

FALL 2022

HISTORY MATTERS



M | HISTORY



FROM THE CHAIR

The summer months afforded me with a number of unique opportunities to reflect on the power of history. In July I participated in one of the Detroit River Story Lab's educational sails. Designed to connect young people from the Metro Detroit area with the river that has defined so much of the city's history, these summer excursions feature talks and workshops on ecology and environmental sustainability, economic and cultural development, and—in my case—the history of the Underground Railroad, abolition, and freedom seeking along the “fluid frontier” between Detroit and Canada. For the thousands of self-emancipated African Americans who made their way from slavery in the United States to freedom in Canada, and for the thousands of fellow Americans who conducted and supported them, Detroit—code-named “Midnight”—and the river were conduits to freedom, self-determination, and community building in new lands.

Talking about this history with high school students on a schooner in the middle of the Detroit River was a potent reminder of how exploration of the past can open up new ways of seeing, understanding, and in some circumstances navigating and enduring the present. We live in one of those moments when and where the practice of history—in all forms of our research and our pedagogy—feels more vital, urgent, and contested than ever. Our own Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies will tackle this issue head-on this year with its “Against History” theme (see page 20).

As a scholar I have always been drawn to public history, particularly when done in conjunction with community-based partners who are personally invested in how historical narratives are co-created and disseminated. This is swiftly becoming a hallmark of part of what we do at U-M History as we continue to excel across multiple domains. In this issue of *History Matters*, you can learn about Professor Stephen Berrey's efforts to document sundown towns (page 16) and Professor Deirdre de la Cruz's leadership in addressing harmful aspects of U-M's Philippine collections (page 6). And in June the College of LSA's Meet the Moment Research Initiative announced a \$2 million grant for the Carceral State Program (CSP), which counts U-M History faculty Heather Ann Thompson and Matthew Lassiter among its

leadership. We are delighted that the CSP is among one of the four projects funded in this college-wide initiative.

My own involvement in the Detroit River Story Lab is part of our embrace of public history and public engagement, which I invite you to explore in more depth on our new U-M History Showcase website (see page 4). With the tagline “U-M History is engaged with the world,” this new addition to our History at Work footprint showcases the many ways in which our faculty and students—both graduate and undergraduate—are making an impact far beyond the classroom and campus by sharing cutting-edge, interdisciplinary research with audiences and partners across the globe.

We want to continue to engage the world as we reconnect with each other. The pandemic is far from over and we will likely dwell in the long tail of COVID for years to come. Mindful of the need to continue to care for vulnerable members of our community, we are planning for an in-person academic year and a re-engagement with the life of the campus and our department. This has already begun, with our first in-person commencement in two years. On April 29 we gathered together to celebrate the achievements of 125 graduating seniors (page 23) and six newly minted PhDs and to welcome them into our ever-expanding alumni network.

If your journeys carry you back to Ann Arbor I hope you'll stop by our Tisch Hall offices. Wherever you are, I invite you to stay connected as we navigate the ebbs and flows of our world—and the myriad ways that history matters.

Warm Regards,

Angela D. Dillard
Department Chair
Richard A. Meisler Collegiate Professor of Afroamerican & African Studies, History, and in the Residential College



Detroit River Story Lab Skiff and Schooner program.
(Angela D. Dillard)

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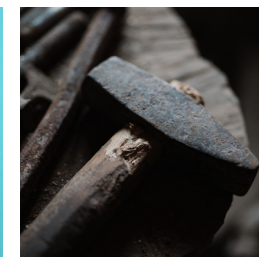
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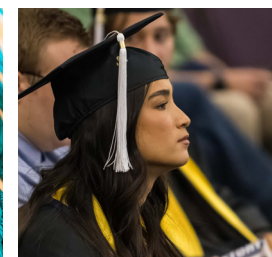
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CLASS OF
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SNAPSHOTS



U-M History Welcomes New Faculty Members

Carina Ray joins U-M History as an associate professor and Bentley Chair in African History. Ray specializes West African and Black Atlantic history. Her book, *Crossing the Color Line: Race, Sex, and the Contested Politics of Colonialism in Ghana* (Ohio University Press), won the AHA/ASALH Wesley-Logan Prize for African Diaspora History. She earned her PhD from Cornell University and previously taught at Brandeis University.

Yanay Israeli joins U-M History as assistant professor with a joint appointment in Judaic Studies. His work centers on the social and legal history of the Iberian world between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Israeli earned his PhD from the University of Michigan Department of History and previously taught at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Sanne Ravensbergen joins U-M History as assistant professor with a joint appointment in the International Institute. She studies the cultural history of law, and her current work focuses on colonial legal spaces in the nineteenth-century Dutch empire. Ravensbergen earned her PhD from Leiden University and previously taught at Leiden’s Institute for History.

Department Launches U-M History Showcase

U-M History is making an impact beyond campus, and in May the department unveiled a new site for collecting, publicizing, and hosting the diverse public engagement activities pursued by its faculty and students. The project was developed in collaboration with LSA Technology Services and U-M Library. Visit the showcase and check out the department’s latest projects—from episodes of *Reverb Effect* to online exhibits—using the QR code (right) or at digitalscholarship.umich.edu/lsa-history/.

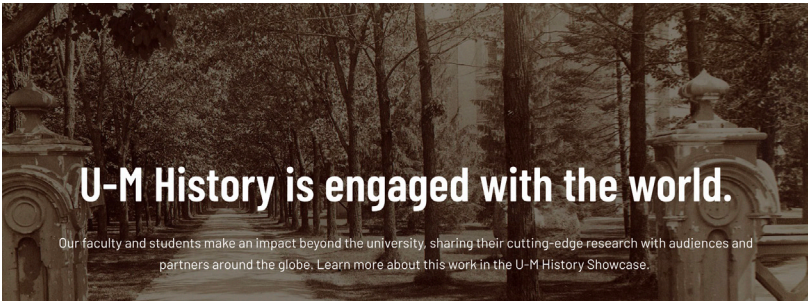
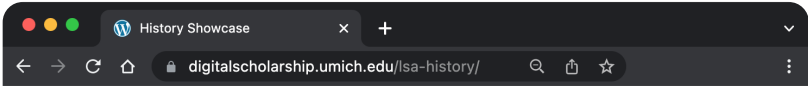


Exhibit Explores Black Community Building in Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor

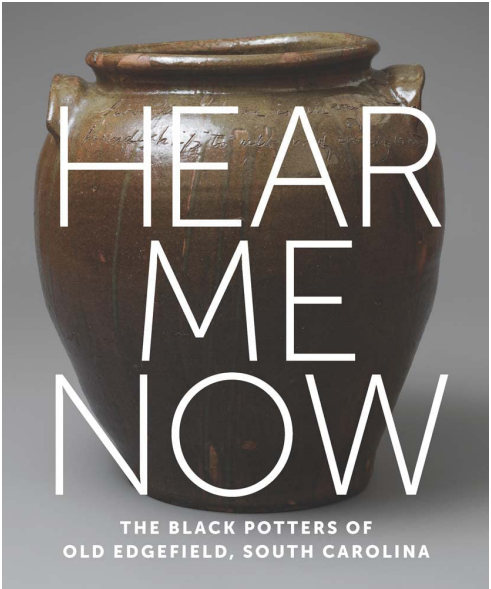
Professor **Jennifer Dominique Jones**, graduate student **Eshe Sherley**, and five undergraduate fellows collaborated with the Bentley Historical Library to create the web exhibit, “Hold Me Up: Narrative Histories of Black Community Building in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, 1920s-1970s.”

