

2026

HISTORY MATTERS



M | HISTORY



FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends:

Like many of my colleagues, I spend a fair amount of time thinking about – or rather, worrying about – the impact of ubiquitous advanced Large Language Model (LLM) AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and others, on student learning, on humanities pedagogy, and on academic freedom itself. Predictions about the future run from frighteningly bleak to buoyantly optimistic. Within the History department we have held workshops and discussions, both among ourselves and with experts from across campus, to better understand the technology and consider where it may lead.

Whatever the future may hold, we are already making pragmatic, ethical, legal, and intellectual decisions about this new technology on an almost daily basis. These choices, even more than speculation about what lies ahead, preoccupy me. They “live rent-free in my head,” to cite an idiom that ChatGPT itself might suggest.

A recent article on this issue by philosopher N. Ángel Pinillos in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 15, 2026) helped ease that preoccupation, if only slightly. Pinillos’ argument is pragmatic: the very skills cultivated by the humanities are precisely those required to use AI well. What are those skills? Every history student – and every member of our faculty – knows these skills: the ability to read texts closely and critically, to place ideas and events in context, to distinguish causes from consequences, and to write analytically, clearly, and persuasively. As Pinillos puts it:

You have to read carefully what [AI] has produced. You have to notice where the argument slips. You have to recognize when a confident-sounding paragraph is actually evading or subtly misunderstanding the question. You have to write the prompt that gets the model to do what you actually want, which requires knowing what you actually want with a precision most people never develop. You have to revise the output, which requires being able to write better than the model writes by default ...

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The person trained to read closely, think critically, and write precisely is, Pinillos concludes, more valuable in nearly every knowledge-work context today than someone who lacks those skills. I hear much the same message from the alumni who return each year for our U-M History Banquet and Career Conference.

There, they meet with majors, minors, and other “History-curious” students in a series of lightning presentations, small-group mentoring sessions, and over a shared meal. Time and again, our alumni describe how the habits of mind they developed as history students – critical reading, analytical thinking, persuasive writing, and the ability to place complex problems in context – have enabled them to build creative, meaningful, and successful careers across a remarkable range of professions. If Pinillos is right, then a humanities education – and a History education in particular – offers one of the strongest preparations for the future of a knowledge economy, precisely because it cultivates the habits of mind that AI cannot replace but instead demands.

A History education also brings beauty, wisdom, and insight into the world. I hope you will find evidence of that in the pages that follow. As we embark on a new academic year, we do so mindful of the challenges ahead, but equally confident that informed, empathetic, historically grounded thinking – our superpower – remains essential to building a more just and flourishing future, whatever may come. I am excited to see what this year will bring. If your travels bring you to Ann Arbor, please stop by our offices in Tisch Hall and say hello. And however you choose to stay connected – with our department, our students, and our alumni – I hope you will join us as we continue to discover and celebrate the many ways that history matters.

Warm regards,



William J. Glover
Department Chair
Professor of History

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UNDERGRADS
AT WORK

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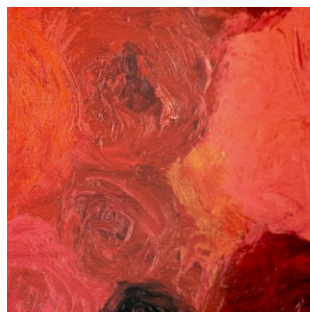
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SNAPSHOTS



Civil Rights Veteran David Dennis Sr. and Son Connect at MLK Day Event

On January 19, History, the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, and the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies held its eighth annual joint MLK Symposium. This year's event, "The Movement Made Us All: Historical Legacies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Current Moment," featured a conversation with civil rights veteran David J. Dennis Sr. and his son, journalist and author David J. Dennis Jr., moderated by Matthew Countryman, associate professor of History and Afroamerican and African Studies.



Full House for Histories of Slavery, Freedom, and the Law Conference

On November 12–13, colleagues, students, and friends of Charles Gibson Distinguished University Professor Emerita of History Rebecca J. Scott gathered for the Histories of Slavery, Freedom, and the Law Conference in honor of Scott, who retired in April. Ada Ferrer (Dayton-Stockton Professor of History, Princeton University) gave a keynote speech in Hutchins Hall, "Generations of Freedom: A Reflection on Rebecca Scott's Work and Influence."



"Anthro-History Returns" Event Brings Alums and Students Together

Doctoral students in the Anthropology and History program hosted an "Anthro-History Returns" symposium February 6–7 featuring alumni guests on panels about money, religion, and archives in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe. The last Anthro-History symposium was held nine years ago. It was able to return this year thanks to the generosity of former faculty member Sally Humphreys' endowment.

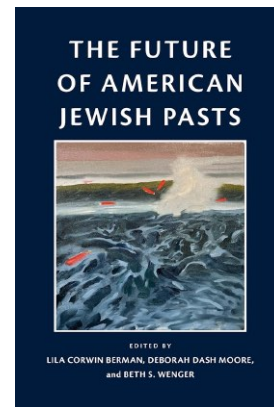
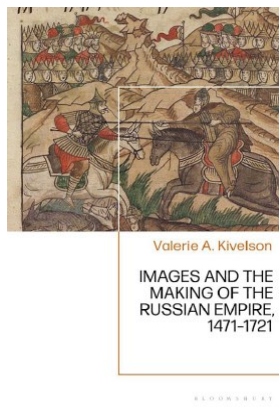
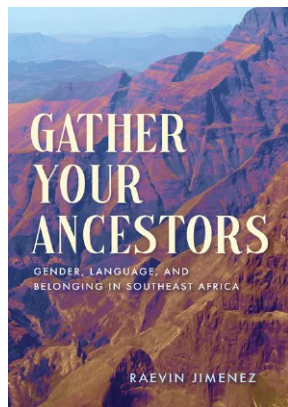
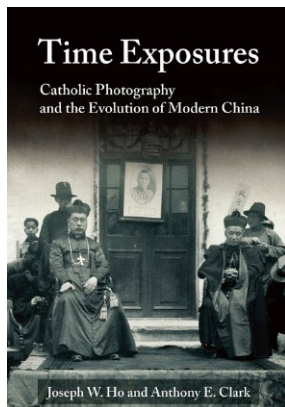
In Memoriam

John V.A. Fine Jr., a distinguished scholar of Byzantium, Christianity, and the medieval and modern Balkans, died July 6, 2026. He taught in the University of Michigan Department of History from 1969 until his retirement in 2013, serving as a dedicated teacher and mentor for nearly 45 years. Fine authored four books and co-authored another with a former student. His courses ranged from Byzantine and early church history to the medieval Balkans and World War II. Beloved by colleagues and students, he profoundly shaped the many scholars and students he taught and mentored.



Gerald Floyd Linderman, a distinguished scholar of American military history and beloved University of Michigan professor, died September 13, 2025, on his 91st birthday. Known for bringing soldiers' lived experiences to the center of American war history, he authored three books and inspired generations of students through lively lectures and engaging debate. His exceptional teaching earned numerous U-M and LSA awards. He retired in 1995, leaving a lasting legacy as a gifted educator, groundbreaking scholar, and cherished mentor.

