael Witgen (who works on Native American history in the Great Lakes region). In addition, Professor Raevin Jimenez (who works on deep time in southern Africa) was enthusiastically approved for a tenure-track position.

We are also delighted to welcome a new colleague, Professor David Tamayo (who works on the history of modern Mexico), as well as an old friend and Department of Afroamerican and African Studies colleague, Professor Angela Dillard (a leading national figure in African American history, who is moving part of her joint appointment into our department).

As you will see in the pages below, we have much else to celebrate in this exceptionally challenging period, from the public-facing work of our faculty in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement to the collaborative efforts of our talented undergraduate students in a recent Environmental Justice HistoryLab. You'll also learn about our emerging graduate HistoryLab collaboration with the Detroit Institute of Arts to build a digital history platform for their iconic Diego Rivera murals, which will help to make these spectacular works of art more readily accessible and useful for K-12 teachers and students around the world.

As always, please don't hesitate to send us your news and good ideas: hist.feedback@umich.edu. We are always very grateful to hear from the many friends of this remarkable department around the world.

Warmly,

Jay Cook
Department Chair
Professor of History and American Studies

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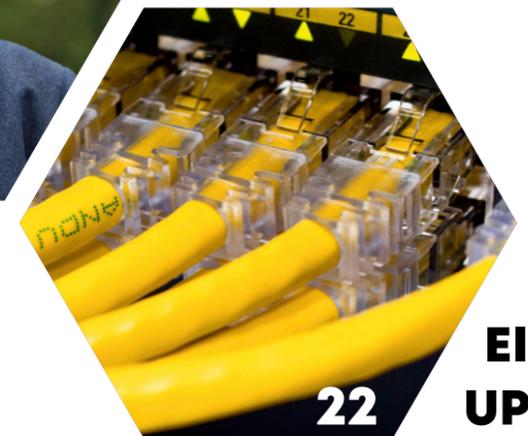
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1. In August 2019 Professor Lakisha Simmons (pictured here) and students Brittany Simmons and Maria Garcia Reyna led nearly 100 guests on “Walking in the Steps of Black Women,” a campus history tour created by students in the 2018 Michigan in the World program.

2. The class of 2020 wasn’t able to celebrate graduation in person because of COVID-19, but U-M History faculty commemorated the baccalaureates, History Honors students, and PhD graduates with video tributes in virtual ceremonies.

3. Mary Basso received the 2020 History Department Undergraduate Award for Leadership and Service. Mary served as the University of Michigan History Club president in 2019-2020, worked for the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies, completed an honors thesis, and volunteered with numerous community efforts.



3



4

4. A historian of modern Latin America, David Tamayo joins U-M History in fall 2020 as an LSA Collegiate Postdoctoral Fellow. He earned his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley in 2018.

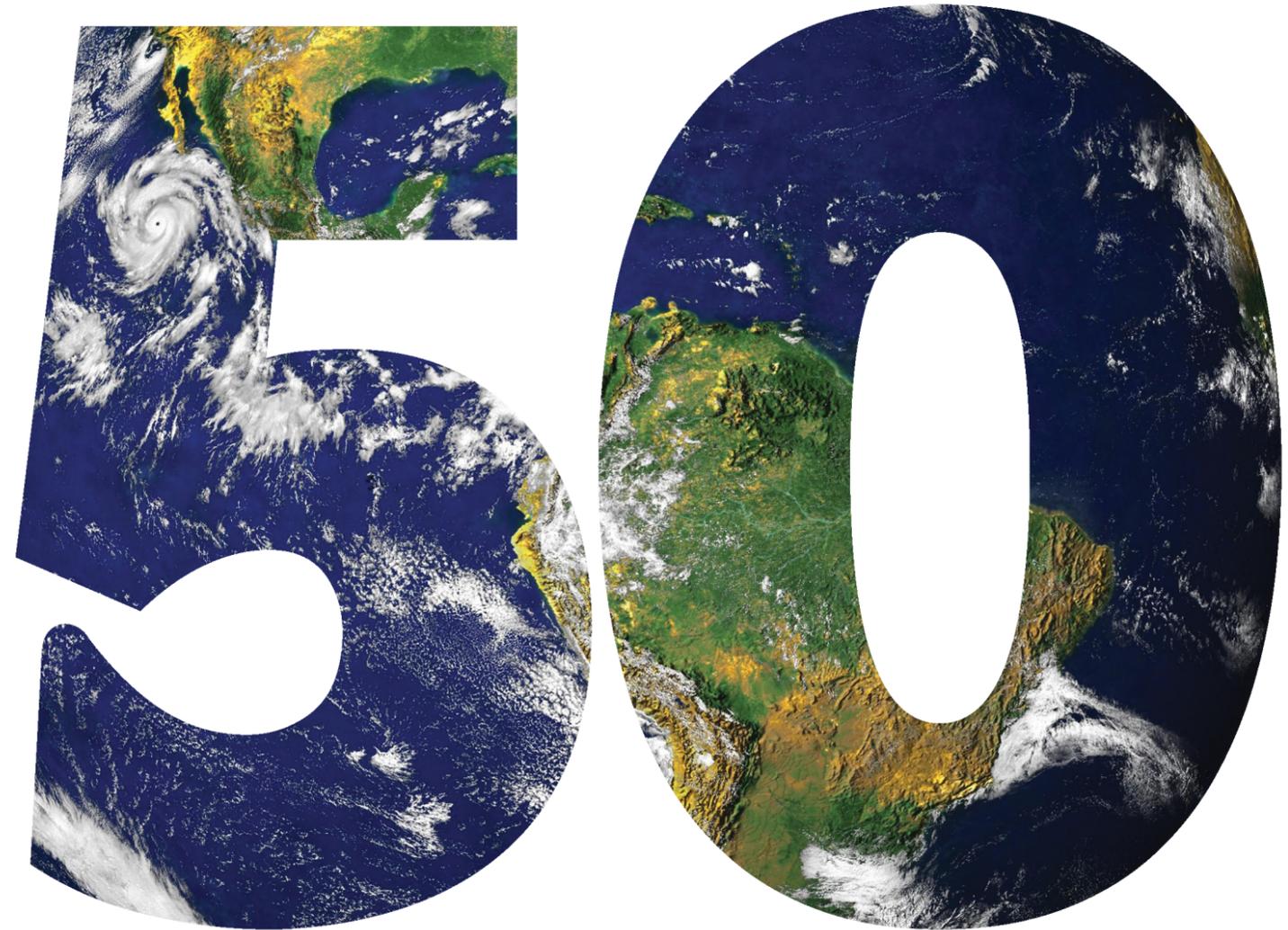
Earth Day at

U-M History's Environmental Justice HistoryLab chronicles a legacy of activism

By Gregory Parker



Students gather for a rally on the Diag during Michigan's 1970 Teach-In on the Environment. (Photo: U-M News and Information Services Photographs, Bentley Historical Library)



