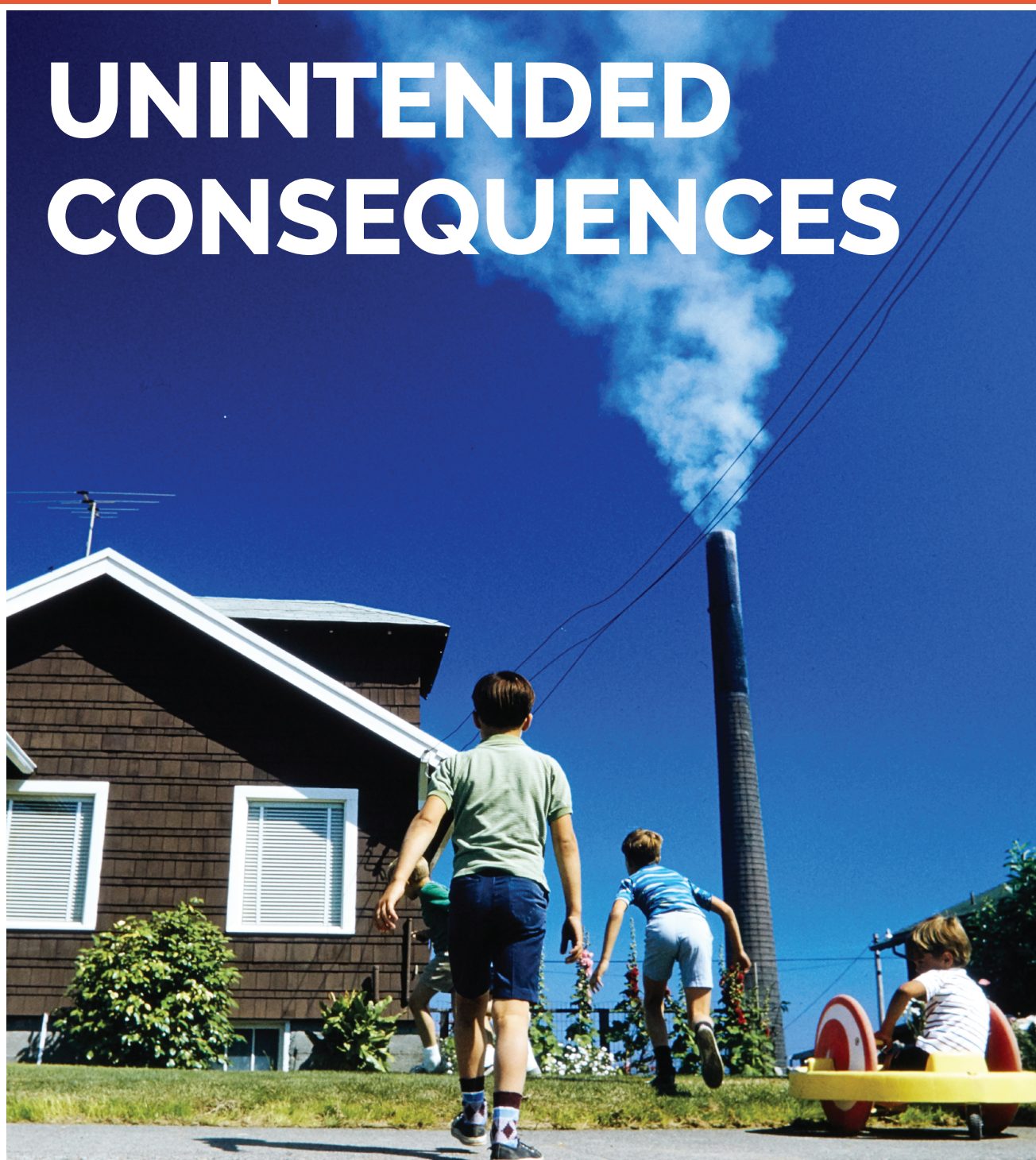


The newsmagazine of the American Historical Association

PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY

Volume 64: 3
May 2026

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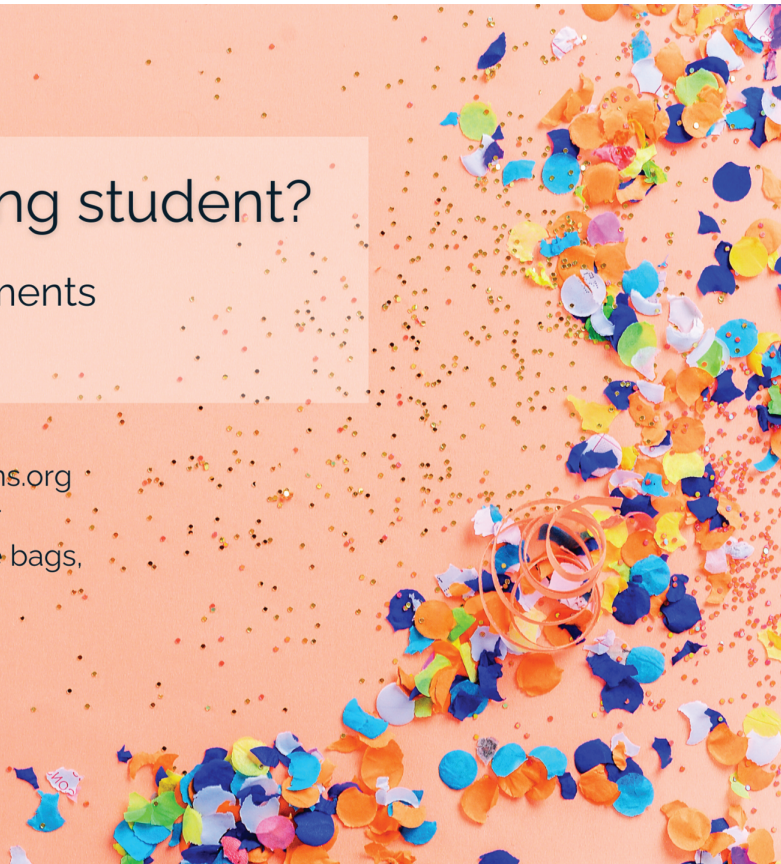
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FEATURES

DANCING IN THE CLASSROOM 26

What I Learned About Teaching History from Hula

EN LI

LA SAGRADA FAMÍLIA..... 29

The Making of an Icon

MARTA V. VICENTE



ON THE COVER

New technology often promises to solve problems. That's what happened starting in the 1920s, when adding lead to gasoline promised to solve a noisy knocking in automobile engines. Yet that additive created another problem, when car exhaust full of lead polluted both air and soil and caused serious public health concerns. In "Where Are We Driving?," Douglas Sackman argues that the history of technology should prompt us to ask what risks artificial intelligence might bring. Big promises are being made about how AI could revolutionize education. But what problems might it introduce?

Photo: Gene Daniels/US National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the Environmental Protection Agency, 545246/public domain

- 3 | **TOWNHOUSE NOTES**
A Proactive and Public Fight
ALEXANDRA F. LEVY
- 4 | **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**
- 5 | **FROM THE PRESIDENT**
On History and Archaeology
SUZANNE MARCHAND
- 8 | **FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**
The Ragged Rebel
SARAH WEICKSEL
- 11 | **NEWS**
The 2025 Academic Jobs Report
ROBERT B. TOWNSEND
Advocacy Briefs
BEN ROSENBAUM
- 19 | **VIEWPOINTS**
In an Age of Distraction
JOHN FEA
Where Are We Driving?
DOUGLAS SACKMAN
- 33 | **AHA ACTIVITIES**
'76 Objects
SARAH WEICKSEL
2026 AHA Nominations
ANTHONY J. STEINHOFF
- 38 | **IN MEMORIAM**
- 47 | **EVERYTHING HAS A HISTORY**
World War I Trench Art Lighter
MICHAEL S. DONOVAN
Map of US-Occupied Tokyo
STEVEN P. REMY

Newsmagazine of the
**AMERICAN
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION**

400 A Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003-3889
PHONE: 202.544.2422
FAX: 202.544.8307
EMAIL: perspectives@historians.org
WEB: historians.org/perspectives



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Perspectives on History (ISSN 1940-8048) is published five times a year, bimonthly September through May, by the American Historical Association, 400 A St. SE, Washington, DC 20003-3889. Phone: 202.544.2422. Fax: 202.544.8307. Web: historians.org/perspectives. Email: perspectives@historians.org (editorial issues) or members@historians.org (membership and subscription issues). Material from *Perspectives on History* may be published in *Perspectives Daily* (ISSN 1556-8563), published by the American Historical Association at historians.org/perspectives.

Perspectives on History is distributed to Association members. Institutional subscriptions are also available. For details, contact members@historians.org or visit historians.org/get-perspectives. Single copies of *Perspectives on History*—if available—can be obtained for \$8 each.

Articles, letters to the editor, and other items intended for publication should be emailed to perspectives@historians.org. Manuscripts accepted for publication will be edited to conform to *Perspectives on History* style, space limitations, and other requirements. Prospective authors should consult the guidelines available at historians.org/write-for-us. Accuracy in articles and other editorial material is the responsibility of the author(s) and contributor(s). *Perspectives on History* and the American Historical Association disclaim responsibility for statements of fact, interpretation, or opinion made in this publication by authors and contributors.

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Periodicals class postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send change of address to *Perspectives on History*, Membership Department, AHA, 400 A St. SE, Washington, DC 20003-3889.

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ALEXANDRA F. LEVY

A PROACTIVE AND PUBLIC FIGHT

The AHA's Federal Advocacy Program

I decided to become a historian in second grade. By middle school, I settled on my field, which I studied throughout college and graduate school: the history of World War II and the Holocaust. Thanks to my excellent teachers, my public schools' extensive libraries, and my parents' support of me reading and querying them about challenging historical topics, I felt an imperative, even as a child, to share the stories of the millions murdered in the Holocaust, to understand how a whole world could go to war, and to appreciate the strength of those who fought against and resisted fascism. Yet today, there are those who would have denied me—and seek now to deny my children—the opportunity to learn about our nation's history. My personal history steels my resolve to fight for the discipline through the AHA's federal advocacy and policy initiatives.

Our current advocacy has coalesced around one central and alarming theme: efforts to restrict history education. The opening salvo was the 1776 Commission report in 2021; then, state legislators introduced and promoted legislation to restrict the teaching of “divisive concepts,” along with ending tenure, curbing academic freedom, and sanitizing social studies curricula. Attacks on history and higher education have since broadened to the federal level, heightened by the current administration's executive orders and new efforts to codify them into federal policy.

Even before the 2024 election, AHA leadership had decided to expand our federal advocacy efforts, but the new administration led us to ramp up our work much more quickly and substantially than planned. Our state-level work gave a crucial advantage: We had seen this playbook before. We know who the major players are. We know what their model legislation looks like, having worked to combat its spread at the state level, and we know what messaging is often most persuasive with different audiences.

But this knowledge can take us only so far. We have, by necessity, been in defense mode, responding to executive orders or

federal actions that impact history and historians. We've tailored our responses to each, in some cases writing statements or letters, developing advocacy guides, and issuing action alerts. In other cases, we have met with congressional staff or historians at federal agencies and worked with partner organizations to coordinate our responses. Much of this work has, by necessity, been behind the scenes. But we are now moving into a more proactive and public mode to fight for history.

We earned important wins in the past year. We worked with congressional offices to resurrect the Congressional History Caucus. We developed strong relationships with other organizations and new allies, united by our support for history, the independence of federal agencies, and the rule of law. Our lawsuit to restore the National Endowment for the Humanities helped expose the appalling ChatGPT-fueled process by which the Department of Government Efficiency illegally terminated history and humanities grants. And in April, in collaboration with American Oversight, we filed a second lawsuit that seeks to ensure enforcement of the Presidential Records Act.

Despite these wins, our advocacy work continues to be immense (see *Advocacy Briefs* on pages 15–18). Advocating on behalf of the historical discipline is a heavy responsibility—one that AHA staff undertake with the utmost seriousness and respect each day. Our goal, above all else, is to support our members and colleagues who are affected by restrictive state legislation or federal actions.

But my tiny, personal goal? It's to help that second-grade student who might walk into her school library, pick up a history book, and want to learn more. That's the person I hold in my mind when all the advocacy work threatens to overwhelm: the child who, if we don't fight for her freedom to learn, may never find her passion for history. **P**

Alexandra F. Levy is director of communications and public affairs at the AHA.



TO THE EDITOR

I'm writing in response to "Who Has Control?," a section of the feature article about the 2026 annual meeting in the March issue. I did not attend, so I can't speak to the accuracy of the summary of the session, *What Historians Should Know about Classical Education*. But I was struck by the overwhelmingly negative tone, which strongly implied that the rise of "classical education" is a bad thing against which historians should be on their guard.

This seems misguided to me on several counts. First, it assumes within the AHA an ideological consensus on right or wrong models of education that, at the least, should be interrogated and would likely not be endorsed by all members. Second, in an issue of *Perspectives on History* that also contained several discussions of career paths for history graduates, it seems odd to disparage a career path (teaching in K–12 classical schools) that might be attractive to current history majors and recent graduates. Third, and most important, in an age in which even students at elite universities are reading less and less and when humanities classes are attracting fewer and fewer students, it seems counterproductive to criticize programs that encourage students to read "Great Books." If anything, we need more students reading classic texts and engaging with deep questions about the human condition.

Historians have a great deal to offer classical education initiatives. We should engage with it and do what we can to shape it, not condemn it outright on ideological grounds.

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SUZANNE MARCHAND

ON HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

As a person who has spent the last three decades reading and writing about the history of archaeology, I have to admit that I find the opening scene from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) hilarious. It is 1938, and “Professor” Jones is finishing a college lecture about archaeological techniques. He instructs the class full of doe-eyed coeds that “70 percent of all archaeology is done in the library” and that “X never, ever marks the spot.” He tells them that next week’s lecture will discuss the Egyptological work of Flinders Petrie at Naucratis in 1885. (He means Matthew Flinders Petrie, one of the leading Egyptologists of the fin de siècle.) Just after class is dismissed, however, Jones jumps out a window to start his treasure hunt. It appears that about one minute of scholarly archaeology was all that director Steven Spielberg thought Hollywood audiences could take—and he was probably right.

The clip highlights the great incongruities that form archaeology’s history and practice, especially as concerns classical and Near Eastern archaeology, the subfield about which I am best informed. On the one hand, there is the now well-known history of imperious and imperialist archaeological extraction, stretching from about 1780 until 1940 or so, in which European scholars and adventurers, like Jones, fanned out across the Mediterranean, and when possible, plunged deeper into Eurasia and western China, in search of increasingly eclectic storehouses of loot. On the other, there is that one scholarly minute—about which the general public, including most of us garden-variety historians, ought to be better informed, especially as it turns out that of all sources for history, today’s public most trusts museums, with which and for which so many archaeologists work.

Today, I think it is fair to say that the story of colonial archaeology, and the consequences of the competitive and escalating expropriations that we might call the “antiquities rush” for the massive enrichment of European museums, is well known. In the last 30 years, the scholarship on these depredations has exploded, and we have explored, too, the previously

unacknowledged contributions of local scholars, collectors, dealers, and political figures. Deepened knowledge of these colonial legacies has further chastened on-site archaeologists, who now partner with local teams and entrust virtually all artifacts to host countries. Inquiry and criticism from those whose treasures were pilfered, and from curators and historians appalled by the practices of their forebears, has resulted in the restitution of some objects, the most high-profile of which are the Benin Bronzes. In the case of Native American materials, federal legislation now requires that grave goods be restored to surviving tribal groups. At a recent conference on the future of the ancient Mediterranean galleries at the British Museum, I learned that the museum is working in partnership with the government of Greece, and it is no longer impossible to believe that some, or even all, of the Parthenon Marbles might return to Athens in the coming years.

Historians, as frequent users of archaeological evidence, ought to know more about how this form of knowledge is made.

One might say that the Indiana Jones films represented a sort of nostalgia for the bad old days of colonial extraction—though the fact that most rapacious of Jones’s competitors were Nazis perhaps already signaled some anxiety about the probity of this “crusade.” In 2026, I hope and believe that most of this nostalgia has evaporated. What I think has been less publicly discussed is one underlying aspect of colonial archaeology’s mythos: the idea that material finds can be easily reconciled with textual history, that books could have led Professor Jones to find an ancient cup that could be proven to be the singular scriptural Holy Grail. The gap between the history of material culture and histories as recounted in written sources is well known to archaeologists, but I think less so to historians, who, as frequent users of archaeological



Photo: Annette Hornischer

evidence, ought to know more about how this form of knowledge is made.

I first came into contact with this sort of archaeology in a graduate course at the University of Chicago. I was assigned a project about a very different sort of vessel: the so-called Dipylon kraters. These are gigantic Greek vases, dating to the latter decades of the Geometric period between the 770s and 730s BCE, before we have surviving Greek texts. They get their name *Dipylon* from the find spot, the great cemetery of Athens, just beyond the city's main fifth-century entrance (the Dipylon Gate), and, given this context, they were probably used to receive funerary libations. Specifically, I was to study one aspect of the ornament on these spectacular vases: the apple-core-shaped "Dipylon" shields carried in what seem to be funerary military processions, possibly related to hero cult worship.

What fascinated me in reading about these gigantic pots was the painstaking effort of archaeologists to attempt to understand and properly date these scenes. I was accustomed to doing a great deal of often tedious reading to grasp Dostoevsky's symbolism or the origins of Alois Riegl's art historical theories. But interpreting Geometric vases opened a whole new level of challenges. Archaeologists such as Anthony Snodgrass and J. N. Coldstream — standing on the shoulders of previous investigators — had read in close detail the few ancient Greek texts that might be relevant. But these were of little use compared to the vast repositories of comparanda (comparative, typological examples) they had studied. Pottery was particularly useful in this endeavor, as local potters across the Mediterranean adopted distinctive shapes and styles of ornament at various times. This made pottery particularly susceptible to the method of "seriation," perfected by none other than Flinders Petrie. Using this method, Petrie was able to create elaborate typological series that offered at least relative chronologies in the absence of any textual records or references. Like Petrie, Snodgrass and Coldstream knew their pots, cold. And yet they demurred when it came to deciding a seemingly simple question: Did the ornamentation depict mythological or real ways of war?

