

FALL 2024

HISTORY MATTERS



FROM THE CHAIR

As I write this message, my initial contribution to *History Matters* as the department’s new chair, the question of Biden’s (and Trump’s) competence to hold the office of president is being raised by people on both the left and the right. Just days ago, candidate Trump narrowly survived an assassination attempt. Elsewhere, wars in the Middle East, Europe, and Northern Africa are taking a turn for the worse; and the devastation of Hurricane Beryl—the earliest Category 5 hurricane on record—is reminding us that climate catastrophes will continue.

By the time you read this, the contexts in which it was written will have played out in ways that I could not have predicted. The anxiety I felt writing it, however, will likely remain: these are challenging times, and many of us feel daunted by what lies ahead. You would have to be completely tuned out not to feel that way.

From my new perch, however, I see reason for continued hope. Taking on the chair position provides an opportunity to contemplate the department’s manifold activities in their fullness. Historians will be the first to tell you that “challenging times” like these are a frequently recurring—indeed normal—part of human experience. They will also tell you that ordinary people like you and me, working with an awareness of how things came to be the way they are, have always been the most powerful force for addressing the most serious of those challenges. Looking outward locally, from our home in Tisch Hall to the campus and communities beyond, I see vibrant, thriving, impactful work going on that is laser-focused on the question of “how things came to be the way they are.” This is good.


This happens in the classroom every day. The Department of History teaches nearly 6,000 undergraduate students at Michigan each year in courses addressing topics from

prehistory to the present in nearly every continent of the world. More than three dozen of these fulfill the university’s Race and Ethnicity requirement, allowing students to develop comparative perspectives and analytical skills central to understanding the most intractable problems confronting us today.

Our department’s impact extends well beyond the classroom. I am particularly struck, for example, by the number of History Department faculty who hold (or have held) important roles in our college and the university. Without naming names (because my point is a more general one), U-M History professors direct programs and centers in the International Institute, an institution central to knowledge creation about the world beyond our national borders. They are vice provosts of the university, and deans and associate deans of the College of LSA and the Rackham Graduate School. They are directors of the Institute for the Humanities, one of the most vibrant centers for humanistic scholarship in the entire country. A U-M historian conceived and co-directs the Center for Social Solutions, a unit deeply concerned with solving society’s most critical social problems, and helped found the Inclusive History Project, where our faculty play crucial roles investigating the university’s history as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

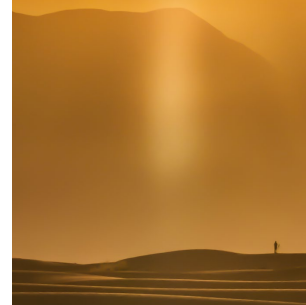
There are many others I could mention, but this list is sufficient to offer my point: in each of these cases, the institution benefits from leaders with deep skills in “historical thinking.” That means an ability to conceptualize relationships between structure and agency; a sensitivity to cultural and temporal difference; an ability to conduct complex research and present the results in clear terms. Historical thinking, moreover, brings empathy to the task of understanding “how things came to be the way they are.” To think historically is to acknowledge a powerful, meaningful relationship with other people, other times, other values.

The need for informed, empathetic, historical thinking has never been greater. Wherever “challenging times” take us in the months ahead, I will find reason for optimism and continued hope right here, close at hand. I will find it traveling alongside the extraordinary faculty, students, staff, and alums of this department doing what they do best.

Warm regards,

William J. Glover
Department Chair
Professor of History

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SNAPSHOTS



Angela Dillard Appointed First Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Angela Dillard began a five-year appointment in January as the university's first vice provost for undergraduate education, responsible for leading improvements in education for more than 32,000 students. She is a longtime advocate for undergraduate success, notably as chair of the Department of History (2021-2023) and as an associate dean in the College of LSA (2017-2019). Dillard is the Richard A. Meisler Collegiate Professor of Afroamerican and African Studies and in the Residential College, specializing in twentieth-century African American intellectual history.



Jeffrey Veidlinger Named Founding Director of Raoul Wallenberg Institute

Jeffrey Veidlinger was selected to lead the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, created by the university in December 2023. The institute will study hatred directed against religious and ethnic communities, and will combat antisemitism, divisiveness, and discrimination through teaching, research, and public engagement. Veidlinger is Joseph Brodsky Collegiate Professor of History and Judaic Studies, specializing in modern Jewish history. The institute's namesake, Raoul Wallenberg, was a Swedish humanitarian who saved thousands of Jewish lives during the Holocaust. Wallenberg graduated with a degree in architecture from U-M in 1935.



Jason Young Tapped to Direct Institute for the Humanities

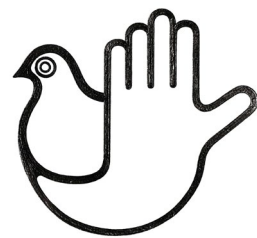
Jason Young has been named director of the university's Institute for the Humanities. The institute conducts a wide array of public and scholarly events, including art exhibitions, and runs a fellowship program for scholars working on humanities topics. Young is the Mary Fair Croushore Professor of Humanities and associate professor of history. A specialist in nineteenth-century African American history, Young's public scholarship includes the traveling exhibition *Hear Me Now: The Black Potters of Old Edgefield, South Carolina*, which he co-curated.

Reverb Effect Season Five Is Live!

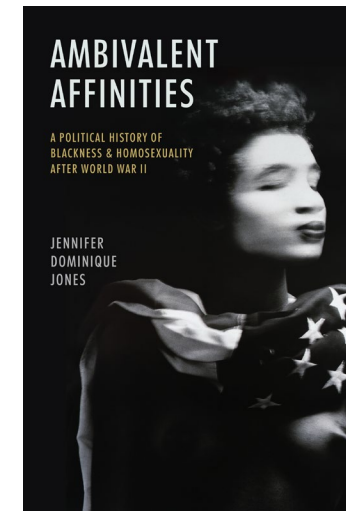
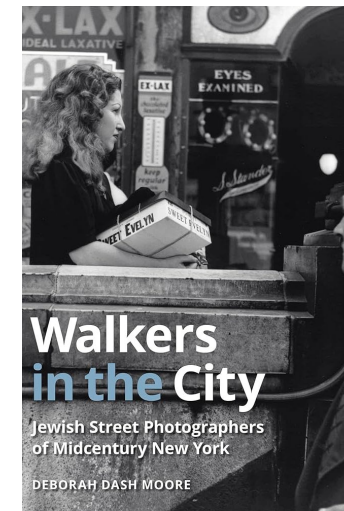
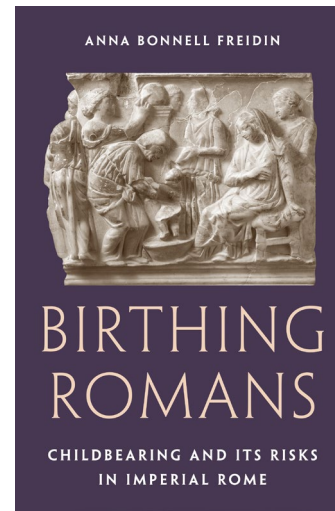
U-M History's podcast is back with six new episodes produced by 2023-24 Gerald Saxon Brown Digital Skills Fellow **Paige Newhouse**. If you like what you hear, please leave a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, and stay tuned for season six!