The undergraduate fellows—**Krista Albertins**, **Isabella Buzynski**, **Paige Hodder**, **Miriam Saperstein**, and **Bennett Walling**—each focused on an aspect of Black communal, institutional, and political life. Link to this latest iteration of the Michigan in the World program using the QR code (right) or at myumi.ch/e6jq3.



Jason Young Co-Curates Met Exhibit on African American Potters

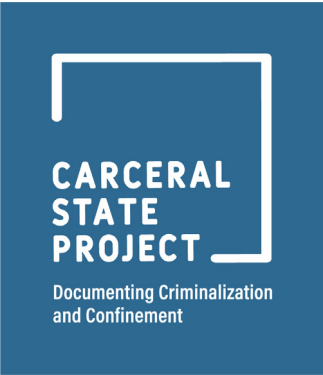
On September 9, 2022, New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art will debut *Hear Me Now: The Black Potters of Old Edgefield, South Carolina*. U-M History Professor **Jason Young** curated the project with Adrienne Spinozzi (Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Ethan Lasser (Museum of Fine Arts). *Hear Me Now* features approximately 50 ceramic objects that, according to the exhibition description, “testify to the lived experiences, artistic agency, and material knowledge of enslaved peoples.” It will travel to the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston; March 6-July 9, 2023), the University of Michigan Museum of Art (August 26, 2023-January 7, 2024), and the High Museum of Art (Atlanta; February 16-May 12, 2024).



THE BLACK POTTERS OF OLD EDGEFIELD, SOUTH CAROLINA

Carceral State Project Wins \$2 Million Grant

The Carceral State Project—lead in part by U-M History faculty **Heather Ann Thompson** and **Matthew Lassiter**—received a \$2 million grant as part of the College of LSA’s Meet the Moment initiative, a new program that “addresses today’s biggest challenges, including social justice and environmental issues, through liberal arts research and interdisciplinary collaboration.” Learn more about the project using the QR code (right) or at sites.lsa.umich.edu/dcc-project.





Decolonizing Collections

By Gregory Parker

Scholars, artists, archivists, and community members team up to address harmful aspects of U-M's Philippine collections

In May, three artists—two from Brooklyn, one from St. Louis—converged upon Ann Arbor to do what historians usually do. They spent time in the archives.

Maia Cruz Palileo, Francis Estrada, and Janna Añonuevo Langholz were here for a two-week residency. But they weren't here to do research in the traditional sense. They were here to interpret U-M's extensive Philippine collections: thousands of mammal specimens, ethnographic objects, historic photographs, herbarium specimens, and even human remains collected by the university during the Philippine's colonial era.

The artist residency came at the end of the first year of ReConnect/ReCollect, a project aiming to assess the scope of U-M's Philippine collections, determine the harm caused, and develop a model for reparation while involving members of the Philippine diaspora in the endeavor.

Without a time machine, it's impossible to fully fix this. But ReConnect/ReCollect is exploring what is possible. During their residency, artist Janna Añonuevo Langholz learned about a scale model of a Philippine house at U-M's Museum of Anthropological Archaeology. And while at the Bentley Historical Library, they found a postcard of a nipa palm, the same material that would have been used to construct the house. They made a large print of the postcard, which they used as a backdrop to photograph the model house, along with animal figurines dating to 200 BCE. The resulting photo—with some artistic license—recontextualizes the house. It's no longer disembodied from the environment in which it would have existed.

The residency will fuel the artists' work for the indefinite future. "Bringing in artists—this work doesn't stay here," said Langholz at a public roundtable. "Our work is seen by the public."

U-M's Philippine collections are among the largest in North America, and they bolstered the reputation of the university's museums, academic departments, and archives. But because they were collected in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the Philippines was first a Spanish colony and later an American one, the process was unequal and extractive.

"Archival and museum collections don't just magically materialize in an institution," said Deirdre de la Cruz, co-director of ReConnect/

ReCollect and an associate professor in the Departments of History and Asian Languages and Cultures.

"From the moment a document, photograph, or artifact is acquired or produced, there is a process of filtering, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing that takes place in the effort to institutionally organize that item in a collection."

At the university, most of the Philippine collections are listed first under the name of the faculty member who procured them and then by discipline.

"When it comes to colonial collections, this process inevitably results in the erasure of local or indigenous identities, meanings, languages and values—and most significantly, in the erasure of local and indigenous peoples themselves," said de la Cruz.

The result can be inaccurate or even offensive descriptions. It also obscures the mechanisms that made these collections possible in the first place: the colonial aspirations of the United States and U-M's complicity in this imperial project.

De la Cruz and Ricky Punzalan, an associate professor in the School of Information, lead the ReConnect/ReCollect team, composed of nearly two dozen scholars, archivists, artists, and community activists. The multi-year program is supported by a \$500,000 grant from U-M's Humanities Collaboratory.

The project has been collaborative from the start. "The Filipino/Filipinx communities are our primary publics," said Punzalan.

Last spring and summer the team convened a series of roundtables and listening sessions with stakeholders to help determine the shape of the two-year program. It was at one of those sessions—



Left: Artist Maia Cruz Palileo in the William L. Clements Library. Right: ReConnect/ReCollect co-directors Ricky Punzalan (left) and Deirdre de la Cruz. (Jeffrey Smith, U-M School of Information)



Artist Janna Añonuevo Langholz (left) and project co-director Ricky Punzalan in the William M. Clements Library. (Jeffrey Smith, U-M School of Information)

which garnered input from scholars, cultural heritage workers, archivists, activists, and Filipino community members—where the artist residency idea first took root.

“We love our listening sessions because so far they have given us a lot of creative and engaging ideas. There is indeed wisdom in our communities,” said Punzalan.

At the same time, Punzalan recognizes the challenges of this collaborative approach. “The Filipino community is not a monolith, so it is often the case that we hear disagreements or conflicting ideas.”