As is so often the case in starting new research, I quickly realized that I was coming in on a much older conversation, one with much at stake for cultural and military historians as well as for archaeologists. The fundamental question required deciding whether painters of these pots had drawn from real life or from legend. This question was made immensely more difficult by the fact that no examples of actual Dipylon shields had been found in excavations and the recognition that the Homeric poems were the tip of a lost



This terra-cotta krater (ca. 750–735 BCE) seems to depict a funerary cortege, in which tiny-headed warriors cover their midribs with what seem to be apple-core-shaped "Dipylon" shields.

Attributed to the Hirschfeld Workshop, Metropolitan Museum of Art, public domain

legendary iceberg. If the shield's odd shape was meant to evoke the figure eight-style shields well attested in Mycenaean art, scholars argued, pots with depictions of these distinctive shields might suggest some kind of continuity of memory across the 500-odd years that separate the end of Mycenaean civilization and the period of Geometric pottery. They might help date the origins of hoplite warfare, with its characteristic round shields. But, skeptics said, wasn't it simpler to assume that one shield shape didn't immediately displace others? If no shields had been found, perhaps this was because they were made of perishable wicker, or wood and hide, and simply did not survive. At the most basic level, it was impossible to fully differentiate fiction from reality, and thus archaeologists were compelled to operate with what Fernando Echeverría called "a cultural construct, full of historical information."

This form of archaeological humility is very far from the Indiana Jones-informed idea of the field, but in some ways has been with us all the time, stretching back, at least, to

the antiquaries of the 16th century. So-called antiquaries collected – in textual descriptions, sketches, casts, or real artifacts – material objects, generally because they were intrigued by the things themselves: coins, or burial urns, or swords and shields. Some of the most elite might have focused on the material world of “civilized” people (Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Israelites), but most assembled humble remains associated with their local “barbarian” histories of Britons, Saxons, or Franks. They organized their catalogs or studies not chronologically but often by manners and customs (scenes relating to death or mythological figures) or by type (weapons, sculptures). Most were not really interested in art, or in documenting, say, the life of Augustus. Nor did they write histories – which were supposed to be complete and exemplary – as their evidence was too fragmentary for that. It was often sufficient for material remains to arouse further curiosity, wonder, and conversation (sometimes hallucinatory), about human behavior, religious symbolics, and the implements of everyday life. They, too, would have been riveted by Dipylon shields, without needing to know for sure whether, or how, ancient Greeks had used them.

Material remains aroused further curiosity, wonder, and conversation.

Our histories of 19th-century archaeology, like our movies, have been skewed by our failure to emphasize the continuities in this antiquarian tradition, through the period of the antiquities rush. Even at the most famous sites, most finds were hard to square with textual records and aesthetic ideals. Heinrich Schliemann claimed to have found Priam’s Treasure at Troy – but his account is fishy, and he may have assembled this “treasure” himself. What Schliemann unquestionably did find were scores of prehistoric, owl-headed vases he had no love for and no means of interpreting. At Olympia, excavators failed to locate Phidias’s gigantic statue of Zeus and instead unearthed large quantities of early bronze figurines, which the lead excavator himself described as “rubbish.” German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was so dissatisfied that he pulled the plug on state funding.

Priam’s Treasure and the monumental Hermes that the Olympia excavators uncovered made headlines, but this made little difference to historians. What did matter was all the hard work stay-at-home antiquarians did in the basements of the Berlin museums to understand the owl-headed vases and figurines. It is this largely unsung archaeological labor that has helped us to understand the everyday lives and

religious worldviews of the textually inaccessible archaic world of the eastern Mediterranean.

This history of the struggle to interpret artifacts outside of textual contexts is one in which Jones’s Egyptological exemplar, Flinders Petrie, did indeed play a starring role. Petrie’s background was engineering, and he was never a devoted textual scholar. It seems to have been useful to him to identify the Greek Egyptian Naucratis and its sister city Daphnae (ancient Tahpanhes) with cities mentioned by Herodotus and the biblical Jeremiah. His real interests lay elsewhere, however: in measuring things, and in collecting data, especially with respect to prehistoric sites. Petrie was no hero; he certainly profited from empire, and he made some ill-advised conjectures about ancient racial history. Nor was he the swashbuckling type; he spent years living, together with his wife and collaborators, in Egyptian tombs (cooler and more stable than tents) and subsisting, Margaret Drower has shown, on a diet of canned peas and jam. One legacy of his Naucratis excavation was a huge cache of erotic statuettes, which he ignored, but which hardworking antiquaries will surely one day endeavor to explain.

To tell the story of Flinders Petrie’s antiquarian tendencies and exhausting endeavors would hardly be Hollywood fodder. But his story might help to remind us that archaeologists work with the material remains of the past in ways we historians do not but can still value. Personally, I admire their willingness to develop new skills to cope with material culture’s intransigence to interpretation, and their dedication to inquiry without the pretense that we do or can know it all. I find it commendable that they don’t mind spending long hours studying “rubbish” or arguing about Dipylon shields. Archaeologists do this work out of care for the objects themselves, but by proceeding so deliberately, they also try to ensure that inquiry is open ended and that historians who might use their work do not adopt false dates or premises. We ought to be grateful for their humility and their care. If featured for only one minute in *Indiana Jones*, the 70 percent of their work in libraries and museums is much more valuable to historians than any grail. **P**

Suzanne Marchand is president of the AHA.

SARAH WEICKSEL

THE RAGGED REBEL

Fabricating Memories



The ragged rebel, as I've come to know him, is an apparition that has haunted my research on the American Civil War for over a decade. He's real enough that he has materialized in numerous sources and multiple forms, but over the years, I have discovered that his existence is based more in myth than reality, and so an apparition he should stay.

Except one day last fall, I found myself staring up at that ragged rebel—not as a ghostly figure but as a life-size bronze statue on a granite plinth. Barefoot and shirtless, standing on uneven rock, he has a gaunt face; his pants are torn, exposing his ankles, and his bony knees are visible beneath the fabric. With upraised arms he holds a broken sword. On the plinth, an inscription reads: “Men who saw night coming down about them could somehow act as if they stood at the edge of dawn—A Confederate soldier shortly before his death.”

Most people educated in the United States have encountered a ragged rebel, whether or not they readily recognize him. When I ask people, “How would you describe a Confederate soldier on his way home from the battlefield at the end of the war? What did he look like? What was he wearing?” they typically offer some variation on disheveled, hungry, tired, in dirty tattered rags. And he often appears as such in period films, novels, textbooks, and more. The ragged rebel is so ubiquitous that he is barely noticeable—a historical truth not worth questioning.

With so many references to the ill-supplied, shoeless Confederate soldier, I expected my research would confirm the well-worn declension narrative of Confederates and their clothing. But I still needed to understand how that decline occurred and what it meant for how people experienced and understood the war. To be sure, I uncovered many stories of broken supply chains, along with stolen knapsacks, insufficient gear, and Confederates outfitting themselves in looted US Army overcoats. But my first clue that something was amiss came in the correspondence of a South Carolina family from the

small planter class. “About my coat and pants,” one soldier wrote to his sister, “you can go to work & fix them up. . . . If you can get some cord I would prefer it to cuffs & collar I expect Bob could get some in Columbia you will understand where I want the cord around the place where the cuffs would be. the gold lace is in the glass drawrs I think.” He admitted that his clothes were getting to be “pretty ragged,” but he assured his sister that he “could go for several months yet & not suffer.” A few weeks later, when his box of new clothes arrived, he reported: “My suit fits vry well I am vry proud of it.”

The ragged rebel is so ubiquitous
that he is barely noticeable.

It was an unremarkable exchange; countless soldiers—North and South—wrote home requesting assistance in procuring clothing. But these letters weren't written early in the war—it was late 1864. Other sources confirmed this South Carolina soldier wasn't unique: A soldier walking the streets of Tallahassee, Florida, wore a brand-new uniform in 1865, after the war's end. Another was arrested in May 1865 in West Virginia for wearing his well-appointed uniform to have a photograph taken. These instances didn't fit with our long-accepted understandings of the failures of Confederate supply and the success of the US Army's anaconda-like blockade in strangling the South's trade capabilities. New dress uniforms, complete with gold trim, were seemingly to be had at war's end across the South, making the ragged rebel less a certain historical fact and instead something worth further investigation. *Why* was the war-torn, disheveled, often underdressed soldier such a ubiquitous figure in postwar narratives and histories?

Much of the commentary I found on new uniforms was tied to an 1865 federal ban on the wearing of Confederate uniforms—an explicit effort to demilitarize the material culture of the Confederate South. Under threat of fines and

imprisonment, former Confederates were banned from wearing military insignia, including brass buttons, gold cord, and braid (also known as lace). Men could keep the gray coat, but decoration was to be removed or covered. Banning uniforms banned the objects that – for four long years – had defined Confederate men as men. This ban simultaneously humiliated them and denied their manhood – they were not only defeated in the war but emasculated after it. Initially, confederate soldiers protested the order by making a mockery of it – jingling buttons in bags at passing US soldiers and sewing large gaudy buttons onto or skewering long thorns through their coats. Some continued to flaunt their intact uniforms in the street, daring a US soldier to challenge them.

Eventually, they harnessed their anger to seize control of the narrative and made Confederate uniforms stripped of insignia central to Lost Cause imagery. The Lost Cause nurtured a public memory of the Confederacy that described slavery as a benevolent institution; secession as constitutional; the cause, righteous; defeat the result of a lack of resources, not valor. And it was in this context that the ragged rebel became a potent symbol that presumed to embody Confederate soldiers' experiences throughout four years of war.

They seized control of the narrative and made Confederate uniforms stripped of insignia central to Lost Cause imagery.

There were moments during the war in which Confederate (and US) soldiers were severely undersupplied, and by its end, there were certainly Confederate soldiers lacking shoes and wearing worn-out pants. The US Army's hard war and breaks in supply chains delayed and prevented soldiers' resupply. Yet many Confederate soldiers continued to be supplied throughout the war, and at least some Confederate clothing depots were still stocked with gray woolen goods at war's end. Nevertheless, stories of glorious victories despite severe undersupply and privation buoyed the Lost Cause, which emphasized that military defeat resulted from the US Army's advantage in number of men and resources, including clothing. Rather than a sign of defeat, then, the image of the ragged rebel was evidence of elite white Southerners' intransigency in the postwar era – of their refusal to accept defeat.

A myth, according to theorist Roland Barthes, talks about things: "It purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement

of fact." Talking and writing about the Lost Cause was critical to the process of making it a "statement of fact," of replacing the causes and events of the war with fabricated memories. So, too, was the donation and collection of objects, the creation of Confederate museums, and the erection of monuments.

And so it is perhaps unsurprising that the ragged rebel soldier finally materialized for me at the base of Stone Mountain, Georgia, the largest memorial to the Confederacy and a vestige of the Lost Cause. Historians have peeled away the layers of that mythology, revealing it to be a distortion of history that romanticizes an "Old South" and the Confederate cause. But the image of the hard-fighting ragged rebel persists, embodied in bronze at Stone Mountain and in our collective imaginary.

Once a myth takes root, it requires great effort to extract it from the historical landscape. One need look no further than Stone Mountain itself to see how a 160-year-old myth continues to distort understandings of the past and reverberates into the present. Carvings of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson didn't ride across that three-acre section of granite rock face until 1972, and they remain there today, with a ragged rebel at the edge, standing watch as fights over reinterpretation continue.

The day of my visit, I was taking part in a program on building a critical memory, designed to develop comparative perspectives on the cultures of remembrance in Germany and the United States. Our discussions served as a reminder that being a historian demands us to grapple with the entirety of past events, places, people, and the things that they left behind. It means recognizing that historical interpretations will, and should, change – as new evidence and new ways of understanding emerge, as new questions are asked of old evidence. It means not dismissing an anomaly and instead being willing ask just how it was that a soldier was asking for a brand-new uniform in late 1864 and why it didn't fit into a narrative I thought we knew, a narrative that turned out to be part truth and part myth.

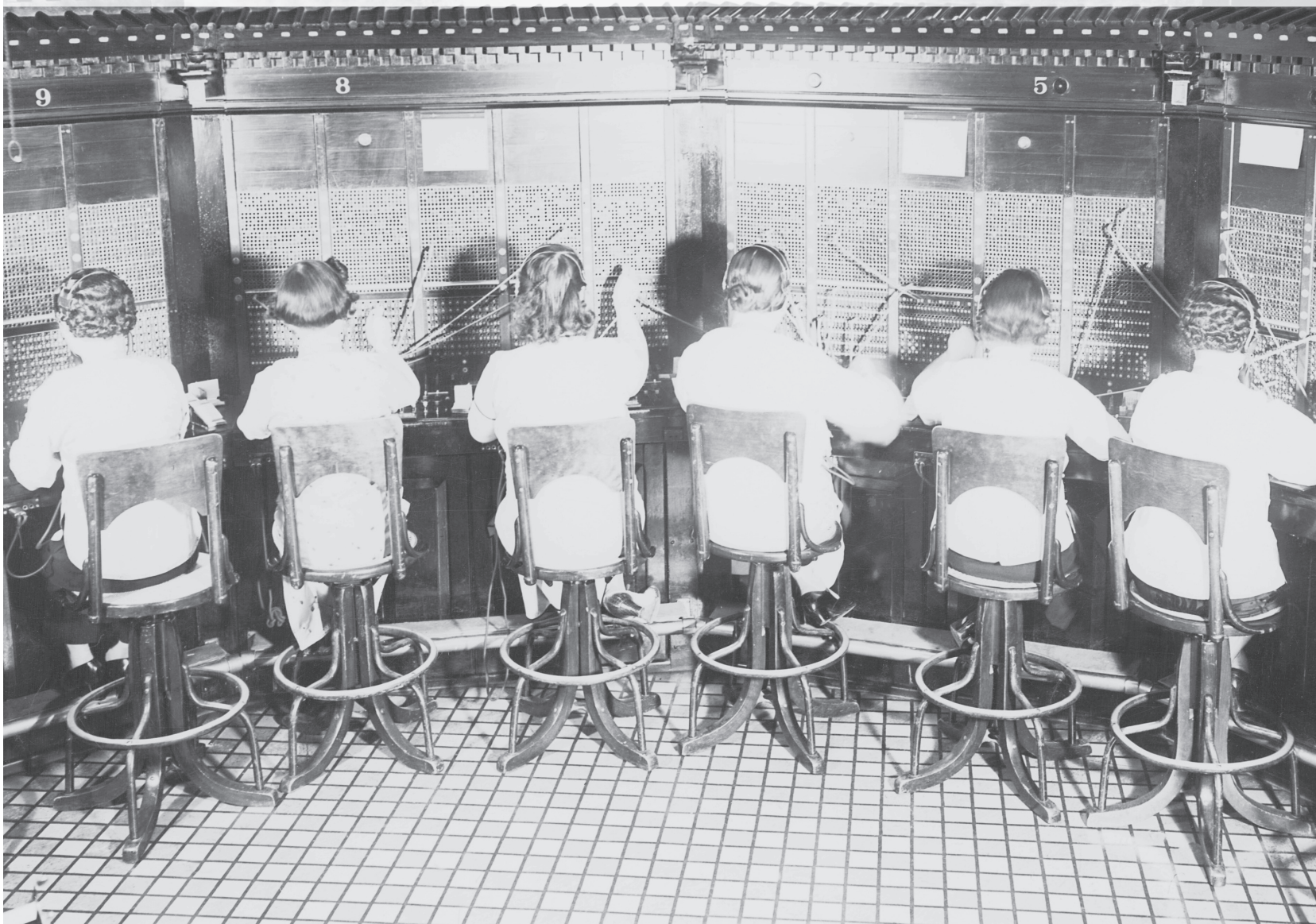
The ragged rebel continues to be an apparition lurking at the shadowy edges and threatening to materialize, but he is kept at bay by a commitment to protecting the integrity of historical practice – by ensuring that the entirety of history can be researched, interpreted, and taught in its full, unvarnished context. **P**

Sarah Weicksel is executive director of the AHA.



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ROBERT B. TOWNSEND

THE 2025 ACADEMIC JOBS REPORT

The evidence is now clear: History departments are shrinking. While we lack recent data about the full range of possible career outcomes for history PhDs, recent estimates of the number of history faculty at two- and four-year institutions by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows a decline of 16 percent from 2015 to 2024, and an analysis of full-time faculty listed in the AHA's *Directory of History Departments* shows a decline of

13 percent from 2010 to 2025. While those trends reflect the accumulation of past hiring by history departments, looking ahead, the number of tenure-line jobs advertised with the AHA Career Center last year fell to the smallest number since the pandemic.

As many readers will know, the number of jobs listed in the AHA Career Center rose to the highest level on record in 2008, but then fell by almost 40 percent in the years after the Great

Recession and has never recovered. Thanks to the protections of tenure, the decline in the number of full-time faculty in history departments has been far more gradual than the drop in job ads, but the data from the BLS and the *Directory* are now showing the effects.