Recent U-M History Publications



Joseph W. Ho

Time Exposures: Catholic Photography and the Evolution of Modern China
Co-authored with Anthony E. Clark
Hong Kong University Press

Raevin Jimenez

Gather Your Ancestors: Gender, Language, and Belonging in Southeast Africa
University of Wisconsin Press

Valerie A. Kivelson

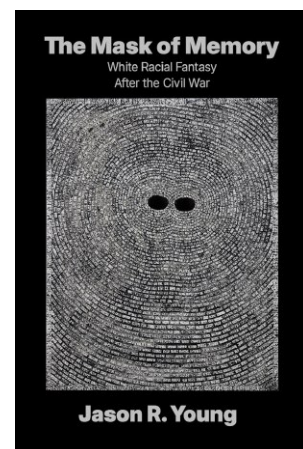
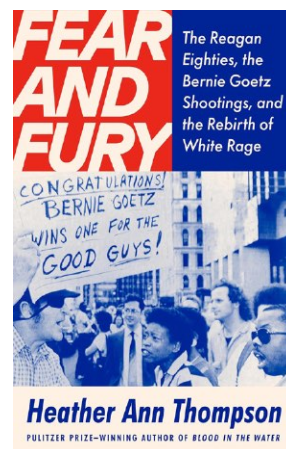
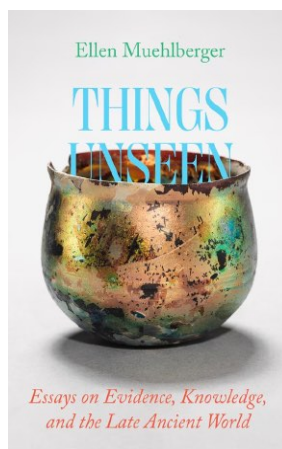
Images and the Making of the Russian Empire, 1471-1721
Bloomsbury

Deborah Dash Moore

The Future of American Jewish Pasts
Co-edited with Lila Corwin Berman and Beth S. Wenger
University of Pennsylvania Press

Ellen Muehlberger

Things Unseen: Essays on Evidence, Knowledge, and the Late Ancient World
University of California Press



Heather Ann Thompson

Fear and Fury: The Reagan Eighties, the Bernie Goetz Shootings, and the Rebirth of White Rage
Pantheon Books

Jason R. Young

The Mask of Memory: White Racial Fantasy After the Civil War
The University of North Carolina Press



(Andrew Mascharka, Michigan Photography)

Eisenberg Institute and Inclusive History Project Host "Living With Treaties" Public Event

Maggie and Ned Blackhawk (New York University, Yale University) headlined the Eisenberg Institute's 2026 public-facing panel that served as the keynote event for the Inclusive History Project's two-day conference, "Living With Treaties."

The panel reflected on the past, present, and future of Indigenous history and considered the complex ties between the University of Michigan and the history of Native American land dispossession.

Summer in the Stacks

Historical research often begins in the archives. U-M History PhD students often spend their summers diving deep into primary sources located around the world. These are just a few of their stories.

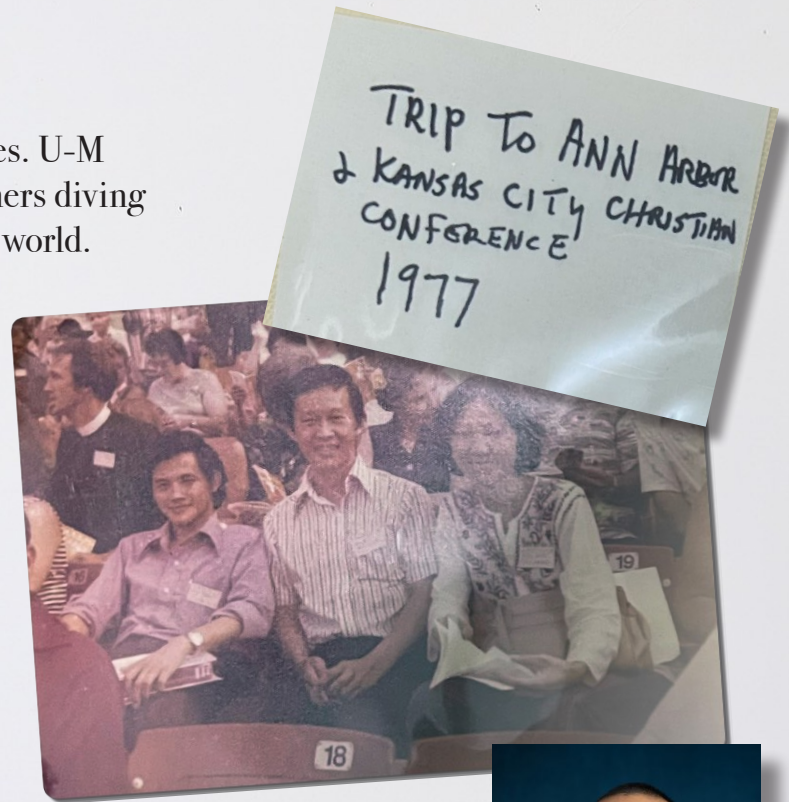
By Elizabeth Collins

Kai ngu

Doctoral Student, Anthropology and History
Archive: The Light of Jesus Christ Covenant Community Archives

This summer I was in the office archives of the Light of Jesus Christ Covenant Community in the capital of Sabah, Malaysia. LJCCC is part of the first global wave of Catholic Charismatic covenant communities that led religious revivals in the 1980s, in tandem with state nationalization campaigns.

I plan to visit charismatic prayer groups and conduct interviews to determine what kinds of practices were ceased (or remade), what new forms were created, and what objects were surrendered (ancestral jars, skulls and ritual paraphernalia). In more rural areas, I want to obtain maps of land-use changes to see if there is a correlation between ecological and religious changes.



Above: LJCCC founders at the Big House on a revival gathering in 1977 (Light of Jesus Christ Covenant Community Archives); below: a collection of religious objects surrendered to a parish (Kai ngu)



Albert Cavallaro

Doctoral Candidate, History

Archives: *Bukhara Regional State Archive, National Archive of Uzbekistan*

Working inside the archives of Uzbekistan is an inherently social experience. This is especially true during the Chilla: the hottest period of the year, lasting roughly 40 days from late June to early August, which also happens to overlap with the conclusion of the academic year for Uzbek universities and institutes of higher education. In July and August professors and graduate students from across Uzbekistan flock to the O'zbekiston Milliy Arxivi (the National Archive of Uzbekistan) located in Tashkent.

It was, in part, to avoid these crowds as well as to look into the processes by which a palace of the Bukharan emir became a museum of regional history in the Soviet period that I, instead, chose to work in the Buxoro Viloyat Davlat Arxivi (the Bukharan Regional State Archive). Here, rather than crowds of other scholars, I found only Muxbirbek, who on behalf of the Uzbek government spends his days sitting in the archives researching victims of state repression in the 1920s and 1930s. We quickly became friends. As he sought information regarding state executions, I instead looked for and found information regarding state anxieties about supposed "pro-emir propaganda" in the palace museums of Soviet Bukhara in the 1940s and 1950s.