Punzalan also stressed the importance of proactive outreach. “We cannot always expect that community members will come to the university and participate in events and dialogues,” he said. “Sometimes we need to go to community events and be present.”

In June, ReConnect/ReCollect participated in the 2022 Kalayaan Celebration, an annual commemoration of Philippine independence held in Warren, Michigan, and coordinated by the Filipino American Community Council of Michigan.

“During the event, we talked with scores of visitors about ReConnect/ReCollect’s mission and highlighted some of the items in the collections using postcards, posters, and a matching game,” said Robert Diaz, a ReConnect/ReCollect team member and U-M History graduate student.

“We want to be good cultural and historical stewards of these collections and truly collaborate with individuals interested in them.

This can only happen when we actively engage with the public in settings like Kalayaan,” said Diaz.

This year, the team will build upon its community engagement work, hosting a series of open houses of the collections for members of the Filipino community. And they will continue their work assessing the scope of the vast Philippine collections, developing a “lexicon of harm” that will guide how the group creates or updates descriptions of the collections, like those contained in finding aids.

“A lot of Philippine materials in our collections haven’t even been described yet, which is of course the most fundamental step in making accessible collections,” said de la Cruz.

The team’s most delicate, and potentially controversial, work involves addressing the ethical and culturally appropriate stewardship of the Philippine human remains in U-M’s collection. “We must proceed with extreme care. Even the most basic question of who should participate in this conversation is not necessarily obvious,” said de la Cruz.

“We have some culturally sensitive items in our collection and we don’t want those to be just openly accessible without the full context of their creation and acquisition,” said Punzalan.

ReConnect/ReCollect will summarize their efforts in a toolkit that documents their activities but also provides a set of best practices for similar efforts.

“We’re thinking of a resource-rich site for other institutions interested in culturally appropriate and historically specific reparative approaches to Philippine collections,” said de la Cruz.

“I want the project to ultimately be able to make tangible recommendations around what would constitute accessibility of our collections here at the university,” said Punzalan. “For me, the project has always been centered around respectful and meaningful public engagement and access.” ■

ALUMNI PROFILE

The Road to Wellington

Matthew Woodbury (PhD 2018) lives in New Zealand, where he is senior historian for the Te Arawhiti—also known as the Office for Māori Crown Relations. Elizabeth Collins caught up with him to talk about his path from Ann Arbor to Wellington.

What inspired you to go into a PhD program in history?

I’ve always loved learning about the past and talking about how we got to be where we are. In college, when I found out I also liked archival research, I saw the PhD as a pathway to becoming a professor.

Can you tell us a bit about your dissertation?

At the core of my project was a question about the ethics of government. My research looked at how colonial administrators in New Zealand thought about indigenous Māori communities in the mid-1800s. I wanted to show how changes in New Zealand’s economic, political, and social circumstances made government programs targeted toward Māori—ones that were described as “humanitarian”—increasingly coercive and controlling.

What kind of work do you do on a day-to-day basis?

Over the course of a week I might meet with Māori communities to discuss their aspirations for how the Crown could acknowledge historic breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, research the history of a contentious site that is being considered as redress for a breach, or draft a briefing to the government minister responsible for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations.

How have your PhD studies and research helped prepare you for this position?

At the core of my work is identifying, interpreting, and conveying complex information to very different audiences. The PhD allowed me to develop the research and communication skills I rely on everyday—knowing how to create and deliver a research program, comfort with synthesizing mountains of sources, and experience with presenting conclusions in a variety of forms.

Your work involves a fair amount of public outreach. What types of challenges do you encounter as a historian engaging in current affairs?

Treaty settlements are a lightning rod for big questions about colonization. It can be hard to reduce history’s complexity and



Matthew Woodbury at a wharenui (meeting house) in Mōrero Marae, Taumarunui. (Matthew Woodbury)

contingency into bite-sized pieces that will fit in reports, speeches, or news briefings. As a public servant I also have to be mindful about how I refer to ongoing work as we are responsible to the government of the day. When thinking about thorny issues, my office has a saying—“What would that look like on the front page of the *Dominion Post*?”—which reminds us that public perception can be as important as the actual content of a decision.

What advice would you give to history PhD students who might be interested in a career beyond academia?

I found it helpful to put some thought into what aspects of academia I found energizing—for me it was collaboration, evidence-based writing, and trying to make a positive change—and seek out opportunities to explore what those “likes” looked like in settings beyond the academy. PhD students are smart, committed, and capable people, and U-M has the resources to explore all kinds of pathways. ■

**Learn more about
ReConnect/ReCollect**

reconnect-recollect.com



Drafting History

How do historians work with journalists to provide essential context to current events?

By Elizabeth Collins

Writing history takes time. But the work of journalists is, fundamentally, *news*, and therefore time-sensitive. Professor Ronald G. Suny took more than 30 years to complete his biography, *Stalin: Passage to Revolution*. When a news story breaks, a reporter may only have a matter of hours to gather their sources—including a soundbite from a historian.

"In several cases I've had journalists reach out, conduct an interview, and publish an article all within the space of 24 hours," Ian Shin, assistant professor of History, described. "The pace they work is vastly different from what we are generally used to as academics, and can feel quite disruptive to the ways we typically prepare to share our scholarship."

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, Professor Pamela Ballinger has been interviewed by the *Christian Science Monitor*—explaining the legacy of the Iron Curtain. Professor Jeffrey Veidlinger has been interviewed by the *Guardian* and written an article for the *Tablet* on anti-Jewish massacres in the area. And Suny has written an article for the *Conversation* correcting misunderstandings about Ukrainian-Russian history that has been shared by *PBS NewsHour*.

U-M History faculty are regular contributors to all manner of local, national, and international news outlets—helping journalists create that first "draft" of history. Their insight not only contributes to the credibility of news outlets, but it makes their own work—typically bound in the ivory tower—more accessible to all.

But how does a historian prepare to translate their scholarship into news-for-the-masses?

Faculty schedules are already packed with research, teaching, and service. So when an email comes in from a journalist, they must first decide if a story is an appropriate match, and whether or not they have the time to participate.

When Professor Hitomi Tonomura was contacted by a writer for the *Detroit News* about a story on the re-branding of "Asian" carp, she quickly knew this was not a good fit. "I don't know a thing about 'Asian' carp, although I always thought it a bad name," she said.

Another time, Tonomura recalled, the subject matter was more appropriate, "but they

wanted the response within a few hours, and it was impossible for me because I was teaching a class during those few hours."

When it all works out and an interview is scheduled, however, preparation is important.