The widest perspective on the state of the academic job market for historians comes from the BLS, which offers annual estimates of the total number of history postsecondary teachers at

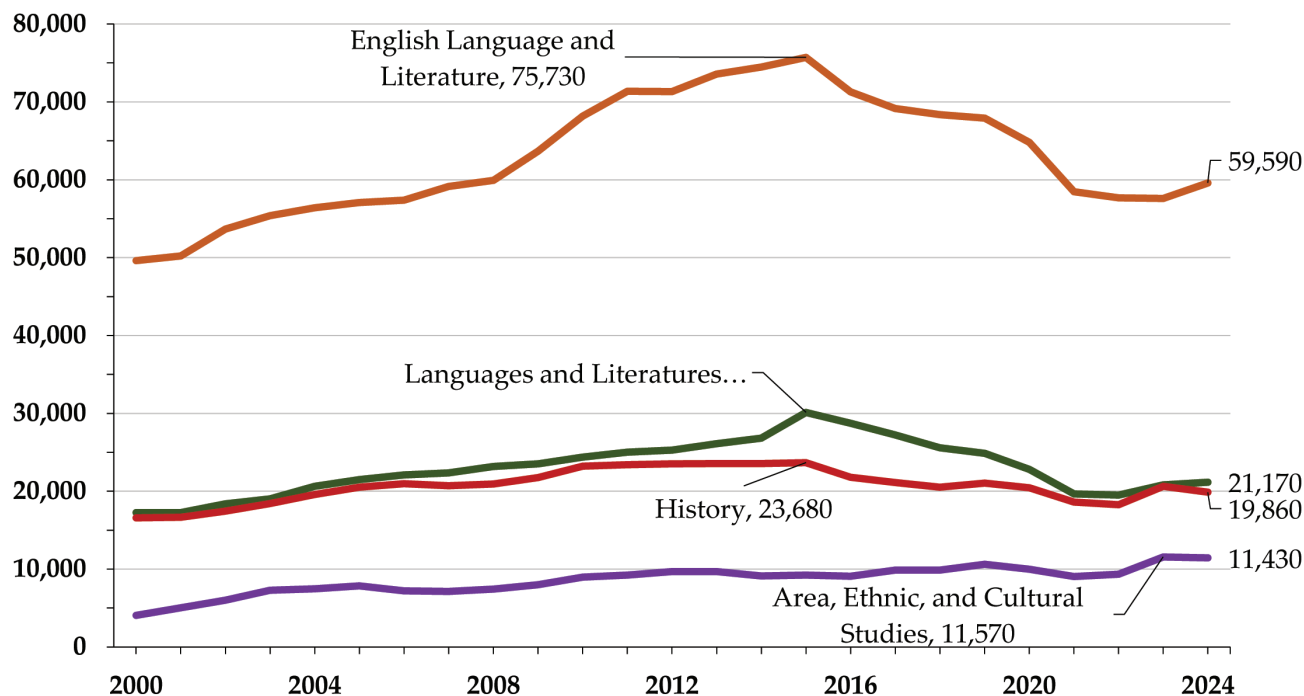


Fig. 1: Estimated number of postsecondary teachers in history and adjacent humanities disciplines, 2000–24. US Department of Labor, BLS, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Program, Employment and Wage Estimates.

two- and four-year colleges. Unlike the *Directory*, it does not distinguish between full- and part-time faculty, so it provides a more holistic look at the total number of faculty employed to teach history. In its estimates, the number of history faculty rose from 16,560 in 2000 to a plateau of around 23,000 from 2010 to 2015. As of 2024 (the most recent available data at the time of this writing), that number is down to just 19,860 history faculty employed. Recent research by the Humanities Indicators confirms these trends, with department chairs in history (and other humanities subjects) expressing increasing pessimism about whether they could replace a tenure-line position if a faculty member left or retired.

As Figure 1 shows, the national trend for history is quite similar to the language disciplines, which saw a similar increase of about 18 percent from 2000 to 2015. While history employment figures fell 16 percent from 2015 to 2024, the number of faculty in English fell 21 percent, and the number employed to teach other languages fell 30 percent. Notably, the category of area, ethnic, and cultural studies is an exception, with gains from 4,070 faculty in 2000 to 11,430 in 2025. As many specialists in the field can attest, history PhDs often fill these positions, which serves as an important reminder that historians are not limited to jobs in history departments; however, there is no available data to show what proportion of those jobs have been filled with

history PhDs. Similarly, there are a growing number of civics centers and civic education programs in the country that might also offer employment opportunities for history PhDs, though the best available estimates indicate that to date they account for less than 1,000 academic jobs.

The declines in history faculty varied substantially by region.

Beneath the national trends, the declines in history faculty varied substantially by region. In the Midwest, the number of history faculty fell 28 percent

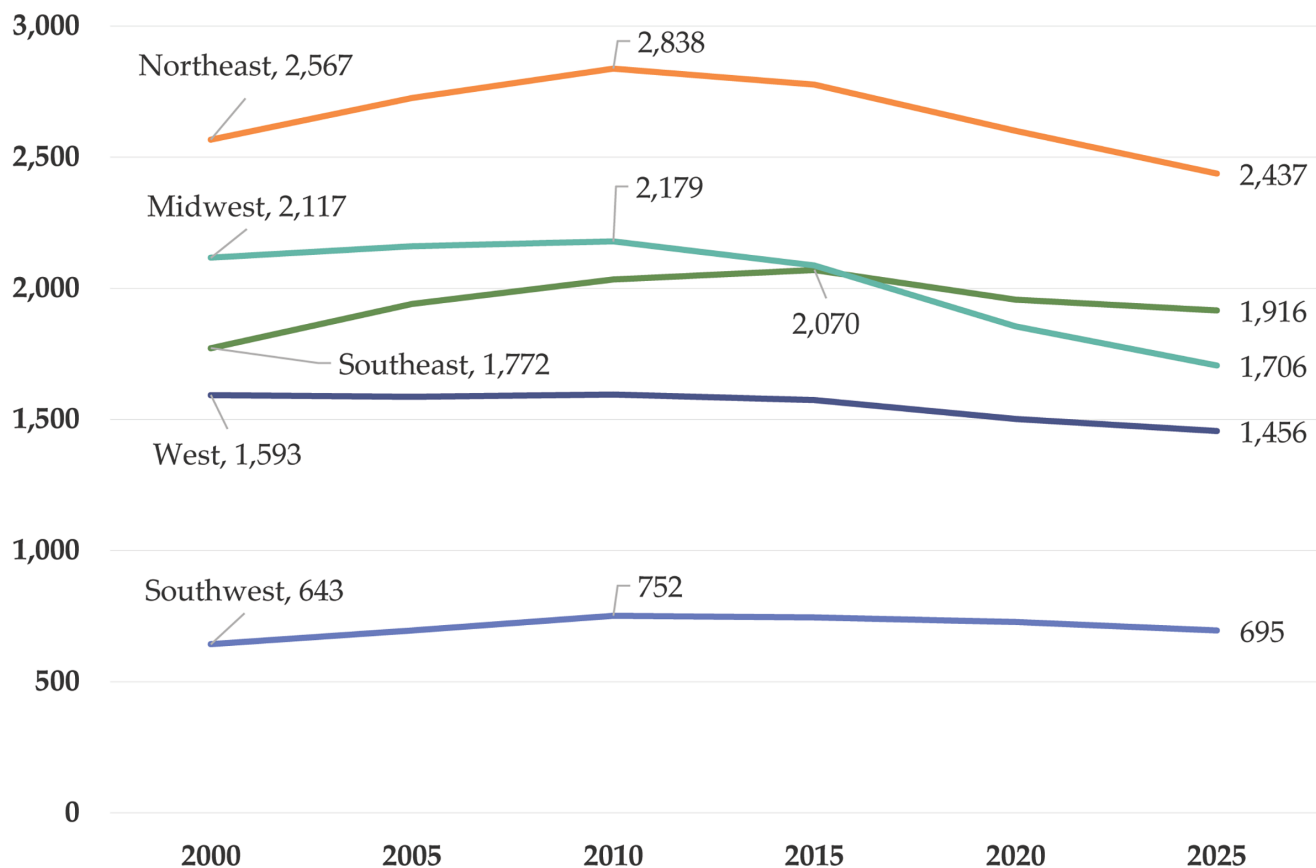
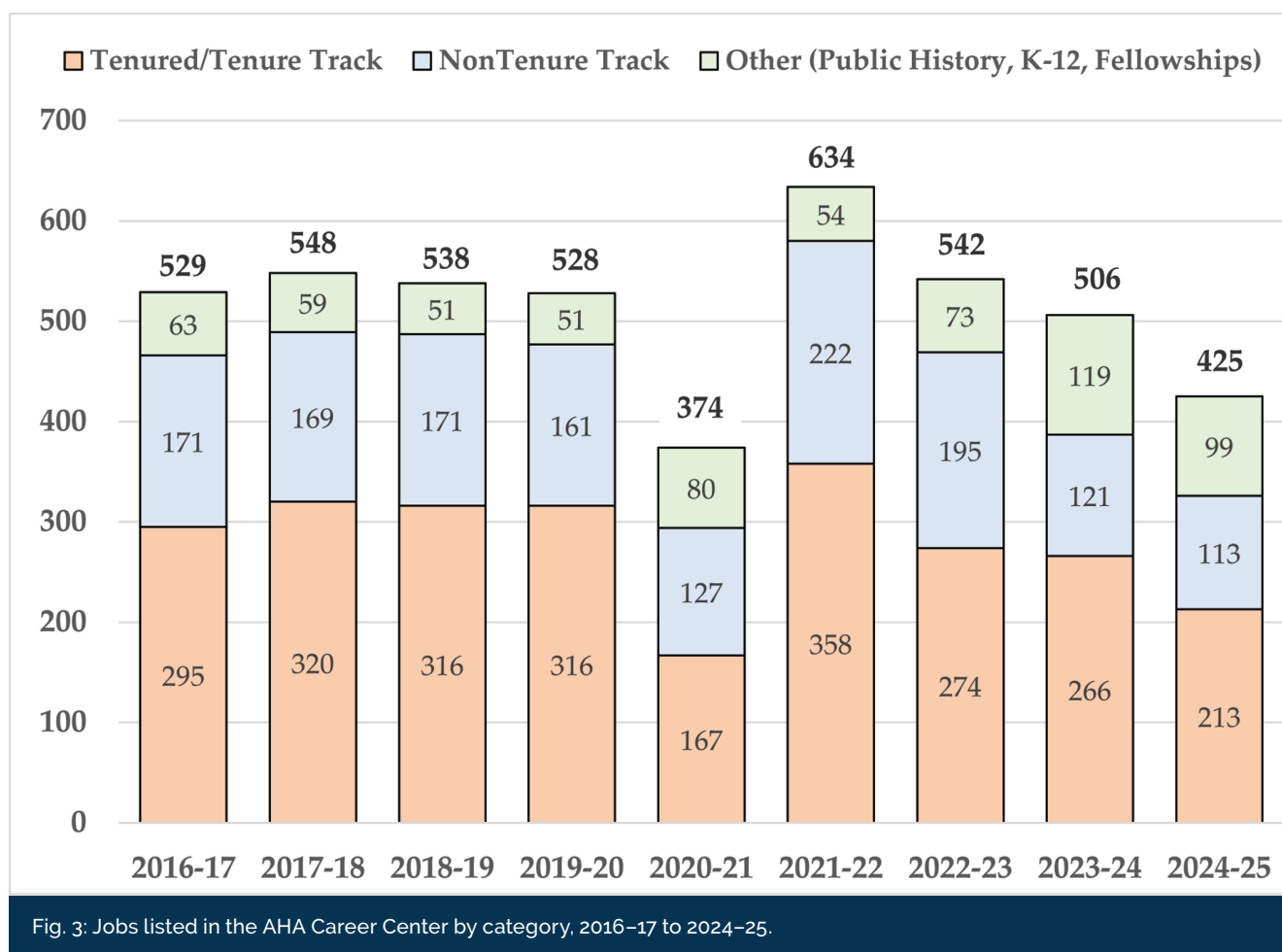


Fig. 2: Trend in full-time faculty at regularly listed history departments in the AHA Directory, by region, 2000–25. Analysis of full-time faculty listed in 546 history departments in the United States listed continuously in the AHA Directory of History Departments (supplemented with counts of faculty listed on departmental websites to fill gaps).



from 2015 to 2024, and in the Northeast, the number fell by 21 percent. To underline that finding, colleges and universities eliminated more than one out of every five history positions that existed in those regions in 2015. Regional differences appear to correspond with declines in history majors in those regions. From 2012 to 2024, the number of students earning history bachelor's degrees in the Midwest fell 50 percent, while in the Northeast, the number fell by 44 percent. In every other region, the declines were less than 40 percent.

As the national trend indicates, the number of history faculty is down since 2015 but still higher than where it was in 2000, and that was true in every region except the Midwest. In the Southwest and West, the number of history

faculty was more than 80 percent higher than it had been in 2000. Even in the Northeast, the number was still 23 percent higher. In the Midwest, however, the total number of history faculty was down by 20 percent from 2000.

Since the BLS estimates include faculty employed to teach history regardless of tenure status and whether they are in a formal history department, it helps to compare those trends to the listings of full-time faculty in the *Directory of History Departments*, since they represent the most secure positions (even if some of them do not include the protections of tenure). Data on full-time faculty in 546 departments listed continuously in the *Directory* from 2000 to the present show more gradual movement both up and down, which is to be expected when looking at positions where tenure-line

jobs are predominant. In the *Directory*, the number grew from 8,692 full-time faculty in 2000 to a high of 9,398 in 2010 (an increase of 8 percent), before falling to 8,210 faculty members in 2025 (down 13 percent from the high).

As shown in Figure 2, declines occurred in every region of the country, but in line with BLS estimates, departments in the Midwest were the hardest hit, as they lost 22 percent of their full-time history faculty from 2010 to 2025. Departments in the Northeast were also hard hit, losing 14 percent of their full-time faculty positions. Even in the Southeast, the region with the smallest losses, the number fell by 6 percent. And very few departments were spared, with both very small departments (those with just one to four full-time faculty) and the very large departments

Table 1: Jobs listed in the AHA Career Center for tenure-track faculty by field of specialization, 2020–21 to 2024–25.

YEAR	AFRICA	ASIA	EUROPE	LATIN AMERICA	MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICA	MULTIPLE GEOGRAPHIC FIELDS	OTHER/ OPEN/ TOPICAL	UNITED STATES/NORTH AMERICA	WORLD/ GLOBAL
2020–21	12	13	10	8	4	5	54	52	11
2021–22	27	36	25	11	11	14	113	93	87
2022–23	21	23	21	12	12	8	76	90	56
2023–24	14	30	28	18	10	9	41	91	25
2024–25	11	24	26	7	8	6	34	84	13

(with 30 or more) each losing 13 percent of their full-time faculty from 2010 to 2025.

The *Directory* and BLS data provide important background context for an assessment of the recent trends in jobs advertised in the AHA Career Center. Since they represent the accumulated effects of past hiring, the job ads offer some perspective on the direction for the future. As Figure 3 shows, the 425 positions listed in the 2024–25 academic year represented a sharp decline from the recent average of around 500 positions per year (excluding the outlier year of the pandemic in 2020–21) and fell 16 percent below the number advertised the year before. This was the lowest level since the pandemic year, which was followed by a substantial rebound the following year but falling numbers every year since.

Perhaps most troubling, the number of tenured/tenure-track positions advertised fell 20 percent from the prior year to just 213 positions. Non-tenure-track positions fell a more modest 7 percent. The other types of positions advertised, which included fellowships, K–12 teaching positions, and public history jobs, fell by 17 percent, but since most of these positions are advertised at the local level, they are much less representative of any trends.

Within the larger decline in job openings, there was a significant change in the mix of advertised positions. Notably, among the tenure-track positions listed in the 2024–25 academic year, the number of jobs seeking a specialist in the history of Europe was essentially unchanged from the number listed in 2021–22 (rising from 25 to 26; Table 1), while listings for specialists in the history of the United States and North America fell by 10 percent and jobs for every other category fell by more than 26 percent. As a result of those shifts, openings for positions focused specifically on US history rose from 22 percent of the tenure-track openings in 2021–22 to 39 percent of them. Openings for specialists in European history rose to 12 percent of the total. The largest decline occurred in the world/global history category, which fell from one in five positions in 2021–22 to less than half that share last year.

Among the openings for non-tenure-track positions, the specialization trends were similar, but among the positions without tenure, positions either in US history or without a specific geographic field specialization have predominated until recently. Over the past four years, there was a modest increase in the number of ads looking for a specialist in European history (up to 10 positions from seven) and a notable increase in the number of jobs open to

more than one field of specialization (from five to 12). But the number of openings that had no specified geographic focus fell from 110 to just 26 openings last year. And the openings for US history specialists fell from 93 to 40.

The number of history faculty is still higher than where it was in 2000.

Viewed collectively, the recent trends send troubling signals about the current direction of the academic job market. This is not the first time the field has had to deal with weakness in hiring by history departments. In the 1970s, a sharp drop in hiring took more than a decade to rebalance. Trends moving in one direction can always turn around (and often have in the past), but the current evidence underscores the need for anyone earning a history PhD to be prepared to look beyond the academic job market for future employment. **P**

Robert B. Townsend is program director for humanities, arts, and culture at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and former director of research and publications at the AHA.

BEN ROSENBAUM

ADVOCACY BRIEFS

Winter and Spring 2025–26

In March, there was a major update on our lawsuit to restore grants canceled by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). On March 6, the AHA and our co-plaintiffs, the American Council of Learned Societies and the Modern Language Association, filed a motion for summary judgment. Depositions and records obtained through the discovery process detail the role of DOGE staff in canceling humanities grants and how both the equal protections guaranteed in the Fifth Amendment and the Federal Records Act were violated in the process. These findings, described in more detail on our website and in a joint press release with our co-plaintiffs, underscore why this case matters not only for historians and educators but also for documenting this moment for the historical record and for the future of public support for the humanities.

On March 7, *New York Times* reporter Jennifer Schuessler covered newly released discovery materials in the case, revealing how humanities grants were canceled during efforts to dismantle the agency.

On April 6, the AHA filed a lawsuit in collaboration with American Oversight challenging a memorandum from the Department of Justice declaring the Presidential Records Act unconsti-

tutional, which would potentially block public access to hundreds of millions of records and present serious risk to transparency and recordkeeping throughout the executive branch.

Additionally, this winter and spring the AHA took a variety of actions to support historians and historical studies, including joining two new coalitions, expanding our advocacy capacity. The Alliance for Higher Education seeks to protect academic freedom in colleges and universities and promote higher education as an essential pillar of a democratic society. The National Parks Cultural Resource Coalition, led by the National Parks Conservation Association, aims to protect and preserve history in the nation's national parks.

At the state level, we responded to proposed changes to state social studies standards and assessments in Texas, Virginia, and Oklahoma. We also sent a letter to members of Tennessee's Senate Education Committee registering concerns with a proposed bill requiring instruction on the history of communism in public K–12 classrooms. We sent a letter to the governor of Oklahoma urging him to rescind an executive order calling on the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) to gut tenure protections for faculty in the state's public colleges and universities, sent a letter to the governor of Kentucky urging him to veto a bill that would gut tenure protections, and signed on to a letter to OSRHE to

reject the measures called for in the governor's order.

We submitted an amicus brief in support of Harvard University's lawsuit against the federal government over the latter's attempt to prevent the institution from hosting foreign scholars and students. We endorsed a congressional resolution supporting Black history museums and cultural institutions, participated in the launch event for the National Parks Cultural Resource Coalition, and participated in an advocacy day urging members of Congress to support the humanities.

AHA Staff and Members Speak Out to Improve Texas State Standards

On November 19, AHA senior program analyst Julia Brookins and member Steven Mintz testified in public comments to the Texas State Board of Education sharing their concerns about ongoing revisions to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills social studies standards. Quoted in the *Dallas Morning News*, Brookins said, "The last big question today is, what is worth knowing? There is a real opportunity here to support social studies instruction that opens up worlds of learning to Texas students." Mintz criticized the new course sequence approved in September as "imbalanced," stating, "This is an abomination of history, if we want to prepare students." AHA member Yolanda Leyva was named to the panel of content advisers supporting the

standards revision. “I’m hopeful that when we talk about people fighting for freedom, we include people of color, because people of color have been fighting for the US to live up to its equality and liberty ideals,” Leyva told the *Morning News*.

