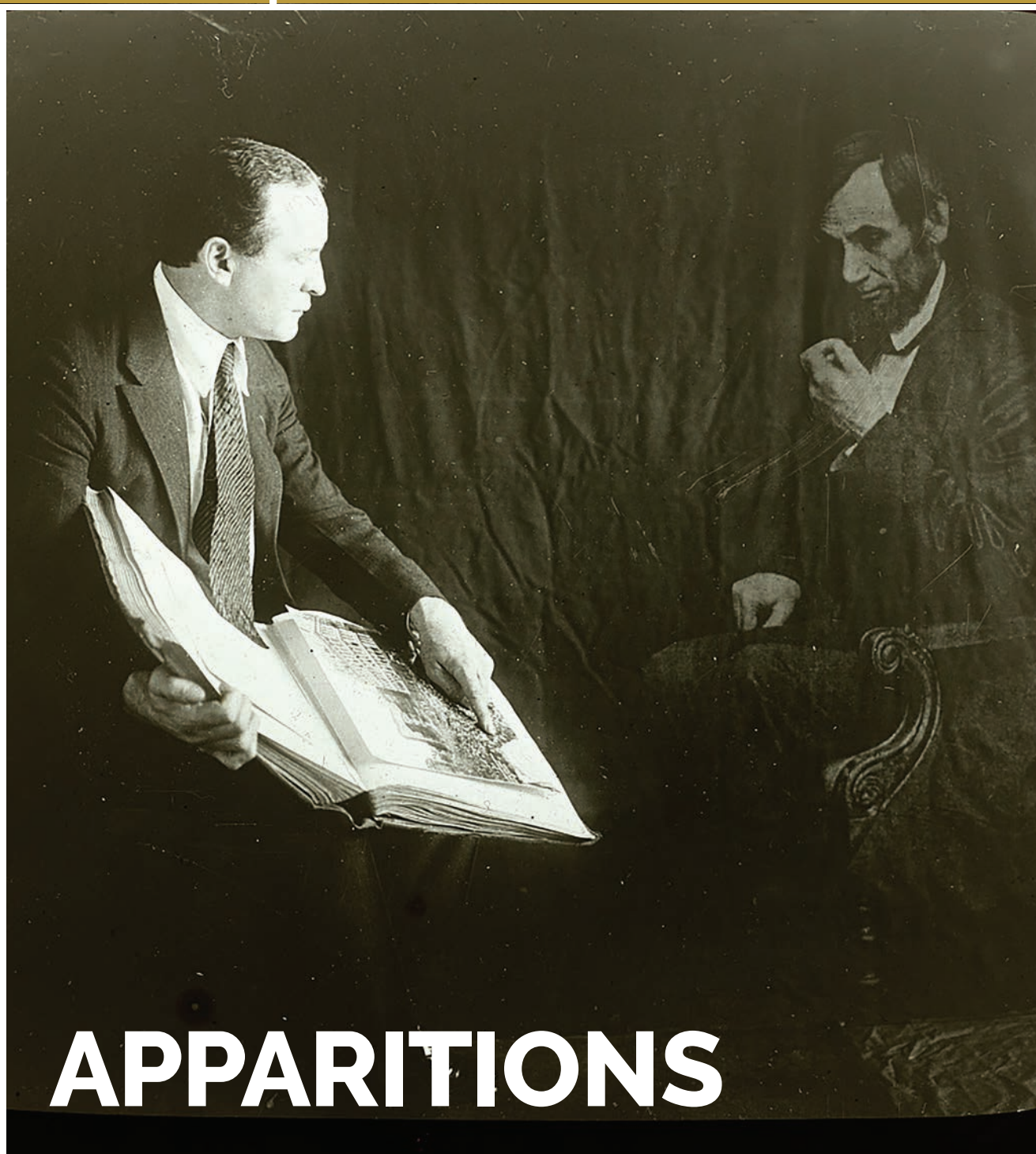


The newsmagazine of the American Historical Association

PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY

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APPARITIONS

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A GLOBAL HISTORY

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ON THE COVER

Harry Houdini was not a fan of the spiritualism movement. The famous magician worked in his later years to expose the fraud of mediums, psychics, and other spiritualists. This photograph of Houdini speaking to the ghost of Abraham Lincoln was created in the 1920s to debunk spirit photography of the era. Today, people are still seeking to contact historical figures, but instead of communicating with their spirits, they are speaking with chatbots. In “Teaching with Ghosts,” Amy Allen and David Hicks caution against classroom use of AI tools that mislead and (at worst) lie about the past and offer pedagogical tips for evaluating the ghosts students now encounter in the AI era.

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BRENDAN GILLIS

THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

Reflecting on the 250th Summer

In 2026, American adults are arguing about history. Congressional hearings about the Smithsonian Institution, the removal of interpretive signage at historic sites, and endless debates over what students should or should not be learning about the past have transformed the 250th anniversary of American independence into yet another forum for partisan political grandstanding and culture wars. Living in Germany during this anniversary year, I expected to spend much of my time explaining those controversies. Instead, students (and teachers) on both sides of the Atlantic reminded me why I fell in love with history in the first place.

In December 2025, my family and I moved to Frankfurt as part of the expatriate community surrounding the US Consulate General. On July 4, while Independence Day celebrations unfolded back home, we spent the day in Worms, where Martin Luther stood before the Imperial Diet in 1521 and refused to recant his beliefs. A few weeks later, I was in Philadelphia, studying one of the two surviving printed copies of the first German translation of the Declaration of Independence, produced just days after John Dunlap's famous broadside printing, on display at the Museum of the American Revolution. While this translation sought to engage German-speaking readers across Pennsylvania, the Revolution has always been an international story.

My most memorable moments of this anniversary year, however, did not come from historic places or remarkable artifacts. They came from students.

In May, I spoke with a group of German teenagers participating in a Frankfurt–Philadelphia mural workshop, a weeklong exchange in which students worked with artists from both cities to design a mural inspired by democratic values. My talk was intended to provide both context and inspiration for a public art project that will be installed later this year in central Frankfurt. About half the students had never formally studied the American Revolution, and their questions were refreshingly direct: So what was the Declaration of

Independence? Were any of the complaints against King George III actually true?

These questions set the stage for an inquiry-driven conversation. I was struck by how differently a familiar document can look when approached not as an artifact of national reverence but as a historical claim to be examined, questioned, and tested against evidence. We talked about Jefferson's soaring language of equality alongside the experiences of people such as Boston King and Prince Hall, who understood the Revolution as a moment of possibility even while confronting slavery, exclusion, and profound uncertainty. The students wanted to understand what it means for revolutionary ideals to co-exist with inequality in such uneasy tension — and why that tension still matters.

German students' questions were refreshingly direct and set the stage for an inquiry-driven conversation.