On April 22, Earth Day turned fifty. Social distancing and stay-at-home orders meant that most of this year's commemorations took place virtually. But U-M—with help from the History Department and its Environmental Justice HistoryLab—was able to host some in-person commemorative events in March, some of the last the university held before closing campus because of the coronavirus outbreak.

It wasn't the first time Ann Arbor was ahead of the game. Back in 1970, U-M held its Earth Day activities a month earlier than the rest of the nation to accommodate its academic calendar—then on the trimester system—giving the community bragging rights as being first.

That four-day event, called the Teach-In on the Environment, was planned by the student-led Environmental Action for Survival (ENACT) group. It kicked off with an opening rally at Crisler Arena that attracted 13,000 and featured a mix of speeches from politicians, student activists, and experts—and entertainment from folk singer Gordon Lightfoot and the cast of *Hair*. Other events included workshops, a film series, panels, and a Diag “eco-rally.” The roster consisted of representatives from Dow Chemical, senators, UAW President Walter Reuther, and Ralph Nader.

The Ann Arbor events were a dress rehearsal for the national activities on April 22, 1970, which would take place in 2,000 communities and involve an estimated 20 million people.

Half a century later, U-M History joined with the School for the Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) and the Ecology Center to help plan the Earth Day at 50 initiative, including a commemorative “Week of Action” scheduled for March 9-14, 2020.

History's contributions included coordinating a youth activist forum on environmental justice and a panel featuring the activists behind the original Teach-In on the Environment.

The department also collaborated with the Center for Academic Innovation for an Earth Day at 50 Teach-Out, which connected online learners with an interdisciplinary group of scholars to explore the origins of Earth Day and the future of sustainability.

These events took place as intended. Others weren't so lucky. Earth Day at 50's signature event, the Rise Up for the Environment Rally, planned by SEAS and the Ecology Center, featured a roster of activists, politicians, and experts like Naomi Klein, Mari Copeny, Abdul El-Sayed, and Philippe Cousteau, Jr. It was cancelled as the coronavirus pandemic worsened.



Putting History to Work

History's involvement in Earth Day at 50 is part of a long-term, department-wide commitment to public-facing scholarship. In 2017 Professor Matthew Lassiter and eight students collaborated to develop *Give Earth a Chance*, an online exhibit that documents the history of the environmental movement in Michigan. The team studied the campus activism that led to the 1970 Teach-In on the Environment, the establishment of the Ecology Center of Ann Arbor, and even the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore.

"It was an amazing and transformative experience," said Matthew Lassiter. "The project demonstrated that History undergraduates can produce original scholarship and laid the foundation for our research partnership with the Ecology Center."

Give Earth a Chance provided invaluable historical details for the Earth Day at 50 planners and journalists covering the events. Student researchers had the chance to connect with the original ENACT activists, which laid the groundwork for an Earth Day at 50 event featuring these environmental movement veterans.

In 2019, the department expanded its efforts, launching the Environmental Justice HistoryLab as part of a larger suite of student-faculty collaborative initiatives aimed at demonstrating the real-world impact of historical research. The Center for Academic Innovation was an early partner, providing seed funding as a pilot to encourage innovative use of historical scholarship.

"The goal is to empower today's community activists and inform policymaking," said Lassiter. "Our collaboration with the Ecology Center is a public engagement mission that connects the campus to the community and also provides History students with valuable experiences and career-oriented skills."

The lab's spring-summer paid internship program—now entering its third year—pairs undergraduate History students with the Ecology Center. Students have collected oral histories and developed a digital exhibit documenting the organization's first fifty years.

Meghan Clark (BA 2019) was part of the *Give Earth a Chance* team, and she signed on for the internship program after she graduated. "When you graduate you're left with this question: I have this history degree, and I know how important I think history is, but how am I going to use this in the real world?" she said.

"I was able to use my research skills ... as well as my history knowledge ... and also challenge myself to develop these more professional skills," said Clark.

This year, the Environmental Justice HistoryLab added a new component: documentary film production. In January, instructor Matthew Woodbury (PhD 2018) met for the first time with students in his History 390 minicourse. In just eight weeks, they produced a historical documentary film on the 1970 teach-in at U-M.

Summer 2019 Environmental Justice HistoryLab interns and Ecology Center staff. Top row, left to right: Mike Garfield, Tracey Easthope, Izzie Kenhard, Meghan Clark, Katie Hummel; bottom row, left to right: Naomi Fergusson, Basil Alsubee.

"What energized participants was the knowledge that the film wasn't just being created for me, rather it had the potential to reach a broad audience," said Woodbury.

Filmmaking is not common in the History curriculum. But the steps leading up to the final product are foundational components of historical inquiry. After familiarizing themselves with the broader history of the environmental movement, the students narrowed their focus to Ann Arbor. They waded through archival materials—many of which had been digitized for the *Give Earth a Chance* exhibit—learned the rudiments of film production, and developed a script.

"This work was also, from the outset, a collaborative experience," said Woodbury. "Students worked in teams of three to produce sections of the overall project, and that aspect of the course was novel for a lot of students. We benefited from having art students, environment students, and political science students all bringing their perspectives to the table."

The resulting film, *The Environmental Action for Survival (ENACT) Teach-In of 1970*, incorporates the resources of the Bentley Historical Library to present a rich visual history of the teach-in. In one scene, students destroy a 1959 Ford sedan after putting it on "trial" on the Diag. The teach-in's opening event is dramatized in a series of still photographs depicting speakers and performers engaging a packed crowd at Crisler Arena. The voice-over narrative ties it all together.