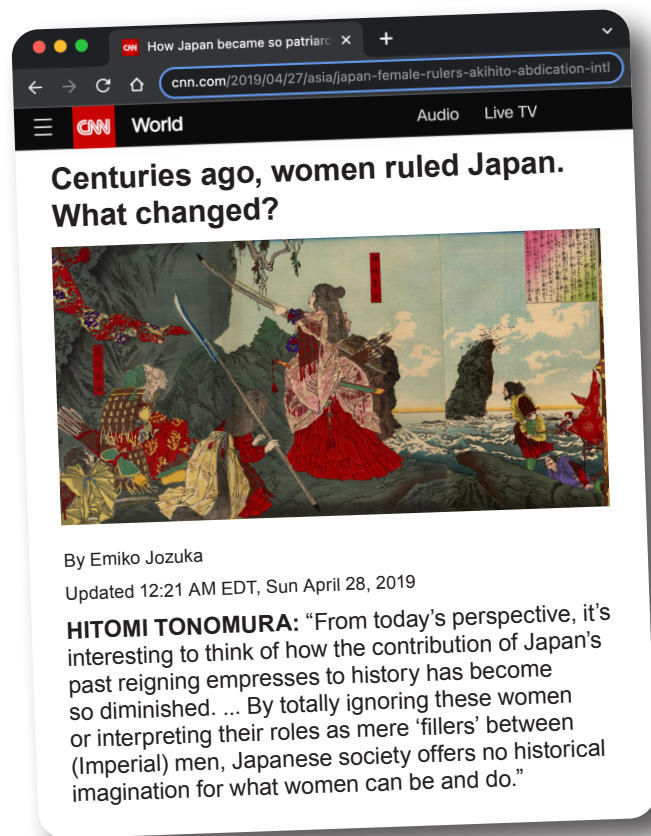
Kira Thurman, an associate professor in History and German, explained that how you prepare really depends on the nature of the interview. "If it's a live interview, I feel like I have to formulate my sentences very carefully, because there's no room for edits. If it's not a live interview then I can be a little bit more chatty and repeat things or come back to a question again."

Either way, Thurman said, she gives herself no more than an hour to review scholarship pertinent to the topic, including primary sources like memoirs, newspaper clippings, and photographs.

Shin does the same, and noted that he will have key statistics and facts ready so that he can cite them accurately. He added, "I also reflect on what takeaways I wish to convey about the topic I'm being asked to speak on, so that during the course of the interview I am able to steer the conversation back to those key points."

In any interview there's the potential for a disconnect between what the journalist has in mind for their story and what the historian knows and is willing to put forward.





On one occasion Tonomura, an expert in premodern Japan, was interviewed for a story on samurai. But she withdrew her appearance. “I just could not get them to see things outside of the stereotyped image of the samurai,” she said. “They knew what they wanted but I wasn’t giving it to them.”

Professor Alexandra Minna Stern described the worst-case scenario: “A journalist will rely on the painstaking research of historians to spin a topic into a digestible form, land a big book contract with a trade publisher, and give the impression that the topic or analysis is completely original.”

But these instances are rare. More often than not the relationships built between historians and journalists are positive. And in the wake of the 2016 election, this mutual trust is vital.

“Many historians that I know felt a new sense of urgency to figure out how to explain to the public the importance of historical thinking,” Thurman said. “It wasn’t that there was necessarily an uptick in historians working with journalists so much as historians in general wrestling with this question of how to explain our work to the public in such a way that it can have an impact.”

One way that historians are able to reach a public audience without the direct aid of a journalist is through writing their own editorials.

In the past year U-M History faculty have published pieces in the *New York Times*, *Boston Review*, *Washington Post*, and more.

Thurman’s article, “When Classical Music Was an Alibi,” co-written with Emily Richmond

Pollock, was published on April 15. “I have found it much more meaningful and much more satisfying to write a piece for the *New York Times* instead of being interviewed by them,” she said. “Because then you can make sure that what you want to say comes out how you want to say it and in the order that you would like to present your argument.”

No matter the form of the outreach—op-ed, full interview, or even just a soundbite—being able to communicate with public audiences in a meaningful way is essential.

“There’s a way that you can present historically informed research and ideas quickly and efficiently without watering down the content,” Thurman said.

“The way historians practice job interviews when they go on the job market—it’s a similar skill, but you just have to practice and practice and practice.”

It’s worth the practice when the payoff is a better-informed public.

In light of anti-Asian discrimination and violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, Shin noted that journalists have been very eager to seek out historians and other academic experts to help contextualize the moment.

“I’ve also worked with staff from the Office of the Vice President for Communications to put together a ‘Faculty Q&A’ about anti-Asian hate and the COVID-19 pandemic, which their office then used to set up interviews with journalists writing about the topic.”

When the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, Stern said that, “Gender and health historians have been providing absolutely critical context to trace shifting patterns of the criminalization and decriminalization of abortion.”

By continuing to provide their perspectives through popular news outlets, U-M historians are proving every day that history matters. And while it might move a bit slow, the repercussions are as loud and relevant as ever. ■



ALUMNI PROFILE

Telling the Right Story

After graduating, Janette Ciborowski (BA 2002) earned a master’s in broadcast journalism, spent a decade in television, and now is a senior public relations manager at technology giant NVIDIA, working in enterprise artificial intelligence.

Gregory Parker connected with her to learn how she’s used her U-M History degree to develop a career in media and communications.

Why did you major in history?

I majored in history because there’s vast power and potential in truly understanding our collective past. I grew up in Houston and always knew there was so much more out there in the world—history seemed like the perfect way to dive in. I also loved writing and reading and was looking for a way to fuse those together.

Can you tell us about a favorite U-M History class?

“America and the Middle East” with Juan Cole. This was excellent as 9/11 had just happened. Being able to immediately tap into the expertise of U-M faculty helped enrich my understanding of a rapidly evolving situation with perspective and nuance.

Can you tell us a little about your career path?

Storytelling has always been at my core. I’m a natural storyteller and being raised in the South certainly gave me a great foundation, as some of the best storytellers are from there. I developed the ability to ask the right questions while pursuing my history degree, which allows me to break apart complex issues correctly.

I started in newspapers. Journalists have always had the unique opportunity to be the point of record for the events of the day. Both newspaper and broadcast journalists draw upon their knowledge of the area and its community and conflict, so a background in history is ideal.

Transitioning to technology public relations was a natural move. Technology has always fascinated me, and I was drawn to those stories during my time in news. Tech companies are shaping the present and the future. Because technology is so fast moving, it’s crucial to be able to aggregate multiple sources and streams of information simultaneously and produce a cohesive story. People who have spent time in newsrooms understand the pressure of a deadline more than most and are able to stay steady during a crisis.

How has your background in history helped you at work?

As a journalist, you’ll often be assigned a story that you might not have a great deal of knowledge about. This is where the ability to



research and synthesize information quickly and accurately is paramount. As a newscast producer, you spent a lot of time thinking about the stories that make the newscast, the flow, transitions, and timing. A background in history is the perfect accompaniment to this work.