Find **Reverb Effect** on your favorite podcast app or stream direct
myumi.ch/96bQz



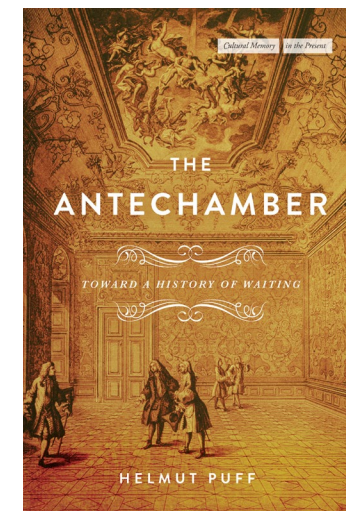
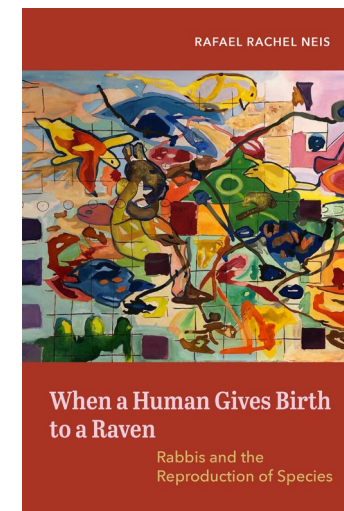
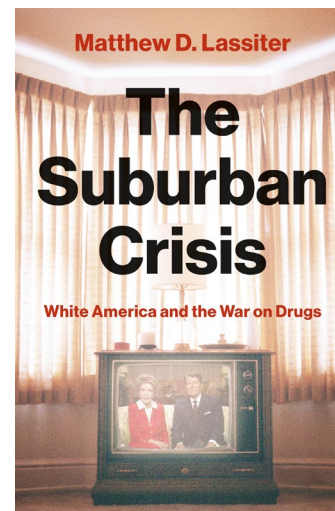
Recent U-M History Faculty Publications



Anna Bonnell Freidin
Birthing Romans: Childbearing and Its Risks in Imperial Rome
Princeton University Press

Deborah Dash Moore
Walkers in the City: Jewish Street Photographers of Midcentury New York
Cornell University Press

Jennifer Dominique Jones
Ambivalent Affinities: A Political History of Blackness and Homosexuality after World War II
University of North Carolina Press



Matthew D. Lassiter
The Suburban Crisis: White America and the War on Drugs
Princeton University Press

Rafael Rachel Neis
When a Human Gives Birth to a Raven: Rabbis and the Reproduction of Species
University of California Press

Helmut Puff
The Antechamber: Toward a History of Waiting
Stanford University Press

Tiya Miles Delivers Eisenberg Institute's 2024 Public Lecture

Tiya Miles returned to Ann Arbor to deliver the Eisenberg Institute's 2024 public-facing lecture on April 11 at the Michigan League Ballroom. Miles highlighted some of the themes of her latest book, *Night Flyer: Harriet Tubman and the Faith Dreams of a Free People*.

A MacArthur "Genius Grant" winner and author of eight books, including National Book Award winner *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*, Miles spent sixteen years on the U-M History faculty.



(Sean Carter)



Karen Carmichael BA 2007
Travel Journalist



Brad Meltzer BA 1992
Novelist and Historian



Mary Beth Norton BA 1964
Mary Donlon Alger Professor of American History, Emerita, Cornell University

Serious Synergy!

This fall U-M History will host its first-ever Undergraduate Banquet and Career Conference, a gathering that will connect current students with the department's biggest asset: its alums.

The two-day event, open to current U-M History majors and minors, will begin the evening of Thursday, November 7, with a banquet at the Michigan League featuring a keynote conversation between bestselling author Brad Meltzer and travel journalist Karen Carmichael with welcome remarks by Mary Beth Norton.

These speakers will inspire U-M History majors to maintain their passion for history well beyond their classroom years.

The following day features a series of rapid roundtables allowing majors to directly connect with six alums—Vivian Flynn, Madison Horton, Andrea Maines, Alexandra Sloan Kelly, Savannah Stephens, and Christopher Wilson—from a wide range of careers, from business to education to museums and beyond.

"We're enormously excited to welcome our accomplished alums back to campus to share their thoughts and experiences with our undergraduates," said William Glover, department chair.

"It's an opportunity for our students to meet people who, not that long ago, were on a similar path."

In addition, throughout the fall term U-M History is partnering with the LSA Opportunity Hub to hold workshops focusing on the practical matters of career preparation, from creating a resume and drafting cover letters to networking and searching for jobs.

As U-M History continues this work in the future, its alums will have additional opportunities to connect with students.

One way to do so right now is by joining LSA Connect, an online mentoring and networking platform exclusively for LSA students and alums. The more U-M History alums who join, the more chances majors and minors will have to connect with those who have already put their history degrees to work in the world. ■

**Interested in mentoring?
Check out LSA Connect!**

lsa.umich.edu/opportunityhub/lsa-connect/alumni



Madison Horton BA 2017
Documentary Producer



Christopher W. Wilson BA 1989
Supervisory Curator, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution



Alexandra Sloan Kelly BA 2006
Assistant US Attorney, US Attorney's Office for the Central District of California



Savannah Stephens BA 2018
Fan and Partner Insights Strategist, National Basketball Association



Vivian Flynn BA 1995
Managing Director, Pomona Capital



Andrea C. Maines BA 1991
Advanced Placement World History and Psychology Teacher, Chelsea High School

What's your advice for students thinking about a history major?

Andrea Maines: The world needs trained historians more than ever! If you have that core passion for history that fills your soul, please follow that wherever it might take you!

Brad Meltzer: Don't listen to your parents. Do what you love.

Savannah Stephens: Hone and leverage your critical thinking skills because you can apply them to any role anywhere.

Vivian Flynn: Don't be afraid to think outside the box. Trust that your history major provides you with a skill set that can be applied to many career paths.

Mary Beth Norton: History, especially as conceptualized and taught today, encompasses a wide variety of topics and innovative approaches to learning and teaches valuable skills over and above any specific course content.

How do you engage in history inside and outside of work?

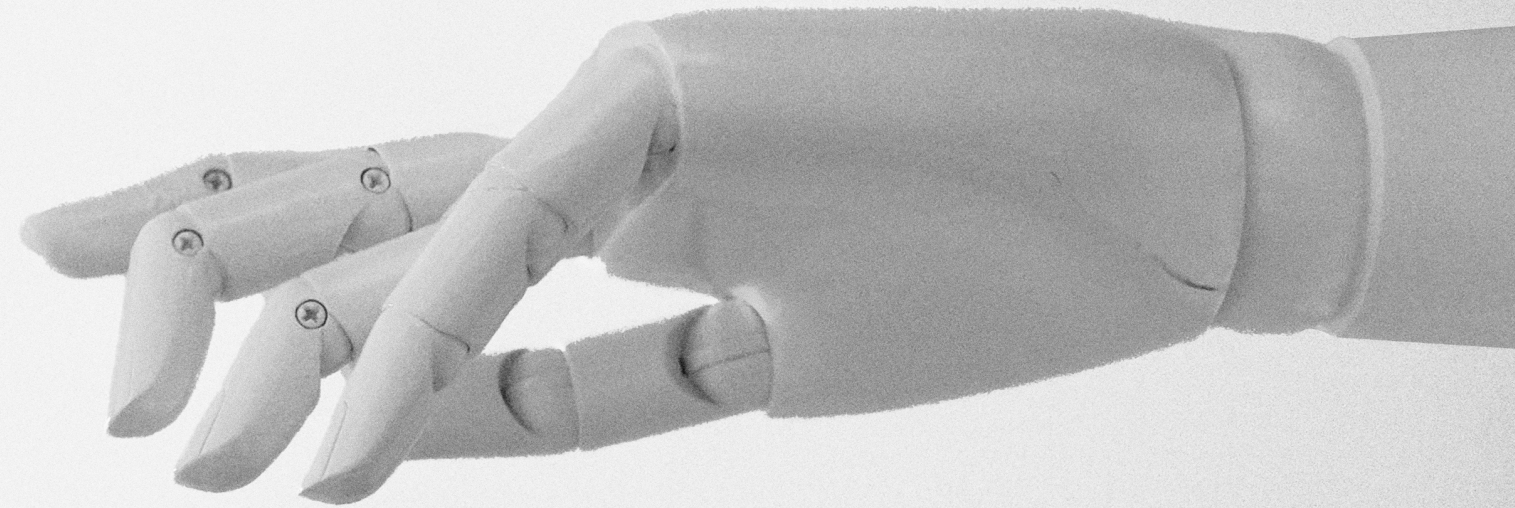
Alexandra Sloan Kelly: Under current Second Amendment doctrine, I often have to compare today's laws with historical analogues of those laws during the founding era.