The same spirit of curiosity greeted me two months later in Philadelphia, where I served for the third time as lead historian for the Young People's Continental Congress, a partnership between National History Day and Carpenters' Hall, where the First Continental Congress met in 1774. Since 2024, students and teachers from across the United States and its territories complete five online modules before gathering for one week to explore the nation's founding through original documents, museums, historic sites, and opportunities to learn with and from historians.

For many participants, the highlight is a visit to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, where they encounter archival collections, often for the first time. The students respond with many questions: Wait — is that really a first edition of Phillis

Wheatley's poems? Why does this draft of the Constitution say "freedom of speech"?

This year, students seemed especially drawn to William Still's *Journal C of the Underground Railroad*. Leaning over its pages, they traced the names, families, and journeys of men and women seeking freedom from slavery. Still recorded these stories at enormous personal risk, preserving fleeting moments of hope and courage that might otherwise have been lost forever.

Only a few blocks away, armed police stood watch over the President's House after the recent removal of interpretive signage that had long foregrounded the lives of Ona Judge, Hercules, and other enslaved people connected to George Washington's household. But in the archive, students quietly wrestled with evidence that complicated familiar narratives without diminishing the significance of the nation's founding. They did exactly what historians hope every visitor to an archive will do: ask questions, weigh evidence, and embrace complexity.

Perhaps that is what has given me the greatest hope in the year of America's semiquincentennial. It is easy to become discouraged by the volume of political energy devoted to policing historical interpretation. Yet the young people I encountered in Germany and the United States were remarkably uninterested in rehearsing the arguments that so often consume adults. They asked generous and generative questions. They delighted in unexpected connections. They were

drawn not to simplified stories but to richer, more complicated ones.

Students quietly wrestled with evidence that complicated familiar narratives without diminishing the significance of the nation's founding.

The work of historians is to help people encounter the past in all its complexity and humanity. Watching students do exactly that—whether encountering the Declaration of Independence for the first time in Frankfurt or touching and reading William Still's journal in Philadelphia—was a welcome reminder that curiosity remains stronger than cynicism. History is much more compelling when we consider its human dimensions, when we can touch, explore, pose questions, recognize the limits of our understanding, and, most importantly, form our own conclusions grounded in evidence.

The adults will undoubtedly keep fighting over history. The kids, I am happy to report, are all right. **P**

Brendan Gillis is director of teaching and learning at the AHA.

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SUZANNE MARCHAND

ON HISTORY PAINTING AND THE MOVIES

A Prologue to Christopher Nolan's The Odyssey

Having devoted more than 30 years to the study of the afterlife of the ancient world, of course I had been eagerly awaiting Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey*. I read the complaints, both before the release and after: The costumes and casting aren't archaeologically and ethnographically accurate; the story is too compressed; the dialogue is too colloquial; there is gratuitous violence (though surprisingly not sex); and Nolan has added didactic moral messages of which Homer had no clue. Having now seen the movie, I happen to agree with some of this, most especially about the flatness of the dialogue. But I am also struck by the familiarity of such criticisms, most of which were once exerted on an ancestral form of historical communication entirely out of fashion today: history painting. This form, too, played fast and loose with classical myth and history, for reasons we too rarely contemplate. Perhaps reviewing that legacy will help us avoid hating Nolan's movie, or at least hating it for the wrong reasons.

Ancient and medieval painters depicted historical scenes, but unquestionably the early modern period marked history painting's greatest hour. From at least the time of Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura* (1435) until its fin de siècle fizzle, history painting was the highest form of visual art to many humanists and artistic academies. It was revered because it raised painting above the mere copying of nature, and resulted in the production of imaginative works whose lessons could be appreciated by artists and connoisseurs alike. Like the history lessons taught to princes, history painting was supposed to provide examples for emulation, and, in the words of the 17th-century Dutch humanist and art theorist Franciscus Junius, "it also arouses the desire to emulate and kindles the spirit to attain virtue. It gives not only knowledge but also willpower, and makes us not only spectators but also actors." Similarly, Junius believed, good history paintings not only trained the mind, but could effect a "true and hearty reconciliation" among persons of warring religious and political factions. At least in theory, history painting was inspirational moral instruction, and effective community-building;

contemplating the deeds of Alexander or Mary Magdalene was a useful means of learning how to lead or how to love.

Notably, what early modern painters and their patrons counted as history was a much more capacious and flexible category than we would allow, including biblical scenes and representations of mythological stories. Unlike, say, sign painters, history painters were relatively well educated. But this doesn't mean they did in-depth research into their subjects. Most painted today from Ovid, tomorrow from Plutarch, and the next day from the book of Genesis. They were hardly alone in their cherry-picking; elite schoolboys and lay readers were also heavy consumers of books of aphorisms, excerpts, and summaries—as they are today. Artists' interests in a particular scene, too, were often driven by a patron's commission, or by the desire to show off their skills in representing, for example, exotic hats or horses' behinds. But they did, usually, choose subjects their audiences would recognize, while updating the story with distinctive, signature twists.

In theory, history painting was inspirational moral instruction, and effective community-building.

Is there a pattern in the subjects they chose? Recently I stumbled on a terrific source that might help actually count early modern historical canvases—almost all of them classical—and separate them from the biblical and mythological themes. Andor Pigler's *Barockthemen* (*Baroque Themes*; 1956; 2 vols.) was published when the author had just become general director of Szépművészeti Múzeum in Budapest. Pigler's work is composed of lists of paintings, and some drawings, from collections across the continent. Volume 1 is devoted to biblical subjects, but because volume 2 contains a section devoted to Greek and Roman history, *Barockthemen* gives us the opportunity to survey the landscape of secular subjects (we will overlook for now the slippage across the mythological/



Photo: Annette Hornischer

historical divide). In this remarkable preinternet synthesis, Pigler surely missed things, but his work gives us the opportunity to tease out some interesting and telling patterns in the depiction of secular historical tales.

A first observation is that many history painters leaned heavily on Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, the most popular historical work from the Renaissance to the 19th century, or on the first-century Roman compiler Valerius Maximus's *Nine Books of Memorable Deeds and Sayings*. Valerius condensed favorite stories into easily readable Latin, making his work, in the words of the Rubens scholar Elizabeth McGrath, "almost tailor-made for translation into images." Valerius also helpfully divided his content into particular categories of instruction, allowing artists to choose scenes that dramatized marital fidelity, for example, or public integrity, or parents who acted severely toward their children. It is noteworthy that the stories are at once heroizing and monitory, teaching noble actions but also allowing readers to experience calamities at a safe distance. Perhaps this explains why so very many

paintings inspired by Valerius warn rulers against evils such as avarice, unbridled passion, and intolerance, even as they flatter them, in scenes such as Queen Esther begging her royal husband Ahasuerus not to kill the Jews of Persia. There are also a disturbingly large number that feature voyeuristic scenes (Diana, Susanna and the Elders, Candaules and Gyges) or severed heads (Tomyris, Judith and Holofernes, Pompey, Salome, and John the Baptist). Filmmakers like Christopher Nolan are not the first or last artists to recognize that violence sells, and he seems to still be trying to warn us about hubris, and the dire consequences of failing to see gods in strangers.