Right: description of photo exhibits at the Bukharan Regional History Museum, 1955 (Albert Cavallaro)



Yee Ting Leong

Doctoral Student, History

Archive: *National Archives of Malaysia*

Over the summer, I spent a month in the National Archives of Malaysia (Arkib Negara Malaysia) branches in the cities of Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Penang, Alor Setar, Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu and Kuantan.

I was looking for police and court records of gendered violence and sexual crimes (in English, Mandarin, Malay, and Jawi), from the 1890s to the 1980s. What I found most fascinating was encountering the voices of child witnesses and survivors of sexual violence. Often disbelieved by the judges and contradicted by the defendants, these witnesses remind us of the fraught nature of knowledge production in colonial courtrooms.

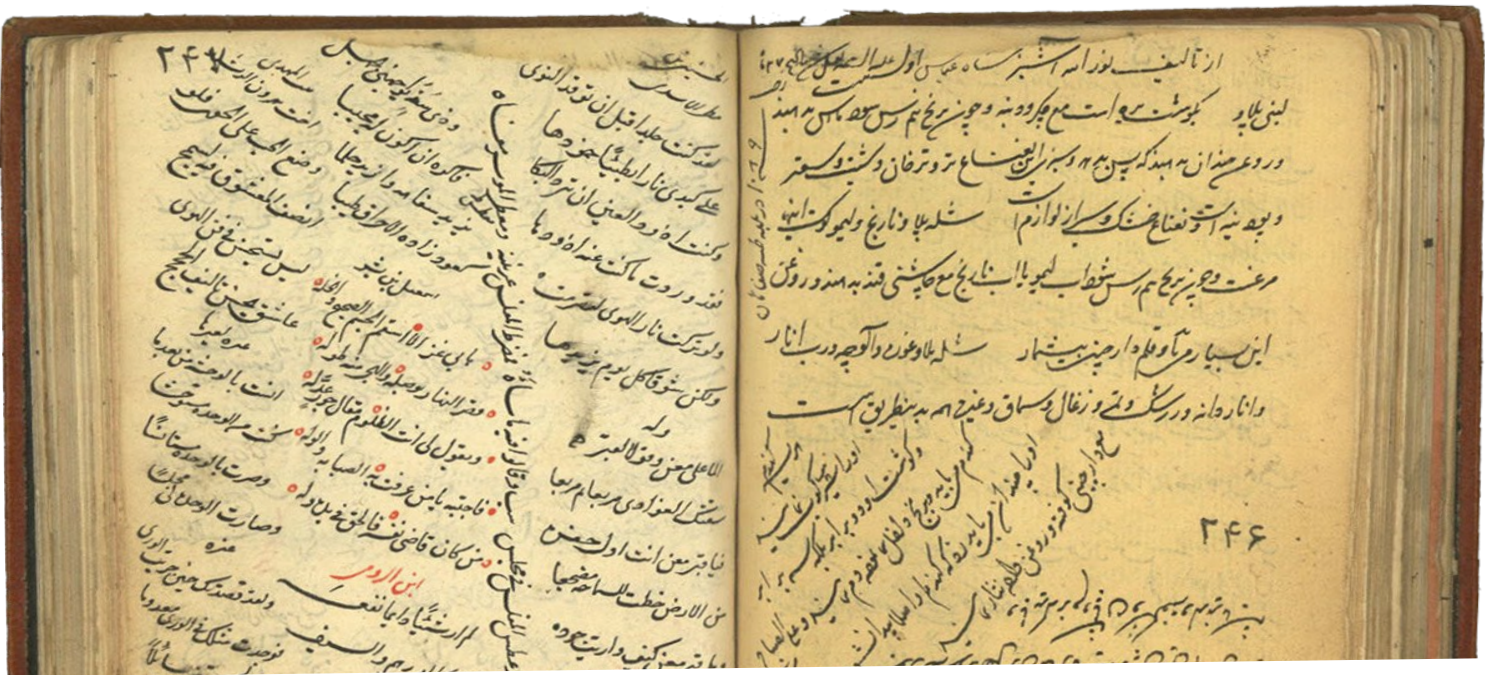


National Archives of Malaysia, Penang (Yee Ting Leong)

A Taste of the

U-M History graduate students and faculty are carrying the mantle of sensory history, a relatively new approach that attempts to understand how people saw, heard, felt, smelled, and *tasted* the world around them.

By Elizabeth Collins



Recipes from Nūrullāh, *Māddat al-hayāh*, a seventeenth century cookbook, Majlis Library, Tehran, Iran (Sam Winikow)

There are few things as universal to the human experience as food. Food nourishes our bodies, strengthens our bonds with one another, and reminds us of the past – near and far. Historians at the University of Michigan have been tapping into the senses as an effective approach to understanding the past, and inspiring the next generation to do the same.

The second half of the twentieth century saw a significant shift in focus in the field of history from major events and actors to the everyday lives of people. And one way in which historians have been able to recapture those lives is through “sensory history.”

Historical sources don’t always tap into the physical, visceral reality of life as effectively as a texture, scent, or taste could.

Taste is a sense that many people find to be very personal. Therefore, it is a significant way to connect with their own past as well as pasts that are far more temporally removed.

At U-M, there have been a number of innovative culinary history projects. Miranda Brown, Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker Collegiate Professor of Chinese Studies and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, teaches a class on Asian foodways. As part of the course, she takes her students to a kitchen where they make dumplings and learn about the complex history of such a simple dish.

“Northern nomadic cultures were interested in wheat,” she wrote, “and the Chinese heartland has always had a strong steaming and boiling culture. That interaction, at this artery of multiple civilizations, is what gave birth to the dumpling.”

Past

Jessica Walker, Assistant Professor in the Department of American Culture and Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, authored the manuscript *Her Kitchen is The World: Black Women and the Culture of Soul Food*, which “traces the construction of soul food using cookbooks, USDA narrative reports, television, and film.”

Both Brown and Walker are actively involved in the Sustainable Food Systems Initiative at U-M, which involves an interdisciplinary mix of students, faculty, and communities in building food systems that are “health-promoting, economically viable, equitable, and ecologically sound.”

In the History department itself, several faculty members have undertaken food-related projects. David Hancock published *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (Yale University Press, 2009) about the Portuguese wine trade and how it shaped the Atlantic world. Melanie Tanielian has written about food crises and humanitarian aid during World War I. Dario Gaggio is currently researching eel farming in post-World War II Italy. And Christian de Pee was featured on an episode of BBC’s *The Forum* podcast explaining how restaurants functioned in twelfth century China.

A lot of the culinary – and more broadly, sensory – work being done in the department today is premodern.

When surviving sources are limited, historians sometimes have to get creative, and that’s exactly what Roman historian Anna Bonnell Freidin has been inspiring her students to do.

In the winter term of 2024, Freidin designed a graduate-level class, Roman Foodways, which focused on systems of agriculture and the culinary economy.

“The food Romans ate connected their bodies to the environments they inhabited, to the machinery of empire, and the divine forces that organized their bodies and worlds,” the syllabus described.