Madison Horton: I think about it every day! I have worked on a few vérité projects, but almost every film I have worked on engages with history in some way.

Karen Carmichael: I use history every day in my work: historical details make up a part of every travel article. History is so entwined with travel; it's part of the story of every place.

Christopher Wilson: In my family, we connect to our family history and heritage through what we prepare and eat, from keeping alive my dad's recipes to connecting to various parts of our ethnic background through cuisine.

GENERATING HISTORY



WHETHER WE'RE READY
OR NOT, ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE HAS
ARRIVED ON CAMPUS

BY ELIZABETH COLLINS

EC: What are you?

U-M GPT: I am an AI language model developed by OpenAI, and my purpose is to assist you with any questions or information you need. I'm here to help students, staff, and anyone affiliated with the University of Michigan by providing support, answering queries, and offering guidance on a wide range of topics. How can I assist you today?

In December 2022, OpenAI—an artificial intelligence research organization—released a free preview of its new chatbot, ChatGPT, and the app very quickly became a main talking point in global news networks.

Less than one year later, in August 2023, the University of Michigan launched its own series of generative AI tools available to all students, faculty, and staff: U-M GPT, U-M Maizey, Gemini, ChatSonic, DALL-E, and more.

“A lot of people on campus saw that this was going to be a transformative technology,” said Don Lambert, director of IT infrastructure at Michigan Engineering. “We could either wait and see what happens with this, or we could go ahead and lead, and we chose to lead.”

The *Michigan Daily* reported that U-M was “the first major university to develop its own generative AI,” and President Santa J. Ono posted on X that this suite of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) would provide users with “tools that firmly emphasize the importance of equity, accessibility, and privacy.”

Despite the university's push, many faculty, staff, and students continue to have concerns about what embracing this technology could mean.

Where does GenAI source its information? What do we do with AI-generated art? Most importantly—how can this technology be used and misused?

Generative AI distinguishes itself from other forms of AI by its ability to create content. “It can be text, videos, sounds, images, code,” explained Lambert. “A lot of times when talking about GenAI we're talking about large language models, and in the end it's really about understanding language.”

In STEM fields, AI has been a helpful assistant for decades.

At U-M, an IBM 650 computer system was installed in September 1956, and the Artificial Intelligence Lab can trace its roots back to a Logic of Computers Group formed in 1970. U-M was a pioneer in the field back then, as it continues to be now.

Just this year, researchers at the lab have been testing the use of AI to improve video-based surgical learning, decode dog vocalizations, and detect PFAS chemical contamination.

The applicability of AI in humanities research might be less apparent—especially in a field like history—but these new language models are more capable of accurately reading and understanding texts than any of their predecessors.

By training GenAI on specific data sets, historians at the University of Venice have created a neural network that “can recreate missing

portions of inscriptions and attribute dates and locations to the texts,” reported Moira Donovan in the *MIT Technology Review*.

Local historians have also been getting creative with GenAI’s ability to read digitized materials and create maps of streets and neighborhoods from specific time periods.

As exciting as these possibilities may be, there are still limitations in what the AI knows. OpenAI uses web scraping—extracting data from online sources—as well as licensing agreements with content providers. But the process of gathering that information and presenting it to users is murky and buried in code.

This is particularly concerning on college campuses where students are challenged every day to create intellectual content—and where academic integrity is taken very seriously. And it’s a challenge for disciplines that rely heavily on reading and writing, like literature, philosophy, religion, and history.

When it comes to teaching, perhaps the biggest question facing history faculty is how to manage students’ engagement with AI in their writing assignments.

Professor Henry Cowles workshopped an essay by U-M GPT in one of his history courses. At the start of class, he asked the AI to write an essay responding to the same prompt his students received (comparing Charlotte Gilman’s 1894 short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” to a more recent source).

“The first attempt would have received an F because it didn’t cite any passages,” Cowles said. “But when we clarified that requirement, and then clarified again when the wrong recent source was cited, the AI produced a paper that the students and I agreed deserved at least a C.”

“FOR HISTORIANS,
WRITING IS A MEANS
TO AN END, A TOOL
FOR HELPING US TO
THINK, TO ANALYZE,
TO WEIGH DIFFERENT
KINDS OF EVIDENCE.”

The temptation to use GenAI as a shortcut might be too great for some students.

“What I see front and center is the illusion of a writing machine that promises to help students meet their own goals,” said Professor Victoria Langland, “a kind of twenty-first century ‘hack’ that would simply assist busy students in getting to where they want to go more efficiently.”

While the potential for this kind of abuse is very real, what’s most disturbing to many faculty is the mere fact that writing is an essential part of building historical knowledge and understanding.

“For historians, writing is a means to an end, a tool for helping us to think, to analyze, to weigh different kinds of evidence,” explained Langland. “It is not the end or goal itself. If we don’t write and revise, we don’t really sort through what we think about our evidence.”

Finding evidence and building arguments are also vital to the work of history students.

“When I think about how to engage with AI, I go back to the fundamentals of what I’m really trying to accomplish,” said Professor Farina Mir, “and this is what’s in my syllabus: help students develop skills from history and the humanities, including critical reading, engaged analysis, argumentation, historical contextualization, and the ability to present arguments verbally and in writing.”

Is it possible for AI to support these efforts? U-M GPT says yes:

I can assist you with your history studies in several ways:

Providing Information: I can supply detailed information on specific historical events, figures, and time periods.

Clarifying Concepts: I can help explain complex historical concepts, causes, and effects.

Study Resources: I can suggest textbooks, academic papers, and online resources.

Practice Questions: I can generate practice questions and quizzes to test your knowledge.

Essay Writing: I can guide you with essay structure, thesis development, and provide feedback on your drafts.

Timelines: I can help you create timelines of historical events to better understand the chronology and relationships between events.

Discussion: I can engage in discussions about historical interpretations and historiography.

Review Sessions: I can help review your notes and discuss major themes to prepare for exams.

But it does require instructors to change the way they manage their classes.

Pragya Kaul, a graduate student instructor, made significant revisions to her syllabus last year. “I had to locate, modify, or draft new policies for my classroom on using AI and the range to which it is acceptable,” she said.