But let's look at some of the most popular scenes in more detail, and see what we might learn about such history lessons in this period. In an era in which Europe was ruled mostly by princes, painters offered relatively few scenes of republican or democratic heroes such as Caesar, Brutus, and Cato, not to mention Themistocles or Pericles. There are, by contrast, a lot of scenes of Alexander, a very large number treating the



This engraved copy of Rubens's *Tomyris* (first painted around 1630) is one of many that circulated on the European print market, often with moralizing captions attached.

Rijksmuseum / public domain



Edwin Long's *Babylonian Marriage Market* (1875) was an artistic sensation—and sufficiently cinematic for D. W. Griffith to filch it for a scene in his movie *Intolerance* (1916).

Courtesy Royal Holloway, University of London

theme of his clemency in sparing the family of Darius III. Homeric scenes have always been popular, including Achilles sulking in his tent (don't do that!) and Penelope waiting by her loom (good wives wait!). Another highly popular theme is that of the continence of the Roman general Scipio, who, according to Livy, not only spared the life of a captured beauty but returned her unharmed to her beloved. Both of these are scenes of rape averted (as are also the stories of Lucrezia and Judith), perhaps capitalizing on the drama embedded in the stories to subtly dissuade oversexed conquering kings.

But early modern painters also frequently depicted powerful queens with their own violent brands of sexuality, such as Dido, Tomyris, and Cleopatra. Despite her incestuous backstory, early modern history painters lavished attention, too, on Artemisia II of Caria, famed for making herself a living commemoration of her brother-husband by drinking his ashes. After all, this scene (for Valerius, one of remarkable marital fidelity) gave painters the opportunity to depict in a single frame a scintillating if rather icky story that required the inclusion of bejeweled queens and fancy pots. One of the greatest early modern history painters, Peter Paul Rubens, completed two versions of barbarian queen Tomyris, who not only succeeded in vanquishing the Persian king Cyrus but then happily dipped his severed

head in a vat of blood as she exulted: "Now, great king, have you had your fill of blood?"

History painters, of course, had an even greater challenge than the aphorists and moralizing schoolmasters: Once they gave up the medieval habit of sequential story panels, they had to condense their stories and lessons into a single frozen pose. Perhaps this explains why deathbed scenes were so common; at the moment of death, it was widely thought, the whole character of the person was revealed. And so we find in Pigler's collection large numbers of death scenes—of Cleopatra and Socrates, Germanicus and Alexander, Cato and Porcia, Caesar and Agrippina. For painters with less high-minded ambitions, the choice of scene might involve animals—including Daniel, Hercules, or the Christians facing lions; Romulus and Remus or Cyrus mothered by wolves; or just about any modern ruler on horseback. Some also clearly enjoyed painting disasters, such as Nero burning Rome or the destruction of Babylon or Carthage. The English Romantic painters J. M. W. Turner and John Martin excelled in panoramic disaster scenes such as the plagues of Egypt and Hannibal's army succumbing to snowstorms. It might be observed that TV producers today cater to similar tastes: for murder mysteries, animal shows, and blockbuster disaster films. As the saying goes, life is short, but art is long.

Now it should be noted that before 1800, artists paid only scant attention to historicizing detail. Rubens and Rembrandt added turbans and “orientalizing” robes, but those were largely costumes they saw in contemporary Mughal paintings or images of Turks. I have long dreamed of writing an essay entitled “Table Settings for the Last Supper,” as paintings of the scene completed before the 19th century often blithely depict the disciples drinking from Renaissance glassware and eating improbably shaped buns from contemporary pewter chargers. One 18th-century Peruvian “Last Supper” depicts an Andean sacrificial guinea pig and local fruits. The idea was to deliver a recognizable scene that made spectators feel they could be the actors, not to make the setting and the props period-perfect.

Some history painters added modern themes in the guise of ancient histories.

Some 19th-century history painters, such as Jean-Léon Gérôme and Lawrence Alma-Tadema, attempted to make their works more archaeologically and ethnographically correct, only to be accused of sacrificing grandeur in favor of “exhibition of archaeological gewgaws” and turning history painting into “a curiosity shop.” They also added some modern themes in the guise of ancient histories. A good example is Edwin Long’s panoramic *Babylonian Marriage Market* (1875), which depicted, with painstaking archaeological accuracy, a scene from Herodotus’s *Histories*. Painting the piece when Britain was convulsed by debates over women’s rights in marriage, Long may have meant to criticize the “selling” of women in the modern marriage markets of Paris and London—John Ruskin, in any case, thought so. Or Long was capitalizing on orientalist themes of white slavery and the harem. In any event, critics wanted a lesson, as well as a thrill, from a canvas that aspired to raise Long’s social status. In this painting, Long got the formula exactly right. Not only did the painting lift Long into the ranks of the most respected painters, but it made the artist’s fortune as well. When D. W. Griffith filched the *Babylonian Marriage Market* for a scene in his movie *Intolerance*, he staged a stropky bride strutting on the auction platform—and arguing her way out of the sale.

We might safely say that the genre of history painting died around 1890—but film was there to fill the gap, taking over its penchant for voyeurism, its love of violence, and its aspirations to teach moral virtues, now to a much wider audience. Historical films, I would submit, still read history through previous artistic or excerpted frameworks; they still sacrifice

archaeological accuracy for resonance with the present; they still aim to show us how (or how not) to lead or to love. There are still lots of near-death (or near-rape) scenes, fierce queens, and interesting animals. The stakes are higher, as they were for history painters, because we think we know the story, and we have strong ideas about how it should be updated (or not) for our own time. Especially in taking on classical (or biblical) subjects that are so well known, a filmmaker is taking a major risk; it is no easy thing to be Rubens or Long. And most of all, we can be grateful that Nolan has invited us to converse, once again, about a great ancient poem. **P**

Suzanne Marchand is president of the AHA.



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ADVOCACY BRIEFS

March to July 2026

This spring and summer, the AHA took action at state and federal levels to support history education and the work of historians. We continued monitoring the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards for social studies review process and advocating for a deliberate process to ensure the standards aligned with historical best practices. We opposed revised social studies standards in Oklahoma, urging the state legislature to require further review, and opposed a new course in Florida that would present a distorted understanding of American history. In higher education, we wrote to Texas Tech University about new content standards for the teaching of gender and sexual orientation.