Freidin’s course used the concept of the “sensorium” as a foundation. From this perspective, human senses are not just physical experiences, but are also culturally constructed.

Sam Winikow, a doctoral candidate, liked Freidin’s class so much that he actually took it twice. His research focuses on artisanal labor in seventeenth century Iran. Winikow was



Marble relief of a Roman baker, Ostia Antica (Inv. 137). Late imperial period. (American Academy in Rome)

already exploring the values of different labor categories, and Freidin’s course was the perfect opportunity to study the social category of “cook.”

“We have a number of documents that provide unique insights [such as] cookbooks from the early sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in the manuscript tradition,” Winikow notes. “The recipes themselves were not heavily measurement-based. There are measurements for a feast – large quantities – but not really about cooking time. [There were perhaps] directions on how strong the fire should be.”

Cookbooks today are generally mathematical, and are used by anyone interested in attempting recipes contained within. But these historical cookbooks were much rarer, and often represented a certain amount of social power at the time.

Winikow explained, “cooking was not about the skills, it was about your moral comportment. Cooks were engaging in the same professional formations as shoemakers and carpenters, and they were not learning from books; rather, apprentices learned from their masters.”

He found that approaching premodern Iran from the point of view of culinary laborers shed light on historical experiences in an indirect way. This included the gendered nature of labor. Winikow noted that there are not many people writing about cultures of male professional cooking.

He also found new questions to ask of his subjects. On the topic of coffee, he said, “while many scholars analyze coffee through the lens of politics, society, and the public sphere, it is equally vital to ask: how do people historically develop a taste for a new substance?”

In contrast to Winikow, who arrived at culinary history in a more roundabout way, doctoral student Wanhan Xing was pursuing the sensory approach from the start.

“In my first grad school application, I proposed doing food studies – specifically, films and food in the late twentieth century. One of the films I was interested in was *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), which features *tanghulu* (candied hawthorn berries on a stick) as an important plot point.”

Xing also took the Roman Foodways course, and used it as an opportunity to expand on her research into Catholic missionaries in seventeenth century China. Specifically, Xing was interested in the religious practice of fasting.

“How can missionaries justify fasting?” Xing asked. “Feasting and fasting featured in missionary translations of the Bible in China, and missionaries cited Chinese medicine and ideas about food moderation in doing so. After all, Saint

Jerome, cited by missionaries, suggested that food was medicine for the body.”

Much like Winikow, Xing is interested in the moral aspects of cuisine. Food and morality have always been intertwined, it would seem, across all geographies.

The prominence of classicists studying culinary history, and sensory history more broadly, may trace back to philosophical origins. The sensorium, as Xing said, “is also a way to respond to the Cartesian dichotomy – body versus mind – that dominated academia for quite a while.” By prioritizing the mind, we devalue the contributions of the body.

In Ann Arbor, the Culinary Historians group hosts a very active speaker program at the District Library. There is no shortage of interest in the subject, even beyond the academy. But for graduate students and faculty at U-M, this approach will continue to provide tasty new perspectives. ■



Dim sum at a Chinese restaurant in Windsor, Canada; above right: a street food stall photographed by French Jesuit missionaries in Suzhou, China, circa 1930. (Joseph W. Ho)

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Bethany Nagle

Joseph W. Ho caught up with her to learn more about the questions that drew her to the field, and what motivates her research and educational outreach.



What did you enjoy most about your time in the U-M History program? What are some learning or community experiences that stand out?

My favorite part about the U-M History program, and the thing I still talk about to this day, was the wide variety of history classes I could take that were absolutely fascinating. The class I brag about most is the History of Witchcraft. Other interesting courses that stand out were about the history and policy making of K-12 education and the history of the 1960s. Every class was taught by passionate professors who were experts in their respective areas of study.

During my time as a student, I attended a leadership summit for college students at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. This experience shaped the rest of my time at Michigan and shifted my career aspirations from becoming a doctor to working in a museum. My history advisor suggested I attend, and I could not be more thankful to Professor Kathleen Canning for highlighting this opportunity for me.

Tell us more about your career after graduating from U-M. Where has life taken you?

I received some great advice from my advisor during my senior year of college: if you want to work in the museum field, you need to move to the heart of the museum industry to get your foot in the door. When I graduated in 2013, that is exactly what I did. I moved to DC and was a nanny for two years while volunteering at a Smithsonian Museum on the Mall and exploring what graduate school opportunities were the best fit for me. After two years, I enrolled in American University's master's program in history.

While in school, I interned at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the White House Historical Association. I eventually returned to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, where I've worked since the summer of 2019. I manage the creation of teacher resources for secondary educators, including over 100 lesson plans, teacher guides, and student activities currently available on the museum's website. I am also on the team for planning the annual Belfer National Conference for Holocaust Education, serving teachers in all 50 states. Over 6,600 teachers registered for the 2026 conference, where we focused on teaching with primary sources from the museum's collections and making Holocaust history accessible for all students.

How does your History undergraduate education surface in your current work?

I think the biggest way my Michigan history education impacted me was by inspiring me to be curious about the past. How do we know what happened? What can we learn from primary sources? What other questions does this history raise for you? U-M professors did a wonderful job modeling this for

me, and I strive to carry the same way of thinking into my own work: creating pathways for students to engage in critical thinking and to keep looking for the next question. Helping others engage with the past in an exciting way feels like a direct extension of what I loved during my time at Michigan.

If you could give one or two key pieces of advice to current History undergraduate students, what would they be?

There are many opportunities to use your history degree within the field of history. From working in museums, cultural tourism sites and parks, archives, historic preservation, education companies, and nonprofits, programming for local or state governments – there are more options available than you think.

If you are willing to put yourself out there, you will find your way. If you're considering applying to graduate school, look at programs that have connections or fellowships to local museums or other historical organizations.

Why does history matter?

History matters because it shapes our understanding of the world around us by providing opportunities to understand one another from different perspectives and cultures. It encourages us to think critically about the stories we share in our communities. History provides tools to analyze past patterns that help inform our current lives. Also, most people enjoy learning when you make it fun! History is about more than facts and dates; when you provide tools that help people make connections, they can find relevance in the past. ■



Bethany Nagle (left) and Cathleen Cadigan (right) filming sessions for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's annual Belfer National Conference for Holocaust Education. (Courtesy of Bethany Nagle)

ALUMNI PROFILE

Poland on the Field

Kathleen Wroblewski (PhD 2018) returned to the University of Michigan in 2019 to take on the role of Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies. Elizabeth Collins spoke with her to learn more about her interest in Poland and athletics.



You were a PhD student here in History, and finished not long ago in 2018. Tell me about your dissertation topic.

I work on peasants and political economy in nineteenth and early twentieth century Polish lands. I was interested in thinking about who these individuals were, how they made their way through the world, and presenting a much more dynamic picture of their experiences.

Once I got into the archives, I came across these documents related to a particular shipping company that was moving people to the United States, but they were also thinking about how to move people across borders. People were writing and saying, "I'm not sure how to present myself at the border, what do I bring?" It was just really neat to see people talking about how people were experiencing mobility, and moving around the world, how to find jobs, and how to present oneself as respectable to the state.