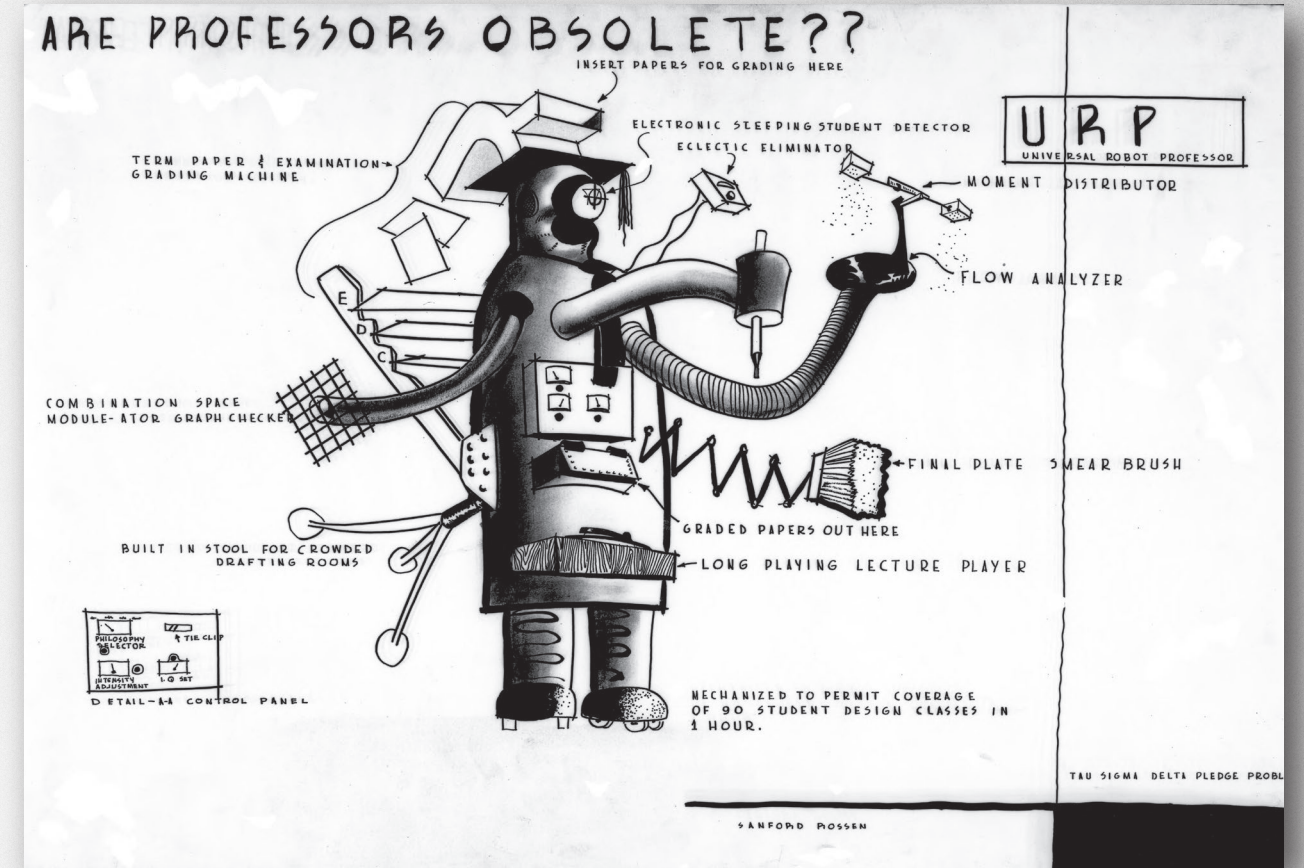
“Instructors have new decisions to make: is it acceptable that AI tech is used to edit and check for grammar, or should it be banned wholesale?” asked Kaul.

Undergraduate students themselves also carry concerns.

“I try to avoid AI as much as possible, even though I know many of my classmates have taken advantage of the new technology,” said recent U-M History graduate McKenzie Liberi (BA 2024).

“I personally do not think that my education would benefit from using AI, and I view it as a new form of plagiarism. Many of my professors have this same opinion, and I also do not want to be accused of academic misconduct.”

The College of LSA has provided some guidance on how to manage AI use in the classroom, including sample syllabus statements and



Sanford Rossen’s design for a robot professor, December 1950. Rossen (1927-1984) earned a Bachelor of Architecture degree at U-M in 1951; his designs include outdoor music venues like Pine Knob in Clarkston, Michigan. (Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan)

prompt literacy resources—which help users learn how to interact with AI more effectively.

“LSA instructors are free to either experiment with or exclude GenAI tools from their classes,” said Emily Ravenwood, manager of the Learning and Teaching Consultants at LSA Technology Services, “and if there are more specific guidelines per field, it’s the department rather than the college who needs to set those.”

Whether or not U-M History writes a formal policy, the community—faculty, students, and staff alike—continues to seek guidance and understanding. Many are finding support and generating ideas from one another, and are staying focused on the essential goals of the history classroom.

In the January 2024 department meeting, U-M History’s interim chair, Joshua Cole, included AI as an agenda item, and in August 2024 the department held a workshop to continue the conversation.

GenAI has only just arrived, and it’s not going away any time soon. So, what is a historian to do?

“Use blue books,” laughed Mir, referring to the physical paper booklets that college instructors have used for decades to facilitate in-person writing.

An essay in the *Michigan Daily* from 1973 by Robert Barkin called “Computer Madness” envisioned a future where computers are in charge of scheduling classes:

Jones: For the last time, I want to drop Music in Technology. How—

Computer: Why do you want to drop it?

Jones: It’s bogue, man.

Computer: That does not compute.

Jones: It’s dull.

Computer: Continue.

Jones: For God’s sake, tell me how to get out of it!

Computer: Section number.

Jones: 003.

Computer: You cannot drop that class.

Jones: Why the hell not?

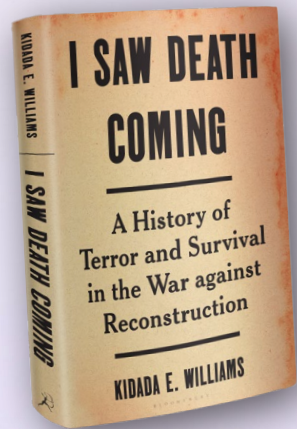
Computer: Drop/adds deadline passed weeks ago.

Barkin couldn’t have known that in 2024 U-M would launch U-M Maizey, an AI tool that is now helping students with their scheduling—but with a little less attitude.

There may yet come a time when AI becomes an essential partner for historians. But it’s difficult to imagine an AI becoming intoxicated by the smell of parchment in the archive or reading a collection of letters against the grain. For now, only a human fully can understand the complicated, contradictory, and seemingly irrational decisions that only humans can make—decisions that sometimes go on to shape the course of history. ■

ALUMNI PROFILE

Answering the Call



Kidada E. Williams (PhD 2005) is a professor of history at Wayne State University in Detroit. Her most recent book, *I Saw Death Coming: A History of Terror and Survival in the War Against Reconstruction* (Bloomsbury Publishing), was longlisted for the 2023 National Book Award for Nonfiction. During her time at U-M, Williams co-developed the Washtenaw County Underground Railroad bus tour with Carol Mull. Staff member Olivia Evans caught up with Williams to discuss her scholarship, her time at U-M, and the importance of accessible history.

How do your graduate studies at U-M inform your work as a historian today?

While at the University of Michigan, I received thorough training in historical research methods, specifically focusing on Black studies' theoretical and methodological frameworks within the United States. This training by people who shared my sense of wonder, awe, and heartbreak emphasized the importance of centering Black people, life, culture, thought, and ethics in historical archives and narratives.

While I initially entered the doctoral program as a dedicated historian, interacting with American Culture students and faculty holding joint appointments in other departments provided me with a deeper appreciation for multidisciplinary study that has informed my research and teaching. I'm still a dedicated historian, but I am open to bringing back the theoretical and methodological tools I have gained from adjacent fields to history.

With *I Saw Death Coming* longlisted for the National Book Award (congratulations!), and your appearance on podcasts, documentaries, and bestsellers lists, how have you dealt with your growing public presence? Has it changed your approach to your work, knowing that you are reaching increasingly broad audiences?