At the federal level, we submitted three comments to the *Federal Register* concerning proposed changes to the National Library of Medicine, federal grants, and the Fulbright–Hays Program. We submitted an amicus brief in the City of Philadelphia’s lawsuit over changes to signage at the President’s House historic site. In July, we submitted written testimony and engaged members of Congress ahead of hearings concerning the National Museum of American History and the Smithsonian Institution. The AHA’s ongoing lawsuits both resulted in favorable rulings from federal judges.

Updates to the AHA’s Lawsuits Against the Federal Government

On May 7, US District Judge Colleen McMahon ruled that the mass termination by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) of more than 1,400 grants to support scholars, research institutions, and humanities organizations was “unlawful, unconstitutional, ultra vires, and without legal effect.” In a 143-page decision, McMahon granted the March 7 motion for a summary judgment on all counts in favor of the plaintiffs: the American Council of Learned Societies, the AHA, and the Modern Language Association. The ruling declared that actions terminating the grants in April 2025, the largest mass termination of previously awarded grants in NEH history, were “in violation of the First Amendment, in violation of the equal protection component of the Fifth Amendment, and without statutory authority.” This came after a ruling on March 23 affirming the plaintiffs’ First Amendment right to publish video footage of depositions submitted as evidence in the case. The videos have been widely shared and reported as the first publicly available testimony by staffers of the now defunct Department of Government Efficiency.

On May 20, the US District Court for the District of Columbia granted emergency relief in the lawsuit the

AHA filed, along with co-plaintiff American Oversight, challenging the Trump administration’s effort to evade the Presidential Records Act (PRA). The injunction enjoined the White House Office, the National Security Council, the US DOGE Service, and all advisors to the president to comply in full with the PRA. The order specified that compliance includes preserving all presidential and vice presidential records as defined by the act, refraining from creating or sending any presidential or vice presidential records via text or ephemeral messaging accounts without copying an official account to preserve the records, and maintaining records retention policies that are in full compliance with the PRA. Defendants were also required to circulate a copy of the order to covered employees, and file a notice with the court on or before May 28, describing steps that have been taken to comply with the court’s order.

AHA Raises Serious Concerns About Proposed Texas Social Studies Education Standards

On April 10, AHA senior program analyst Julia Brookins testified before the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) about the review of the TEKS standards for social studies. She testified that the state was creating standards out of alignment with established best practices for which no educational and

professional development resources currently exist, only to then “commission a custom educational product with a huge contract, awarded to a political ally, for an educational resource that is designed to fit the unvetted, destructive standards.”

On June 11, an action alert sent to members in Texas urged them to submit public comments to the Texas Education Agency and to contact their elected SBOE members and state legislators to share concerns about the draft standards.

On June 22, Brookins testified again before the SBOE. “Without numerous corrections and substantive changes,” Brookins explained, “the proposed TEKS would likely reduce and distort students’ understanding of historical events, while failing to develop their conceptual knowledge and historical thinking skills. We found too many problems to summarize, and they cannot be addressed haphazardly through amendments.” Brookins argued that the draft standards fail to comply with state law by neglecting requirements for college and career readiness, the history of civic engagement in the United States, and adequate world history.

On June 26, the AHA submitted a comment to the SBOE expressing serious concerns about the 2026 draft standards. The comment argued that the standards prescribe an overwhelming amount of content at the expense of historical thinking and disciplinary understanding, while also distorting history through significant omissions and misrepresentations. The AHA urged the SBOE to devote the time, expertise, and resources necessary for meaningful revision, even if that delays final adoption.

AHA Files Amicus Brief in Lawsuit Defending Public History

On April 27, the AHA filed an amicus curiae brief in support of the City of Philadelphia’s lawsuit against the National Park Service (NPS), which challenges the removal of the Freedom and Slavery Exhibit at Independence National Historical Park. Our brief provides historical and professional context for the case, which argues that NPS actions undermine the historical integrity of the site. The exhibit, which was peer-reviewed and had been previously approved by the NPS, documented the lives of enslaved people at the President’s House.

AHA Opposes Restrictions on Teaching and Learning at Texas Tech University

On April 28, the AHA issued a statement strongly opposing the new Texas Tech University Course Content Guidelines. The guidelines impose a “strict prohibition” on content related to “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity” in core and undergraduate-level classes, while failing to define these terms. “Historians understand that the history of sexual orientation and gender identity is inseparable from the broader human past; efforts to exclude it fundamentally distort the historical record,” the statement reads. “Students deserve to learn full and accurate histories of the United States and the world, and for university students at every level these histories necessarily include histories of gender and sexuality, and of LGBTQ+ people. Simple respect for the past in all its complex humanity demands that we give attention to these experiences.”

AHA Urges Oklahoma Legislature to Return Social Studies Standards for Further Review

On May 7, the AHA sent a letter to members of the Oklahoma State Legislature urging them to return the newly revised state social studies standards to the State Board of Education for further review. An amended draft published at the last legally permissible moment included a series of alarming changes to standards addressing tribal sovereignty, as well as two new elective courses that had not been included in the materials circulated for public comment. An action alert sent to members in Oklahoma urged them to contact their state legislators to ask them to address the major issues with the standards.

AHA Submits Comment in Support of National Library of Medicine

On May 20, the AHA submitted a comment to the *Federal Register* in response to the framework proposed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for the *NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2027–2031*, which articulates priorities for the institution at large. An institute within NIH, the National Library of Medicine (NLM) is the world’s largest biomedical library. Its collection provides records used by historians, health professionals, and scholars in many fields and disciplines. The AHA’s comment emphasized the importance of preserving and expanding access to the nation’s biomedical historical record and urges the NIH to uphold those principles in their maintenance of the NLM. An action alert urged members to submit comments of their own.

AHA Expresses Concern About Florida FACT US History Course Framework

On May 28, the AHA issued a statement expressing concern about the recently announced Florida Advanced Courses and Tests (FACT) US History course framework, which “imposes an overt ideological agenda on Florida public school students who seek to earn college credit before enrolling in higher education.” As a state-designed alternative to the Advanced Placement course in US history, Florida officials have tried to justify the FACT framework with “inflammatory claims of widespread political indoctrination in classrooms that are unsupported by the broader reality of history education in Florida and across the United States,” resulting in a “partial, distorted, and educationally unsound account of our nation’s history” that “repeatedly presents contested ideological interpretations that are far outside of mainstream consensus as settled historical fact.” As of July 31, 10 organizations have signed on to this statement.