How do you stay engaged with history?

Documentaries are the easiest way for me to stay connected with the past. The visual medium is a powerful way to tell a great story and engage the audience.

I also love a good historical read or autobiography, and I make it a point to visit a history museum when I’m in a new town to help get a feel of the location and its community. I want to understand more about where I’m visiting—what makes it tick.

What advice do you have for current U-M History students who might want to pursue careers in communications and media?

Keep all your options open and interview as many people in diverse career paths as you can. A history degree is the best complement to a diverse range of industries. ■

In the Field



By Elizabeth Collins

In spring 2020 many PhD students had to put their research plans on hold. This past year, travel has resumed, archives have reopened, and U-M History students can once again be found in all corners of the globe. What does a research trip actually entail? To find out we talked to a handful of doctoral candidates who recently worked in archives abroad.



Paige Newhouse

PhD candidate studying the Vietnamese diaspora in Germany. Her dissertation explores how understandings of migration in Germany change during and in the aftermath of reunification through the experiences of Vietnamese migrants.

Newhouse became engaged in the subject after working at the Women’s Center in Friedland, a refugee camp in Germany. She has conducted research in a number of archives primarily in Berlin. “My biggest challenge is gaining access to files because of privacy laws in Germany.”

She also stresses the importance of developing a consistent workflow. “I tried to upload all the photographs I’d take after every archive visit. Then I’d spend one day a week editing the photos and cataloging them in my computer. You have to remain organized or else it’s a total mess.”



Frank Espinosa

PhD candidate studying medieval Iberia (Valencia) and Christian-Muslim relations. His dissertation analyzes Muslim communities of the late-medieval Kingdom of Valencia living amidst the anti-Jewish riots of 1391.

Espinosa has been working in archives across Valencia and Catalonia. Traveling for research is not without its challenges. “Early in my research trip, I got sick and had to redo my research schedule. This forced me to be flexible and prioritize what I needed to see—and it paid off. During those final three days, I found some of the most exciting and foundational sources for my project.”



Armen Abkarian

PhD candidate studying premodern Armenia. His dissertation explores the various configurations of Cilician Armenian kingship as they are expressed in premodern literary sources.

Abkarian conducts most of his research at Yerevan’s Matenadaran—known officially as the Research Institute for Ancient Manuscripts. “A typical day of research is spent examining digital scans of premodern texts at the Matenadaran, with an eye for material details that do not appear in printed editions, such as ink color, ornamentation, or text formatting. Additionally, the lively atmosphere of the Matenadaran creates a welcoming environment for me to talk shop with my colleagues when we are not otherwise engaged in the reading hall.”



Sauda Nabukenya

PhD candidate studying twentieth-century East Africa. Her dissertation investigates the evolution of Uganda’s law and legal culture, focusing on the role of ordinary people.

In 2018, Nabukenya encountered a wealth of court records in Uganda that had been deemed unimportant and neglected. “In the basement repository of the court buildings, files were piled haphazardly on shelves, some scattered on the floors and covered in dust. . . . Some documents were stained, torn, marked with water damage, and insects and mold had destroyed others.” Nabukenya led a team of 15 students from U-M and Makerere University to clean, catalog, and preserve the Mengo Court Archive—resulting in the rescue of more than 145,000 court cases.



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Small Towns, Big Histories

Professor Stephen A. Berrey works on the history of race and culture in the United States. He is the author of *Jim Crow Routines: Everyday Performances of Race and the End of Segregation in Mississippi* (University of North Carolina Press), which focused on changing conceptions of race in the dawn of the civil rights era.

Recently, he's turned his attention to the history of race in small towns—and sundown towns in particular. Gregory Parker talked with him to learn more.

What's a sundown town?

A sundown town is a town or suburb that is “all-white” on purpose. The phrase refers to some groups having to be out of town by sundown. Through ordinances, signs, sirens, policing, violent acts, or informal measures, people in these communities have intentionally excluded Black people, Native Americans, Latina/o people, Asian American people, and Jewish people. These practices emerged in the late-nineteenth century and some places continue to be sundown towns or suburbs in the present. These communities exist throughout the continental United States and have been especially prevalent outside the South.

How did you get involved in the Sundown Towns Project?

James (Jim) Loewen (author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*) began this research, writing a book and creating a website documenting these places. In 2019, at the Organization of American Historians conference, Jim and I ended up on the same walking tour of Philadelphia's Chinatown. We spent much of the tour chatting about our shared research interests, and an hour later he had persuaded me to sign on to help him continue his work on sundown towns. Sadly, Jim passed away in August 2021. Since then, I've been directing this project.

How do you tackle a project of this magnitude?

It's an immense challenge as there are still many towns, past and present, we haven't yet documented, and there are other places that would benefit from additional research. We've had nearly a million

visitors to the site in the last two years, and we encourage visitors to share what they know about towns in our database or about towns that they believe should be in our database. I also meet with community groups to show them how they can do this research, and we have resources for educators on the website. At the University of Michigan, I've been teaching an undergraduate HistoryLab course (History 491, “Race, Local History, and Sundown Towns”) in which students engage in this work. They also learn how to access and analyze census data, find local history archives, and conduct oral histories.

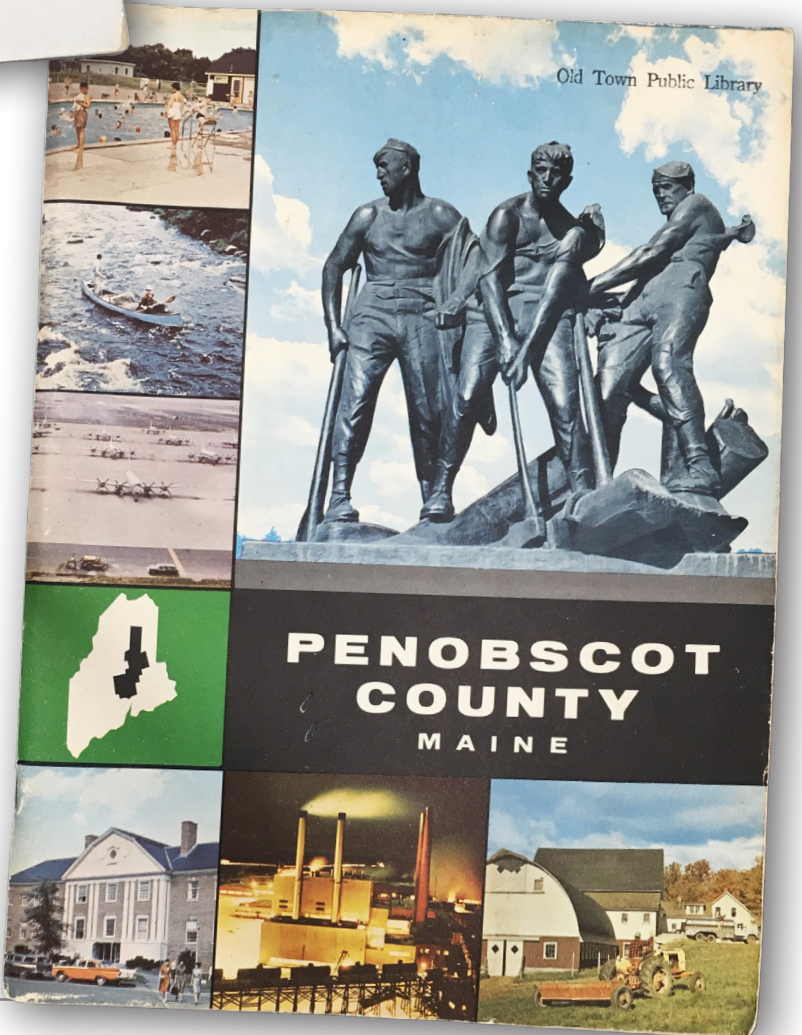
What can small towns tell us about the history of race in America?