The fifty-year commemoration is a momentous occasion, but the hard work is not yet over. For History major Basil Alsubee, one



Original ENACT members convene for the Earth Day at 50 commemoration on March 11, 2020. From left to right: George Koling, Elizabeth Grant Kingwill, Doug Scott, David Allan, Arthur Hanson, Barbara Alexander.

of the HistoryLab's interns, being able to learn practical skills that will help these efforts was key. "It's easier to see the real-world ramifications right in front of you than picturing them in an abstract way," he said.

As long as activists continue to work for improved environmental health, the Environmental Justice HistoryLab will be there to record the history. ■

Learn more about these projects—and view the film and exhibit—at sites.lsa.umich.edu/enviro-historylab.

Student Perspective

Frances Mackethan

History Major

Working on the Environmental Justice HistoryLab as a summer intern was an incredible experience that not only gave me an opportunity to create impactful, published work, but also to apply what I've learned in my History classes. Although we could not physically go through the Ecology Center (EC) archives due to COVID-19, I was still able to do research in online newspaper archives which gave me the chance to take the research skills I've learned in the classroom to the real world.

Throughout the summer I also worked with oral histories of previous EC staff, which were conducted by previous student interns. By watching, analyzing, and indexing these interviews I learned so much about the amazing efforts of the EC team and the impact they've had on environmentalism in Michigan and across the nation. Despite hardships, failures, and years of struggle, those at the EC refused to give up, and because of their tenacity, they were able to make huge strides.

Moving forward into my last year of college, what I will hold onto most from this internship are those interviews and how they showed me what an incredible impact even a single person can



have if they work hard and refuse to give up. That lesson, and the hands-on research and writing experience I gained, have helped me to face the daunting task of job searching during a pandemic. I'm confident that the skills I've learned in History classrooms have prepared me for the challenge.



JENNIFER LEVASSEUR

**HISTORY ALUM AND CURATOR AT THE
NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM DISCUSSES
HER PATH TO A CAREER IN PUBLIC HISTORY**

BY ELIZABETH COLLINS

Jennifer Levasseur (BA 1999) is one of only a handful of spaceflight curators around the world. Her book, *Through Astronaut Eyes: Photography from Early Human Spaceflight* (Purdue University Press, 2020), explores the origins and impact of astronaut still photography during the height of the Space Race, 1962 to 1972. History staffer Elizabeth Collins talked with Levasseur to learn more about her work and the role public historians play as educators in an ever-changing social landscape. This interview has been edited and condensed.

How did you decide to major in History?

I had always believed that my career path was business. But if you are thinking you're supposed to be one thing, the world and the universe can tell you that you are wrong. I took Econ 101 at the end of my freshman year and I failed, it was terrible. After a similar disaster with what is now Accounting 300, I immediately made sure I had History classes that spring—that I was taking courses that really meant something to me. I had always been interested in history. My family grew up in Southeast Michigan, and I had gone to the Henry Ford Museum repeatedly as a child, and so I knew that I had this deep interest in the subject matter and I was passionate about it. What that meant for the future, I didn't know. But, what I like to tell students is: Don't be afraid to not know something. Don't be afraid to wait for the right moment and that inspiration to come.

You earned your PhD from George Mason. Why did you pursue a doctorate?

What compelled me to do the PhD was the job. For Smithsonian employees, you can be a museum specialist, work on objects, do all kinds of cool stuff, but you can't have the title, and be that expert person the public comes to when they want to know about a

specific artifact unless you have a PhD. There is something unique about the opportunity to be one of three or four space shuttle curators in the entire country, in fact the entire world.

What is it like to work as a curator?

Working in a museum and in public history is a passion. It is not something one does lightly, because you're not going to become very famous from it, and you're definitely not going to earn a lot of money. As a curator, I want to tell people about history through objects. Why do we collect artifacts? Why do we save things? As somebody who has saved things throughout their life, I understood that intimately.

We then have to find access points for each of our audiences. You have to be willing to not think about your self-interest and your expertise so much as what you think that person should take away from being in the museum. We hate to have to do it—it's the worst part of my job—but boiling something down into 50 words on an exhibit script is necessary, when I really want to tell you everything!

I also work as part of a team. Although I understand the roles of professors and how they work as an educational team, my team is much different in that it's comprised of educators, designers, and media specialists. I still have my research, I still have to do my

books and my articles, but I very much am embedded and in love with the other part of the job, which is about public outreach and doing the exhibits and working with the artifacts.

How is the museum responding to the changing social landscape?

One big goal we have is to make everybody feel like they are a part of the story. If we're going to talk about the story of human spaceflight, and you are eleven and you have the passion for physics or science or the planet Jupiter, there is a path for you to become involved in answering big questions about our universe.

We want every young person to come into a room and feel like they can identify with one of the historical subjects in that space. We're doing that more and more through the narratives—through personal narratives especially. So we tell the stories of the African American engineers down at the Marshall Space Flight Center who helped develop the Saturn V, or the women who worked out at Jet Propulsion Laboratory as some of the first computers who were involved in programming the probes that go out to the outer solar system. Or the women engineers who were down at Langley who helped John Glenn on his flight. The expectation is that we will have considered diversity as part and parcel of every single story we tell.

Museum interpretation is also more of a conversation than it used to be. We want to have a dialogue. We want it to be interactive.

Have museums had to step up in their roles as educators?

Museum outreach, in terms of the digital component, is not new. We film lots of programs, we interview astronauts and others—we've been building a catalogue of material. But the pandemic has made me realize how we need to reanalyze, reorient our goals in terms of how we educate our young people.

It's quite inspiring how museums have gotten together and had conversations about this. It's not just about working in isolation, it's really about sharing and making sure that we do it right for our visitors and that we don't further endanger anyone by not cleaning a railing in front of an object or not putting public safety at the heart of our daily practices. We have a very peculiar environment. We have to worry about the care of our objects as well as the care of our visitors. Sometimes

that actually competes with the other, and we have to figure out what's the best way to do the right thing for both.

Tell me about your recent book.