Brookins testified again before the Texas Education Agency on February 25; a video is available on the AHA’s YouTube channel.

AHA and Partners Call for Pause in Changes to Commonwealth Social Studies Assessments

On December 10, the AHA, National Council for the Social Studies, Virginia Social Studies Leaders Consortium, and Virginia Council for the Social Studies sent a joint letter to the members of the Virginia Board of Education and the superintendent of public instruction urging them to pause proposed amendments to Virginia’s ESSA Consolidated State Plan related to history and social science. They called on the board to allow adequate time for a deliberate and inclusive process that involves educational experts and stakeholders across the commonwealth. The letter reads, “Sweeping changes to accountability and assessment must not be rushed forward without transparent public review and meaningful professional consultation.”

AHA Files Amicus Brief in Support of Foreign Scholars

On December 22, the AHA, in collaboration with Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, filed an amicus brief in support of Harvard University’s lawsuit against the federal government over the university’s ability to host foreign scholars and students. Seventeen other scholarly humanities organizations joined the AHA on the brief.

The brief conveys the importance of international scholars and students to American higher education, with a focus on the historical discipline, and the benefits and opportunities they bring to the United States. In support of Harvard’s case, the brief explains that using visa revocations and the like as a means to stifle political speech is a violation of the First Amendment. These actions “threaten the tremendous contributions of foreign-born historians and other foreign scholars and students.”

AHA Signs On to Letter in Defense of Academic Freedom at Texas A&M University

On February 10, the AHA signed on to a letter by PEN America calling on Texas A&M University to rescind new policies that have censored course content and resulted in major revisions of course syllabi, cancellation of certain classes, and the closure of the university’s Women’s and Gender Studies program, through which history courses are cross-listed. “These policies limit students’ access to course content related to race, gender, and sexual orientation, and constrain professors’ ability to teach effectively by prohibiting instruction responsive to class discussions or current events,” the letter reads. “Robust commitments to academic freedom ensure faculty can teach freely and without fear of retaliation in their areas of expertise, including on topics related to race, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity.”

AHA Urges Recission of Oklahoma Executive Order Targeting Tenure Protections

On February 17, the AHA sent a letter to Governor Kevin Stitt urging him to rescind an executive order encouraging the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to gut existing tenure protections at state research universities and

eliminate tenure outright at regional universities and community colleges. “If adopted,” the letter reads, “these changes will undermine the quality of higher education at Oklahoma’s world-class public institutions, stifling innovation, narrowing opportunities for student learning, and producing less employable college graduates.”

On February 20, the AHA joined a letter from the Alliance for Higher Education to the OSRHE in response to Governor Stitt’s executive order. The alliance’s letter corrects misconceptions about tenure and defends its importance for academic freedom: “Executive Order 2026-07 calls for academic excellence while it seeks to limit the very pillars that allow knowledge generation, innovation, and competitiveness to thrive: the freedom to explore controversial ideas and cutting-edge research without the fear of dismissal based on political and institutional whims.”

AHA Responds to Revised Oklahoma Social Studies Standards

On February 18, the AHA submitted comments responding to the newly revised Oklahoma social studies standards released on January 29. This was after the Oklahoma State Supreme Court set aside the 2025 standards draft, approved in April, in response to a suit brought by parents of Oklahoma students. The AHA also sent an action alert to members in Oklahoma encouraging them to submit comments of their own.

AHA Registers Concerns with Tennessee History of Communism Education Bill

On February 24, the AHA sent a letter to the members of Tennessee’s Senate Education Committee registering serious concerns about pending legislation that would require instruction on the history

of communism in public K–12 schools. “This bill offers a highly politicized version of Cold War and modern American history that is based on a misleading interpretation of the American past,” the letter reads. “This is not good history. It will not provide a strong foundation for student learning.”

AHA Endorses Congressional Resolution in Support of Black History Museums and Cultural Institutions

The AHA endorsed a resolution introduced by Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) on February 26 recognizing and celebrating the significance of Black history museums and cultural institutions. The resolution recognizes Black history museums and cultural institutions are essential to fulfilling the United States’ founding promises and telling the full, accurate history of our nation; calls on relevant federal agencies to ensure strong support for Black museums and cultural institutions in their funding and partnership programs; and calls on the people of the United States to engage with Black history museums and cultural institutions and to confront efforts to erase or distort Black history. The resolution also emphasizes the importance and centrality of Black history within American history, and calls for partnership with Black history museums and cultural institutions in the American Semiquincentennial celebrations.

In endorsing the resolution, AHA executive director Sarah Weicksel said, “The Black history museums and cultural institutions supported by this resolution are essential to telling the full story of our nation’s past. As we commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the 100th anniversary of Black History Month, we must acknowledge

that Black historical experiences belong in all institutions where United States history is presented and interpreted—from our museums to our parks to our schools.”

AHA Amplifies Public Comment Request on NAEP Civics Assessment

On March 4, the AHA sent an action alert calling on members to submit comments to the National Assessment Governing Board as they sought public comments to prepare for a potential update of the National Assessment of Educational Progress Civics Assessment Framework. The initial gathering of public comment was the first stage in a comprehensive multiyear process that, if the board decides framework revisions are needed, will later involve multiple iterations of stakeholder feedback and an expert panel to guide the development of assessment questions and recommendations for contextual questionnaires administered to students, teachers, and schools.

AHA Executive Director Speaks at Launch for National Parks Cultural Resource Coalition

The AHA is a member of the recently established National Parks Cultural Resource Coalition, which held its official kickoff event on March 5 at the US Capitol. Weicksel spoke at the introductory press conference alongside two US senators and three US representatives as well as leaders from other coalition member organizations, and she served as a panelist on the America 250 and Beyond panel.

AHA Staff Participate in National Humanities Alliance Advocacy Day

On March 9, Weicksel, director of communications and public affairs

Alexandra Levy, and public affairs associate Ben Rosenbaum participated in the National Humanities Alliance annual meeting, with Weicksel serving on a panel on how to advocate for the National Archives on Capitol Hill. On March 10, Weicksel, Levy, and Rosenbaum joined state delegations advocating in congressional offices for robust funding for the humanities in agencies and programs including the NEH, the National Archives, Title VI and Fulbright–Hays international education programs, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the National Park Service.

AHA Sends Action Alert Opposing “Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act”

On March 26, the AHA sent out an action alert calling on Ohio residents to oppose Ohio House Bill 486, the “Charlie Kirk American Heritage Act,” which would codify a distorted interpretation of American religious history as part of the legal framework governing public education in Ohio.

AHA Sends Action Alert Opposing Alabama Ten Commandments Bill

On March 30, the AHA sent out an action alert calling on Alabama residents to oppose legislation requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in public school history classrooms while promoting a misleading account of American religious history.

AHA Opposes Proposed Bill Attacking Tenure in Kentucky

On April 2, the AHA sent a letter to Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear urging him to veto House Bill 490, which would effectively gut tenure protections in the state, threatening the academic quality and institutional

independence that foster innovation at Kentucky's world-class public institutions. "Weakening tenure will not make public higher education any more efficient or affordable. Faculty pay is not responsible for budgetary woes at colleges and universities," the letter states. "Attacks on tenure erode the value of public higher education and severely reduce the return on investment for both public funds and tuition dollars."

AHA Files Lawsuit to Defend the Presidential Records Act

On April 6, the AHA, in collaboration with American Oversight, filed a lawsuit challenging a recent memorandum from the Department of Justice that declared the Presidential Records Act unconstitutional. "This case is about the preservation of records that document our nation's history, and whether the American people are able to access and learn from that history," the lawsuit begins. The

memo advised the White House that the records of official activities of the president and White House staff were the personal property of the president and not the American people. This would potentially block public access to hundreds of millions of records and present serious risk to transparency and recordkeeping throughout the executive branch. **P**

Ben Rosenbaum is public affairs associate at the AHA.



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JOHN FEA

IN AN AGE OF DISTRACTION

Historical Thinking, AI, and the Formation of College Students

When did our students learn how to write?" I asked Cathay Snyder, a historian with whom I have co-taught the general education US history introductory course at Messiah University for more than two decades.

It was fall 2024. I had just returned from a yearlong sabbatical and was grading the first assignment: a paper on Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and the American Enlightenment. I noticed that students were now writing perfect sentences, and I was using less red ink than before. Many of these papers contained arguments supported by solid evidence from the text. What had changed? Cathay explained that during my time away, our students had discovered ChatGPT. "Chat *what?*" I replied. Being somewhat of a Luddite when it comes to new technology, I had hoped to ignore the artificial intelligence boom that started with the wide availability of large language models (LLMs). I now realize that was unrealistic.

In December 2025, after nearly 30 years in the classroom at three institutions (including 23 years at Messiah), I retired from teaching. AI was not the only—or the most important—reason I decided to step down, but it was a factor. I never figured out how to prevent my students from using LLMs to write their papers, and, at this stage of my

career, I wasn't particularly interested in trying. But that was not my primary concern with these new tools. I am retiring early, in part, because I realized AI would likely end the approach to history education that I had championed throughout my career. It was time for me to go.

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AI promises efficiency, personalization, and speed. This combination is appealing to college students who are dealing with academic pressures and a fast-paced world. History teachers are now faced with the tension between student demand for quick results (which AI provides) and the slow, thoughtful process of learning to think historically. This tension is not merely about plagiarizing papers; it cuts to the heart of what it means to nurture intellectual and moral maturity at a time when universities are moving away from the humanities and neglecting the very practices that once defined liberal arts education.

AI cannot do what history professors do. We ask students to engage deeply with a text, wrestle with uncertainty, and consider interpretations that may oppose their beliefs. Historical thinking fosters humility, highlights contingency, and emphasizes that human lives do not follow orderly cause-and-effect patterns. Today's AI tools are designed to deliver answers in seconds, simplifying complexity into easy summaries and providing conclusions before students have time to formulate their own questions. When efficiency is our priority, the virtues of historical work start to seem like vices.

What are those virtues? Historian John Lewis Gaddis noted that historical thinking develops "the ability to step outside oneself." On my office door is a quote from Sam Wineburg, author of the monumental *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*: "The narcissist sees the world—both the past and the present—in his own image. Mature historical knowing teaches us to do the opposite: to go beyond our own image, to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born." In this sense, Wineburg notes, "History educates ('leads outward' in the Latin) in the deepest sense." This outward movement—into the worldviews, mentalities, and experiences of others—helps students build empathy and moral imagination.

Or consider the way historians train students to analyze primary documents. The objective is not only to find meaning but to understand the author as a human being placed in a context that requires careful reconstruction. Historical thinking, to quote Wineburg again, demands that we ask not only what a text is “saying” but also what it is “doing.” This requires students to situate a source within its social, cultural, or political context; explore the author’s possible motives; consider alternative scenarios; and recognize that the historical record is always incomplete. AI tools, on the other hand,

transform the unfamiliarity of the past—L. P. Hartley’s “foreign country”—into categories that feel familiar today.

Historical thinking is always focused on uncovering truth. It teaches students to proceed with care, constantly aware of bias—both in their sources and in themselves. Historical thinkers seek corroboration, assess competing views, and remain open to changing their minds. This way of thinking pushes back against our natural impatience with uncertainty. In a time of instant responses and automated

explanations, the historian’s comfort with provisional conclusions seems countercultural. As Wineburg famously said, doing history is an “unnatural act.” LLMs, by contrast, present their answers with the confidence of an oracle—fast, articulate, and comprehensive. Learning to think historically takes time. It teaches students to evaluate evidence, understand complexity, and resist simple narratives. It prepares them to navigate a world inundated with unverified information and algorithmic influence. While AI tools speed up content consumption, historical thinking encourages us to pause



The AI age has teachers pulled between student demand for quick results and the slow, thoughtful process of learning to think historically.

Imperial War Museums, War Office Second World War Official Collection, IWM (H 32586)

and question. Knowledge is not just data; it involves discernment.

The tension between AI and historical thinking becomes clearer when we consider how colleges and universities—facing financial pressures, shrinking enrollments, and the push for majors that lead directly to jobs—are letting the humanities and liberal arts wither on the vine. History departments were once essential to general education and the university's intellectual culture. Now they must defend their existence mainly in economic terms. Administrators decide whether to replace retiring faculty or add new full-time positions based on student interest or market demands. (I recently learned that it is unlikely I will be replaced at Messiah.) As a result, universities prioritize training for a capitalist economy over preparing democratic citizens.

In a November 2025 article for *The Atlantic* titled “Colleges Are Preparing to Self-Lobotomize,” Michael Clune wrote, “The skills needed to thrive in an AI world might counterintuitively be exactly those that the liberal arts have long cultivated.” Indeed, AI cannot instill in students the habits of careful inquiry, reflection, and moral consideration that come from analyzing primary sources or discussing interpretations in a seminar. It cannot replace the mentoring relationship between a teacher and a student, where ideas are discovered rather than downloaded. It cannot create a departmental culture of face-to-face learners built on the integration of scholarship, mutual learning, and, in my case at Messiah University, Christian faith. It cannot produce what historian Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen has called an “intellectual orientation” and a “daily practice” that goes beyond the activists’ use of the past to achieve a goal. It cannot convince young people to pursue a college

education that will prepare them for life, and perhaps even nourish their souls in the process.

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Of course, the solution is not to reject AI entirely. These tools can support historians by raising new questions, uncovering patterns in research, or helping with translation and transcription. But it should always be used as a tool within a humanistic context, not as a substitute. AI cannot replace the cognitive and moral effort that students should engage in. As Clune writes, “Students must be able to ask AI questions, critically analyze its written responses, identify possible weaknesses or inaccuracies, and integrate new information with existing knowledge.” In other words, AI should serve intellectual growth. But such development takes time—perhaps four years—as students gradually cultivate the habits necessary to engage with and reflect on the world responsibly.

Ultimately, the tension between AI and the teaching of historical thinking reflects a larger question: What is the purpose of higher education? Do colleges exist to prepare citizens who can think critically, empathize, and

imagine? Or do they exist solely to deliver skills as efficiently as possible? How we answer these questions will determine whether historical thinking remains a key part of students’ education or becomes an artifact of a past academic culture. **P**

John Fea is distinguished professor of history at Messiah University and Visiting Fellow in History at the Lumen Center.

WHERE ARE WE DRIVING?

Automobile History May Provide a Road Map of Where Generative AI Is Leading Us

Spurred on by Hua Hsu's alarming *New Yorker* article "What Happens After A.I. Destroys College Writing?," the University of Puget Sound convened a pedagogical summit of sorts in October 2025 to take up the question "Is the big research paper dead?" Speaking for the history department, I said that it wasn't dead yet—not unlike the plucky knight in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* who keeps losing limbs but soldiers on. We have clung, through all these years, to the senior thesis—expecting our students to complete a major research paper in their capstone course as part of the history major.

On the first day of that class—before I ask them to define history and reflect on why people find it interesting or useful—I start with an icebreaker: If you could have a historical superpower, what would it be? Some choose the ability to commune with the dead. Others would like to know what historical actors were really thinking when they did X, Y, or Z. Some want language fluencies. One student asked to magically be able to format citations in Chicago style, while others go big, asking for time travel. But no one has ever said about history research, "I'd like to just be able to push a button and be done with it."

Writing a 25-page paper over the course of a semester is a journey. And if you

ask me whether we should keep on doing what we've basically been doing with this capstone for decades, my answer might depend a lot on where we are in that journey. There's plodding in the valley of doubt, and then climbing out. At so many points, I feel a kind of vicarious vertigo: Are we going to fall off this ridge and plunge into the abyss? Will this student finally find sufficient primary sources? Will another student engage in the relevant historiography? Will a third, bursting with ideas and passion for their project, ever put proverbial pen to paper?

But after the final drafts are in, I usually feel proud. The students forged on, in a community of learning. It's not just a journey for a journey's sake. It involves putting skills and hard work together, over the arc of a semester, into projects they care about, where they do the research, consult the experts, become experts themselves, argue their positions, work over written and oral exposition, see it through to completion, stand behind it, and put something new—and crafted by themselves, in community—into the world.

That is a creative thing. The paper they have produced is a creation, but in creating it, they are also creating themselves—as historians in their own right, and as people who can grasp what people in the past went through and express why it matters. That is not something machines can do for them, though

machines can and do help. But off-loading the creative work, the heavy lifting, to a machine can be debilitating for the student, rather than body building; enfeebling, rather than edifying and contributing to growth; atrophying, rather than developing the ambulatory practices and skills, intellectual muscles and sinews, needed for the journey.

Off-loading the creative work, the heavy lifting, to a machine can be debilitating for the student.

Even without the looming presence and insistent pushing of generative AI, ask me at certain points in the process about getting rid of the research paper, and I might say, "Let's throw it overboard and do something different, more accessible, and more like where history in the public is going." But in retrospect—a perspective that comes naturally to us as historians, as we look back in order to chart the future—I still think that requiring our majors to write the research paper is a good foundation for their futures, and by extension our futures.

As I put together my pedagogical road map for the territory ahead, in which

generative AI will be a ubiquitous feature of the landscape, I rely on history. In particular, the history of technology. That field is part of my origin story as a historian, for I wasn't a history major as an undergrad. But a history of technology course ended up paving the way for my future. I was thinking about that course and its readings last year when a student chose the building of the Satsop nuclear power plant in Washington as his thesis topic. The cooling towers still stand as relics, but the plant was never completed. They were part of a program called the Washington Public Power Supply System – its acronym, fittingly, is pronounced “whoops.” The student, having driven 300 miles from Tacoma to Pullman to examine archival sources,

wrote an illuminating thesis focusing on how labor, politics, and the environment all factored in to seal the nuclear plant's unfinished fate.

His project got me thinking back on a then new book we read in that old course I took as an undergrad: Langdon Winner's *The Whale and the Reactor* (1986). Winner raised deep political and environmental questions about nuclear power plants and other technologies. Decades before the appearance of ChatGPT, Winner presented a skeptical view of the hype around so-called artificial intelligence and what it promised. Hype, he claimed, provided “much of the persuasive power of those who prematurely claim great advances in ‘artificial intelligence’ based on narrow but

impressive demonstrations of computer performance.” And here's the kicker: “Children have always fantasized that their dolls were alive and talking.”