Thanks! It was an unexpected but lovely surprise, and it's been a wild ride. I wouldn't say reaching a broader audience has changed my approach much because the rigor of the training and research remains the same; the output is the only difference. I still work like most academic historians do. However, I spend more time developing my understanding of the line between what the public

wants and needs and then identifying and utilizing the resources to provide it. Many of us reinvent the wheel because there isn't widespread support for public work in history departments and organizations and because there's a tendency for people to hoard resources and information, so I try to help other scholars interested in public work do it well.

You've worked in public history since your graduate school days, starting with the Washtenaw County Underground Railroad bus tour. How did your interest in public history begin?

I came from a history-loving family on both sides. When I published my first book, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, I felt my family wouldn't want to read it. Not because they couldn't but because I wrote it for my career goals—degree, job, tenure, and promotion—rather than for history-curious people like them. Feeling that I had let down non-academic readers reminded me of my interest in creating something more accessible to a broader audience. I started sharing history sources on my Twitter account, which led to my work on the #CharlestonSyllabus and other conversations.

I continued that work with my next book, *I Saw Death Coming*, and was working on that at the beginning of the pandemic when Kelly Hardcastle Jones, who had worked on *BackStory with the American History Guys*, contacted me about hosting a podcast on the Civil War. Kelly explained they came to me because they wanted to center African Americans in the story and thought I was great at storytelling. We produced an impactful show that reached the top 1 percent of downloads. *Seizing Freedom* taught me many things, including the importance of being open to new opportunities to share historical research and expand my training and reach.

From your editing of the #CharlestonSyllabus in 2015 to your involvement with the Zinn Project, you've offered many resources to K-12 teachers with an intent to alter the way African American history is taught in schools. How did you get involved with this work, and why does it matter?

Honestly, I was asked, recognized the need, and decided to answer the call.

Working with K-12 history and social science teachers through NEH Summer Institutes and the Zinn Education Project helped me understand many educators' lack of content training in US and African American history. The burden is on teachers to find good history content, especially when their districts' chosen textbooks may be problematic. For many, this extra work is a bridge too far. I get it! Many of our nation's most prestigious and cherished educational and historical institutions have educator resources on their websites, including lesson plans by grade. When talking to teachers, I recognized that most of them didn't know about them, so I decided to make them available. It took fifteen minutes to create the web page, so when teachers or parents reach out to me, I can point them in the right direction.

Historians are well-positioned to help people understand the complexity of interpreting history, our methods, and how our tools and perspectives evolve. Dismissing distorted or problematic historical accounts is not enough; we must help people understand why they are inaccurate, how these misconceptions originated, what they achieve, and why accurate, evidence-based historical interpretations matter for understanding the past and the present.

What advice would you offer to U-M grads who want to get involved in academia and public history?

My advice would be to get trained as broadly as possible in different elements of the craft of history, writing, and communication.

I recommend consuming different types of history content: TV and radio interviews, documentary films, podcasts, graphic histories, literary and history magazines, narrative non-fiction and creative nonfiction, and audiobooks. Ask yourself: What resonates intellectually or emotionally? What doesn't? Why? How did they do this? How do they address the "why this history matters today" question? How might you do it? Most people who are good at working in public have spent time and energy developing their skills. If your institutions and organizations aren't providing professional development resources, ask them to.

Be open to new opportunities. But, as you do this, you must understand the potential positive or negative impact of your public

work on degree requirements, job prospects, promotions, and tenure. What counts? To whom? And why?

The best work is accomplished in community. So, find your people—like-minded individuals who are eager to expand their audience, share resources and opportunities, and hold you to high standards.

Lastly, there's enough public work to go around, so don't hoard information, resources, or opportunities. If the media contacts you and you're not the historian who wrote the dissertation, article, or book on that topic, then be generous and pass the mic. ■



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Recentering the Narrative

In May, Eric Toups earned his PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign after successfully defending his dissertation, “Bvlbancha: Place and Power in the Mississippi River Delta to 1795.”

He’s joining U-M History this fall as an assistant professor of Indigenous North American history. Staff member Elise Borbely connected with him to learn more about his research and what inspired him to become a historian.

What inspired you to study the history of Indigenous people?

When I was just starting grad school, I used to participate in Reddit’s AskHistorians page. Someone had asked a question about the history of the town seal of Natick, Massachusetts, which was founded as a missionary town for New England Indigenous communities who converted to Puritanism in the seventeenth century. In trying to explain the history of paternalism and colonialism baked into the seal, I conducted some research of my own on the subject and on the responses of the Nipmuc and Massachusetts communities.

This hands-on experience introduced me to the important research questions of early Indigenous American history and how those questions connected to the modern day. I took my research interests to different parts of the continent, but that initial foray created an interest and a set of personal commitments that I try to maintain in all my work.

Your dissertation covers nearly 14,000 years. What is it like to write on the scale of millennia, rather than centuries or even decades?

The idea was to tell the history of a specific location and how the material realities of that place affected its history. Most of the project is concerned with more recent history from about 300 to 400 years ago and how Indigenous communities leveraged their deep knowledge systems and understanding of how to live in a muddy, flooded, deltaic landscape to maintain their hold over their homeland in the face of an expansive colonial power.

The story of the colonization of Louisiana is relatively well-studied and documented, but Indigenous communities are often pushed to the edge of the relevant historical narratives. I believed that telling the history of the place itself, Bvlbancha, would be a good way to place Indigenous groups like the Houmas and Chitimachas at the center. Placing my start point 14,000 years ago was a way of communicating how colonists felt as they tried to override these deep connections: humbled. Bvlbancha has always been so much bigger than any one community.



able to physically claim and as evidence that Native peoples continued to deny access to their lands and ways of knowing when it suited them.

Can you talk about your work with the Peoria and Miami Nations in the Reclaiming Stories Project?

I was lucky enough to be introduced to the project as a graduate student due to involvement of my advisor, Dr. Robert Morrissey. The Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris houses some beautiful painted hide robes called *minohsaya* from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made by ancestors of the Peoria and Miami communities. Our goal is to help communities like the Peoria and Miami reclaim the knowledge systems engraved upon these robes.

We are currently organizing our third Learning Lab in Miami, Oklahoma. These labs bring in scholars, artists, and community leaders who help the Peoria and Miami communities of today relearn these practices. Our last lab had us actually tanning and fleshing the hides! One of our long term goals is to fly some community

members to Paris to see these robes in person. The project tries to place itself in service to these communities and my work on that often reflects this ethos. Sometimes it means helping with the research or arranging travel details, but other times it involves taking pictures or setting up equipment. Anything to help.

What types of courses are you looking forward to teaching at U-M?

I was hired on as a Native American scholar and most of my courses will reflect that. I developed a course on Indigenous environmental history for winter 2025 and plan on teaching other Native American and Indigenous history courses for undergraduate and graduate students in the near future. That said, I have a few ideas for other types of courses that fall outside Native American history, strictly speaking. I’m excited to teach American borderlands history or colonial American history courses when I get the opportunity. I am also workshopping a course called “Haunted America,” which will examine American history through places considered by many to be touched by the supernatural.

What excites you about coming to Ann Arbor?

I love college football, so I’m looking forward to rooting for the home team (no matter how uncertain its future is at present!) All the rivers, streams, and lakes nearby will be great for kayaking. My partner, Ananya, and I are also excited to tuck into the local food scene. We had good luck with Frita Batidos when we visited and we think our streak will keep going! ■

Eric Toups examines colonial-era maps at the Clements Historical Library. (Gregory Parker)

You’re looking at the archaeological record, geological and climate data, oral traditions, and colonial archives. How do you develop a narrative out of such an incredible range and variety of sources?