In January 1986, I was watching the Space Shuttle *Challenger* launch with my third grade classmates live on television, and I saw who was supposed to be the first teacher to go into space die. I wanted to know why it happened and I didn't really have a way of asking. When I got to Michigan, I learned how to ask those questions, peeling back what was on the surface to understand how technology, management, and other components played a role in the disaster.

Thinking about how I remember spaceflight when I was growing up—how I connected deeply to the visual element—made me think: If I can understand my generation through the experience of watching space shuttle launches on television, how can we understand my parents' generation as shaped by their experience watching the Apollo lunar landings in the 1960s? How do they remember it? That developed into ideas about technology, visual culture, and how it is we connect to memory through photographs.

We all know that Neil Armstrong stepped on the surface of the moon in 1969, but what was the next thing he did? The next thing he did was take a picture. He knew that was his way to share what he saw.

Any memories of U-M you'd like to share?

Even as an undergraduate, I was challenged to think and ask questions about history. I had the great Sidney Fine as a professor back in the 1990s, and I absolutely loved his storytelling. His way of talking about history was so compelling. I owe a lot of the way that my historical thinking developed to my time in Michigan. Go Blue! ■



Edward H. White II, pictured during his egress from the Gemini-Titan 4 spacecraft, was the first American to walk in space in 1965. (Photo: NASA)

Engaging History

U-M History graduate students are redefining what it means to be a historian

By Elizabeth Collins

"As curators of history, we have a responsibility to know how to translate our work to and for the very communities we write about," said Nicole Navarro, a U-M History doctoral candidate.

The term public engagement can mean many things, but for historians it refers to the important task of translating their research for general audiences and applying their work to contemporary projects that will have a positive impact.

For graduate students, the job market is looming. Public engagement programs offer experiences that make them better candidates for academic positions as well as better qualified for careers outside the academy.

"Departments, including our own, are increasingly interested in applicants' digital projects and their reach beyond the academy," said Professor Melanie Tanielian, U-M History's public engagement and career diversity coordinator. "It's clear that our students need to walk out the door with a broadened set of skills. It's also our responsibility to help them to articulate that historian's skills can be valuable in multiple careers."

But beyond bolstering the CV, the department has committed itself to a belief that community and outreach-oriented work is integral to scholarly endeavors—not a secondary concern. It has recently tapped its PhD alumni network, hosting the October 2019 conference, "U-M History in the Public Service: A Vision for the Humanities PhD in the 21st Century," and is putting these ideas into practice.

From paid internships to HistoryLabs, U-M History has created a portfolio of initiatives and programs that allows graduate students to build their public engagement skills.

Behind the scenes, the graduate student public engagement and professionalization coordinator—another paid intern—works closely with fellow graduate students and department leadership to facilitate these programs. This position was established in 2018 with funding from the American Historical Association.

We highlighted several of these projects below and spoke with graduate students involved to learn more about their experiences.



Scenes from "U-M History in the Public Service: A Vision for the Humanities PhD in the 21st Century." (Photos: Sean Carter)

Top: Ambassador Susan L. Ziadeh (left) and graduate student Pragya Kaul during a breakout session.

Middle: Professor Minayo Nasiali (standing; University of California, Los Angeles), panelist for "What I Wish I Had Known in Graduate School."

Bottom: Graduate students Mix Mann (left) and Eshe Sherley during a conference session.



Nicole Navarro U-M HistoryLabs Policing and Social Justice Lab

In 2018 and 2019, Nicole Navarro was the lab supervisor for the Policing and Social Justice (PSJ) Lab's undergraduate courses on the history of policing and police brutality in Detroit.

I taught students how to use digital mapping systems, like ArcGIS, StoryMaps, and Social Explorer, in order to visualize and analyze patterns of police brutality and violence leading to the development of two digital exhibitions: *Detroit Under Fire* (1957-1973) and *Crackdown* (1974-1993). My work with the PSJ Lab also led to my involvement with the Documenting Criminalization and Confinement research initiative and the Carceral State Project.

As a graduate student collaborator, I am currently working on developing a website and mapping project of all police killing based on the undergraduate research from the classes. I was surprised by how influential my involvement with the PSJ Lab would be in developing my teaching pedagogy and in shaping aspects of my dissertation. This experience allowed me to develop mentorship skills in the classroom through working in a truly collaborative environment with the undergraduates.

I was committed to public engagement before starting the program here, having worked at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and I am grateful for opportunities to continue and expand that work at U-M.



Detroit Under Fire home page. Visit the exhibition at policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire.

Daniela Sheinin Reverb Effect Podcast

Daniela Sheinin served as the Gerald Saxon Brown Digital Skills Intern for 2019-2020, producing seven episodes of the Reverb Effect podcast.

I had spent several months conducting oral history interviews for my dissertation, so I felt pretty comfortable speaking into a recorder and thought I might reasonably be able to learn audio production. It was a huge learning curve, but in the end it wasn't that hard. I had to learn the seemingly endless trial-and-error process of audio production, and how to be generous with myself and others when it didn't go perfectly. This was a very important lesson for me, as I imagine it would be for most graduate students—you just have to try something new. *Reverb Effect* is immensely collaborative, something I find generally useful in creative projects, and gives producers time to hone skills for which they may not otherwise have had time.

I'm grateful I've had the opportunity to work for three public engagement programs and feel not only much more prepared to tackle positions beyond academia for which I may not have felt qualified before, but it has also been incredibly valuable for my scholarship and teaching. Even my co-advisor confirmed my writing has become much more fluid and assertive, not unlike the podcast narratives I released.



Sheinin wrote and produced a *Reverb Effect* episode exploring the characteristics of President Donald Trump, sitcom character Archie Bunker, and their shared hometown: Queens, New York.



Alexander Clayton Michigan in the World

Alexander Clayton served as graduate supervisor for Mental Health at Michigan, the Michigan in the World (MITW) project for spring 2020.

As part of the MITW team, I helped lead a group of five undergraduate student fellows in their preparation of an online exhibit exploring the history of mental health at the University of Michigan. My role in the project included helping the fellows with their archival research, giving them advice on structuring their projects, and providing suggestions for their writing. I coordinated workshops with the Bentley's archivists and put together writing circles, hoping to emulate the in-person experience as much as possible. It could never replace encounters in the physical archive, but we tried to make the project as exploratory and collaborative as possible.