You also teach classes on U-M athletics. Where does your interest in sports come from?

I've always watched a lot of baseball. I've been really into athletics and thinking about why people are so absorbed with them, and why there's an expectation at American universities that it's such an integral part of the experience. That, to me, is unique. It's not something that happens worldwide. And so it really became an opportunity for me to think about why we have this empire, the university, and, why sports don't look different, in our context.



Stadion Dziesięciolecia, 1958. (Lencse Zoltán)

Currently, I'm a co-PI on the Inclusive History Project site on athletics called "Beyond the Big House," and I teach a research lab on that. I work with Michael Rosenberg, and he's a writer at *Sports Illustrated*. We're developing a podcast that explores the gendered nature of U-M athletics, really from the outset. That is going to come out hopefully towards the end of the summer when everyone is ready for football, and they want information about U-M sports. The first series will explore both gendered theories, but also how the ideas of gender made their way into the built space of campus – like the development of the architecture. We also have a documentary in the works about the recruitment of football players and race in the 1950s.

What are you currently researching?

I appreciate the opportunity to do my work, and to be very creative with my research interests. The benefit of being in this department is how innovative people are, and how supportive people are when you decide to pivot and get interested in other things.

I'm starting a project on the creation of a stadium in Warsaw, Poland, which came to fruition in 1955 in the run-up to a festival of youth and students. It was called the Fifth World Festival of youth and students for peace and friendship. And so it was this big manifestation to really put the city on display.

One of the main sites was this national stadium, alongside the Pałac Kultury i Nauki, which is the big palace of culture. And these were seen as these symbols of the communist state. And so, my project has been on how people thought about youth and body and athletics in the 1950s. It's at this pivotal moment after Stalin dies, but before Khrushchev's secret speech, where you start to see people in art history have interpreted this moment as a sort of thaw.

I was at the archive yesterday reading papers about the transportation systems. Officials were really serious about making sure that the trains were running, that people were able to get to venue sites, that all the tickets were printed. There's this state bureaucracy that was supporting the whole athletics infrastructure that 10 years before was just a field of rubble.

What do you like best about your work as the ADUS?

Our undergrad students are so diverse. You think you know your students, and then you realize that you don't, and they're always doing really cool stuff. The kinds of co-creation of knowledge that happens within the classroom has been really fun. I've been teaching the methods classes, the intro methods classes, and being able to go into archives with students, and think about developing projects that then grow into something larger, perhaps, has been really fun. ■

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

A Love of Mexico

David Tamayo joined the department in the fall of 2020 as a Collegiate Fellow through the program for nontraditional scholars, and made tenure-track status in 2022. Elizabeth Collins caught up with him to learn more about his journey into the field.



Tell me more about your academic trajectory. What defines you as a nontraditional scholar?

My family moved from Tijuana, Mexico, to Southern California. Initially, I was a history student at the Autonomous University of Baja California near the border. I was interested in exploring the history of these places I grew up in, and I studied history there for a year before transferring to community college and later to the University of California, Berkeley.

From there, I went on to receive a master's degree in Latin American Studies from the University of Arizona. And then life and work opportunities took me to Tokyo, Japan, where I taught English and Spanish for two years.

What is your first book project about?

My first book expands my doctoral dissertation and examines how the middle classes were alienated by the anti-clerical, pro-labor, and agrarian politics of the 1910 Revolution and its aftermath. I use service clubs such as Lions and Rotary International to show how the middle classes engaged politically to defend their conservative cultural and political values. The Lions, one of the major social organizations that flourished in twentieth-century Mexico, became the de facto club for politicians in the conservative wing of the official revolutionary party, while Rotary drew together disaffected revolutionaries, Catholic activists, employers, and others who rejected the state's radicalism.

How do you see this topic resonating today?

As a Mexican living in the United States, I think it's important to understand what happens when these American exports – Lions, Rotary, etc. – go overseas, and how the American values they promote

are translated. There can be unintended consequences. When the Lions went to Mexico, it became linked with the party of the revolution. When Rotary came to Mexico, one of its clubs in Monterrey became a splinter group that was pro-fascist.

We are not immune to the dark side of seemingly non-partisan charitable organizations. There are many groups still active today that foster ideas of racial, cultural, or wealth superiority, along with other forms of inequality. It's important to be aware of this history of powerful forces to better address and challenge them.

You've been an educator for a long time. What are your favorite classes to teach at U-M?

I really enjoy teaching History 202. I had never taught a non-thematic class like this before, one that is not related to my own research interests. I was skeptical before taking it on, but it has become one of my favorites to teach. It's really fun to work with all History majors, and see them grow together as a cohort. And I learn so much with them!

Of course, I also love teaching History 363: Mexico. It's not only my area of expertise, but it's very personal to me. I always have a diverse group of students who are genuinely interested in learning this history, and recognize how important it is in order for us to have educated dialogues about contemporary issues.

You've been in Ann Arbor for six years now. What do you like best about living here?

Ann Arbor has been wonderful! After spending much of my life in the Southwest and Mexico, I love the lush greenery, the colorful birds, and our backyard carne asadas in the summer. I've also grown to appreciate winters here. The best part is that everything is close by, giving me ample time to spend with my two boys and support them at their soccer and basketball games. ■



Organizers and members of the first Rotary Club in Mexico at Mexico City, 1921. (Courtesy of David Tamayo)

History Undergraduates



At the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, Wenlu Gao examines an art historian and U-M alum's notes from postwar Japan (Joseph W. Ho)



Lillianah Olatunji drafts a narrative on Japanese language instructors at the Army Intensive Japanese Language School based at U-M during WWII (Joseph W. Ho)

Michigan in the World

Working with Professor Hitomi Tonomura, the Bentley Historical Library, and U-M History staff, undergraduate students recover U-M–Japan contacts in WWII, the 1950s, and beyond.



Professor Hitomi Tonomura and Nathan Fournier discuss files in the archives at the Toledo Museum of Art (Joseph W. Ho)



The 2026 Michigan in the World team discusses project findings at the Bentley Historical Library. Right to left: Emily Luo, Kaitlyn Yang, Lillianah Olatunji, Sarah McLusky, Hitomi Tonomura, Wanhua Xing, Ames Lim, Nathan Fournier, Wenlu Gao (Joseph W. Ho)

at Work

Jewell Mason

I chose to research Asher Aray, a free Black Underground Railroad worker, because I found it interesting that he lived in Ypsilanti, where I was living at the time.

My initial research showed that he was buried in one of the earliest integrated cemeteries in Michigan, which was a ten-minute drive from my apartment. As I dove deeper into my research, I found him tied to the escape of twenty-eight freedom seekers from Boone County, Kentucky. This is what most notably put him into the historical record, but the more I researched, the more I found him mentioned in anti-slavery conventions in Ann Arbor and the State Convention of the Colored Citizens Committee held in Detroit.