AHA Holds Advocacy 101 Training Workshop

On June 26, the AHA held an online workshop with government relations consultant Jessica Venable. The webinar introduced members and other history advocates to the fundamentals of federal advocacy. Participants learned how Congress makes decisions about programs and agencies relevant to historical scholarship, how to communicate their expertise to policymakers and staff, and how to build the kind of ongoing constituent relationship that makes advocacy effective over time. The session also addressed how federal engagement skills translate to state and institutional contexts, equipping members to advocate wherever their work is most affected. The

session was designed for historians who want to understand the federal landscape and begin to engage it—whether by contacting their representatives, preparing for a Hill meeting, or responding to an action alert. The workshop was recorded and is available in full on the AHA’s YouTube channel.

AHA Sends Action Alert Calling for Comments on the Presidential Religious Liberty Draft Report

On July 6, the AHA sent an action alert calling for historians and educators to submit comments responding to the draft report published by the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission. The report relied on distorted accounts of American religious history to advance a constitutional interpretation that challenges long-established understandings of the First Amendment and the separation of church and state, and seeks to elevate an interpretation grounded in flawed historical assumptions as the official position of the US government. It also recommends policies that would encourage states to expand religious instruction and displays in public schools while creating new mechanisms to investigate and sanction educators and institutions accused of violating students’ religious liberty. We recommended that comments address the report’s misunderstanding and disregard for the historical origins and importance of religious liberty, and challenge the report’s ideological narrative that treats highly contested interpretations as settled historical fact.

AHA Submits Comment Seeking to Prevent Politicization of Federal Grantmaking

On July 8, the AHA submitted a comment to the *Federal Register* opposing a

rule proposed by the Office of Management and Budget that would give political appointees final approval over all federal grants. “The AHA is deeply concerned that this proposed rule would weaken the nation’s research enterprise and diminish US leadership in scholarly research,” the comment reads. “In the historical discipline, the rule would reduce this nation’s ability to produce the evidence-based scholarship that informs education, public policy, cultural institutions, and public understanding of the past.” An action alert urged historians to submit their own comments on the proposed changes.

Update to the AHA’s Historians Defend the Smithsonian Page

On July 9, the AHA updated our *Historians Defend the Smithsonian* web page to address the White House Domestic Policy Council’s July 4 report attacking the independence of the National Museum of American History. “As the AHA did in August 2025, when the White House announced it would undertake a review of the exhibitions, materials, and practices of Smithsonian museums, and as it did in March 2025, when the White House issued an executive order on ‘Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History,’ the Association reiterates its strong support for an independent Smithsonian Institution—one that remains free from the ideological priorities of any presidential administration and one that belongs to all of the American people,” we wrote. “The AHA urges the administration and the American public to respect and value the integrity of the historians, curators, and other museum professionals who bring their expertise to the public through their research, exhibitions, programs, and educational materials.”

AHA Submits Written Testimony in Support of the Smithsonian at Congressional Hearings

On July 21, executive director Sarah Weicksel submitted a statement defending the Smithsonian's independence and professional integrity for the hearing "Rewriting American History: Examining the Smithsonian's Efforts to Reshape the Past," held by the Subcommittee on Delivering on Government Efficiency in the House of Representatives. The AHA submitted identical written testimony to the Committee on House Administration's July 22 hearing on "Oversight of the Smithsonian: Radical Revisionism at the National Museum of American History." "Historians, curators, and other museum professionals practice our craft with scholarly integrity, adhering to established standards of evidence, historical inquiry, and professional practice," reads the statement. "The American

Historical Association supports an independent Smithsonian Institution—one that remains free from the ideological or political priorities of any administration and one that serves all the American people."

AHA Submits Comment Calling for the Protection of Federal International Education Programs

On July 28, the AHA submitted a comment to the *Federal Register* objecting to a proposal by the Department of Education to rescind the regulations governing the federal Title VI International Education and Fulbright–Hays Programs. The comment emphasizes the importance of these programs and rejects the department's claim that existing regulations are unnecessarily burdensome. It argues that the existing regulations "promote transparency, fair competition, and accountability,"

and eliminating them would create "significant uncertainty for institutions that rely on these programs to develop the nation's international expertise." An action alert urged members to submit their own comments on these programs. **P**

Ben Rosenbaum was public affairs associate at the AHA from 2023–26.

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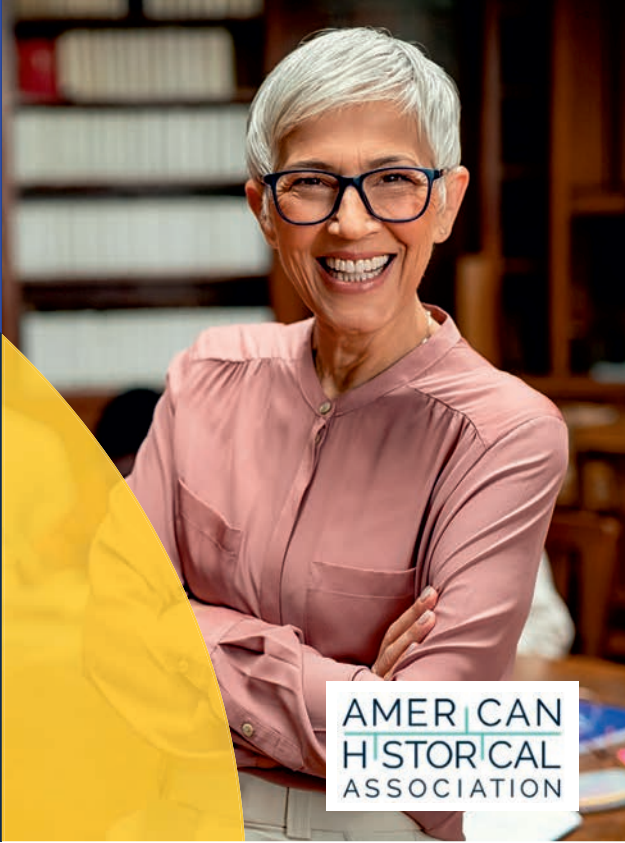
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TEACHING WITH GHOSTS

Generative AI, Palimpsests, and the Burden of Historical Representation

In our professional development workshops on AI and history instruction, we often encounter teachers curious about platforms like schoolai.com, humy.ai, and character.ai, which invite users to “speak” with historical figures. Excited about the potential of these tools to get students engaged in history, these educators are eager for our endorsement.

But our (and our colleagues’) experiments with these platforms have raised far-reaching concerns. During a conversation we had with a simulated Anne Frank using character.ai, she told us, “I died in the typhus epidemic in the spring of 1945.” She specified how many people were killed in the Holocaust—adding, “I have spoken with many people who lived through it”—and was excited to let us know that when she grows up, she wants to be an author “like J. K. Rowling.” The generated response was fluent but impossible. This is just one example of many that historians and educators have shared about how these AI tools at best mislead readers—and at worst lie about the past.