In the present, we know that cities and small towns are radically different kinds of places, from their demographics to the ways people in these places think about politics, race, immigration, and various social issues. In many respects, this real and imagined rural-urban divide can be traced back to the early twentieth century and to the processes of urbanization, industrialization, internal migration, and immigration. Focusing on that period, I've been exploring how people in a few very white, small towns in Maine, Indiana, and Napa Valley, California, responded to these changes and how their responses shaped their racial world.

It's a history of small towns often defined by exclusion, Ku Klux Klan activity, and white-centered local histories. It's also a cultural history in which various practices, including amateur blackface minstrel shows (into the 1970s), historical pageants, Indian mascots, and even a 1920s dance party craze featuring music from China, shaped ideas about race. I'm uncovering this largely unknown past of small-town America. I also see an opportunity for this research to speak to our racial present. Toward that end, the book will consider ways people can grapple with this hard history and find hope, inspiration, and a path forward.

Can you tell us about Singing Justice?

Singing Justice is an investigative music collaborative combining research and performance. Organized through the Humanities Collaboratory at the Institute for the Humanities at the University of Michigan, we are a diverse group of faculty, graduate students, and performers dedicated to centering music by Black people, including composers, performers, and audiences that have been marginalized and misrepresented in music history. Our work cuts across genres including



spirituals, blues, jazz, Motown, and hip hop, as well as opera, country, and art song. We are staging seminar recitals in which we mix performance, historical context, and performer-audience Q&A for a range of audiences in the United States and Europe. We are drawing on those recitals and additional research to write a book that will serve as a guide for talking about and teaching about Black song, and pitched to scholars, educators, and people interested in music.

How do you approach collaborations with artists and fellow scholars?

Collaboration was a challenge for me initially because I was trained to do scholarly work on my own and largely in isolation. But it's been incredible and even magical what our Singing Justice group has already accomplished collectively. From my perspective our collaboration has worked for the following reasons: We truly listen to each other, hearing what each of us brings to the conversation and what each of us needs. We are generous and patient with each other. We've learned to trust each other, and we've created a compassionate and supportive community. It helps that each of us is invested in the work. At the end of the day, though, it is our care for each other that is helping us to do amazing work together, work that none of us could have produced on our own. ■

Visit the Sundown Towns project

justice.tougaloo.edu/sundown-towns



Postcards and commemorative booklets from Old Town, Maine. (Old Town Public Library)

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Laughing at the Past

In 2021 Professor Brian Porter-Szűcs was on sabbatical in Poland, where his latest book became a bestseller. After interviews in the country’s leading newspapers and magazines, he found himself in a most unexpected place: onstage at a Warsaw comedy club.

By Brian Porter-Szűcs

A man sits down for a session with his therapist. “I just can’t function anymore,” he says. “My relationships are falling apart, I’m useless at work, and I can’t find the motivation to get up in the morning.” The therapist nods sagely, and asks some probing questions in an attempt to find what lies at the root of the man’s despair. “It’s all the failure,” he finally admits. “We lost the Uprising of 1863, we lost the Uprising of 1830, the country was partitioned in 1795, and on and on. How can anyone today be happy?”

Comedy never translates, so you’ll have to take my word for it that the audience at the *Klub Komedii* (Comedy Club) in Warsaw was in stitches. The humor relied on the disconnect between the actual lives of Poles today and the way they are taught to remember their history.

On July 9, 2021, I had the most unusual experience of my professional career: I was invited to appear onstage with an improv comedy group for a show based on my newest book, *Całkiem zwyczajny kraj: Historia Polski bez martyrologii* (A Perfectly Ordinary Country: A History of Poland without Martyrology). I was asked to read excerpts from the book, which they then used as inspirations for their sketches. It might seem counterintuitive to mine a history book for laughs, but those brilliant comedians made it work.

The book itself was based on an earlier work of mine, *Beyond Martyrdom: Poland in the Modern World* (Wiley), but the Polish edition had been extensively rewritten to sharpen the argument and customize it for Polish readers. Apparently it hit a nerve, because to my astonishment it became a bestseller, and was even made into an audiobook (not to mention the subject of a comedy show). I had expected harsh criticism (who, after all, wants to be told that they are “perfectly ordinary”?), but while the attacks certainly came, they were drowned out by the enthusiasm. I wish I could pretend that this reception was because of my great writing, but I’m not that delusional: it was a case of having the right message at the right moment.

Since 2015 Poland has been governed by an authoritarian, nationalist political party, and they have devoted enormous resources towards what they call “*polityka historyczna*,” which translates as both “historical politics” and “historical policy.” Both senses are important, because the authorities exploit stories about historical injustices in order to rally their base, and they believe that it is the responsibility of the government to shape historical consciousness. As a historian who supports the ruling party once put it to me, “history should teach people without ambiguity who is good and who is evil.” The historical curriculum in schools, historical films and



From top: *Całkiem zwyczajny kraj* on the bestseller table at a Warsaw train station. Brian Porter-Szűcs (top row, third from left) and the *Klub Komedii* cast. Interview with Tomasz Lis, editor of *Newsweek Polska*. (Brian Porter-Szűcs)

Opposite: July 2017 protest in Poznan, Poland, against the judicial reform plans of the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice) ruling party. (Sakuto, CC BY-NC 2.0)



TV shows financed by government subsidies, elaborate ceremonies and celebrations—all these things are mobilized by the authorities to inculcate the idea that Poland (collectively) is always virtuous and innocent, and always persecuted by its implacably hostile neighbors. Because of this history, people are taught, respect for diversity, adherence to legal “technicalities,” and liberal democracy itself are luxuries that the country cannot afford.