I came to Michigan after three years of working as an assistant curator of theatre and performance at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, as well as a handful of other paid and unpaid positions in museums and archives. My time in public history helped me build a professional specialism in the history of popular entertainment and its archival collections. I still turn to this knowledge today as I explore new sources, locations, and perspectives in my dissertation project. It has given me an awareness of historic collections and the various ways in which archives are formed (or not formed), something that is too rarely discussed in academia.



The MITW team (right) created an online exhibit that included the story of graduate student Robert Stacy, who was convicted of arson in the fire that destroyed Haven Hall (above) in 1950.



Taylor Sims Public Engagement and Professionalization Coordinator

Taylor Sims has recently taken on the position of public engagement and professionalization coordinator for 2020-21.

This position seemed like a good opportunity to lean into work I genuinely enjoy—working with graduate students across cohorts, connecting individuals and opportunities, and really just trying to make our program better. Better equipped to prepare students for whatever they hope to pursue beyond the PhD, better situated to responsibly engage the present, and overall better suited to the world we live in.

At its best, public engagement encourages us to think about our responsibilities as historians—where and how we engage, using our expertise and skills for the publics we hope to reach rather than ourselves. Like history as a discipline, ideally, these opportunities help us think beyond ourselves. Big and small, they prepare graduate students for careers both within and beyond academia, honing skills that may go uncultivated in a more traditional, straightforward PhD program trajectory. ■



Sims (left) moderated the "What I Wish I Had Known in Graduate School" panel at the October 2019 conference, "U-M History in the Public Service: A Vision for the Humanities PhD in the 21st Century."

LEARN
MORE!

Read more about the department's career development and public engagement projects on our website at lsa.umich.edu/history/history-at-work.

DETROIT INDUSTRY

THE DIA PARTNERS WITH U-M HISTORY
GRADUATE STUDENTS ON A VIRTUAL FIELD
TRIP FOR DIEGO RIVERA'S ICONIC MURALS

BY GREGORY PARKER

In early 1932, if you went looking for artist Diego Rivera, you might have found him on the production line of the Ford River Rouge Complex in Dearborn, Michigan.

He wasn't assembling front-end suspension parts or pouring molten steel into molds. Rather, he was roaming the megafactory, researching the mass production techniques for his latest commission: a series of murals depicting modern industry for the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Rivera and artist Frida Kahlo, recently married, journeyed to Detroit for the mural commission. Despite spending only a year in the city, they each left an indelible artistic legacy and completed some of their best-known works.

Eighty-eight years later, the History Department and the DIA are collaborating on a virtual field trip for *Detroit Industry*, the now-iconic murals Rivera painted in the museum's courtyard.

"This exciting partnership has been years in the making and will represent our very first HistoryLab explicitly designed to benefit K-12 school teachers and students across our region—and the wider world," said History Department Chair Jay Cook.

In January 2021 a class of graduate students will engage directly with the DIA to provide historical context and assets for the project, including photos and other media. The DIA will work with their vendor to incorporate these materials into a digital platform that will launch in the 2021-22 school year.

The project leverages the expertise of U-M History faculty and PhD students in the histories of labor, corporate capitalism, immigration, race and ethnicity, the city of Detroit, and 1930s politics and radicalism.

"For us, this is an ideal vehicle to place U-M History in the public service, simultaneously working to build transferable skills for our talented PhD students, while also creating something of great value for diverse communities beyond our own campus," said Cook.



Detroit Industry, Diego Rivera, Detroit Institute of Arts. (Photo: Gregory Parker)

"U-M graduate students are full-fledged researchers in the DIA's interpretive planning process," said Jason Gillespie, director of education programs at the museum. "The final product will be an innovative digital resource that will share *Detroit Industry* with teachers and students throughout Michigan and the nation."

History graduate students Irene Mora and Richard A. Bachmann spent the summer doing preliminary research for the project, which will contextualize this world-famous work of art within its home community. Their work will kick-start the project in January.

"We're seeing what's out there, undertaking the primary selection of materials for students taking the course, so they have something to work with right from the start," said Bachmann.

"It's important to emphasize the fact that this is a Detroit institution," said Mora. For her, the project also offers an

opportunity to bring Latinx history to a larger audience, as many schools ignore the topic.

"Folks don't know the long ties that Latinos/as have in Detroit," said Mora. "I view Diego's and Kahlo's art as a mark on the city. Through their art larger publics are informed of the long historical genealogy that Latinx communities have in Detroit."

Professors Anthony Mora and John Carson are the project's faculty directors. "Part of the learning experience for the graduate students is learning how to present concepts to a wide audience, from sophisticated high school students to something a fourth-grader can understand," said Carson.

This project is the latest History Department effort to diversify training for graduate students, preparing them for a variety of careers inside and outside of the academy. In 2019 the department launched

a HistoryLab partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum where graduate students work with museum professionals to curate online exhibits for educators using materials from the museum's archives.

Beyond the practical benefits for graduate students, programs like these bring benefits to the wider public.

"We have a unique opportunity to partner with the DIA's exceptional staff and collaborate on a digital history platform that will help make these iconic murals come alive for thousands of school kids who might not have the chance to interact with Rivera's work," said Cook.

"This project will ultimately give students a fun and stimulating introduction to the amazing stories that are within the Latinx community," said Anthony Mora. ■

“Profound Paradox”

Jennifer Dominique Jones is reshaping our understanding of Black liberal politics after World War II

By Gregory Parker

Professor Jennifer Dominique Jones is constructing a new framework for interpreting Black liberal politics after World War II. Focusing on the relationship between “Blackness” and “queerness,” her scholarship has profound consequences for our understanding of social justice activism in the past and present. Staffer Gregory Parker recently connected with Professor Jones to talk about her research and book project.

Can you tell me a little about *Queering the American Dilemma: Sexuality, Gender and African American Political Organizing, 1945-1993*?