We write as history education faculty who work with in-service and preservice history teachers in methods courses and professional development, as well as with K–12 students in workshops and camps. Generative AI (GenAI) is an increasing part of how students encounter the past. Young people meet

history not just through teachers, textbooks, or online educational resources but also through chatbots and AI image generators. In this landscape, limiting GenAI in the classroom does not keep students from using it; rather, it denies history educators the opportunity to shape the future of GenAI in education. In our minds, the task is not to eliminate GenAI but to study it, treating its output as a primary source in order to help students see how GenAI constructs history while reflecting the biases and assumptions of the present.

You likely had a reaction to reading our position (positive or negative!). The use of GenAI, in and outside of education, has produced a range of emotional responses from educators, students, and parents, with some urging integration while others advocate for outright bans. But whatever our personal opinions, the College Board reports that 84 percent of high school students had used GenAI as of October 2025, while a minority of schools had established an official policy and fewer than half had blocked GenAI platforms at their schools. By February 2026, 88 percent of higher education faculty in English, history, humanities, and social sciences reported seeing students using GenAI for writing assignments.

The AHA is one of few organizations that provides official guidance for working with AI. The *Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence in History Education*

argues that bans are not a long-term solution and that history education should cultivate AI literacy. It calls for intentional engagement rooted in historical thinking. In its most practical guidance, it emphasizes clear classroom policies and routine disclosure and citation of AI-assisted work. We share that stance but aim to sharpen it by treating citation not as a box to check but as the beginning of a disciplinary problem: provenance. For history educators, one important piece of the puzzle is developing a form of AI literacy grounded in historical thinking and ethical judgments about when generating a voice or image becomes a form of speaking for others.

A palimpsest, literally “scraped again,” is a manuscript page that was reused after its original text was erased.

Long before algorithms, palimpsests offered historians a metaphor for the layered nature of recordkeeping. A palimpsest, literally “scraped again,” is a manuscript page that was reused after its original text was erased. Traces of earlier writing remained, and over time, scholars learned to read through

those layers. This was no easy task, as words left behind were not always visible to the naked eye and illuminating them required technological advancement.

We can now see GenAI reenacting this process digitally. Its models are trained on immense corpora: archives, books, artworks, and metadata encoding centuries of cultural production. When the machine “writes,” it reinscribes those traces. The result is a new text or image that appears original but is haunted by what preceded it. These algorithmic palimpsests are not simply copies of what came before. Instead, they are aggregations of prior meaning smoothed into a surface so seamless that what came before disappears; sorting out where information was sourced can be difficult. The authors of the *Guiding Principles* warn

that AI systems “reproduce existing textual and visual patterns without regard for evidence, authorship, or historical context.” A generated artifact can appear finished and authoritative when it is in fact merely speculative. Palimpsests remind us that history is layered and partial, a truth the digital version may tempt students, teachers, and historians to forget. History educators must help students learn to read through the surface.

In film, the “burden of representation” names the moral weight placed on creators who depict historically marginalized peoples. In historical film, the “burden of historical representation” extends the obligation to long-suppressed perspectives. That obligation has always existed alongside interpretation. No source is a transparent window on the past; all

representations demand critical reading. What is different in the age of GenAI is not the need for interpretation but the presence of “sources” with no creator to be situated, questioned, or held accountable for representational choices. When a model produces a “voice” for Anne Frank or generates a new “photograph” of Omaha Beach on D-Day, it takes on the representational work of authors and artists without their awareness, intention, or accountability. Ethical labor once borne, however imperfectly, by authors, filmmakers, editors, and institutions is now performed by a system that cannot recognize harm, evidence, or historical consequence.

In this setting, responsibility relocates while the conditions of responsibility change. When looking at GenAI outputs, the burden of representation becomes a burden of reading. Historians and history educators must make that interpretive labor more explicit because the machine’s outputs obscure its provenance. In earlier media forms, students could be taught to analyze intention, perspective, or omission by contextualizing a source. GenAI complicates that work by mass-producing plausible narratives and images on demand. The problem is not bias alone but a persuasive surface detached from evidentiary warrant. In this way, GenAI forces us to teach historical literacy as both evidence based and media critical.

There is a reason K–12 history teachers use films and documentaries: They give historical figures cinematic afterlives that audiences often recall more vividly than they remember a primary or secondary source. Character-based AI platforms inherit and magnify that burden. A film is finite; a chatbot generates endless dialogue in a simulated tone, and when students use these platforms, the output is rarely verified in real time. What feels like a private conversation is actually a layered synthesis shaped by



Just as Harry Houdini posed with an apparent apparition of Abraham Lincoln to demonstrate how photographic techniques could manufacture encounters with the dead, GenAI chatbots transform a constructed representation into the appearance of a direct encounter with a historical figure.

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training data, algorithmic patterning, and user prompting. These simulations risk reinscribing harm by inviting students to consume recitations of trauma (as in our Anne Frank example) as interactive entertainment that positions the guesswork of AI platforms, however well trained, as testimony. Asking GenAI to imitate first-person historical voices—especially the voices of those who suffered or were silenced—blurs the distinction between evidence and empathy and undermines students’ capacity to think historically.

If these simulations occur in the classroom, we suggest treating them as triage, not pedagogy, in three steps: Label them as present-day artifacts, not recovered testimony. Avoid first-person role-play. Quarantine them for critique by asking where the information came from and what anachronisms or omissions appear.

First-person historical voices that can help anchor empathy to evidence include diaries, letters, oral histories, and museum collections. When students encounter a simulated voice, instructors might redirect the discussion toward ethics: Who benefits when a machine “speaks for” the dead, and who might be simplified or harmed? Avoiding simulation means not avoiding GenAI but reframing its products as cultural mirrors rather than historical sources: What the algorithm generates tells us less about the past than about how the past is remembered.

Similar ethical tensions surface in AI-generated imagery. We asked ChatGPT to create “a realistic photo of soldiers storming Omaha Beach.” At first glance, the resulting image resembled Robert Capa’s D-Day photographs; on closer inspection, we saw that the soldiers were marching into the sea rather than onto the beach. When we pointed out those errors and asked ChatGPT to “improve” the photo, it produced an

image nearly identical to Robert F. Sargent’s *Into the Jaws of Death*, without attribution. And while we were able to identify the original, most students could not.

This is plagiarism, but it is also a collapse of provenance. The model could reproduce the photograph’s composition but not its context—the peril, perspective, and contingency that gave the original meaning. Because AI lacks “vertical textual memory,” its representations float free of evidence.

Asking GenAI to imitate first-person historical voices undermines students’ capacity to think historically.

Just as we suggest that teachers avoid having GenAI speak for the dead, we also suggest they avoid using GenAI to visualize the past as documentary evidence. If such images circulate through student projects or on social media, teachers can reframe them as objects of critique—products of the present rather than evidence of the past—and ask what characteristics make the image believable.