With a lot of patience and a bit of skepticism. So many of the archives I used were created, in part, to naturalize the presence of the colonial land and social systems we often call “Louisiana.” The term “Bvlbancha,” meaning “the place of many tongues,” only rarely recurs in the written archive, and a lot of Indigenous knowledge of the region was deliberately excluded.

Fortunately, contemporary Indigenous groups were not simply waiting around for scholars to thread this needle. Communities like the United Houma Nation and activist groups like the Bvlbancha Collective had already applied Indigenous oral traditions to archival knowledge and worked with other scholars to research collaboratively. I built on their assertions, that Native peoples have always been in Bvlbancha and had a hand in shaping the landscapes and waterways.

The evidence was everywhere once I learned how to look for it. For example, there were a lot of maps of “Louisiana” that left large portions of the landscape blank, but an equally large number of archival documents and archaeological evidence demonstrating a longstanding Indigenous presence and power within the blank spaces on the map. These maps, then, became evidence of how little territory colonials were



ALUMNI PROFILE



Pruning the Past

History alum Melvyn C. Goldstein has won awards for writing books and cultivating bonsai. His two passions have shared roots.

Melvyn C. Goldstein (BA 1959, MA 1960) is Distinguished University Professor and John Reynolds Harkness Professor Emeritus in the Department of Anthropology at Case Western University, from which he retired this past June after more than 55 years on the faculty. He has written and edited dozens of books on the history, anthropology, and language of Tibet, all alongside amassing an incredible (and also award-winning) bonsai collection, which now forms the core of the Melvyn C. Goldstein Bonsai Garden at the University of Michigan's Matthaei Botanical Gardens.

Professor Henry M. Cowles caught up with Goldstein on the occasion of his retirement to talk about his illustrious career, his bonsai collection, and how the two have intertwined.

Why did you major in history?

I made that decision almost 70 years ago! At some point early on in my time at the University of Michigan, I was drawn into the orbit of Professor Andrei Lobanov-Rostovsky, who was not only a historian of Russia but also a Russian prince who served in the White Army until its defeat in 1920. After receiving my MA in 1960, my plan was to stay to do a doctorate with him on Russia and Mongolia. But little did I know, Professor Lobanov-Rostovsky was planning on retiring that year—which is precisely what he did. I was disappointed of course, but Professor Lobanov had me over for dinner and told me that because the department had not decided on a replacement, I should go study with his friend Professor Nicolas Poppe, a famous scholar on Mongolia at the University of Washington. So I got in my car and drove to Seattle in the summer of 1960.

How did you end up training in anthropology—and specializing on Tibet?

Well, when I got to the University of Washington, they had just been funded by the Rockefeller Foundation to set up one of eight



From left, opposite: Melvyn Goldstein and college roommate Russ Rayman in 1959; Goldstein in Limi, Nepal in 1974; Goldstein interviewing the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India, in 2005. Above: Goldstein (right) with Jack Sustic, bonsai specialist at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens. (Melvyn Goldstein, Matthaei Botanical Gardens)

centers for Tibetan studies around the world. These centers were meant to train young scholars to help preserve knowledge of traditional Tibetan society and culture, about which there was a lot of concern after the Dalai Lama's failed uprising in Lhasa. Even though I had no particular interest in Tibet when I arrived, some faculty persuaded me to study Tibetan along with Mongolian. As I began to learn Tibetan, I started interviewing some of the refugees that the program had brought to Seattle from India to help teach Tibetan, and I quickly realized that I liked the interviewing more than the language study—and that was how I found anthropology. To me, anthropology and history were related, because they both let me get to see how societies work from the ground-up, how history and culture get made.

What was it like when you first made it to Tibet?

Tibet was closed to Western researchers then, so my early work was with refugees—first in the United States, and then while living for two years in a Tibetan refugee settlement in India where the Dalai Lama had set up his exiled government. After that I was able to do fieldwork in northern Nepal with indigenous Tibetans, but it was only after relations with China changed under Nixon

that I was finally able to get to Tibet by securing a fellowship for summer research in Lhasa, although even that took three years of waiting for the Chinese government to grant me permission. Thus, it was only in 1985, almost twenty years after getting my PhD, that I finally made it to Lhasa for fieldwork. But to get to Lhasa, you had to connect through Beijing and wait for multiple days. And so, I found myself in Beijing, staying at hotels—each of which had bonsai in their enclosed gardens, and so I spent time admiring these beautiful trees and got to know them. That was how I met bonsai and decided I wanted to learn to raise them myself.

Ah—I knew they were coming! Tell me about your time with the trees.

Well, at first I was merely an admirer, because the house where I lived near the campus of Case Western Reserve did not have a backyard you could fence off to cultivate them. But ten years later, I moved into the house where I live now, and I finally had space to keep trees—and I went to work. At that time, the nearest teacher was in Erie, Pennsylvania, and so I would drive an hour and a half to study with him almost every weekend. In those days, I was doing longitudinal studies with Tibetan nomads, about how they

had adapted to living at high altitudes, and when my Tibetan graduate student and I would stop in Beijing on the way back from fieldwork, I would buy a few trees. Some of them were heavy and delicate to transport, and so he would help me get them through the airport and the USDA examination and then back home.

My collection began to grow, and so I began working with more and more people to cultivate and care for them; it was really a group effort. And eventually, of course, the collection got so big and had won enough awards that my alma mater got interested, and so I was able to donate what is now the Matthaei Botanical Garden's Melvyn C. Goldstein Bonsai Garden.

And tell me: how do you see these two things, your books and your trees, relating?

So many ways! I always remember what one of my Japanese teachers, who led a school in California on Azaleas, said about bonsai: we buy our trees, but we don't own them. We are just looking after them, and then we pass them on. I think in some

ways scholarship is like that: we meet the world where it is and we do our best to tell its story. My books are full of documents that would be hard for others to access; the hundreds of oral histories I collected in Tibet are now housed at the Library of Congress and available online. Like my trees, these will survive me and allow others to engage with the world in their own ways.

Another connection has to do with collaboration. Some people think scholarship and bonsai are solitary, but in both I have been lucky to have amazing partners and collaborators, teachers and students. We gather around a tree or text, and something wonderful happens. Even now, I am writing a book about this amazing monastery that in the 1950s had 10,000 monks. Can you imagine? Some people think of monasteries as isolated and quiet, but this was vast, a bustling place with monks of all sorts, from brilliant scholars to those earning a living through tailoring or crafts or petty trading. That monastery is like scholarship and bonsai, at least for me: from the outside, it seems solitary, but look inside: it is teeming with life, with people, with trees. ■

The Melvyn C. Goldstein Bonsai Garden at U-M's Matthaei Botanical Gardens

Melvyn Goldstein has been collecting, cultivating, and caring for bonsai for nearly fifty years. In 2023 he donated more than 100 trees in his world-class collection to U-M's Matthaei Botanical Gardens, who rechristened their bonsai garden in his honor. One of the nation's premiere spaces for this art form, it is free and open to the public from May to November.



Learn more about the bonsai garden

mbgna.umich.edu/bonsai-home



Scenes from the naming ceremony. Bottom middle: University of Michigan President Santa J. Ono (left) and Melvyn Goldstein. (Matthaei Botanical Gardens)

IN MEMORIAM

A Great Humanity

Ellen Poteet, a 1998 U-M History PhD and lecturer in the department since 2006, passed away at the beginning of April. This remembrance, written by her friend Netta Berlin (U-M Department of Classical Studies), celebrates the life of an incredible scholar, teacher, and human being.

In July, Ellen was posthumously selected as one of the four collegiate lecturers for the Ann Arbor Campus for 2024-2025.