But in our era of ever more powerful LLMs, that fantasy is now easier to maintain – a mass hallucination, you might call it. In *Autonomous Technology* (1977), Winner pointed out that the history of technology is often the history of people releasing “powerful changes into the world with cavalier disregard for consequences; that they begin to ‘use’ apparatus, technique, and organization with no attention to the ways in which these ‘tools’ unexpectedly rearrange their lives; . . . that they endlessly proliferate technological forms of life that isolate people from



The 1972 caption to this photo was “Children play in yard of Ruston home, while Tacoma smelter stack showers area with arsenic and lead residue.” Is AI now showering our students with fallout?

Gene Daniels/US National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the Environmental Protection Agency, 545246/public domain

each other and cripples rather than enrich the human potential.”

Based on this view of the technological past, and the legacies that have been carved out for us, I’m trying to apply a precautionary principle with respect to the introduction of generative AI to our learning environments. I worry that the drive to put machine learning into everything we do in education will one day appear, in retrospect, as analogous to the decision to put lead into gasoline in the 1920s. Sure, that additive addressed the knock in automobile engines, allowing us to speed faster down the highway encapsulated in quietude. There was a safe alternative: Ethanol additives have the same effect. But ethanol could not be patented; tetraethyl lead could be, and so the profits could be privatized, and the costs externalized, out of the exhaust pipe. This nation got in its cars and drove everywhere—and polluted the environment, spewing lead out into the places where we live. While severe lead poisoning can result in coma or death, chronic exposure can cause headaches, constipation, and the loss of memory and intelligence. We moved faster but thought slower. We blew past ourselves.

The most extreme version of this lesson from history can be found in Caroline Fraser’s book *Murderland*, which traces and indicts both leaded gasoline and our local Tacoma smelter’s persistent plume for spewing lead into our environment, creating conditions on the ground that aided and abetted the rise of serial killer mentalities among us. Expose children to lead, and they can become “irritable, nervous, inattentive, slow to learn.” They can have hallucinations. They lash out. In the worst cases, they can die. Or the lead poisoning can be one factor in spurring them toward enacting violence on those around them. Ted Bundy, who briefly

attended my college in the 1970s, grew up immersed in this environment.

As we navigate the intrusion of generative AI into our writing and teaching, we can draw on the history of technology to help us see the risks associated with hyped progress. The suffusion of machine learning into our total lives is a massive experiment. We and our students are its subjects. There are indications that AI use quickly becomes a threat to our human, natural intelligence and its continued cultivation. Our history with the automobile, including leaded gasoline, tells us that we have in the past cruised by the wreckage caused by new technologies while reveling in our newfound speed. In our ongoing experience with generative AI and all that it promises for education, the costs may lie in the debilitation of our students’ capacities for critical thought and expression, and a general toxification of our learning environments.

We moved faster
but thought slower.
We blew past
ourselves.

By the sweat of their brows, seniors last semester generated a wonderful set of original papers adding to the world’s knowledge, on topics ranging from how the monarch butterfly took flight as a symbol of immigrant rights to gender-empowering performances in Trinidad’s Carnival. During their research journeys, they transformed themselves from students absorbing history to historians questioning it and forging new understandings of the past. Along the way, one student took a detour through unauthorized use of an LLM to generate parts of an early draft. This became a learning opportunity, as we worked together in the middle of the term

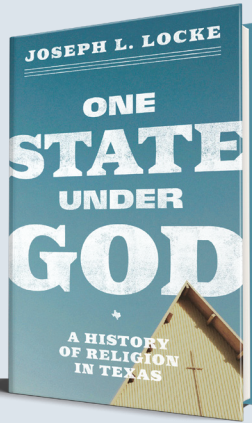
so they could ultimately create something new and of their own from the research they had assiduously done. Another student, inspired in part by their own experience with interest in an automobile purchase, examined the history of buying cars on credit. We are now in the midst of a new phase of turbocharged consumer culture, but we have the power to decide how much credit to extend to vehicles of all kinds running on AI.

We don’t know where this is heading. In another book we read in that history of technology class long ago, the odd third-person autobiography called *The Education of Henry Adams*, Adams reflects on a world’s fair he had recently visited. It was one of those “magic lands” — as John Findlay, one of our history majors who went on to become a renowned historian of the American West, calls them — where stories are told about ourselves, and where we are going, and that almost always put on display technologically propelled utopias of the future. As Adams saw it, “Chicago asked in 1893 for the first time the question whether the American people knew where they were driving.” That same question is before us now. **P**

Douglas Sackman is distinguished professor of history at the University of Puget Sound, author of Orange Empire and Wild Men, and editor of A Companion to American Environmental History.

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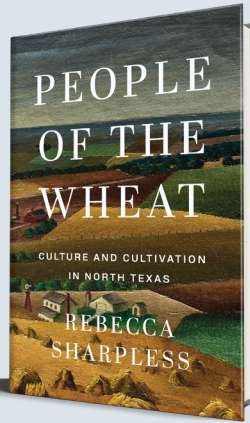


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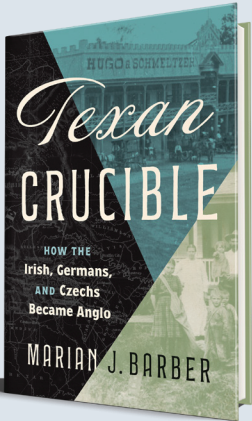


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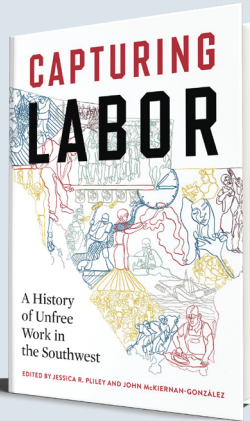


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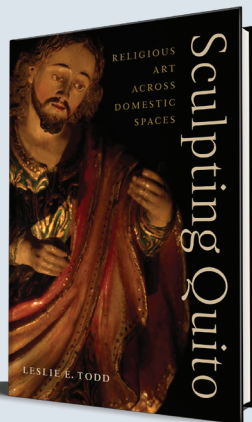


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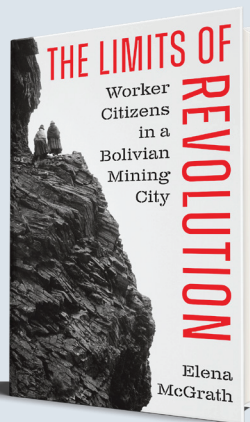


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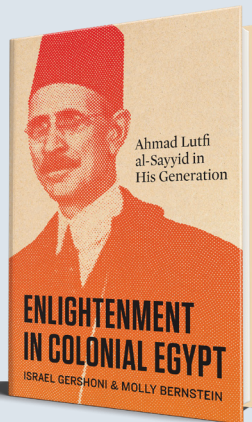


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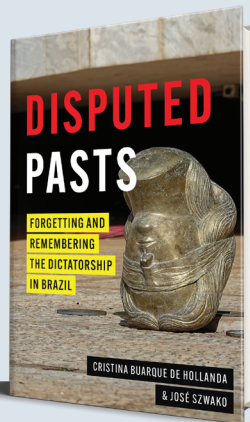


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EN LI

DANCING IN THE CLASSROOM

What I Learned About Teaching History from Hula



By sharing her hula dancing with her students, En Li models vulnerability while learning.
Courtesy En Li

WHEN I START a new class every semester, before I tell my students that I have a PhD in Chinese history, I tell them, “I am a hula dancer.” Most look surprised and curious about what I have to say next. Although I don’t wear a *mu’umu’u* to class, hula is important to my teaching. I started learning history and hula around the same time. Hula and my career have intertwined for the past decade and changed the way I approach teaching history, providing opportunities in the realm of course content, illuminating key pedagogical similarities, and highlighting challenge as a core component in the learning process. I dance in the classroom—as my career advances, hula continues to provide insights for me to rethink classroom authority by showing my own vulnerability and preparing students to be lifelong learners.

Featuring chanted poetry and interpretive movements, hula dance originated as a religious performance dedicated to Hawaiian goddesses and gods, preserving Hawaiian stories of creation and other significant events. I entered the world of hula at a Midwestern research university in 2008, one year after I moved to the United States from China for my doctoral degree in Chinese history. My boyfriend, who later became my husband, was a member of the university’s Hawaiian Club and regularly participated in club events. The first number he showed me was “Ka Uluwehi O Ke Kai,” a song by Auntie Edith Kanaka’ole (1913–79) that describes the similarities between gathering the ocean’s seaweed and courting a lover. Growing up in mainland China in the 1980s, I partook in a Sunday-morning math class as my only extracurricular activity since many parents who’d experienced China’s radical 1950s–1970s when education access was limited valued scholastic work over artistic pursuits. I was eager to learn something new, and hula was my first experience with dance besides some awkward social dances at college. As a typical Hawaiian *mele*, or love song, “Ka Uluwehi O Ke Kai” has four verses, and each verse is sung twice. The hand and feet movements are relatively slow paced and simple, with the hands acting out the lyrics (for example, gathering seaweed), and the music is relaxing and cheerful. Compared to my graduate studies in history that focused on reading, writing, and class discussion, I was intrigued by hula dance as a different way to tell stories about history.

From a combination of curiosity about a new expression, a craving to cultivate an artistic talent, and a stubborn drive to learn a new skill, hula and my teaching career started to intertwine. Besides learning at the university’s Hawaiian Club, I took classes from different *kumu hula*, master teachers, while I did dissertation research in Taipei and Hong Kong. Whenever I moved to a new city as my academic career advanced, my husband and I looked for a *hālau*, or hula troupe, to join

before we looked for a place to live. We regularly attended workshops across the United States and even planned a visit to Hawaii around viewing *luaus*. After I took my first job as an assistant professor in Asian and world history, we became dancers for the only Polynesian dancing troupe in Iowa. Once, a casino in Sioux City, Iowa, invited the troupe to perform and I received \$500 plus two nights of hotel accommodations—more than the typical honorarium for talks on my first book about legalizing gambling in 19th-century China published by a major university press.

Hula dance as a different way to tell stories about history.

During these early years in my classroom, I started to draw connections between learning hula and teaching history. Hula is first a unique and generative content portal to Asian and world history. For example, I have used videos of different dancing and costume styles to showcase the turning point of Hawaiian history in the context of 19th-century colonialism, specifically with the arrival of American Protestant missionaries in the 1820s. I have also used hula to challenge students’ gender stereotypes—few are aware of the important role of male hula dancers in this sacred tradition. In my East Asian history class, I use hula as an example of how different cultures pass knowledge across generations. Hawaiian history was largely remembered in chants and interpreted through dancing. When I describe how people in 1000 BCE China used oracle bones to record history and how people developed their own phonetic alphabet in 15th-century Korea, I incorporate hula to explore the beauty and diversity of cultural communication with students.

As my career advances, hula also provides insights into teaching practice, especially as I wrestle with two interconnected mid-career crises: avoiding the danger of losing freshness and invention after repetitively teaching the same materials and being the only authority in the classroom. After years of teaching, I started to realize that excessive structure could limit students’ creativity, and more importantly, an overly planned session may take away instructors’ spontaneity. This spontaneity is easily forgotten, but vitally important to a genuine interaction.

I have learned through hula that spontaneity and repetition are intertwined. Repetition gives dancers power, as many *kumu hula* emphasize. Both dancing and teaching share structural similarities of improvised exchange between instructors and students that is built on routine and repetition. During a two-hour weekly hula practice session, the first third is

typically dedicated to basic techniques. While many humanities classes emphasize creativity demonstrated in spontaneous discussions, informed by my hula practice sessions, I understood the value of more structured classes with clear learning goals and routines that build a solid foundation for later creative expression. Consistent instructions and classroom routines enable a sense of “trained spontaneity” that is like the routines and patterns in dancing. If students feel like a certain class goes well, that’s probably because of all the purposeful components by instructors through years of experimenting and fine-tuning. Just like in “Cook Ting,” one of Zhuangzi’s most famous parables – it was said that Cook Ting was able to dissect an ox as if he were dancing in perfect rhythm only after years of practice.

Repetitively teaching the same materials, however, inevitably contributes to a loss of the initial interest and fresh eyes for the material, which risks losing the important connection with the students who are new to the material. Moreover, like other junior women faculty and non-native English-speaking instructors, oftentimes I have felt like I had to “know it all” to establish and maintain my classroom authority and to compensate for the fact that I did not look or sound like a “typical” professor, which can make it particularly challenging to connect with students on a personal level.

Dancing hula provides another opportunity for me to experience vulnerability as a learner.

To further remind myself of the uneasiness of a new learner, I bring hula into the classroom by dancing a hula number that I have learned recently in class. Even during the pandemic semesters, I continued the tradition online. This performance, happening in the same classroom as teaching history, is important to my teaching. Dancing hula provides another opportunity for me to experience vulnerability as a learner. Every hula troupe regularly prepares new numbers and shows, so a practice session is usually a mixture of old and new numbers to expand the repertoire. After settling in a new city, no matter how experienced I was as a dancer, I had to learn a new set of numbers and work my way up from the back row in the local troupe. Every week, my body gets used to new combinations of steps and to new formations of different combinations of dancers. I inevitably make mistakes, to say nothing of many moves that are constantly adjusted during different phases of practice before they are finalized for a show. Compared to the pleasure and confidence of

performing the numbers after years of perfection, this learning process is unpleasant, insecure, and full of discomfort.

Therefore, although I have danced hula for over a decade, I still feel nervous to dance in front of my students. I know hula much less well than I know Chinese history. My nervousness surrounding hula reminds me of the vulnerability of “performing” while learning: the confusion when students are introduced to a new subject, the mistakes they might make, the time they need to digest the information, the courage they need to raise questions, and the hesitancy that they have responding to my questions. These are factors I and probably other experienced teachers have taken for granted after years of teaching the same subjects. Thus, my dancing in class serves as a model of the patience and courage it takes to overcome the discomfort in the learning process, and this modeling is especially important to students. Students today seem increasingly wary of being wrong, sometimes afraid to speak up and to risk being corrected. Showing vulnerability through dancing helps me connect with students beyond the subject that I teach. A classroom, in addition to a stage for the instructor, is also a space where students can feel confused; can make mistakes; and, most importantly, with the teacher’s instructions to practice, can overcome the temporary discomfort, learn, and grow stronger.

In the last class of a semester, I encourage students to think about what they can do with the new knowledge and how they can continue to explore the subject beyond the classroom. Although I still feel inadequate compared to many hula dancers who started as children, I hope the hula journey starting in my 20s also encourages other teachers to undertake similar practices of modeling learning and performing for students and to prepare students to appreciate the world as a classroom with all the learning skills we have taught them. As I typically end a hula show not with “Goodbye” but with “Aloha ‘oe, a hui hou,” or “Until we meet again,” as teachers, we shall be excited to see students move to center stage and show us all the new knowledge that they have discovered on their own, until we meet again. **P**

En Li is associate professor of modern East Asian history at the University of Texas at Dallas.

MARTA V. VICENTE

LA SAGRADA FAMÍLIA

The Making of an Icon



After nearly 150 years of construction, La Sagrada Família in Barcelona will finally be completed in June.

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GROWING UP in Barcelona in the 1970s, I could see the church of La Sagrada Família from the rooftop terrace of my apartment building. As I helped my mother hang clothes out to dry, we would look toward the unfinished church. We never imagined that La Sagrada Família would be completed in our lifetimes, a feeling shared by most *barcelonins*. Back then, as my family strolled through the park in front of La Sagrada Família on Sunday mornings, only a handful of tourists took snapshots of the church. It stood as a testament to the creative spark of the architect Antoni Gaudí's genius—magnificent, yet incomplete.

Fast-forward five decades, and the view could not be more different: La Sagrada Família's nearing completion has transformed the church from a local project left in limbo into an international architectural icon, embodying Barcelona's new global aspirations. In 2025 alone, close to five million people visited the church, with 15,000 daily visitors paying €26 to enter the site. And it is not enough to simply visit; in our social media world, one needs to visually document the experience. My brother works at the Sagrada Família metro stop, whose entrance opens directly onto the church, and a few years ago he witnessed a viral trend develop. Under hashtags like #escalatorrend, #SagradaFamíliaMetro, and #LaSagradaEscalator, visitors filmed themselves emerging from the metro escalator with the basilica rising dramatically behind them. The trend quickly became disruptive. TikTokers repeatedly rode the escalators up and down, blocking residents' access and prompting complaints to metro authorities. Filming on the metro escalator is now prohibited, though of course this has not stopped people from trying.

What happened? How did we go from viewing Gaudí as a local eccentric to seeing his church as a world-renowned icon? To understand why finishing this masterpiece matters, we need to look at the history of La Sagrada Família's construction. First conceived by Josep Maria Bocabella i Verdguer, a bookseller, philanthropist, and devotee of Saint Joseph, La Sagrada Família was a religious counterpoint to the rapid industrialization of 19th-century Barcelona. Construction began in 1882 under Francisco de Paula del Villar, who envisioned a conventional neo-Gothic church. However, following a dispute over costs, a year later the project was handed over to Gaudí, who radically reimaged the site. The young Catalan architect blended Modernisme (Catalan art nouveau) with organic forms and "ruled geometry"—curved surfaces generated by straight lines. Though these shapes appear bent or twisted, they are composed of countless straight paths. Gaudí worked with intricate physical models, which became the blueprints for the church's construction. His unorthodox vision drew both fascination and fierce

criticism—often reflected in the biting satirical magazines of the era—while his models were frequently featured in architectural journals. Of the 18 towers originally planned, Gaudí lived to see only the Tower of Sant Bernabé completed in November 1925. He died on June 10, 1926, three days after being struck by a tram while walking to confession. He was buried in the crypt of the building that had become his life's work.

Gaudí famously remarked that his "client" (God) was in no hurry, fully aware that the basilica would be a project of generations rather than a single lifetime. He viewed his role not as the finisher but as the one who established the structural DNA for those who would follow. To this end, he left behind a workshop filled with large-scale plaster models—an "architectural legacy" designed to guide the church's eventual completion long after his death. However, the Spanish Civil War nearly extinguished the possibility of completing his masterpiece. In 1936, anarchists broke into the church, destroying most of the original 3D models and sparking a long-standing debate: If future architects could no longer be certain of the master's exact intentions, was there any sense in continuing?

La Sagrada Família remained a local project, fueled by community offerings and annual fundraisers.