Queering the American Dilemma argues for the mutually referential nature of “Blackness” and “queerness” as political concepts in the contest over the Black-white racial status quo in the half century after World War II. Its chapters follow these two concepts over six distinct historical moments, locating them in specific discursive spaces. My analysis homes in on African American mainstream liberal organizations, in order to elucidate how homosexuality (as same-sex sex and gender nonconformity was referred to), as well as opposition to it, was constitutive of Black liberal politics during this period. Through this means, I offer new interpretations about Black and gay political engagements and Black sexual politics while remaining attentive to the actions and discourses of two groups with whom Black political action was always in implicit conversation: white gay/lesbian politics, on the one hand, and conservative politics, on the other.

I argue that these material and rhetorical crossings facilitated a profound paradox: as Blackness became increasingly associated with heterosexuality while gay/lesbian political formations became racialized as white (a process deeply tied to local spatial contexts and organizational formations), these two groups became increasingly mutually referential in discourses of the national political sphere. Such bidirectional referentiality was not rooted in the language of shared or intersecting identities, but rather in the rhetoric of similar and/or shared estrangements—that is the condition of being marginalized and deemed non-normative. Identifying the origins of these shared estrangements is consequential for both African American and gay/lesbian/queer history, not only because it provides added texture to each group’s individual experience, but because it provides a broader framework and set of explanations for the manner in which increasing “gay clout” continued to refer and require Blackness as a touchstone.

You’re a historian living through a historical moment, and it also happens to be related to what you study. As you work on larger projects, are there ever moments when you see what’s happening now and say, “I’ve got to rethink that”? Does history ever change faster than you can write it?

For me, I think the question is less that history changes faster than we can write it and more that the questions a scholar asks or the implications of a line of inquiry may change during the writing process. As a graduate student, a particular set of presentist questions fueled my interest in the appearance of constructions of

same-sex intimacy and gender non-conformity within the modern civil rights movement and white supremacist responses to it: Where did comparisons between Black racial identities and LGBTQ+ identities emerge? Does returning to this period cast new light on the prevalent notion of ubiquitous Black homophobia? I completed my dissertation a month before the killing of Michael Brown and the visible emergence of what would come to be known as the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL). Since then, I have been struck by the alliances and tensions between an older cadre of Black politicians (many of whom embrace liberal policies and reform) and organizers associated with the M4BL, many of whom embrace a Black feminist radical tradition in which intersectional understanding of race, gender, class, and sexuality is central. This movement, along with other developments in my thinking, have shifted my line of inquiry somewhat.

The book, now, contextualizes these early twenty-first century tensions by revealing how Black liberal political organizations have long grappled with the institutionalization of heterosexuality as central to full citizenship and the ways in which political homophobia could be weaponized against supporters of racial equality or undertaken as a strategy to counter white supremacy. Calling our attention to the ways in which Black liberals deployed homophobic rhetoric does not legitimize or condone such action—rather it reveals how this group of historical actors (and their political descendants) continue to grapple with the long historical constructions of Black sexuality as deviant and the reverberations of what Margot Canaday calls “the straight state” as they sought empowerment during the last half of the twentieth century.

Can you talk about the challenges of archival work?

In my work, the archive is a site of ambivalence. On the one hand, it can be a site of violence and erasure, as information about gender-nonconforming and same-sex desiring individuals is either absent or pathologizing. However, it is also a site of possibility in which I have found shards of stories, experiences, and information in unexpected places. My own approach to archival research is incredibly capacious in that I consult as many collections as possible for shards of information that might allow me to tell a larger story. This often means looking in unexpected places for information (or what I call moving beyond the finding aid) and allowing intuition to guide my research. Once I find documents of interest, I employ various methods to analyze the documents, including reading against the grain and engaging in Black feminist speculation practices.

Since some of the people you study are still alive, are oral histories or interviews part of your work?

Oral histories are an important part of my scholarship, especially for the final chapters of the book and a new book project about African American migration to Michigan cities and towns along what would become Interstate 94. The ability to speak to some of the historical actors in my current study has been wonderful and incredibly enlightening. One aspect of this process that has struck me is how generous people have been with their time and memories—often offering up so much rich material that falls outside of the parameters of the book. I am still in the process of conducting interviews for *Queering the American Dilemma* and the new project. ■



THE NEW YORKER

WHEN MARIAN ANDERSON DEFIED THE NAZIS

By Kira Thurman
July 15, 2020

If Americans know one fact about the legendary African-American contralto **Marian Anderson**, it's that she sang in defiance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1939. When the Daughters of the American Revolution denied her request to perform in the D.A.R. Constitution Hall, in Washington, D.C., for racist reasons, Anderson picked up her musical scores and, instead, sang Schubert and African-American spirituals on the steps of the Memorial, to more than seventy-



At a time when many Black artists were fleeing Europe, the singer Marian Anderson chose to stay. Photograph from Everett Collection / Shutterstock

and people. But that performance was not Anderson's first in defying anti-Black racism in such a spectacular manner that it made international news. Throughout the nineteen-thirties, she defied down opposition in Nazi Germany and Fascist

"The lesson of Anderson's time in Europe is stunning in its simplicity and, for that reason, has been easy to dismiss. She showed up. Even under the threat of violence. Even with the shadow of Nazism looming over her like a dark cloud, she showed up."

Kira Thurman

Each year U-M History faculty appear in or write scores of articles for newspapers, magazines, and other media sources around the world. This is in addition to their online public engagement work: Professor Juan Cole's Informed Comment blog has a global readership and he counts more than 50,000 followers on Twitter.

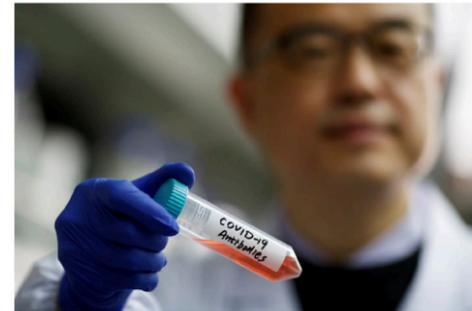
In July, Professor Kira Thurman wrote an article on singer Marian Anderson for the New Yorker. "As a historian committed to documenting Black lives in European spaces, it is imperative that I engage with the public to counter long-standing myths of European whiteness," said Thurman.