This “historical politics” does not only encourage authoritarianism: it is flat-out wrong. To be sure, during World War II, Poland really was the site for unspeakable horrors. Not only did over 90 percent of the country’s Jews perish in the Holocaust, but over two-and-a-half million Christian Poles died as well (put together, about 16 percent of the prewar population). Every Polish city was left in ruins, and the scars (material and psychological) endured for decades. But the official narrative of Poland’s past treats that period as if it was a metaphor for the entirety of the country’s past. Even more importantly, it blames “foreigners” for all suffering and silences any pain that can’t be subsumed into a national framework. The centuries of unfree labor (serfdom) are not discussed, because in that case the “bad guys” were Polish-speaking Roman Catholics. We can’t learn about the nested prejudices, within which Poles were discriminated against in the nineteenth-century German and Russian Empires, even as the Poles themselves treated Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians with comparable bigotry. The history of women becomes marginalized—acceptable when describing how women sacrificed for the nation, unacceptable when exposing misogyny or sexism in Polish society. A historical narrative based entirely on external enemies flattens Poles themselves into homogeneous heroic martyrs, erases dynamics of power within the Polish community, and transforms everyone else into an eternal threat.

Beyond all that, it makes the study of Poland’s past unrelentingly serious and completely disconnected from life today. It becomes a story of battles (usually defeats), political persecution, and resistance (always heroic, and always doomed). There is no space for the history of everyday life, popular culture, business and labor, fashion, food, sexuality, religious practices, and so much more. The official story gives you plenty to get depressed about, and plenty to get angry about, but almost nothing to relate to.

That’s why the routine with which I started this essay was funny: it pointed out the cavernous gap between the grand tragedy of the national narrative and the experiences of Poles in the twenty-first century. The comedians also had a great time with a passage in which I pointed out that there were fewer women in the constitutional assembly of 1919 than there were men named “Feliks,” and another in which I contrasted the stodgy leadership of the Polish People’s Republic with the way “commies” and “hippies” were typically lumped together in the United States during the Cold War.

There really is a lot to laugh at in Polish history—or anyone’s history. Of course we need to remember the injustices and tragedies of the past, because without understanding them we can’t prevent them in the future. We need to pay particular attention to the systems of injustice that extend from the past into our present. But we also need to avoid getting defined by suffering or martyrdom. Not only does that play into the hands of politicians who thrive on dividing the world into “us” and “them,” but it covers up the complexity, ambiguity, and diversity that allows the past to have meaning for us today. ■

Brian Porter-Szűcs is Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of History.





(Nenad Stojkovic, CC BY 2.0)

Can We Really Be Against History?

By John Carson

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

—Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Charles Dickens's oft-quoted words feel hollow at the moment, at least to me. In the face of one pandemic—COVID—that mutates and mutates and will not stop and a second—monkeypox—that looms on the horizon and is already being weaponized rather than treated as a global health issue, it is easy simply to despair. Where is the interweaving Dickens suggests and historians so often confirm that marks the texture of the present and the past?

Authoritarianism, with its contempt for history, is on the rise across the globe, imposing the outlooks and agendas of a few for the diverse experiences, desires, and beliefs of the many. The inaction on global climate change threatens possibly to annihilate human history, but more probably to underscore global inequities as the haves find ways to protect themselves and the have-nots bear the brunt of the costs. Racism, sexism, classism, transphobia, anti-LGBTQIA+, and other ideologies of hatred continue to proliferate, hypercharged by individuals and institutions more interested in self-aggrandizement than the common good.

The 2022-23 Eisenberg Institute theme, "Against History," is a reflection on and response to the sense that we are in a "season of darkness." It is a kind of continuation of last year's theme, "Recovery," but from the perspective of history itself—as both a resource for holding individuals and institutions to account and a repository of practices and knowledges that have served to maintain and even exacerbate inequalities and erasures.

Contemporary attempts to rewrite history or challenge conventional methodologies and sources make this theme feel urgent. But the politics of history are and have always been present. They are evident whenever we tell stories about the past, whenever we invoke the past to support or challenge the status quo, whenever we construct public narratives justifying who should rule, and whenever we regulate the most private domestic and personal practices. With "Against History" we want to unpack the divergent meanings and practices of history. We aim to explore the ideologies involved in its construction and deployment as well as highlight the dangers of whitewashing the complexities of the past.

Our speakers, workshops, and symposia represent diverse attempts to think with and through the notion of being "Against History." We anticipate thought-provoking presentations and lively discussions (while being careful to adhere to the university's public health guidelines). We are also looking forward to moments of socializing, whether at the opening reception at the U-M Museum of Art, in the corridors of Haven Hall after talks, or in the Eisenberg suite at almost any time. We relish the opportunity to listen, think, question, consider, and conspire together. Come join us! ■

John Carson is an associate professor in History and director of the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies.

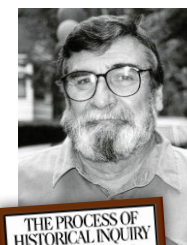
View the Eisenberg's full 2022-23 program

lsa.umich.edu/eihs



IN MEMORIAM

JEROME M. CLUBB



Professor Emeritus **Jerome M. Clubb** died on December 15, 2021, in Vancouver, Washington, at the age of 93. His approach to "history from the bottom up" led him to the University of Michigan in 1966, and he served as executive director of the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) from 1975 to 1991.

His articles and books range widely over topics such as electoral realignments in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, archiving of quantitative materials, and family living conditions near the turn of the twentieth century. He retired in 1992.

RAYMOND GREW

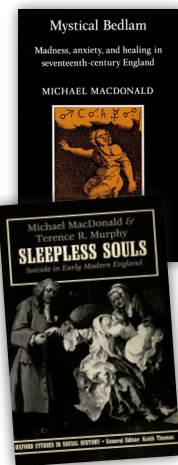


Professor Emeritus **Raymond Grew** passed away in September 2020. He was 90.

Grew was a historian of modern Italy and France, but his approach was global and comparative. He earned his PhD from Harvard University in 1957 and joined the University of Michigan faculty in 1964. He served as editor of the journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History* from 1973 to 1997.

Notable works include *A Sterner Plan for Italian Unity* and *School, State, and Society: The Growth of Elementary Schooling in Nineteenth-Century France*. He retired from U-M in 1999.

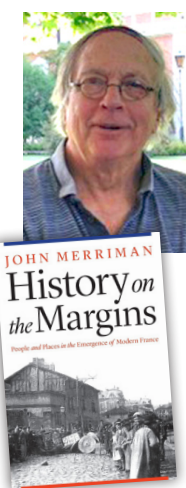
MICHAEL MACDONALD



Professor emeritus **Michael MacDonald** passed away at his home on October 3, 2021. He earned his PhD from Stanford University in 1979 and joined the University of Michigan in 1988. He was a specialist in early modern English history, and his research focused on the history of the mind, and popular religious and magical beliefs. His books and edited collections include *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* and *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*.