He was also mentioned in other Underground Railroad workers' accounts of other escapes. I think the most interesting thing that I found was when I visited the archives that held his family's papers and was able to find his ledger, which documented him helping at least forty freedom seekers make their way to freedom. I found this research and history to be very interesting, and I feel honored to be able to highlight the incredible work of this individual. My research shows the strong community ties that were crucial in making the Underground Railroad work in successfully transporting freedom seekers to freedom in Canada. I am excited to get the site of Asher Aray's farm (now a gas station and convenience store) recognized on the Network to Freedom. ■



Jewell Mason stands on the former site of Asher Aray's farm. (Joseph W. Ho)

Michigan History Center

Each summer two students work with the MHC to conduct research on the history of the Underground Railroad in Michigan and nominate a field site for public commemoration.

Audrey Rosenberg

The topic of my research and nomination is the Detroit Colored Vigilant Committee, an African American abolitionist organization that advocated for African American rights and held stations on the Underground Railroad in the mid-1800s.

The specific location that I nominated is an area of green space on the corner of East Jefferson Avenue and Bates Street in Detroit, which once housed a lodge that the committee used as a station. Abolitionists like William Lambert and George DeBaptiste brought freedom seekers to this lodge as the first stop in Detroit before helping them cross the Detroit River to Canada. The green space appears to adhere to the same foundation that the original building had, according to comparisons I have made with maps and modern images.

This project presented a unique challenge for me: I knew it would be more difficult to find information in some newspapers since the Underground Railroad depended on secrecy. That made the information I did find that much more rewarding, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to write and research this nomination. ■



Audrey Rosenberg stands on the site in downtown Detroit that once held a lodge used as an Underground Railroad station (Joseph W. Ho)

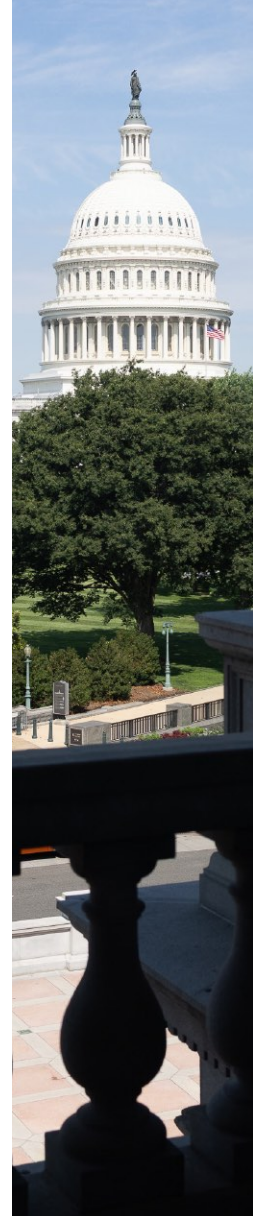
At the Smithsonian with U-M History Interns

At the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, U-M History undergraduate interns gain public history skills with hands-on experiences in museum operations and archival research. Working closely with alum Christopher Wilson, Supervisory Curator and Chair of the Division of Home and Community Life, alongside his expert colleagues at the Smithsonian and Library of Congress, students play key roles in preserving American histories for generations to come.

Photo essay by Joseph W. Ho



Clockwise from top left: Ariela Alperstein examines and shows details in a 1910 dress made by a woman in Panama – clean hands are better than gloves when working with textiles; Audra Woehle (left) and Grace Jiang (right) catalog a doctor's bag; Christopher Wilson converses with interns at his NMAH office. (Joseph W. Ho)



Top row, left to right: Naomi Coquillon (right), Chief of Interpretation at the Library of Congress, leads interns on a tour of the library; Christopher Wilson, Ariela Alperstein, Audra Woehle, and Grace Jiang on the steps of the Library of Congress; Grace Jiang (right) and Audra Woehle catalog a broken outdoor speaker from the NMAH, destroyed during the January 6, 2021 United States Capitol attack; the United States Capitol building as seen from the Library of Congress.

Bottom row, left to right: Laura E. Johnson, Curator of Costumes and Textiles at the NMAH, shares rare items from the collection with the interns; Yve Colby, C. Malcolm Watkins Curator of the Domestic Life Collection at the NMAH, discusses historical home appliances preserved in the collection. (Joseph W. Ho)

Tracing Odysseys: From Global Family Histories to Groundbreaking New Volume

Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard on their new French-language book, *De l'esclavage à la liberté. L'odyssée des Tinchant, 1793–1945*, and what it offers readers with fragmented family histories of their own.

By Joseph W. Ho

It began with a letter, ostensibly about cigar branding.

In September 1899, a merchant in Antwerp named Édouard Tinchant wrote to Máximo Gómez, the general who had led and survived Cuba's long war against Spanish colonialism, asking permission to put his name and portrait on a premium line of cigars. To explain the boldness of the request, he offered a few words about his family. His father, of Haitian descent, had taken six children out of Louisiana, he wrote, because he wanted to raise them in a land where they would not be plagued by prejudices. He himself had served in the Union Army and been elected a delegate to Louisiana's Constitutional Convention of 1867–68. He had always supported Cuba's cause.

Rebecca J. Scott read that letter in the Cuban National Archives. In it, she recognized several of the long nineteenth century's struggles over citizenship and racial equality: the Haitian Revolution, the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Cuban War of Independence. All these folded into one family's account of itself. Either the man was a fabulist, Scott thought, or this was a path into all these events.

Every time a new record surfaced, Scott, the Charles Gibson Distinguished University Professor Emerita of History at U-M, reached out to Jean M. Hébrard, a masterful reader of French documents, now a research professor at Johns Hopkins University. After the fourth or fifth call, she suggested that they write the book together. Drawing from their research in seven countries, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Harvard University Press, 2012) followed five generations across three continents, from a West African woman named Rosalie, carried into slavery in Saint-Domingue, to her descendant Marie-José, a member of the Belgian resistance in WWII.

Now, fourteen years later, Hébrard and Scott have published *De l'esclavage à la liberté. L'odyssée des Tinchant, 1793–1945* [*From Slavery to Freedom: The Odyssey of the Tinchant Family, 1793–1945*] (Gallimard, May 2026). It is not a translation. "They're completely different books," Scott says. "There is not a single sentence that is matched."

Their rule was that whoever's mother tongue it was held the pen. This time it was Hébrard's turn, and he had different questions. American historical scholarship has nearly a century of research on slavery behind it, while French research on these topics was only beginning.

Multiple contributions shaped the book's development. The family had read the first book, *Freedom Papers*, and joined the project, opening private collections and reading drafts of the new one, chapter by chapter. Pandemic-era digitization transformed what was findable: once Belgium's nineteenth century newspapers went online, Hébrard says, a search for "Tinchant" returned more than two hundred articles, yielding a whole new chapter on the family's life in Antwerp. Word came that a researcher in Haiti had found Rosalie's death certificate. Rosalie, after years in Cuba as a refugee, had gone back to Haiti – the one country where a woman of color could then be assured of citizenship – and died there in 1851, recorded as "Rosalie Vincent, citizen, landholder, African." "It just took my breath away," Scott says.

What the authors most want general readers to take away, though, is the approach to such histories: so many readers arrive with family memories of their own. A *Le Monde* journalist interrupted her own interview with Scott and Hébrard to describe a Caribbean ancestor. An RFI (Radio France Internationale) reporter waited until the formal interview was over, then added: "let me tell you about my family."