"Demonstrating to wide audiences that many of our notions of race and music stem from a greater transatlantic historical process is important if we want to better understand and even challenge so many assumptions and norms that societies continue to uphold today," said Thurman, whose "Was Beethoven Black?" Twitter thread has been retweeted more than 10,000 times. ■

The Washington Post

The scientific method can't save us from the coronavirus

What we need is problem-solving — creativity, flexibility and teamwork



Scientist Ling Zhong shows a tube with a solution containing covid-19 antibodies in his lab at Tsinghua University's Research Center for Public Health in Beijing on March 23. (Thomas Hsieh/Reuters)

By Henry M. Cowles

Henry M. Cowles is assistant professor of history at the University of Michigan. He is the author of *Scientific Method: An Evolution of Thinking from Darwin to Dewey* (Harvard, 2020).

April 23, 2020 at 7:32 a.m. EDT

The scientific method can't save us — because it doesn't exist.

"If science saves us, though, it will be because it lacks a single method. The novel coronavirus causing the current crisis presents a multidimensional challenge—to personal, public, economic and mental health. There is no single tool with which to confront such a threat; what we need is a vast tool kit."

Henry M. Cowles

The Washington Post

The policy mistakes from the 1990s that have made covid-19 worse

Being tough on crime and cutting benefits from the poor left millions more susceptible to disease



Senia Murcutt, a custody assistant, is pictured at the Twin Towers jail in Los Angeles on April 16. Nationwide, first responders who've recovered 19 have begun returning to jobs that put them back on the front lines of the fight against the coronavirus. (Chris Carlson/AP)

By Heather Ann Thompson

A professor at the University of Michigan, Heather Ann Thompson is a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and author of "Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy" and "Whose Detroit? Labor, and Race in a Modern American City."

May 4, 2020 at 6:00 a.m. EDT

India Porter is scared. A tiny woman who stands barely five feet tall, she is confined to the Valley Correctional Facility, where, she explains, "the officers are stressed, and my peers are



"We might have been spared so much of this recent trauma altogether if we had simply paid closer attention to what was happening in the nation's prisons, in its poorest neighborhoods and in the halls of Congress, in the 1990s."

Heather Ann Thompson

THE CONVERSATION

THE CONVERSATION

COVID-19 Arts Culture Economy Business Education Environment Energy Ethics Religion Health Politics Society Science Technology

2020 uprisings, unprecedented in scope, join a long river of struggle in America

June 7, 2020 10:45am EDT

The river was the metaphor that best captured "the long, continuous movement" of the black freedom struggle for theologian, historian and civil rights activist Vincent Harding. Harding, who had served as a speechwriter for Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., wrote in his groundbreaking 1981 study of African-American history, "There is a River. The Black Struggle for Freedom in America" that the freedom struggle was "sometimes powerful, tumultuous, rolling with life; at other times meandering and turgid."

Author: Matthew Countryman, Professor of History and African American Studies, University of Michigan

Disclosure statement: Matthew Countryman does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive any financial benefit from any company or organization that would benefit from this article.



"More than the number and size of the protests, though, what makes the 2020 uprisings unprecedented are the ways that they have pulled together multiple currents within the US protest tradition into a mighty river of demand for fundamental change in American society."

Matthew Countryman

The Washington Post

What the older generations owe the young 50 years after the first Earth Day

Young people, who will suffer the consequences of inaction, are leading the charge for climate action.



More than 20,000 mostly young people gathered on a hilltop at Philadelphia's Fairmount Park on April 23, 1970, to celebrate Earth Day. (AP)

By Matthew D. Lassiter

Matthew D. Lassiter is professor of history and director of the Environmental Justice History Lab at the University of Michigan and the co-editor, along with eight undergraduates, of "Earth a Chance: Environmental Activism in Michigan."

April 22, 2020 at 6:00 a.m. EDT

"Back in 1970, elementary and high school students from a racially and economically diverse spectrum of American communities made up the largest single group of participants in the first Earth Day on April 22."

Matthew Lassiter



Los Angeles Times

Opinion: The link between anti-Black racism and Trump's 'kung flu' comment



President Trump speaks during a campaign rally at the BOK Center Saturday in Tulsa, Okla. (Evan Vucci / Associated Press)

By SEWELL CHAN | EDITOR OF THE EDITORIAL PAGES

JUNE 22, 2020 | 4:26 PM

American scholar Daniel J. Boorstin coined the term "pseudo-event" to describe a staged event designed as a public relations tactic in the field of public relations: Saying or doing something to generate media attention and publicity.



"History shows us that the way we talk about scientific phenomena can lead to the dehumanization of minority groups."

Ian Shin

The Guardian

'The worshipping of whiteness': why racist symbols persist in America

Tributes to a checkered past exist all over the US, even as Confederate statues are removed and brands reconsider racial stereotypes



Abolitionist Harriet Tubman was supposed to supplant Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill. Then came the Trump administration. Photograph: AP

Alexandra Villarreal in New York

Tue 30 Jun 2020 04:00 EDT

In life, the seventh US president, Andrew Jackson, accrued their wealth at the expense of hundreds of thousands of African Americans. Now, even in death, Jackson still wields the power of the dollar. Americans whenever they pull a \$20 bill from their wallets are



"I hope at least that the questioning that has started with monuments, because they're visible, because they're large, and because they're easy to remove, will continue to happen as we start to re-evaluate the symbols on money, on our stamps."

Alvita Akiboh

“Only Connect!”

Eisenberg Institute programming is going remote,
but the medium is not necessarily the message

By Mrinalini Sinha

I have been thinking a lot lately about E.M. Forster’s famous injunction in *Howard’s End*: “Only connect!” Though something of a cliché, his various meditations on the meaning of human connections nevertheless seem resonant to me in these virus-haunted times.

Re-reading his dystopian and prescient short story, “The Machine Stops,” which anticipates in many details our own pandemic times, I am struck by a central tension. The story is set in a universe of self-isolated individuals who experience the world and communicate with other human beings only via a machine until one day the machine begins to malfunction. One of the two main characters of the story, Vashti, revels in the fact that the machine allows her to reach out to vast numbers of individuals in far-away lands who share her obscure interests; but eventually her son, Kuno, who is a rebel against machine-mediated experiences, makes her realize the machine provides no substitute for direct human connections. In the time before COVID, I might not have gotten much past the story’s avowed anti-technological stance.