Ellen Spence Poteet passed away on April 3, 2024, in Batouri, Cameroon, where she is buried, as she wished. Cameroon was dear to her heart and central to her sense of purpose in the world. She was born in 1960 and raised primarily in New Orleans. There she studied ballet for many years, attended Ursuline Academy for two years, and graduated from Isidore Newman School.

Ellen earned her BA in history at Bryn Mawr College and her MA and PhD in history at the University of Michigan. She held academic appointments at Muhlenberg College and, from 2006 on, at the University of Michigan. Although Ellen's graduate training was in early Christianity, she embraced a wide range of frameworks in her teaching of history, including the Byzantine empire, medieval Europe, and Africa from antiquity to the modern era. Over the course of her studies and teaching, she learned several languages, both ancient and modern.

Ellen was particularly interested in how the evolution of West African societies was influenced by the intersection of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions, and in the need to orient one's understanding of African society within this prism. After living in several Central and Eastern African countries for extended periods of time, often in communities with large Muslim populations, Ellen found a spiritual home in Cameroon. During leaves from her academic position, she dedicated her time in Cameroon to teaching, especially incarcerated adults. At Michigan, she was an important part of the Africanist community, where she relished her relationships with visiting scholars and students from Africa.



Ellen Poteet visiting with children in Batouri, Cameroon. (Courtesy Dianne Feeley)

Monasticism and nomadism were important to Ellen as subjects not only for the classroom but also as ways of life. Having lived among monastics, she maintained deep ties to that world. She also developed enduring friendships with nomadic people in Africa.

Although she was a creature of habit in how she went through her days, Ellen was comfortable in having no settled home. A red bike was her beloved means of transportation in Ann Arbor; otherwise she walked pretty much everywhere she wanted to go, even resisting rides from moto chauffeurs in Cameroon. Her evening walks, taken with no destination in mind, were crucial to her well-being.

Ellen was an independent thinker and a committed activist. As a supporter of radical causes, she was deeply influenced by the leftist politics of her father Ewing M. Poteet, a noted violinist, music critic, and teacher. After college she worked for New York Public Research Group and during graduate school she wrote several essays of criticism for the socialist journal *Against the Current*, each marked by her fierce intelligence.

An inveterate letter writer, Ellen regularly corresponded with many people, always by hand, unless circumstances necessitated the use of an electronic device. Those fortunate enough to be in her epistolary orbit were treated to lengthy and keenly observed accounts of her daily life and surroundings, the most vivid of these stemming from her experiences in Cameroon.

Ellen is survived by her step-sister Ruth S. Robertson of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin; a cousin, Susan C. Wilson of Longview, Texas, among numerous other cousins; and many friends from Michigan to Cameroon. In addition to her father, Ellen was predeceased by her grandparents Malcolm and Mildred R. Spence, mother Shirley Silvernail, and step-father John Silvernail.

As she once said of her father, Ellen exhibited a great humanity, which came of living widely and deeply. ■

Home and Exile in an Era of Emergency

By John Carson

(Bill Devlin, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The American president has been granted complete (and unprecedented) immunity for any actions arguably deemed official. Far-right parties across the globe are pushing agendas based on fear—if not hatred—of immigrants and longing for authoritarian rulers to reinstate “traditional” values. People and non-human organisms are being uprooted in the face of global climate change at an accelerating rate. At this moment of emergency, the fragility of home and reality of exile are seemingly manifest everywhere.

This year’s Eisenberg Institute theme, “Home and Exile,” will explore and complicate these notions and the effects so central to their resonance. Home, across an array of cultures, is often figured as a sanctuary, a place of belonging and kinship, a grounding for the private and personal, an environment that nurtures and sustains, and a site for self-discovery and realization. And yet home is also saturated with complex normativities that can stultify rather than support, constrain rather than nourish, and inhibit rather than embolden. If for some, home can be a refuge, for others it can be the locus for violence and oppression, a place to escape rather than settle.

A similar doubleness complicates exile. It is hard not to associate it with loss, displacement, disruption, and alienation. Exile also suggests the forced abandonment of the familiar for a new and possibly hostile environment—often at terrible costs. And yet it can also bring new perspectives, unforeseen opportunities, the freedom to reinvent, and the possibility of starting over and building a better community. For those in political exile, it can mean safety and the refusal to be silenced. For those in ecological exile, it can mean the possibility of survival.

In this year of rising temperatures—both political and climatic—thoughtful exploration of home and exile seems particularly urgent. This year’s Eisenberg programming is not so much interested in the dichotomies of home and exile, but rather the entanglements, the ways in which humans and non-human organisms engage with both rootedness and migration. We believe this year’s lectures, workshops, and symposia will bring just this nuance to our discussions.

And, as an added bonus, on the evening of April 17, 2025, Maya Jasanoff, the X.D. and Nancy Yang Professor and Coolidge Professor of History at Harvard University, will deliver the institute’s annual public-facing lecture. A prize-winning historian and noted public intellectual (in 2021 she chaired the Booker Prize committee), Professor Jasanoff will speak about some of her work examining the human preoccupation with ancestry. We invite everyone to come enjoy the fun and be part of the conversations. ■

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

View the Eisenberg’s full 2024-25 program

lsa.umich.edu/eihs



CLASS OF 2024



On May 3 the U-M History community packed the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre to celebrate the Class of 2024. Ava Seaman (1) delivered the student address and Professor and Vice Provost Angela Dillard (2) delivered the ceremony’s keynote address.

Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies Kate Wroblewski presented Nina Naffziger and Julia Reinach (3, left to right) with the Undergraduate Award for Leadership and Service. Professor Anna Bonnell Freidin received the Undergraduate Teaching Award.

After taking the stage for the group shot (4), Rikki Fay Goldman (5) and fellow graduates ventured outside for more photos and fun.



(Sean Carter)



Andy Achenbaum (PhD 1976) recently published *Safeguarding Social Security for Future Generations: Leaving a Legacy in an Aging Society* (Routledge).

Thomas Beall (BA 1983) completed a PhD in international relations at Salve Regina University in December 2023.

Bogdan Bele (BA 2015) graduated from Berkeley Law and passed the California Bar Examination in 2023.

Laurie Boulden (BA 1991) was appointed the chief learning officer for the Department of Homeland Security in July 2022. Laurie is responsible for providing training and development policy and guidance to DHS, along with programs to support the human resources community of practice in the department.

Bruce Boyce (BA 1984) is an interpretive guide and researcher at Taliesin West, Frank Lloyd Wright's winter studio and residence in Arizona. He produces a history podcast, *I Take History With My Coffee*, and has a blog by the same name.

Matthew Buszek (BS 2010) defended his PhD dissertation, "Stanislaus Hosius and the Proposed National Church of Poland," at the Catholic University of America.

Joseph J. Casino (MA 1970, PhD Candidate 1972) has taught history at Villanova University since 1978. In 2023 he was elected to the Board of Governors of the Civil War Museum of Philadelphia, and since 2018 he has served on the Delaware Valley Paleontological Society's Board of Directors.

Jorge L. China (PhD 1994), director of Wayne State University's Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies, attained the rank of distinguished service professor of history. His most recent work, "A Tradition of Contraband: Secreting and Silencing the Illegal Importation and Exploitation of Enslaved Africans in Spanish Colonial Puerto Rico," appears in *Transatlantic Bondage: Slavery and Freedom in Spain, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico* (SUNY Press, 2024).

David Churchman (BA 1960, MA 1964) published the paperback edition of *Learning Negotiation Through Literature* (Ethics International Press).

Julie Cook (BA 2009) is collections manager and registrar at the Edsel and Eleanor Ford House in Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan.