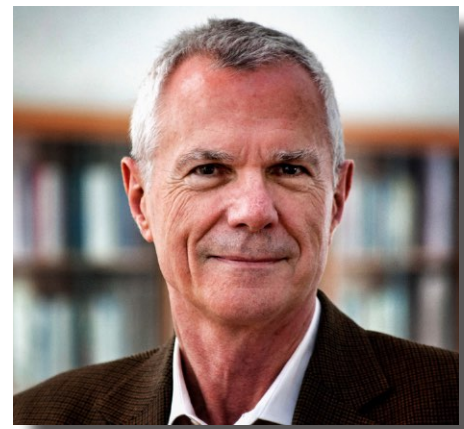
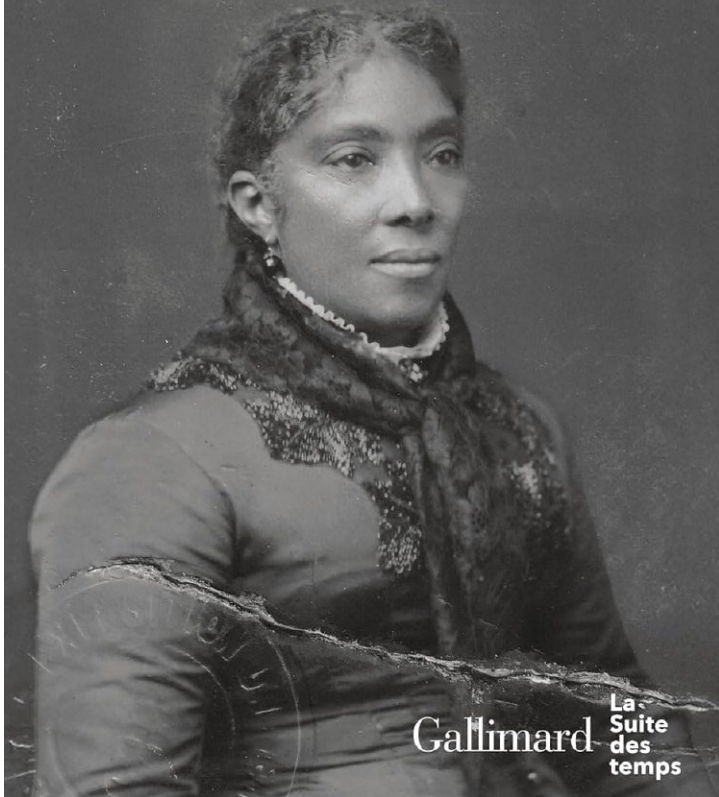
To them and other families wondering about tracing their own histories within larger ones, Hébrard's advice is two words: "do it." With one condition: "the important thing is to have questions." What changed in this family, and when, and why – and what never changed at all. Scott adds: when thinking about tackling one's family history, read widely, including fiction. As an example, she suggests Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* for a sense of saga and contingency rather than idealistic genealogical discovery.

Above all, family historians should keep a watchful eye for discrepancies. One branch of the Tinchants turned out to have invented an elaborate Mexican origin; Joseph Tinchant restyled himself Don José and sold cigars supposedly grown in Mexico from Cuban sources. Another descendant grew up believing the family's darker skin came from Mayan ancestors. The useful question, Scott

Jean Hébrard et Rebecca J. Scott

De l'esclavage à la liberté

L'odyssée des Tinchant, 1793-1945



Jean M. Hébrard (Le Centre de Recherches sur le Brésil Colonial et Contemporain)



Rebecca J. Scott (Lin Jones, Michigan Photography)

and Hébrard noted, was not whether – or only that – these stories were simply false. Rather, more complex understandings are found by tracing histories that also include self-invention.

The same instinct governs their answer to the question audiences always ask: is this family typical? Scott notes that this worry is misguided. Committed to following the family wherever its history led, they had to explain every anomaly. It is in anomalies, Hébrard argues, that institutions reveal how they work. Such a scholarly perspective is analogous to searching for clues through a microscope, Scott adds.

Paraphrasing French historian Arlette Farge, Scott notes that “we cannot bring back to life those whose names we find in the archive, but we must take care not to efface the other stories that might yet be written from their presence.”

In leading others to think critically about such processes of historical recovery, both are still teaching. Their former U-M History seminar, “Getting the Documents to Speak,” is due for revival in Paris in 2027. Asked how they will chase all the leads fascinated readers now send them, Scott doesn’t hesitate. “This is why we keep teaching seminars to graduate students. We ourselves will not live long enough to follow all these possible trails.” ■



Michele Kleijnen (left) and Antoine Struyf (right), two descendants of Joseph (José) Tinchant. (Courtesy of Rebecca Scott)

EISENBERG INSTITUTE

Celebrating Twenty Years of Scholarly Community and a New Gift

Institute receives an additional \$2 million donation from Kenneth Eisenberg and launches new initiatives

By Dario Gaggio



Kenneth and Frances Aftel Eisenberg

An Institute like ours can only thrive with the trust of its supporters and constituencies. A first, foundational act of trust was bestowed on us twenty years ago, when Kenneth and Frances Aftel Eisenberg endowed our Institute and set it on a path to realize our colleagues' ambition: a world-class forum for historical research and an inclusive venue where our intellectual commitments could be reinvigorated and shared with the wider world. I am proud to announce that last year our benefactors confirmed their trust in us with an extraordinarily generous additional gift. These are not easy times for the humanities, caught between competing priorities and agendas that are not always benevolent. In this challenging landscape, the Eisenbergs' generosity will enable us to expand our work, grounded in scholarly freedom, integrity, and responsibility. For more than two decades, the Institute has been committed to an ethic of service, supporting our colleagues, our graduate and undergraduate students, and the wider community of scholars and citizens around us. This gift prompts us to recommit to that ethic for decades to come.

In that spirit, we are developing two initiatives that will begin to put the new resources to meaningful use. With the cooperation

of our colleagues in the Department of History, over the coming academic year we will organize a biennial Eisenberg Conference, bringing together our faculty and external scholars to discuss a theme of broad relevance. We will ensure that this conference is inclusive, participatory, and fully open to the public. In addition, we are establishing an Eisenberg Journalist in Residence program, in cooperation with U-M's Wallace House Center for Journalists. Each year, a distinguished journalist will join us for a week during the winter semester, delivering a public lecture, leading a focused workshop with faculty and graduate students, and visiting both undergraduate and graduate classes. These initiatives are only the beginning of the transformative impact this new gift will have on the Institute, the department, and our broader intellectual community. Thanks to the Eisenbergs' support, we can look to the future with renewed confidence and optimism.