Today I read the story differently. The machinic mediations of Zoom have now become a part of our lives, but not so much to supplant as to sustain existing connections. We Zoom to keep up with our relationships at a time when in-person meetings can be dangerous. And we Zoom because through physically distancing we also affirm what we owe to other people and to society. Both these objectives would fall well within what Forster would have considered to be meaningful human connections. Maybe the medium, after all, is not always the message.

This affirmation of a mediated community guides the transition of taking the Eisenberg Institute completely online for the first time this

fall. We recognize that Zoom will bring some significant changes in our format; but we hope to keep the essentials the same. Forced to think what for me constitutes the essence of the Eisenberg Institute, I found it can be summed up in one word: connections.

As in the historian Sanjay Subramanyam’s notion of “connected histories,” the Eisenberg Institute invites us to explore connections across periods, geographies, methodologies, and multilingual archives. It is something of a paradox that even violently antagonistic histories are intertwined, so this linking up of histories is not always without controversy. In addition, the institute creates the disciplinary possibilities for seeing the potential interconnections between issues—between, say, the problem of over-policing and neoliberal policies or between individual stories and broader historical narratives, which are the preconditions for all radical knowledge. The Eisenberg Institute almost uniquely fosters connections across disciplines, fields, and subfields, and across methodological inclinations. And so we are enabled to connect the past and the present and see both afresh.

To return to the connections of sociability: The Eisenberg Institute draws attention to the connections that tie the university to society, faculty to graduate students, scholars to the public, and Ann Arbor to the world. We begin to imagine, with a renewed sophistication, actually habitable communities.

The imperative to connect will guide the Eisenberg Institute as we explore the theme of “Chaos and Clamor” in the fall term and work with an unthemed program in the winter term. While pursuing our work this year, in greatly altered circumstances, we could do worse than to keep the challenge of creating meaningful connections uppermost in our minds. As history impinges on us, we are well positioned to articulate intellectual links and jolting collisions between seemingly discrete histories and issues. ■

Mrinalini Sinha is Alice Freeman Palmer Professor of History and director of the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies.

ALUMNI UPDATES

Craig Barker (BA 2000) was honored as the 2018-19 Livonia Public Schools High School Educator of the Year and the Annette and Jim McConnell Michigan High School History Teacher of the Year.

Bruce Boyce (BA 1984) is an educational specialist and interpretive guide at Xhibits AZ, working on exhibits highlighting history, culture, and science. He is also the author of the history blog *I Take History with My Coffee* (itakehistory.wixsite.com/website)

Francis G. Couvares (PhD 1980) continues as E. Dwight Salmon Professor of History and American Studies at Amherst College. He is working on a new edition of *Interpretations of American History*, this time as sole author.

Sara Fitzgerald (BA 1973) published *Conquering Heroines: How Women Fought Sex Bias at Michigan and Paved the Way for Title IX* (University of Michigan Press, 2020) and *The Poet’s Girl* (Thought Catalog Books, 2020), a novel about Emily Hale, T.S. Eliot’s first love and longtime muse.

Gary D. Grant (BA 1980) is engaged in a thriving real estate development business and law practice in the New Jersey and New York areas.

Charles Hayden (BA 1962) is a retired criminal court judge (Superior Court) for the State of California.

Jennifer Holland (BA 2003), assistant professor of history at the University of Oklahoma, published her first book, *Tiny You: A Western History of the Anti-Abortion Movement* (University of California Press, 2020).

Brian Igoe (BA 2010) was appointed assistant director of admissions at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance.

Courtney Janes (BA 2002) and two colleagues won the Kennedy Center’s Israeli Lounge redesign competition. Janes’s design team proposed a jewel box-like concept that is based on the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel.

Jennifer (Skomer) Levasseur (BA 1999) published her book *Through Astronaut Eyes: Photographing Early Human Spaceflight* with Purdue University Press in 2020. Dr. Levasseur serves as the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum’s curator of the Space Shuttle, International Space Station, and contemporary spaceflight programs.

Andrea Maines (BA 1991) is currently teaching advanced placement world history at Chelsea High School in Chelsea, Michigan.

Bethany Nagle (BA 2013) recently accepted a full-time position with the Education Initiatives team for the Levine Institute for Holocaust Education at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Donn Neal (PhD 1973) continues to work in several history-related roles, including archivist at his church and serving on the board for the Burwell-Morgan Mill, a museum in Millwood, Virginia.

Mary Beth Norton (BA 1964) retired in 2018 after 49 years of university teaching, 47 of them at Cornell University. In February 2020, Alfred A. Knopf published her latest book, *1774: The Long Year of Revolution*.

Lisa Parisi (MA 2013) is graduate program coordinator for the Department of and Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, working with graduate students and assisting them as they progress toward their degree requirements.

James I. Singer (BA 1972) is co-author of “Reckoning in Creve Coeur: Venable Park” for *Gateway*, the Missouri Historical Society’s magazine (api.mohistory.org/files/files/gateway-singer.pdf). The article recounts the story of the Venables, an African American family who moved to St. Louis’s Creve Coeur suburb and faced fierce resistance by white neighbors.

Robert Thurston (PhD 1980), emeritus professor of history at Miami University, is managing partner of Oxford Coffee Company. Among his new publications is “Violence toward Heretics and Witches” in the *Cambridge World History of Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) and “Can the Coffee Crisis Be Fixed? The Price of Coffee, History and the Situation Today” in *Roast* magazine (March/April 2020).

In Memoriam

John Rozett (PhD 1974) passed away in Albany, New York, in July 2020. He was 77. John is survived by his wife, two sons, and three granddaughters. His dissertation on voting behavior in Illinois in the first half of the nineteenth century was one of the earliest studies to employ quantitative methodology in the field of American history. After Ann Arbor, John worked as political analyst at the New York State Assembly for more than three decades. ■



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PhD alums (left to right) Rebekah E. Pite, Parna Sengupta, Minayo Nasiali, and Tamar Carroll at the November 2019 conference, "U-M History in the Public Service: A Vision for the Humanities PhD in the 21st Century." (Photo: Sean Carter)