These philosophical doubts, coupled with technical hurdles and a reliance on private donations, kept construction painstakingly slow for decades. As an expiatory church "for the people, by the people," La Sagrada Família remained a local project, fueled by community offerings and annual fundraisers held on March 19—the Feast of Saint Joseph and the anniversary of the first stone. But the pace shifted dramatically in the 1980s, when the temple transitioned from a community-funded "stone puzzle" into a high-tech engineering marvel supported by millions of international visitors. This era was defined by the adoption of 3D printing and aerospace software, as architects realized that Gaudí's complex, organic curves shared the same mathematical logic as aircraft wings.

While technical difficulties subsided and financial challenges were gradually overcome, controversy surrounding the completion of La Sagrada Família only intensified. Because the original models and the drawings were destroyed during the Spanish Civil War, critics—including renowned architects such as Charles-Édouard Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius—argued that the building should have been left unfinished as a "monumental fragment," comparable to the Parthenon. From this perspective, any further construction represents an

interpretation rather than an authentic work by Gaudí. This opposition culminated in a 2008 manifesto signed by more than 400 experts calling for a halt to construction. Prominent Catalan architect Beth Galí has likewise dismissed the ongoing work as a commercial tourist enterprise rather than architecture intended for religious devotion.

The central argument for leaving the church unfinished is that a work of art is inseparable from the hand of its creator; in this view, the “true” Sagrada Família died with Gaudí. There are also practical concerns—particularly the construction of the Great Stairway imagined by Gaudí, which would require building a massive bridge-like structure over the street and demolishing several residential buildings. Current estimates suggest that, if approved by the city, the monumental entrance would not be completed until 2034. Conversely, proponents—including current lead architect Jordi Faulí i Oller, who has directed the project since 2012—have relied on surviving fragments of Gaudí’s models and advanced digital technologies to reconstruct his complex geometric logic. They argue that by adhering to his underlying “geometric code” and mathematical principles, the basilica remains a living project that is faithful to Gaudí’s original vision.

La Sagrada Família is more than an architectural marvel; it is the physical manifestation of Antoni Gaudí’s spiritual obsession. While he was initially viewed as a local eccentric hero—a man whose singular vision seemed almost too radical for his time—his relationship with the basilica eventually transcended mere professional duty. As he transitioned from a secular architect to a devoted mystic, his life became inseparable from the basilica’s construction. This total devotion is captured in his own words: “I have no family, no clients, no fortune . . . I can give myself completely to the Temple.” His ambition was to create a space that evoked the “infinite attributes” of the Divine. Because the building is so uniquely tied to Gaudí’s personal faith, it has become a site of religious pilgrimage as much as an architectural landmark. This culminated in 2000 with the start of his canonization process, leading to Pope Francis declaring him “Venerable” on April 14, 2025. Ultimately, this transition from a local eccentric to a venerable mystic reveals that Gaudí did not merely build a church; he poured his soul into the stone, ensuring that the completion of the basilica is not just an architectural milestone but the silent prayer of a life fully consecrated to the Divine.

If Antoni Gaudí’s life consecrated La Sagrada Família in spirit, the following decades have consecrated it in the eyes of the world. A pivotal shift occurred in 2010 when Pope Benedict XVI designated the site a minor basilica, transforming it from

a mere construction zone into a sacred space for worship. Its legacy was further cemented by UNESCO recognition and the completion in February 2026 of the 172.5-meter Tower of Jesus Christ, making La Sagrada Família the tallest church in the world. As Barcelona serves as the 2026 World Capital of Architecture, the basilica stands alongside icons like the Eiffel Tower—a destination so singular that travelers visit Barcelona specifically to witness it.

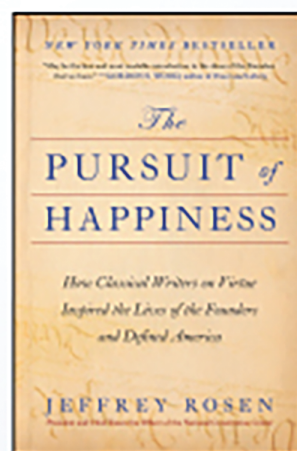
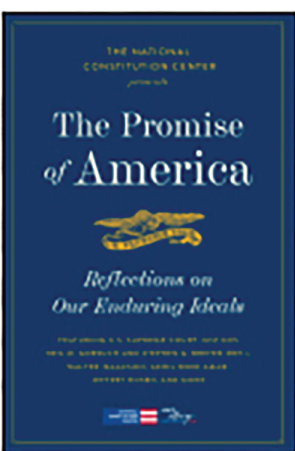
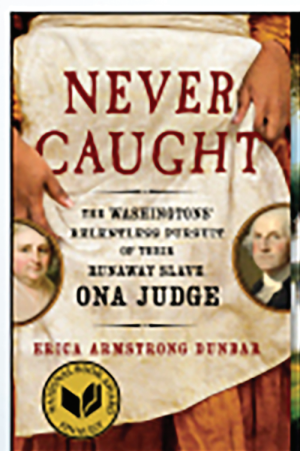
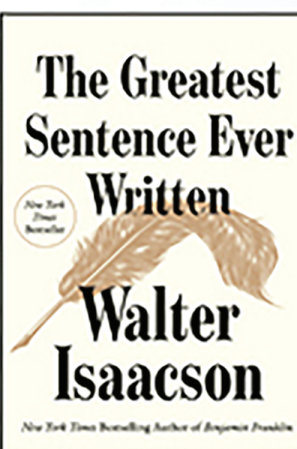
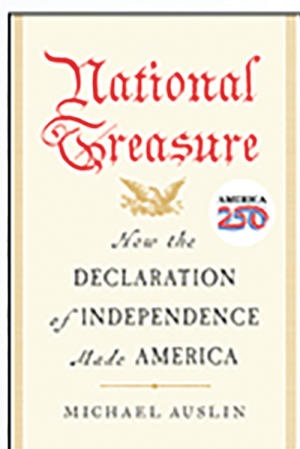
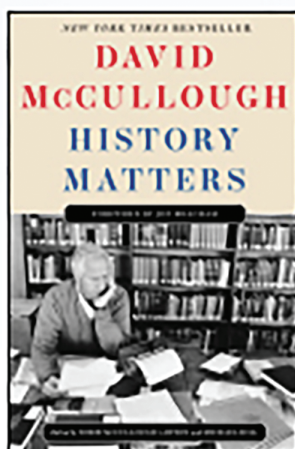
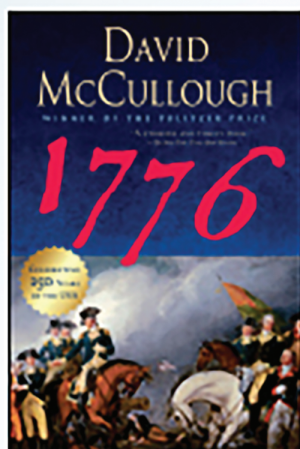
Pope Benedict XVI designated the site a minor basilica, transforming it from a mere construction zone into a sacred space for worship.

Returning to the TikTokers, La Sagrada Família’s escalator trend could represent a commercialization of Gaudí’s church, a distortion of its original purpose: to create a magnificent work of architecture in honor of God. Or perhaps not. Could it be that these TikTokers are, unexpectedly, fulfilling Gaudí’s desire for a church for the people and by the people? Gaudí envisioned a church so tall and monumental that it could be seen from anywhere in the city, with bells loud enough to be heard from afar. In this sense, witnessing the grand structure suddenly emerge in the background as one rises from the metro may fit that vision.

I myself have not returned to La Sagrada Família. Perhaps I am among those who feel nostalgia for the unfinished church—a testament to the power and beauty of incompleteness, akin to the fragmented verses of Sappho. Or perhaps the reason is more mundane. I am overwhelmed by crowds, and I wonder whether I could still feel the breath of the Divine when surrounded by dozens—hundreds—of people pressing around me. I have chosen to live with the uncertainty of never fully answering this question. Yet La Sagrada Família is scheduled for completion on June 10, the 100th anniversary of Gaudí’s death, marking the end of what is perhaps one of the most celebrated architectural journeys in the world. **P**

Marta V. Vicente is Ahmanson-Murphy Professor of Medieval and Renaissance History at the University of Kansas.

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SARAH WEICKSEL

'76 OBJECTS

In the June 2026 Issue of the American Historical Review

Efforts to manifest connections to the American Revolution through the material world have a long history; they began in the moment—with people saving objects ranging from tent fragments to furniture—and persist into the present day. Commemorative milestones have provided reasons to revisit and to reimagine the American Revolution through both old and new objects, the impulse for doing so shape-shifting along the way.

These commemorative milestones often have come at fraught moments in the nation's history. The United States was still deeply divided and roiling in the aftermath of the Civil War during the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. The bicentennial occurred as the nation was emerging from the Watergate scandal. And we find ourselves at the semiquincentennial in a deeply polarized political moment in which history has become a major flash point amid a presidential administration's movement to flatten, and in some cases erase, narratives of US history.

Institutions across the United States have produced programming, exhibits, and teaching materials, contributing complexity to our understanding of the founding of the United States and the intervening 250 years. Schoolchildren and adults alike are watching *The American Revolution*, a new documentary by Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein, and David Schmidt. And, as in the past, the commemorative landscape is awash with memorabilia. America250, for instance, has an entire line of merchandise, from key chains to a branded cowbell, to (in a nod to the 2020s) charcuterie boards, wine totes, and pickleball paddles emblazoned in a signature red, white, and blue logo.

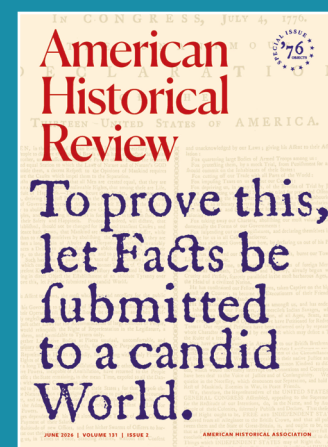
But the semiquincentennial is not only a moment for public commemoration. It offers us a distinct moment in time at which to deeply assess the nation's past, to grapple with its complexities and contradictions, to take stock of our scholarship, and to do so not only alongside other historians but also in conversation with students and the general public.

In *'76 Objects*, a special issue of the *American Historical Review*, material culture of the revolutionary era takes center stage as a method of historical inquiry. This is the first issue of the *AHR* in its more than 130-year history to focus entirely on material culture. In fact, material culture, despite having been a flourishing field of scholarly study for nearly five decades, is still relatively underutilized when it comes to the academic discipline of history. While the scholarship of historians of ancient and premodern eras has long been informed by the study of physical artifacts, those who study more recent eras have tended to privilege textual sources. In a 2005 *AHR* article, Leora Auslander offered an explanation as to why: "Historians," she wrote, "are, by profession, suspicious of things. Words are our stock-in-trade."

The authors of the 64 short essays in this special issue each focus on an individual object, taking various approaches to explore its context and significance.

The three-dimensional nature of objects—their style, construction, materials, and tactile qualities—is important to understanding both their roles in people's lives and their historical significance. So, too, are the cultural, social, and political meanings that are embedded within and created by objects' design, production, use, destruction, and preservation. Objects have communicative, emotive, expressive, performative, and, at times, violent effects in the world. The authors of the 64 short essays in this special issue each focus on an individual object, taking various approaches to explore the context and significance of items ranging from furniture, to portraits, to shoe leather scraps. Zara Anishanslin (Univ. of Delaware), Kenneth Cohen (National Museum of American History), Nathan Perl-Rosenthal (Univ. of Southern California), and Ashli White (Univ. of Miami) contribute longer essays to round out the issue.

The cover of this *American Historical Review* special issue, which marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the US Declaration of Independence, draws from the language of the original document, telling readers: “To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.” In *'76 Objects*, material culture takes center stage as a method of historical inquiry through essays that collectively offer new insights into revolutionary America and capture a diversity of experiences through their focus on both ordinary and extraordinary objects.



Teasing out material culture’s many interpretations can be challenging. The meanings accessible through documents often prove easier to evoke through a textual quotation than through the level of description required to interpret an object, but the pervasiveness of text – and of literacy itself – is, in the grand scheme of things, really quite modern. And so, by decentering text, we can open portals into the past as it was lived in all its texture.

Material culture requires us to use the power of description to help people to see something, feel it, smell it, know it. Sometimes, as Anishanslin explores in her essay, words are all we have left of a thing. Those “absent objects, and the reasons for their absence,” she writes, “offer important historical and historiographical insights.” In those instances, we must piece together our understanding through not only the words but also the objects we do still have. There is much to be gained by mobilizing material objects in our scholarship to serve as meaningful sources that, in all their three-dimensionality, pose questions and problems with which historians must reckon. And numerous historians of multiple fields and time periods are grappling with such questions. The essays in this issue build on decades of innovative scholarship conducted in both historical and interdisciplinary contexts. They take stock of where we have been and gesture toward where we might go.

This special issue is not intended to define or advocate for a specific methodology by which to study material culture; no single approach is privileged. Instead, it highlights a range of approaches through which to study a wide variety of material objects. While each essay is grounded in an individual object, how an author uses that object varies. Sometimes the object is at the center, showcasing what we can learn from intensive object-centered research; sometimes an object is used as a touchstone to relate a history grounded primarily in documents, an object-driven one in which the material itself is less central,

but nevertheless important to posing a historical question. Some essays are deeply rooted in material analysis, while others situate an object within a broader array of objects, images, and texts to draw out its meanings. In some instances, the objects themselves no longer exist. Artifacts, Cohen reminds us, “can serve as nexuses or prompts as much as evidence.” Our goal has been to be inclusive – methodologically, chronologically, and geographically – to show the variety of ways a historian might use material culture to uncover insights into the history of the revolutionary era and to capture a diversity of experiences through both ordinary and extraordinary objects.

What story does an object tell best? The answer depends on the questions you ask of it. Our knowledge of objects, as White observes, “rests on the formidable expertise of many specialists.” I still have research questions about the ways in which these objects, as Perl-Rosenthal suggests, sit “at the juncture between two scales of analysis” – in this case, the local and the global.

Thousands of objects, remarkable and mundane, were in motion as the British American colonies moved toward revolution. Beads. Smoothbore flintlock muskets. Pocket maps. Beaver round hats. Striped drugget. Oakum. Some of them tell little-known local histories. Others offer insight into much larger, global histories. All are access points for unlocking deeper histories of the revolutionary era. We invite you to explore the objects in this issue – to engage with the interpretations presented, to ask your own historical questions of them, and to seek out the answers.

Multiple stories are contained within these objects. What will you ask of them? **P**

Sarah Weicksel is executive director of the AHA and editor of the June 2026 special issue of the American Historical Review.

ANTHONY J. STEINHOFF

2026 AHA NOMINATIONS

On behalf of the Nominating Committee, I recently submitted to the executive director the nominations for the positions that will be filled by election in 2026. The full slate of nominations appears below. It is the result of more than two months of effort by the members of the Nominating Committee and the AHA staff, both before and after the Nominating Committee's in-person meeting at the end of January.

The challenge facing each year's committee is considerable. The "easier" part of the task is to identify and propose individuals who can reliably fulfill the duties associated with a given position, drawing on the committee members' professional networks and information provided by AHA staff. Determining which of these to propose for a position, however, reflects the more complicated part of the committee's charge: ensuring that the various AHA constituencies – field specializations, types of institutions, genders, geographies, and career stages – find appropriate institutional expression. This means that the committee does not just strive to produce a "balanced" ballot each year, but that it looks at the existing composition of the AHA Council and the elected committees and constructs the ballot to address the specific vacancies or needs it has identified.

Some choices are straightforward: The Teaching Division, for example, always needs a schoolteacher among its members. For 2026, the bylaws also stipulate that the president-elect not be an Americanist or a Europeanist. Once the committee begins to settle on candidates for a position, those choices start to restrict the options available for the remaining positions. Creating each year's slate of nominations follows a certain, albeit complex logic. It is not, however, an act of puzzle solving; there is no single "right answer," just a series of potential configurations that crystallize only at the end of the process.

The committee encourages all members to cast their ballots beginning June 1.

President

Lonnie Bunch III, Smithsonian Institution (secretary; US, museums, African American history, American presidency/sport/film)

President-Elect

Tobie S. Meyer-Fong, Johns Hopkins University (professor and chair; East Asia, social and cultural history of China since 1600)

Lynn M. Thomas, University of Washington, Seattle (Giovanni and Amne Costigan Endowed Professor in History and director, Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities; politics and gender in eastern and southern Africa)

Research Division

Vice President

Jane Landers, Vanderbilt University (Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of History; colonial Latin America and Atlantic world, Africans and their descendants)

Lara Putnam, University of Pittsburgh (professor; historical methods and digital technology, Latin America and Caribbean, transnational labor/immigration/gender, Rust Belt political participation)

Council Member

Rose Miron, Minnesota Historical Society (senior director of Library, Archives, and Collections; Indigenous history across the Great Lakes, public history and memory)

Margaret Salazar-Porzio, Oatlands, National Trust for Historic Preservation (executive director; public history/preservation/humanities leadership, visual and material culture, American race/ethnicity/civic memory)

Professional Division

Council Member

Jim Ambuske, More Perfect (director of digital history; American Revolution, Scotland, British Atlantic world, public history, podcasting)

L. Bao Bui, University of Illinois, Chicago (visiting lecturer; food politics, military, foreign relations, US Civil War)

Teaching Division

Council Member

Samantha Futrell, William & Mary Strategic Cultural Partnerships (master teacher and president, Virginia Council for the Social Studies; US, secondary writing instruction)

Wayne Zhang, Roald Amundsen High School, Chicago Public Schools (teacher and social studies department chair; world studies)

Council Member, At Large

Christopher Hulshof, University of Wisconsin–Madison (PhD candidate; empire/covert operations/Cold War Southeast Asia)

Andrew Varsanyi, University of Nebraska–Lincoln (PhD candidate; 19th-century Great Plains class/civic association/democratic life)

Committee on Committees

Alan L. McPherson, Temple University (professor; US foreign relations, US–Latin American relations, global)

Zachary R. Morgan, Ohio State University (associate professor, Department of Comparative Studies; race, slavery, abolition, Afro–Latin American studies, Brazil)

Nominating Committee

Slot 1

Nile Blunt, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (senior director of museum learning; Atlantic world)

Sam Vong, Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History (curator of Asian Pacific American History; Asian American, refugees)

Slot 2

Jennifer L. Foray, Indiana University (associate professor; modern imperialism and decolonization, Dutch-Indonesian relationship, pedagogy, methods and historiography)

Karen Petrone, University of Kentucky (professor; cultural, gender, propaganda, war and memory, Russia and Soviet Union, Holocaust education)

Slot 3

James F. Brooks, University of Georgia (Carl and Sally Gable Distinguished Professor of History; Indigenous and colonial past)

Baki Tezcan, University of California, Davis (professor; pre-modern Middle East, early modern Ottoman sociopolitical, early modern transformation of Islam) 

Anthony J. Steinhoff is a professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal and chair of the 2026–27 Nominating Committee.