He retired in 2015 and retained a close connection the U-M community.

JOHN MERRIMAN



Noted U-M History alum **John Merriman**, Charles Seymour Professor of History at Yale University, died after a long illness on May 22, 2022, at the age of 75. He had just completed the manuscript of an eleventh book.

Merriman was born in 1946 in Battle Creek, Michigan. He received both his BA and his PhD in history from U-M, embracing the teaching of social history as it was practiced by his mentor and advisor, Charles Tilly. Central to Merriman's work was a commitment to the stories of those whose voices were absent or hard to find in the written record. In 2018, he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for Scholarly Distinction from the American Historical Association.

SONYA O. ROSE



Professor Emerita **Sonya O. Rose**, 84, of Sarasota, Florida, died at home on October 15, 2020. She received her PhD in sociology from Northwestern University in 1974. In 1993 she joined the University of Michigan faculty, and in 2002 she was appointed the Natalie Zemon Davis Collegiate Professor of History, Sociology, and Women's Studies.

One of the leading historians of modern Britain, her books include *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* and *Which People's War: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945*. After retiring in 2006, she relocated to London.

JOHN SHY



On April 8, 2022, Professor Emeritus **John Shy** died peacefully after a brief stay at Arbor Hospice in Saline, Michigan. He was 91. He served in the airborne infantry in Japan, 1952-1955, and received his PhD from Princeton University in 1961. He joined the University of Michigan faculty in 1968.

Throughout his career he was the world's foremost authority on the military aspects of the American Revolution. His first book, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the Revolution*, received the John H. Dunning Prize from the American Historical Association. After he retired in 1996, he lived with his wife, Arlene, in Ann Arbor.

ALUMNI UPDATES



(Sean Carter)

Krista Albertins (BA 2022) joined the Shaker Historical Society in Shaker Heights, Ohio, as education and outreach manager.

Michael Barera (BA 2012) moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to take the position of assistant archivist and digitization specialist at the Milwaukee County Historical Society.

Elise Borbely (BA 2021) joined the U-M Department of History as student services assistant.

Timothy Chester (BA 1978) is currently vice-chair of the Michigan Historical Commission.

Claude Clegg (PhD 1995) is the Lyle V. Jones Distinguished Professor and chair of the Department of African, African American, and Diaspora Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His fourth book, *The Black President: Hope and Fury in the Age of Obama*, was recently published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

Robyn d’Avignon (PhD 2016), assistant professor of history at New York University, announced the publication of her first book, *A Ritual Geology: Gold and Subterranean Knowledge in Savanna West Africa* (Duke University Press).

Hampton Dellinger (BA 1989) was confirmed by the US Senate in October 2021 to serve as an assistant attorney general in the US Department of Justice and head up the Office of Legal Policy. He recounts: “I loved my time at U-M, including taking many amazing history classes (with Rebecca Scott, Sidney Fine, and others) and writing a history thesis on Muhammad Ali and the Vietnam War.”

Cynthia Denny (BA 1980) reports that she’s started a “new career in the wine industry.”

Harry Elias (BS 1972) has retired from the bench after 30 years as judge in Municipal and Superior Courts in San Diego. This followed his work in private practice and as a prosecuting attorney. He now sits by assignment as a visiting judge in different counties in California.

CLASS OF 2022



On April 29, family, friends, faculty, and staff packed Auditorium 3 in the Modern Languages Building to celebrate 125 students graduating with bachelor’s degrees from U-M History. It was the first in-person ceremony since 2019.

Dania Jaamour and Mariah Missentzis received the Undergraduate Award for Leadership and Service, and Professor Melanie Tanielian was presented with the Undergraduate Teaching Award. Professor Howard Brick (middle right) presented the keynote address, while Serena Bernal (top right) delivered the student remarks.



(Photos: Sean Carter)

Sara Fitzgerald (BA 1973) was interviewed in May about Title IX for the Remedial Herstory Project’s eponymous podcast, and in August she spoke on “The Lure of Women’s History” for the organization’s summer retreat for educators.

Tracy Keith Flemming (2010 PhD), senior lecturer at the University of Environment and Sustainable Development, Ghana, announced publication of *Travel and the Pan African Imagination* (Lexington Books).

David Hatch (BA 1998) recently became managing partner of the Los Angeles branch of Hooper, Lundy, and Bookman, PC. He has four children (one of whom prepared this update), and he has shared his love and passion for history with his eldest daughter, who intends to pursue a history degree.

Tyrone Johnson (BA 1989) recently began work as disability examiner for the Social Security Administration. He was previously an elementary and middle school teacher in Denver and Aurora, Colorado.

Stephanie Leitzel (BA 2015), a PhD candidate in history at Harvard University, received the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome. After finishing up archival research and doing a fellowship at the Newberry Library, she will join the American Academy and finish her dissertation, “Economies of Color: Italian Capitalists, Dye Commerce, and the Making of a Global Economy (1450–1650).”

Mary Livesay (BA 2001) joined Homeboy Industries as manager of foundation relations in 2021. Located in Los Angeles, the organization is the world’s largest gang re-entry and rehabilitation program.

Mary Beth Norton (BA 1964), Mary Donlon Alger Professor of American History Emerita at Cornell University, won the Fraunces Tavern Museum award for American Revolution scholarship and the George Washington Prize for the best book on the American Revolution for *1774: The Long Year of Revolution* (Knopf). In 2021 she received a lifetime achievement award from the New England Historic Genealogical Society.

Lisa Parisi (MA 2012) recently joined U-M’s Anthropology Department as graduate program coordinator. She reports that she’s “happy to have returned back to Michigan and the university in a position where I can give back to the student community.”

Timothy Scarnecchia (BA 1985, PhD 1994) published *Race and Diplomacy in Zimbabwe: The Cold War and Decolonization, 1960–1984* (Cambridge University Press). In 2022 he was promoted to full professor in Kent State University’s Department of History.

Robert W. Thurston (PhD 1980), emeritus professor of history at Miami University and managing partner at Oxford Coffee Company, published *The Body in the Anglosphere, 1880–1920: “Well Sexed Womanhood,” “Finer Natives,” and “Very White Men”* (Routledge).

John A. Williams (PhD 1996) is co-editor and chapter author of *Conflict and Survival in Contemporary Western European Film* (Rowman and Littlefield).

**We’d love to know:
What’s new with you?**

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In 2022 Angell Hall's lobby was reconceived as a "Living Room" for studying and relaxing. (Gregory Parker)