Pedagogy attuned to both history and technology invites students to read GenAI’s outputs as artifacts:—what we call pedagogies of the palimpsest. Rather than banning AI, history educators can reframe its products as opportunities for disciplinary reasoning while building critical AI literacy: understanding how AI generates outputs, appraising its affordances, and evaluating ethical use. Critical AI literacy and historical literacy should work together. Learning to recognize how GenAI systems generate information—and where they fit in the long lineage of

media, textbooks, films, and games that mediate our relationship to the past—will help students navigate the digital epochs they already consume.

Five moves can translate a palimpsest reading into teachable habits:

- **Locate the constructed narrator:** Who appears to be speaking here, and with what authority?
- **Analyze the voice:** What emotions or assumptions make the narrative persuasive?
- **Cross-examine the evidence:** What can be verified, and what is invented?
- **Discuss the ethics of representation:** Who benefits, and who might be harmed?
- **Reflect on the machine’s mirror:** What does our desire to make the past “speak” reveal about us?

These moves turn the burden of historical representation into a scaffold for critical reflection. Students learn that every depiction—whether on film, in a textbook, or produced by an algorithm—embeds choices about power and perspective.

Educators already know that students learn history not only in their classrooms but from documentaries, graphic novels, family anecdotes, and video games that simulate past worlds. GenAI is the newest, most complex and increasingly ubiquitous form of cultural curriculum. Our task now is to contextualize and critique it, thereby merging historical literacy with AI literacy. Students who learn to read the digital palimpsest will come prepared to evaluate AI’s representations of the past and to recognize their own place in history. **P**

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CRISTIÁN CASTRO

SEISMIC PACIFIC

How the Margins Became the Center of Earthquake Science



Carte de Grand Océan ou Mer du Sud. This 1788 map from the atlas of French explorer Jean-François de La Pérouse charted the Pacific basin more than a century before earthquakes would make it the center of modern seismology.

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AT THE JANUARY 1907 meeting of the Philosophical Society of Great Britain, the American geologist Warren Upham presented a paper comparing two recent catastrophes, the 1906 earthquakes in San Francisco and Valparaíso. His analysis moved in two directions at once, invoking the emerging language of modern science—fault lines, seismic waves, geodetic measurements—while also referencing divine will. Even in the early 20th century, God still had a place in the mechanics of disaster.

Upham's paper captured a moment of epistemic instability. Scientific explanations of earthquakes were gaining ground but had not yet fully displaced older frameworks of meaning. What is less obvious—but more consequential—is where this new scientific authority would be produced. Contrary to the familiar story that locates modern science in Europe and radiates it outward, the history of seismology suggests a different geography. Over the course of the 20th century, the Pacific Rim, long treated as peripheral, became central to the production of earthquake knowledge. This shift invites us to rethink the broader geography of modern knowledge. If we follow the seismic belt that stretches from California to Chile to Japan, what emerges is a hemispheric story in which catastrophe, rather than marginality, positioned these regions at the forefront of scientific innovation. The Pacific Rim became a center not despite its instability but because of it.

The Pacific Rim became a center not despite its instability but because of it.

For centuries, earthquakes were understood by linking natural events to supernatural forces. In ancient Greece, Poseidon was said to shake the earth; in Japan, a giant catfish churned beneath the islands; and in the Andes, the Inca earth goddess Pachamama was said to tremble with anger when neglected. These explanations did not simply reflect ignorance. They offered coherent ways of interpreting unpredictability and destruction in the absence of systematic observation.

The Enlightenment began to erode these frameworks. The 1755 Lisbon earthquake, which devastated one of Europe's major cities, prompted a wave of philosophical and scientific inquiry. Thinkers such as Voltaire challenged providential explanations and insisted on natural causes. By the late 18th century, scientists like John Michell were proposing theories of subterranean motion. New instruments soon followed—Luigi Palmieri's electromagnetic seismograph among the first—but through the 19th century they yielded only

scattered readings of European seismic activity, disconnected from one another and from any coordinated system. Yet the transition from speculation to systematic knowledge required more than new ideas. It required instruments, institutions, and—crucially—repeated encounters with the phenomenon of earthquakes. It is here that the Pacific Rim would prove decisive.

The 1906 San Francisco earthquake exposed the limits of the existing knowledge and fragmented observation, marking a turning point toward systemic earthquake observation. In response, American scientists and institutions moved to construct a coordinated system for monitoring seismic activity. US organizations funded the development of seismograph stations across the country, including a cluster in Southern California that geologist Harry Wood built around Pasadena, Mount Wilson, and Riverside—the nucleus of what would become the Caltech Seismological Laboratory. Researchers including John Milne and Thomas Jaggard helped transform earthquake observation into a systematic, data-driven enterprise. What had once been sporadic and local became continuous and national. This emerging network did more than generate data. It repositioned the United States within a global field of scientific exchange. Seismic records collected in California could now be compared with those from elsewhere, enabling new forms of collaboration and standardization. Disaster, in this sense, catalyzed not only national infrastructure but also international scientific integration.

Chile confronted similar challenges under different conditions. Located along one of the most active seismic zones on earth, the country experienced recurrent destruction. The 1906 Valparaíso earthquake—occurring just months after San Francisco's—highlighted the need for research on seismic risk. In 1908, the Chilean government established a national seismological service at the University of Chile. Under the direction of Augusto Döhl, the institution gathered, analyzed, and disseminated information about earthquakes across the country. Its creation marked a significant moment in the integration of scientific knowledge into state structures. Chile's case underscores a key dynamic: Repeated exposure to catastrophe could accelerate the institutionalization of science. Earthquakes were not isolated events but recurring conditions that demanded ongoing observation and analysis. In this context, scientific knowledge became inseparable from questions of governance, infrastructure, and public safety.

Nowhere was the relationship between disaster and scientific authority more pronounced than in Japan. The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, which killed more than 140,000 people, revealed the scale of seismic vulnerability and the urgency of

systematic research. Founded in 1925, the Earthquake Research Institute (ERI) and its scientists advanced influential theories – most notably the law describing the decay of aftershocks – that continue to shape the field. Japan’s experience illustrates how regions subject to extreme natural forces could become sites of epistemic authority. The very conditions that made the country vulnerable also made it indispensable to the global production of knowledge about earthquakes.

Taken together, these cases reveal a broader transformation. During the 19th century, the study of earthquakes was largely embedded within European intellectual traditions. By the mid-20th century, however, the Pacific Rim had become the primary locus of seismological research. Not merely the result of scientific progress, this shift was driven by the uneven distribution of natural phenomena and by the institutional responses they provoked. Regions once considered peripheral were, in fact, uniquely positioned to generate new knowledge because they experienced earthquakes with greater frequency and intensity than almost anywhere else on earth.