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JSTOR



Martha Chaiklin

1960–2026

Historian of Japan and
Material Culture; AHA
Member

Martha Chaiklin embodied career diversity. As a curator, professor, editor, author, and election worker, Martha brought big energy, analytical brilliance, and a hearty laugh to all her undertakings. She wrote across national, regional, linguistic, and temporal boundaries before the global turn. She was a citizen of the world, living and working in the United States, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. She was at the forefront of material culture studies with her innovative, varied research on objects from shoes to mermaids. But most central to her professional identity and prolific publications, Martha was a meticulous archival researcher with methods, memory, and an eye for detail that focused her writing on empirical insights and connections.

Martha trained as a scholar of early modern Japan with a focus on interactions with the Dutch East India Company in the Tokugawa era. Raised in Columbia, Maryland, she earned a BA from Washington University in St. Louis and an MA from the University of Michigan before moving to Japan, where she worked in advertising and earned a second MA from Seijo University. She subsequently moved with two young children to undertake a PhD at Leiden University in the Netherlands. While there, she worked with the journal *Itinerario*, initiating her lifelong dedication to book reviewing.

After her first book, *Cultural Commerce and Dutch Commercial Culture: The Influence of European Material Culture on Japan, 1700–1850* (Leiden Univ., 2003), Martha and her sons returned to the United States, where she worked as the East Asian curator at the Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM) and taught at several universities, including the University of Alabama and the University of Pittsburgh. At MPM, her expertise in material culture became even more tangible. She once noted that although she'd studied the significant differences between Japanese and European armor, she didn't really know what that meant until she had to move hefty Samurai *dō* and the even more unwieldy metal plate and chain mail of a German knight. This curiosity for how things felt, how people used

them, and why they mattered in specific human contexts animated Martha's work.

Martha's abiding interest in people and the things they made propelled her research; she went where the archives took her, fearless about going to new cities, countries, repositories, or topics. She often reported on recent correspondence with a librarian or archivist who'd helped her track down a detailed reference to local ivory carving. Her interests ranged from *netsuke* (miniature sculptures) to live peacocks, from merchants to prostitutes. "Trade is trade," she commented wryly. She lit up equally talking about the technical specifications of early modern glassblowing compared to modern sheet glass and the cultural meaning of elephants in East Africa and Sri Lanka. She spent years tracking ivory hunters, caravans, merchants, artisans, and consumers for *Ivory and the Aesthetics of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). She ranged across the Indian Ocean world for information and inspiration to tell a story about supposedly insular Japan.

Martha also loved shoes. She was delighted to contribute a chapter on Japanese footwear to a volume blurbed by Manolo Blahnik, who said, "This volume helps transform the shoe from a mundane object of everyday use into something of great social and psychological power." His observation captures Martha's approach to history, crafting narrative and analytical power from objects and their past uses.

In addition to her monographs, Martha translated C. T. Assendelft de Coningh's Dutch memoir, *A Pioneer in Yokohama: A Dutchman's Adventures in the New Treaty Port* (Hackett, 2012); edited *Shashi: The Journal of Japanese Business and Company History* and the volume *Mediated by Gifts: Politics and Society in Japan, 1350–1850* (Brill, 2016); and co-edited *Asian Material Culture* (Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2009) and *Animal Trade Histories in the Indian Ocean World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). She accomplished all of this as a single mother and most of it as an independent scholar. As her many collaborators and colleagues will attest, she did a lot of this work while multitasking, moving through the world with love and sardonic wit. She is survived by her sons Samuel and David Suzuki, her mother Sharon Chaiklin, and siblings Seth and Nina. They are not alone in feeling the loss of Martha's passing.

Laura J. Mitchell
University of California, Irvine

Kerry Ward
Rice University

Photo courtesy Chaiklin family



Samuel R. Gammon III

1924–2024

Former AHA
Executive Director

Ambassador Samuel R. Gammon III served as the executive director of the American Historical Association from 1981 to 1994, a critical time for the organization and the discipline. He helped lift the Association out of a period of financial difficulty and played a vital role as the scholarly community negotiated challenges from the Reagan administration.

Sam was born into the world of academic history. His father, Samuel R. Gammon Jr., was professor and chair of the Department of Government and History at Texas A&M University. Starting his studies at Texas A&M, Sam was called away to US Army service in World War II, after which he returned to complete his BA in history in 1946. He then went to Princeton University, but his studies were interrupted again by service in the Korean War. He eventually completed his history PhD in 1953.

Sam then entered the Foreign Service and served in a wide array of posts in Europe and Africa before retiring as ambassador to Mauritius from 1978 to 1980. Throughout his tenure at the AHA, he continued to carry the title of ambassador and the diplomatic bearing of his years in the Foreign Service. Even though he spent much of his time after earning the PhD either abroad or in Washington, he also found time to turn his dissertation into a monograph, *Statesman and Schemer: William, First Lord Paget, Tudor Minister*, in 1973.

When Sam joined the AHA, it was suffering from declining revenues and a reputation for not being collegial with other scholarly societies, so his diplomatic skills and financial acumen were a particular benefit for the organization – and especially needed as a new Republican administration embarked on an agenda to cut funding to history activities and involve itself in a range of historical subjects.

The cautious and well-honed diplomatic approach Sam learned in the Foreign Service proved invaluable as a way to keep the Association in those conversations, opening doors on Capitol Hill and the various departments and agencies in

the city. Early in his tenure, he revitalized the political efforts of the Association by pushing back on Reagan administration efforts to politicize the National Archives, undermine various public records acts, and slash funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities and National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

As executive director, Sam instituted numerous institutional reforms that persist today. The most visible involved turning the then quite modest *AHA Newsletter* (consisting largely of research notices, letters, and committee reports) into a wide-ranging publication, now called *Perspectives on History*, about practices in the discipline. He incorporated into the newsletter job ads (previously published separately in the *Employment Information Bulletin*) and invited specialists in a variety of the discipline's activities to serve as contributing editors (from film and museums to teaching and professional issues). He also instituted renewed outreach efforts to historians around the country and helped reverse almost a decade of declining memberships. And toward the end of his tenure, he recognized the rising significance of the internet. He encouraged staff to develop a website for the Association and negotiated with the Mellon Foundation to make the *American Historical Review* the first journal in JSTOR (though neither project was completed until after he left).

Sam's innate sense of caution ran afoul of changing political times as the Reagan and (first) Bush administrations gave way to the Clinton era. With a new generation of historians rising into leadership positions, Sam's political acumen and the internal reforms he had put in place early in his tenure began to appear staid and complacent. He retired after a contentious debate over the financial costs of canceling the hotel contracts for the 1995 annual meeting in Cincinnati after the city voted to eliminate gay rights from its Human Rights Ordinance.

He continued to be a visible presence in Washington over following decades before he moved to Charlottesville, Virginia, where he died on October 21, 2024, at the age of 100.

Robert B. Townsend
American Academy of Arts and Sciences



Alison Isenberg

1962–2025

Historian of Urban America; AHA Member

Alison Isenberg, historian of urban America and professor of history at Princeton University, died on October 23, 2025, in Princeton, New Jersey. She is survived by her husband, fellow historian Keith Wailoo, and their two daughters, Sarah Iman Wailoo and Myla Eleanor Isenberg Wailoo.

Born in 1962, Isenberg received her BA from Yale University in 1984, where she worked with Ann Fabian and William Cronon, and her PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in 1995, where she studied with Michael Katz. Following these mentors, Isenberg produced a wealth of impressive scholarship over her career.

Isenberg distinguished herself as a scholar with a passion for exploring the forgotten people and places of major cities. Her undergrad thesis at Yale, the first of many prizewinning works, traced the life of a New England woman in the San Francisco gold rush. Before entering graduate school, Isenberg deepened her education in urban affairs by applying her skills in urban planning and housing development at the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the Community Preservation Corporation in the Bronx. As a doctoral student, she crafted another prizewinning work in her dissertation on the creation and crisis of the American downtown.

Her published works only brought more prizes. Her first book, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), won the Ellis W. Hawley Prize from the Organization of American Historians and the Lewis Mumford Prize from the Society for American City and Regional Planning History (SACRPH), among others. Her second, *Designing San Francisco: Art, Land, and Urban Renewal in the City by the Bay* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2017), won the PROSE Award in Architecture and Urban Planning from the Association of American Publishers and the John Brinckerhoff Jackson Book Prize from the Foundation for Landscape Studies. Her third book, the soon-to-be-released *Uprisings* (Princeton Univ. Press), turned her talents to yet another city: Trenton and the deadly uprising there after the murder of Martin Luther King Jr.

But these books only scratch the surface of Isenberg's considerable contributions to urban history. She served as president of SACRPH, as a board member for the Urban History Association and H-Urban, and as the founding review editor for the *Journal of Planning History*. She was the founding co-director of both the Princeton-Mellon Initiative in Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities (2011–25) and the Robert Wood Johnson "Truth and Repair" project (2023–25), which united scholarly communities at Princeton, Rutgers University, St. Peter's University, and cultural institutions across New Jersey. She also linked her recent research in the "Trenton project" to a larger community of artists and public history advocates to restore and recover the recent past there.

Despite her larger-than-life profile as a national figure in her field, Isenberg remained primarily focused on her students. Over three decades, she taught at Florida International University (1994–97), the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1997–2001), Rutgers University (2001–10), and finally Princeton (2010–25). Perhaps not surprisingly for a scholar of urban planning, Isenberg was skilled at building communities and crafting environments in which her students could thrive. She enabled her students to feel safe presenting their ideas and taking risks in their research. In 2024, she received one of Princeton's awards for graduate student mentoring in recognition of her incredible commitment to the Department of History's students.

Setting an example of cooperation and collaboration, Isenberg was well known for reaching down to lift up her own students and other junior scholars in the field, showering them with seemingly endless energy and encouragement. She nurtured young minds, encouraging them to pursue their own ideas and often planting seeds of a new project. For all her own considerable accomplishments, she seemed to delight in the achievements of others even more. She had a beaming smile that projected warmth and confidence—not in herself, but in you.

In a word, Alison Isenberg was brilliant. Of course, she had a brilliance that shone through in conventional ways our discipline prioritizes, in prizewinning writing and award-winning teaching. But she was brilliant in that her presence always shined brightly. She lit up a room just by being there. To her lasting credit, her students basked in that light and the communities she crafted glowed from her warmth. Our world is now darker and dimmer without her in it.

Kevin M. Kruse
Princeton University

Photo courtesy the Trustees of Princeton University



Norman L. Jones

1951–2026

Tudor Historian; AHA Member

Norman L. Jones, professor emeritus at Utah State University, died on February 9, 2026, after a year of treatment for esophageal cancer.

Norm grew up on a farm in southern Idaho, where he developed a lifelong love for books and dogs. He earned his BA in history at Idaho State University (1972); his MA in history at the University of Colorado, Boulder (1974); and his PhD at Clare College, Cambridge (1978), under the supervision of Sir Geoffrey Elton. His first book, *Faith by Statute: Parliament and the Settlement of Religion, 1559* (Royal Historical Society; Humanities Press, 1982), based on his doctoral thesis, won the Whitfield Prize from the Royal Historical Society in 1982. This award marked the beginning of a storied career that spanned over four decades, 11 books, and more than 40 articles on Tudor history.

Norm's research focused on the intersections between religion, politics, and society. Since the 1980s, he was particularly interested in William Cecil, Lord Burghley's management of Elizabethan England—an interest shaped by Norm's 18 years as a department head. In addition, Norm highly valued collaboration. The volumes he co-edited substantially contributed to our understanding of English legal, social, political, and religious history. He cherished friendships and collaborations forged through fellowships at the Huntington and Folger Shakespeare Libraries, Oxford University, the University of Geneva, and Cambridge University. One of the highlights of his career was becoming the Burghley Visiting Fellow at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 2023.

Norm taught for one year at Harvard University before taking up a permanent post at Utah State University (USU), where he taught the Western civilizations survey and classes in early modern Europe, Reformation England, and the history of Christianity. A great storyteller, he taught with rigor and joy, always eager to bring students into the practice of history as consumers and producers of knowledge, as sharp critical thinkers, and as accomplished communicators. As a leading

scholar in Reformation history, he recruited students from across the United States to USU's master's program. Those students had the advantage of working with Norm in a small program that allowed for close mentoring—and he was an outstanding mentor. When one of his graduate students pressed him about why he hadn't sought employment at a more prestigious program where he could train PhD students, he gestured toward the surrounding mountains and valley and said that he did not want to leave the beauty of the Inter-mountain West and that he deeply valued showing students who came from a background similar to his what was available to them in the wider world. For him, a land grant university in the landscape he loved was the best job he could imagine.

Beyond the classroom, Norm was a leader in curricular reform at USU, in the state of Utah, and nationally. He was instrumental in encouraging collaboration between Lumina Foundation and the American Historical Association on the Tuning project. Developed in the European Union at the turn of the century, the faculty-led, discipline-focused, and student-centered project brought educators together to address a central question: When students complete a course, a program of study, or a degree, what should they know, understand, and be able to do? In other words, what would students take from their studies into further education, employment, and civic life? In 2009, when Lumina experimented with Tuning in the United States across three state systems, Norm helped guide the initiative in Utah. He quickly recognized that this project would be more effective and persuasive if led by professional disciplinary societies (rather than educational administrators). The partnership Norm suggested led to a generous Lumina grant for the Tuning the Historical Discipline initiative from 2012 to 2016. Faculty work in Tuning inspired changes in courses, curricula, assignments, and grading. But the project also contributed to wider conversations with parents, employers, legislators, and the public at large. Tuning strengthened faculty work in building equitable introductory courses, meaningful assessment, K–16 collaboration, career guidance, and legislative advocacy. The project has continued to have a transformative effect on the work of teaching and learning among historians.

Norm leaves his loving wife Cecile Gilmer, his siblings, nieces and nephews, and a host of friends and colleagues.

Susan M. Cogan
Utah State University

Daniel J. McInerney
Utah State University (emeritus)



Vicente L. Rafael

1956–2026

Historian of the Philippines and Scholar of Translation

Vicente (Vince) Leuterio Rafael, eminent historian of the Philippines and scholar of translation, died on February 21, 2026.

Vince was born in Manila in 1956, nine years before the election of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. to the Philippine presidency and 14 years before the declaration of martial law, under which he would come of age as a young adult and budding scholar. Shaped by the emergence of authoritarianism and student protest within the dynamic and eclectic creative world of the city during the Cold War, he completed his BA in history and philosophy at the Ateneo de Manila University in 1977.

In 1979, he began graduate studies at Cornell University, where he earned his MA in 1982 and his PhD in 1984. His dissertation would become his first monograph, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Ateneo de Manila Univ. Press and Cornell Univ. Press, 1988; repr., Duke Univ. Press, 1993). Writing for the journal *Philippine Studies*, Vince reflected on the book's lukewarm reception upon its release. Initially the book was dismissed as irrelevant to the serious study of the Philippines and his prose as too dense and difficult. He resigned himself to the idea that his work would fall to the wayside of the emerging canon of Philippine scholarship. However, despite these early criticisms, *Contracting Colonialism* is now regarded as a classic in the critical study of language and translation, early modern Spanish empire, and, of course, Philippine and Southeast Asian studies.

Over the next four decades, Vince wrote prolifically across disciplines and geographies, particularly around the politics of language, vernaculars, and translation under global imperialism. In 2000, with Duke University Press (which would become his publisher of choice), he published another classic of Philippine and Filipino diasporic cultural studies, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*. In *White Love*, through his signature methodological eclecticism and carefully selected historical ironies and ruptures, he eschewed the epic mode of historical writing in favor of the episodic historical essay.

Praised by the political scientist John Sidel for its “style and nuance,” *White Love* won the National Book Award for History from the Manila Critics’ Circle.

Returning to the study of translation and empire, Vince published *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (Duke Univ. Press, 2016). Expanding on his close focus on philology and vernaculars in earlier works, *Motherless Tongues* scrutinized the politics of area studies through the genres of academic biographies, which, he argued, are also ways that scholars translate their lives into languages and epistemologies. It famously ends with an interview between himself and the translation scholar Siri Nergaard, in which he declared that, rather than simply a luxury or a profession, “translation is a compulsion, not simply a choice.”

His final book, *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte* (Duke Univ. Press, 2023), was a remarkable work of analytical courage and critical pessimism. Written alongside the unfolding of the presidency of Rodrigo Roa Duterte, who infamously waged the so-called War on Drugs against the urban poor and enemies of the state, *The Sovereign Trickster* is a cultural anthropology of the rhetoric of authoritarian rule, which examines the fraught rise of our contemporary political moment from the perspective of the Global South postcolony.

Vince’s scholarly career was as border-crossing as his work on translation. He held positions on faculty at the Ateneo de Manila University, the Department of History at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, and the Department of Communication at the University of California, San Diego, as well as visiting appointments across the United States and Europe. At the time of his death, he was a professor of history and Southeast Asian studies and the Colonel Donald W. Wiethuechter USA Retired Faculty Fellow in Military History at the University of Washington in Seattle. Over a 23-year tenure at UW, he supervised generations of scholars in Philippine, Southeast Asian, and Asian American studies.

Vince will be missed for his care for the field of Philippine studies and his deep love for younger scholars, especially those whom he mentored around the world, both formally as an advisor and (most frequently) informally as a comrade. He is survived by his wife Lila Ramos Shahani, the scholar and former secretary-general of the Philippine National Commission for UNESCO.

Adrian De Leon
New York University



Lois G. Schwoerer

1927–2025

Historian of Britain;
AHA 50-Year Member

Lois Green Schwoerer, Elmer Louis Kayser Professor of History emerita at the George Washington University, died on August 10, 2025. Born on June 4, 1927, she graduated from Smith College *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa and, under the direction of Caroline Robbins, completed her PhD in European and English history in 1956 from Bryn Mawr College. Her husband, Frank Schwoerer, died in 2000. She is survived by her son, Dr. John Schwoerer, and two grandchildren, Emma and Charles.