Our community, however, won't have to wait long to see great things from the Eisenberg Institute. Our program for the upcoming academic year offers ample opportunity to understand both the deep past and the present in light of historical reflection. While we have forgone an explicit overarching theme, our roster of speakers will bring a historical lens to issues that are central to our public consciousness. A cluster of speakers will focus on the Middle East today and over the centuries. We will learn about the challenges facing Palestinian scholars and practitioners as they work to preserve their people's history in the face of violence and occupation. We have also invited one of the world's leading experts on the history of maritime trade in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. Other speakers' scholarly interests include the environmental history of the Ottoman Empire, and disability and difference in medieval Mesopotamia. We will welcome historians of the African American experience, of the global political left in the context of decolonization, of urbanism and city life in Africa, and of student activism in modern China. Come take this historically informed tour of the world with us, and don't forget to ask the hard and urgent questions. ■

A Historian at Heart

The inaugural Dr. Stephen and Lee Gork Endowed Lecture at the Eisenberg Institute closes a circle decades in the making

By Joseph W. Ho

When Professor Michelle Moyd took the podium in Tisch Hall on February 12 to deliver “Labor, Spirit, and Sovereignty: Africa’s Great War,” she inaugurated the Dr. Stephen and Lee Gork Endowed Lecture at the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies. In the audience were Stephen Gork and his wife, Lee, celebrating the lecture that now bears their names.

As things go, Stephen Gork’s very first history course at Michigan was in African history. He had arrived as a junior transfer from Jackson Community College, and in that first semester U-M History Professor Godfrey N. Uzoigwe – Nigerian-born, British-educated, often sporting pinstriped three-piece suits – set the standard by which Gork has measured intellectual seriousness ever since. Assigned a term paper, he chose Bantu migration patterns and produced some eighty typewritten pages, only to learn in the semester’s last week that the page limit was ten; Professor Uzoigwe granted an exception. The paper carried 115 footnotes, a number that Gork recalls with a laugh.

When he mentioned Uzoigwe to Moyd, Red Cedar Distinguished Professor at Michigan State University and author of *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa*, she knew Uzoigwe’s work well, having cited him in her own scholarship. Moyd’s lecture, on African labor and resistance during the First World War, spoke to a subject that echoed Gork’s encounters with African history at U-M, as well as his ongoing interests in making historical themes accessible to wider audiences.

Gork’s path to studying history was a colorful one. Told he needed a major when enrolling at U-M, he pored over career magazines and decided to become a dentist. Yet, because his pre-dental coursework counted as electives, he could major in whatever subjects he loved most. Gork quickly chose history, concentrating on the British Empire under the late Professor Gerald Saxon Brown, “an old school gentleman” whose courses on the Victorian era “really scratched an old itch of mine.”



Stephen and Lee Gork



Michelle Moyd delivers the inaugural Gork Lecture, February 12, 2026. (Joseph W. Ho)

Dentistry became Gork’s thirty-nine-year career, while history remained his lifelong intellectual love. Raised by two educators, including a mother whose genealogical research fills five volumes held at the Library of Congress, he has spent years reading about and visiting historic sites. He traces his own family back to a Cotswolds house his ancestors left in 1836. It is now a bed and breakfast, and nearly every recent descendant has since stayed there.

Eleven members of the Gork family have attended the University of Michigan. Considering this legacy, “I thought the absolute perfect way for me to give back was through the History department,” Gork says. “I always considered that mine. I was the history major.” The gift honors his parents as much as the field: “they would be happy to do this.”

When asked what he loves best about Eisenberg Institute programs, Gork immediately responds that it is the question-and-answer period following the engaging lectures. “I am so humbled sitting there listening,” he says.

Thanks to Stephen and Lee Gork, there will be many more of these gatherings for years to come. ■

ALUMNI UPDATES

Meredith Codlin Strauss (BA 1996) attended Columbia Law School and is now a partner at Rottenstreich Farley Bronstein Fisher Potter Hodas LLP, where she specializes in complex, high-net-worth matrimonial litigation. She is a fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers and the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.

John Beatty (BA 1982, MA 1984) was elected a fellow of the American Society of Genealogists in October 2025 and recently authored *The Citadel: The History of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Indiana, 1898–2026*.

Richard Bodek (PhD 1990), professor of history at the College of Charleston, used his Fulbright Award at the University of Roehampton in London to complete work on his new book, *Death in the Rubble: The Female Killer Who Stalked Cold War Berlin* (University of Toronto Press), which uses the true-crime genre to explore the social history of occupied Berlin in 1949.

Christopher Day (BA 1999) attended law school at Case Western Reserve University and has practiced law for 21 years, 18 of them as a senior magistrate for the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas.

Randal Jelks (BA 1981), Ruth N. Hall Professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies at Indiana University Bloomington, published his fifth book, *My America: Langston Hughes on Democracy* (Broadleaf Books).

Dr. Rebecca Kline (BS 2017) graduated from medical school and is completing a residency in internal medicine in Wisconsin.

Lucas Marra (Minor 2025) is pursuing a JD at the University of Minnesota Law School.

April Mayes (PhD 2003), senior associate dean at Pomona College, celebrates 20 years as the Warren Finney Day Professor of History.

Ian F. McNeely (PhD 1998), professor of history and senior associate dean for undergraduate education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, published *The University Unfettered: Public Higher Education in an Age of Disruption* (Columbia University Press).

Mary Beth Norton (BA 1960), the Mary Donlon Alger Professor Emerita of American History at Cornell University, published *I Humbly Beg Your Speedy Answer: Letters on Love & Marriage from the World's First Personal Advice Column* (Princeton University Press), a collection of questions and answers about courtship, marriage, and love from a seventeenth-century periodical.

Cassie Slattery (BA 2002) started a new role as director of strategic initiatives at the University of Utah.

Robert Warren (BA 1980) received the 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild and has practiced immigration law for nearly 35 years.

ALUMS AND STUDENTS CONNECT AT BANQUET AND CAREER CONFERENCE



On November 7–8, 2025, U-M History held its second annual undergraduate banquet and career conference to connect undergraduate alumni and current undergraduate students.

U-M History collaborated with the LSA Opportunity Hub to organize the two-day conference.

On Friday evening, the alumni, more than 50 undergraduate students, and History faculty and staff gathered at the Graduate Hotel for a formal plated dinner and program.

Saturday morning, the alumni met with groups of students who received more personalized advice about how to make the most of their time at U-M – and how to prepare for what comes next.

Top photo, from left to right: U-M History alumni Katharine Brophy Dubois, Matthew Trieste, Christopher Wilson, Luke Trieste (son of Matthew Trieste), Emma Kinery, Vivian Flynn, and Adnan Zuberi.

Bottom photo: Katharine Brophy Dubois speaks with students at alumni roundtables during the conference. (Joseph W. Ho)

CLASS OF 2026



On May 1, the U-M History community gathered in the main auditorium of the Michigan Theater to celebrate the Class of 2026. Matthew Countryman (left) delivered the ceremony's keynote address.

Jewell Mason gave the student address, and Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies Kate Wroblewski presented Elizabeth Harrington, Delanie Shaffer, and Hillary Poudeu Tchokothe with the Undergraduate Award for Leadership and Service.



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Front cover: Woman pouring oil, detail from a 1904 stained glass window by Nicola D'Ascenzo, Hatcher Graduate Library, University of Michigan (Joseph W. Ho).

Back cover: History office manager and alum Elise Keffer uses a late 1950s Rolleiflex camera during a staff vintage camera outing in the fall (Joseph W. Ho).

Please direct *History Matters* correspondence to hist.outreach@umich.edu.

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