Brad Estes (BA 2011) joined the partnership of Lewis & Llewellyn LLP, a law firm specializing in commercial litigation. He founded and runs Lewis & Llewellyn's annual Equity Fellowship, which provides hands-on litigation experience, law school preparation, and general professional development to high-achieving young adults from groups historically underrepresented in the legal profession.

Sara Fitzgerald (BA 1973) spoke at the annual conference of the American Literature Association in May on the topic, "The Making of a Playwright: T. S. Eliot, Emily Hale, and a Conflict of Tastes." Fitzgerald's biography of Hale will be published by Rowman & Littlefield in September 2024.

Walter Flood (BA 1961) has been a REALTOR since 1974 and still practices at 87 years old.

Georgina Hickey (PhD 1995) published *Breaking the Gender Code: Women and Urban Public Space in the Twentieth-Century United States* (University of Texas Press). The book investigates challenges to the code of urban gender segregation, focusing on organized advocacy to make the public spaces of American cities accessible to women.

Tegan Higgins (BA 1994) and her sister **Tiffany Dietz** (BA 1994) launched T and T Twin Talk, social media accounts on Instagram and Tik Tok, in early 2023. They started out seeking to raise awareness for breast cancer, as they are both survivors, but ended up creating a niche on social media for middle-aged/middle-sized women, reaching 494,000 followers on Instagram. They also work with the Pink Fund, raising money for people going through breast cancer treatment.

Mary Klein Kansfield (MA 1965) published her third book, *A Culture of Our Own: Three Generations of Midwestern Dutch Women* (Wit and Intellect Press).

Maddox Karp (BA 2024) reported that his grandfather, Myles Lash, recently published *Imminent Peril* (Book Baby), a historical fiction novel about the Civil War through the perspective of a young Michigander in the Wolverine Brigade.

Xiaoyue Li (PhD 2021) is a tenure-track assistant professor in the Departments of History and Middle East and North African Studies at Tulane University.

Mark Lotito (PhD 2011) practices law but had the opportunity to publish his revised dissertation in 2019 as *The Reformation of Historical Thought* (Brill). The book was selected for the 2024 International Melancthon Prize, named for Philip Melancthon, a Renaissance-era scholar and religious reformer, and bestowed every three years by Melancthon's home city of Bretten, Germany. Mark was the last PhD student of Tom Tentler, the department's longtime Reformation historian who passed away in 2021.

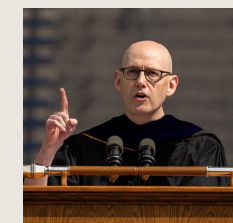
Mary Beth Norton (BA 1964) reported that after the publication of *1774: The Long Year of Revolution* (Penguin Random House) in 2020, she turned to a source uncovered years earlier in her research: a London broadsheet titled *The Athenian Mercury*. She's nearly finished selecting and editing all the letters she wants to feature in the book, tentatively titled "I Humbly Beg your Speedy Answer: Letters to the World's First Personal Advice Column, 1691-1696" and under contract to Princeton University Press.

Kristin Olbertson (PhD 2005), professor of history at Alma College, published her first book, *The Dreadful Word: Speech Crime and Polite Gentlemen in Massachusetts, 1690-1776* (Cambridge University Press).

Rebekah Pite (PhD 2007) published *Sharing Yerba Mate: How South America's Most Popular Drink Defined a Region* (University of North Carolina Press). The award-winning book introduces readers to the history of the ritualized drink that is a major part of everyday life in the Southern Cone.

John Robson (BA 1985) recently retired after a 38-year career comprising 21 years in the Army and Army Reserve, and 26 years in the US Intelligence Community. His career included two US embassy assignments and four combat zone deployments. After retiring from government service he joined the Space Dynamics Laboratory.

Brad Meltzer Delivers Spring 2024 Commencement Speech



Brad Meltzer (BA 1992) delivered U-M's Spring Commencement address to more than 8,500 graduating students at the Big House on May 4. A bestselling author of nonfiction and fiction—including thirteen thrillers and the Ordinary People Change the

World children's book series—Meltzer was presented with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at the ceremony.

Meltzer used magic as a theme throughout the speech, and at the end he pulled off a magic trick of his own: former Wolverine and NFL star Desmond Howard and 2024 national championship team members J.J. McCarthy and Blake Corum joined Meltzer on stage, opening their robes to reveal Block M shirts.

(Photos: Eric Bronson, Erin Kirkland)

Rose Mary Sheldon (PhD 1987) is now professor emerita at the Virginia Military Institute, where she held the Burgwyn Chair in Military History. She recently published her ninth book, *Guarding the Caesars: Roman Internal Security under the Flavian Dynasty* (Rowman & Littlefield), the sequel to *Kill Caesar! Assassination in the Early Roman Empire* (Stackpole Books).

Ken Swope (PhD 2001) published *Struggle for Empire: The Battles of General Zuo Zongtang* (Naval Institute Press), and his first monograph, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*, has appeared in Chinese translation. He received a travel grant from Stanford's East Asia Library to conduct research for a forthcoming volume on the Qing Dynasty.

Christopher Thiry (BA 1989) published "Santa's Got a Gun: A Case Study of Cultural Stereotypes Embedded in a Map" in the peer-reviewed journal *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization*.

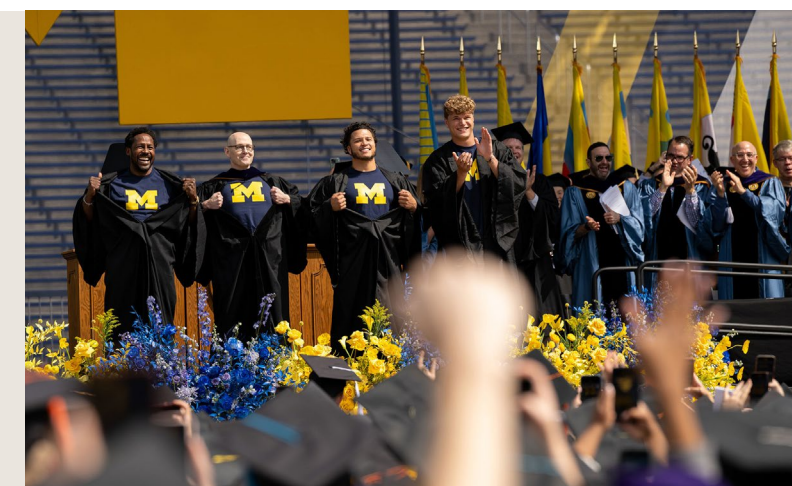
Michelle D'Haene Tobin (BA 1980) will publish her debut novel, *Home for the Bewildered* (Vine Leaves Press), in September 2024. She works as a licensed clinical social worker in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Lynn Weiner (BA 1972) retired as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of history at Roosevelt University in Chicago. She recently co-edited and co-authored an online public history resource, "Telling Women's Stories: A Toolkit for Historic Sites and Museums," hosted by the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites. She's also writing a book on public history.

Christopher Wilson (BA 1989) was named supervisory museum curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Marissa Wojcik (BA 2016) published her first cookbook, *Modern Jewish Breads: Recipes From North Shore To South Bay*, a memoir told through updated classic recipes.

Mark Yura (BA 1975) retired from 45 years of private law practice and is launching a second career in consulting to small businesses and related services.



Watch Brad Meltzer's graduation speech

myumi.ch/Dr4VR

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Front cover: 2024 History Department commencement ceremony (Sean Carter).
Back cover: Angell Hall (Gregory Parker).

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Regents of the University of Michigan: Jordan B. Acker, Michael J. Behm, Mark J. Bernstein, Paul W. Brown, Sarah Hubbard, Denise Ilitch, Ron Weiser, Katherine E. White, Santa J. Ono (ex officio)

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