Schwoerer became the first tenured woman faculty member in the history department at George Washington University, earning the rank of professor in 1976, 11 years after her arrival. She served as department chair and contributed to the creation of the women's studies program and its MA degree. In 1992, she became the first woman to hold the Elmer Louis Kayser Professor of History. Upon her retirement in 1996, GWU established the Lois G. Schwoerer Graduate Fellowship in Early Modern English and European History. In 1997, a *Festschrift* in her honor was published, *Politics and the Political Imagination in Later Stuart Britain* (Univ. of Rochester Press).

Schwoerer was an indefatigable scholar, publishing seven books, including five monographs, four of which were published by Johns Hopkins University Press, and approximately 50 articles. For most of her career, Schwoerer explored the puzzling dilemma that early modern English men and women faced as they tried to balance England's tradition of monarchical authority with the possibility—and eventual reality—of shared governance in the second half of the 17th century. “No Standing Armies!” *The Antiarmy Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (1974) won the annual prize of the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians. *The Declaration of Rights, 1689* (1981) received honorable mention in the John Ben Snow competition. *Lady Rachel Russell: “One of the Best of Women”* (1988) tied together Schwoerer's interest in women's history and the political machinations of the Restoration. Through the lens of a “Grub Street” publicist, her next book, *The Ingenious Mr. Henry Care: Restoration Publicist* (2001), delved

into the world of Restoration politics and print. Finally, when she was 89, Schwoerer plunged into the history of material culture with *Gun Culture in Early Modern England* (Univ. of Virginia Press, 2016).

Schwoerer held numerous fellowships and was elected a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. She was a founding member of the Center for the History of British Political Thought at the Folger Shakespeare Library and a member of Yale University's Committee on Parliamentary History. In 1987–89, Schwoerer served as president of the North American Conference on British Studies.

Schwoerer could be a demanding and intimidating mentor, but even if she was parsimonious with her carrots, they tasted all the sweeter when she bestowed them. In short, she brought out the best in her students. She also tirelessly promoted the careers of other prominent women historians, including Janelle Greenberg, Linda Levy Peck, and Hilda L. Smith.

Beyond academia, she enjoyed sailing and playing tennis. Schwoerer was a member of the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC. She traveled to the United Kingdom “countless times” and beyond with her husband and, after his passing, with her companion, Paul Zmola. Her dinner parties were always elegant affairs, complete with heady conversations addressing contemporary, often highly controversial topics—much to the chagrin of the occasionally uninitiated guest.

Lois Schwoerer will be remembered fondly by all those who had the privilege to work with her. She had tremendous strength of will, and she certainly knew her own mind. Lois truly loved studying early modern English history, especially at the Folger Shakespeare Library, where she kept a personal seat cushion at her favorite desk. She will be missed by the many students, colleagues, and friends who had the privilege of knowing and loving our dear friend Lois.

Bruce Janacek
North Central College

Melinda S. Zook
Purdue University

Photo courtesy Schwoerer family



Quintard Taylor

1948–2025

Historian of United States and Black History

Beloved colleague Quintard Taylor, who taught at the University of Washington for nearly 20 years, passed away September 21, 2025, at age 76. A prolific scholar who reinvented the field of Black history in the American West, he was equally renowned as a pioneer of online public history and the founder and director of BlackPast.org, the world’s largest encyclopedia of African and African American history. A legendary road warrior, Taylor rarely declined an invitation to speak, delivering at least 300 public lectures at universities, churches, and community centers across the United States, Africa, and Europe. He served on the AHA Council and Committee on Affiliated Societies from 2003–06.

Taylor authored or co-authored eight books and at least 75 academic articles and book chapters; his Pulitzer Prize–nominated book *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528–1990* (W. W. Norton, 1998) was especially influential. A carefully argued, field-defining work of enormous scope, it broke the North-South binary of Black historiography and clarified the special circumstances of Black experiences in the American West, which included barriers limiting mass migration and multiracial demographics of Indigenous, Asian, and Hispanic peoples struggling under harsh white supremacist regimes. A vibrant field erupted in the wake of *Racial Frontier’s* publication; a full generation of scholarship responded to his reframing of western and African American history. Taylor’s contribution was acknowledged in numerous awards – perhaps most meaningfully in 2011, when he became the first Black scholar elected as the president of the Western Historical Association.

He did not start off in the West. Indeed, as our colleague John Findlay explained, Taylor’s career path may be seen as a series of westward steps from one coast to the other. Born and raised in Tennessee, he earned a BA in history in 1969 at Saint Augustine’s College, the historically Black university in Raleigh, North Carolina. From there, he went on to the University of Minnesota for graduate studies in American history, earning an MA in 1971 and a PhD in 1977. Meanwhile,

he had begun teaching, first with an appointment in the new Black studies program at Washington State University, later joining the history faculty at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. In 1990, Taylor moved to the University of Oregon, where he served as history department chair. His final move came in 1999, when he was appointed the Scott and Dorothy Bullitt Professor of American History at the University of Washington.

Seattle welcomed Taylor, and not only academic Seattle. One of his earlier books, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Univ. of Washington Press, 1994), had already become (and remains today) a touchstone text in the city. He became an instant celebrity and was quickly called on for lectures, public ceremonies, and policy advice. His death has been mourned in Seattle newspapers, television reports, and public ceremonies.

An early advocate of digital publishing, Taylor founded BlackPast.org in 2007. It has since become an essential source for African American and global African history, with more than 64 million site users. The encyclopedia features 7,200 separate entries written by nearly 1,000 contributors. Taylor poured heart, soul, and money into BlackPast.org and along the way invented a new method of crowdsourcing. The hundreds of contributors, which include world-renowned scholars, were personally coaxed, prodded, reminded, and reminded again that they needed to contribute.

Quintard is survived by his wife Phylisha Agbor-Taylor; sons Quintard Taylor III and William Taylor; and daughter Jamila Taylor, a prominent member of the Washington State Legislature.

BlackPast.org is Quintard’s greatest legacy, and his friends and family are determined to ensure that it endures. Donations in his name will help. Quintard’s passing will also be honored at the 2026 conference of the Pacific Coast Branch of the AHA, which will feature a session honoring Taylor and assessing the field that he redefined.

James Gregory
University of Washington

Photo: Joe Mabel/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0



John R. Wunder

1945–2023

Historian of the American West

John R. Wunder, professor emeritus of history at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL), died on June 25, 2023, at age 78. Wunder made foundational contributions to the study of the American West, Native American law and sovereignty, and Great Plains history. His legacy endures through his scholarship and the students and colleagues whose work he shaped.

Born in Vinton, Iowa, and raised in Dysart, Wunder developed an early appreciation for regional identity and rural life that remained central to his historical vision. He earned his BA, MA, and JD from the University of Iowa and his PhD at the University of Washington. This combination of legal training and historical method characterized his scholarship, which centered Native American sovereignty and law in American history and insisted on understanding Native nations as enduring legal and political entities.

Wunder's scholarly output was extraordinary in both volume and scope. He published 22 books, more than 60 journal articles, and nearly 150 essays, reviews, and reference entries across western history, Great Plains studies, legal history, and Native American history. His landmark book, *"Retained by the People": A History of American Indians and the Bill of Rights* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), and his six-volume series, *Native Americans and the Law* (Routledge, 1996–99), helped establish Indigenous legal history and tribal sovereignty as core areas of inquiry.

His scholarship addressed a wide range of interests: frontier courts, land and environmental management, Spanish exploration of the Great Plains, the Kansas–Nebraska Act, the Kiowa people, Chinese immigrants, and the writer Mari Sandoz. Late in his career, he wrote a history of Nebraska's eight-man football tradition with his usual seriousness of inquiry and respect for regional culture. For Wunder, law, culture, and community were inseparable areas of study.

During his tenure as director of UNL's Center for Great Plains Studies (1988–97), Wunder expanded the center's intellectual mission, founded the interdisciplinary journal *Great Plains*

Research, helped launch the *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, and strengthened the Great Plains Art Museum. Drawing on his legal expertise, he helped to defend Native burial rights and facilitate the respectful repatriation and stewardship of Indigenous cultural materials in Nebraska. As president of the UNL Faculty Senate during the 2003–04 academic year, Wunder established a task force that laid the groundwork for a major reform of the university's general education curriculum. Fundamental to his work was a commitment to expanding access to members of all ethnic backgrounds and gender identities.

Wunder's influence extended well beyond Nebraska. Beginning in the mid-1990s, he developed a relationship with the University of Helsinki, where he served as a Fulbright Scholar and later as a permanent visiting professor in American studies. His teaching and mentorship there helped shape an international cohort of scholars working on the history of the American West and Indigenous peoples, reinforcing his belief that regional history should speak to global audiences.

For many, however, Wunder's most enduring legacy lies in his mentorship. He advised at least 26 doctoral dissertations and 31 master's theses, while mentoring many more students and junior scholars across institutions and disciplines. His students now occupy positions throughout the academy and public humanities, reflecting the breadth of his influence. Known for his intellectual rigor, careful guidance, and generosity of spirit, Wunder approached mentorship as a long-term professional commitment.

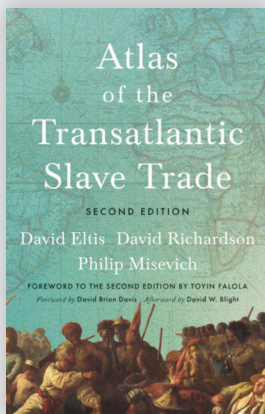
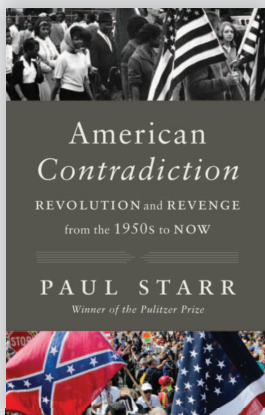
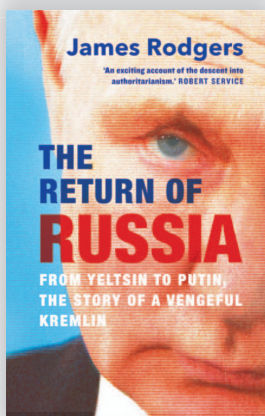
Wunder was also deeply committed to the history discipline and public humanities. He devoted nearly four decades to the Western History Association, serving as president in 2010. He was similarly engaged with Humanities Nebraska and the Mari Sandoz Society. In 2021, he received the prestigious Sower Award from Humanities Nebraska in recognition of his contributions to the state's cultural and intellectual life.

Wunder once said that he hoped to be remembered as a good historian and a good mentor. Those who studied with him, worked alongside him, or benefited from his guidance know that he achieved both. His scholarship reshaped fields, his institutions were strengthened by his leadership, and his students continue to carry his influence forward.

Susan A. Miller, Shannon D. Smith,
Paul A. Olson, Tim Alan Garrison,
and Akim Reinhardt

Photo courtesy the Department of History, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

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MICHAEL S. DONOVAN

WORLD WAR I TRENCH ART LIGHTER

After my father's younger brother died in 2019, I inherited some objects that had belonged to my paternal great-grandfather, Timothy F. Donovan (1872–1944), whom I refer to as TFD. The son of Irish immigrants, TFD enlisted in Brooklyn's 14th Regiment in 1892 as a private and rose through the ranks to second-in-command with the rank of lieutenant colonel. It was with this regiment, reorganized to the 2nd Pioneer Infantry Regiment, that TFD served during World War I. From this period of service in Europe, I inherited an intricate World War I trench art lighter.

Dating to the Napoleonic Wars, the term “trench art” encompasses a wide range of decorative items crafted during armed conflict. During World War I, shell cases were a popular material for such projects. The firing of artillery projectiles, or shells, leaves behind an empty shell case. This metal cylinder contains the propellant that launches the projectile toward its target. Because most shell cases were made of malleable brass, they became one type of raw material that idle soldiers and artisans transformed into art in various shapes and sizes—and with over one billion artillery projectiles fired from 1914 to 1918, shells were an abundant resource.

TFD's lighter features the personalized inscription “Lt Colel TFD.” Also visible is a distinctive thistle motif, with a traditional bulbous flower and spiked leaves. Floral designs were often used as decorative elements in World War I trench art, with the thistle sometimes appearing as an ornamental motif. The presence of thistle on TFD's lighter likely reflects that broad decorative tradition rather than any specific symbolism.

On the other side of the lighter is a cross of Lorraine overlaid on a bird design, with “Nancy” engraved above it in decorative, Gothic-style lettering. Nancy, located in the Lorraine region of eastern France, was a key city during the war and in TFD's service. After arriving in Europe in July 1918, TFD led a large detachment to Nancy, then to Dijon and Is-sur-Tille, and

crossed into Germany to Coblenz, before finally departing for home in October 1919.

TFD's lighter, measuring 73 by 30 by 13 millimeters, is skillfully crafted with precisely cut end caps, clean soldered seams, and balanced decorative engraving. Removing the lighter's snugly fitted top reveals the flint and wheel assembly and the wick holder, beneath which sits the fuel reservoir. Such skillful construction suggests that a soldier did not create the lighter, since trench art produced by soldiers during the war was cruder in execution. Rather, the lighter was likely crafted by an enterprising French artisan, as evidenced by the specific regional symbols, floral design with the thistle, personalization, the inclusion of Nancy, and a unique construction style. Since family lore indicates the lighter was a gift to TFD from the soldiers he led, it was most likely a commissioned piece specifically crafted for him.

I am proud to be the current steward of the lighter, preserving a piece of our family's history that has endured for more than a century. As a lieutenant colonel, I also received a gift from the soldiers I once led in war, a time-honored military tradition that connects me to TFD. His lighter is prominently displayed in our home alongside other reminders of his long and distinguished military service to our country. But the lighter is more than a family keepsake. This object was transformed from a piece of war material designed to deliver destruction into an enduring and personal decorative item. **P**

Michael S. Donovan is an independent scholar and writer in Virginia. He holds an MA from the National Defense University, an MBA from Regis University, and a BS from Florida Institute of Technology.



Photo: Michael S. Donovan

STEVEN P. REMY

MAP OF US- OCCUPIED TOKYO

While rummaging around a Wisconsin junk shop in the mid-1990s, I found a map of occupied Tokyo. Dated April 1947, it was printed by the US Army's 64th Engineer Topographic Battalion, which produced critically important maps for wartime and postwar military operations, especially in Asia.

This one was designed to help thousands of American personnel and their dependents navigate the sprawling, bomb-scarred city. The 22-by-29-inch map folds neatly to pocket size and centers on the area between the Imperial Palace grounds and Tokyo harbor, encompassing Chiyoda special ward, the Ginza district, the main train station, and the financial district. Here the Americans established the administrative, residential, and social infrastructure of the occupation, its landmarks highlighted in solid black: General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters, the embassy, hospitals, banks, post exchanges, vehicle maintenance shops, cinemas (one named for war correspondent Ernie Pyle), apartment buildings, hotels, and clubs. Known as "little America," its streets were jammed with jeeps, buses, and imported American cars and its buildings festooned with American flags and—every December—covered in Christmas decorations.

A web of bright red lines indicated bus routes servicing the area, with a few extending to peripheral points of significance, notably the former war ministry building then housing the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Werner Michel, an army intelligence agent, recalled the map—which he carried along with one of the city's wards and police boxes ("where a policeman could assist by pointing to the desired location often in pantomime")—made getting around "an adventure."

While copies of the map are not hard to find today, what's most intriguing about the one I found are the personal notations of the original owner. He is not identified, though he left some clues. "Work" is written next to a circle drawn around the Bank of Chosen, the central bank for Japan's Korean



Photo: Steven P. Remy

colony until 1945, when the Americans took it over for a similar purpose in the US-occupied south. "Billet" is written next to the finance ministry. "E[nlisted] M[en's] club" is also noted. In a nod to the emerging Cold War, the roughly one kilometer between the Soviet and American embassies is designated "No man's land—never the twain shall meet."

It's also clear he had an active social life. "Oh boy!" appears next to the YWCA and "WAC shack" next to the Women's Army Corps headquarters. The names of 16 women are indicated at various points, usually next to a hotel or office: Nanette at the French embassy, Soo Fen at the Chinese. Only one name, Kimiko, is Japanese.

In stark contrast to the lives of most Japanese people, that of an American in the enclave was indeed something of an adventure, and an extraordinarily comfortable one. In a city in which 65 percent of the housing stock had been destroyed, thousands of Americans lived in intact apartments and hotels or in spacious homes attended to by multiple Japanese servants, their wages paid by the Japanese government. The entertainment venues and commissaries—off-limits to Japanese—were numerous and well stocked. And while many Americans were compassionate and respectful, MacArthur's personal interpreter later admitted that MacArthur and nearly every other American he knew "were extremely conceited and extremely arrogant and used our power every inch of the way."

In simple graphic form, the map reflected the harsh reality of the occupation. The assortment of requisitioned offices, hotels, and recreational facilities stands in sharp contrast to the pale, unmarked stretches outside little America. As the wife of an American officer remembered, much of that space would have been "wasteland, heaped with ashes, charred wood, and rusty metal," places even adventurous Americans rarely visited. **P**

Steven P. Remy is professor of history at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York.



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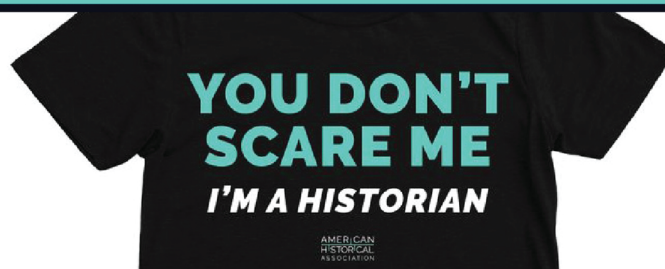
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Careers for History Majors

A publication from the American Historical Association

Updated edition available January 2026—new essays, information, and resources for students seeking information on how majoring in history can set them up for career success!

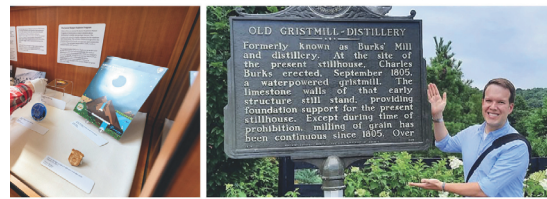
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Contributors

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