What emerged was a hemispheric network of observation and exchange linking the Americas and East Asia. Data circulated across the Pacific; instruments were standardized; theories were refined through comparison. In this sense, the rise of modern seismology cannot be understood within national or continental frameworks alone. It was, from its inception, a transpacific and hemispheric enterprise.

The California Institute of Technology (Caltech) became the primary node through which these transpacific connections were institutionalized. On its campus in Pasadena, Japanese, Chilean, and American scientists trained together, co-authored foundational papers, and built the instruments and theories that came to define the discipline. Kiyoo Wadati’s method of plotting the logarithm of ground-motion amplitude against distance – developed in Japan from observations of local earthquakes – directly informed the magnitude scale that Beno Gutenberg and Charles Richter developed at Caltech in 1935. Cinna Lomnitz, trained under Gutenberg, Richter, and Hugo Benioff, in 1955 became the first Latin American to earn a PhD in geophysics, before returning home to direct a geophysics institute at the University of Chile.

The 1960 Valdivia earthquake – the largest recorded in the 20th century, at magnitude 9.5, and called the Great Chilean earthquake – crystallized these transpacific connections during a shared scientific event. Japanese seismograph networks had been recording Chilean earthquakes since the 1920s, and the Valdivia event produced the first clear observations of earth’s normal modes – the slow, whole-earth vibrations that

follow a great earthquake, like a bell ringing after being struck. Chile’s local records let seismologists calibrate what Japanese instruments were detecting an ocean away, data that researchers on both sides of the Pacific analyzed in parallel. The exchange was not simply institutional but methodological. Each contributed observational frameworks and analytical tools that the others incorporated, producing a body of knowledge that no single nation could have generated alone. At the same time, the language of seismology created at institutions like Caltech and the ERI – magnitude scales, plate tectonics – became global, shaping how earthquakes were understood everywhere. The Pacific did not simply contribute to scientific knowledge; it redefined its center.

Modern seismology was,
from its inception, transpacific
and hemispheric.

The history of seismology complicates familiar narratives about the geography of modern science. Rather than diffusing outward from a stable European core, knowledge about earthquakes emerged in regions often labeled as marginal. This dynamic resonates with broader historiographical shifts that emphasize the circulation of knowledge across borders and the role of so-called peripheries in shaping global modernity. Recent work in disaster studies has highlighted how earthquakes reshape societies by transforming cities, governance structures, and collective identities. They also reshape knowledge. They determine where research is conducted, which questions are prioritized, and whose expertise becomes authoritative. To speak of a “seismic Pacific,” then, is not simply to identify a region of geological activity. It is to recognize a historical process through which the geography of knowledge was reconfigured.

When Upham stood before his London audience in 1907, he inhabited a world in which scientific and theological explanations of earthquakes co-existed uneasily. Within a few decades, that balance would shift decisively toward science and the Pacific. By tracing the development of seismology across the Pacific, we can see how regions long considered peripheral came to occupy a central place in the modern understanding of the earth. The aftershocks of that transformation are still with us – not only in the science that measures earthquakes but in the global structures of knowledge that those measurements helped to build. **P**

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JESSE SPOHNHOLZ, BRENNAN MILLER, ERIC NELSON, ALEX HONOLD, AND TREVOR R. GETZ

COLLABORATING ON THE INTRO COURSE, FIVE YEARS LATER

History for the 21st Century Shares New Teaching Modules



The History for the 21st Century modules are tested in classroom settings with students like these at Washington State University.
Jamie Seckington

TREVOR R. GETZ and Steven M. Harris announced a new grassroots, faculty-led project inspired by History Gateways in “Collaborating on the Intro Course: The History for the 21st Century Project” (*Perspectives on History*, December 2020). With a blueprint that envisioned faculty helping one another reform introductory history courses to support student-centered, inquiry-based learning, History for the 21st Century also endeavored to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing instructors: increased teaching workloads, varying levels of college preparedness among incoming students, declining institutional support for faculty, and an ever-changing historical and historiographical landscape spanning a dizzying array of topics. By leveraging the team’s collective expertise in historical pedagogy and research, we set out to improve how we teach, inspire our students, and assess their engagement and learning in entry-level classes. Now we can report on some results from this initiative.

We advocate for an inquiry-based approach by which students pose meaningful questions, interpret evidence, compare perspectives, and construct historical accounts. Inquiry engages students in the practices of historical knowledge production and supports the development of transferable skills—such as critical literacy and analytical reasoning—while avoiding the replication of content common to surveys of large topics.

This approach challenges students to progress to the more independent and open-ended forms of inquiry necessary for success at the postsecondary level. We are inspired by initiatives at institutions such as the University of Houston and California State University, Long Beach, which are working to build these skills in their courses. We also recognize that this form of instruction requires significant time, planning, and pedagogical expertise. Just as students benefit from scaffolding, instructors need adaptable materials, clear instructional models, and practical guidance. Offering these resources is central to our mission.

We work together to produce accessible, inquiry-based learning across a wide range of instructional contexts, including high-enrollment survey courses. Thus far, we have designed and published 18 sets of teaching modules targeting world history courses, with more on the way, including materials for US history. Each module offers two weeks of inquiry-driven, student-centered education for use in active-learning courses of any size. To date, modules have been taught in courses of up to 250 students. Our authors are professionally trained academic historians—from senior scholars to doctoral candidates—who work with collaborators from our team. Each module includes course readings, primary sources, instructor guides with detailed

backward-designed lesson plans, explicit learning objectives, editable slide decks, suggested final assessments, and other course materials.

All modules undergo a double-anonymized peer review by content specialists and experts in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and then testing in introductory history courses by faculty from our community of practice and their students. This multilayered review process has helped us to ensure scholarly understandings of topics and support student engagement. Modules can be assigned together to form an entire course, used to augment an existing one, or modified to support an instructor’s area of expertise or interests.

Thus far, we have published 18 sets of teaching modules targeting world history courses.

Current modules cover wide chronological periods of world history. Outside of a single time period are *Your Place in the World* and *Unsovereign Space*. Modules centered on the Black Death and the Chinese and Parthian Empires will interest those teaching the premodern world. For the early modern period, instructors will find piracy, utopias, the silk trade, refugees, and our newest module *Collecting in the Colonies: Hidden Histories of British Science*. The long 19th century is covered with monuments to revolution, colonialism and imperialism, global medievalisms, and the global 1905. Finally, the 20th-century modules are on African diaspora, decolonization, and anticolonialism.

Each module bridges gaps between what experts on teaching and learning understand and what faculty and students achieve by forming meaningful connections between history and their own lived experiences. In *Monuments and Memories in the Atlantic Revolutions*, students explore the events and legacies of the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions through the prism of how these episodes have been commemorated across time. The module opens with students exploring the monument landscape in the United States by identifying an example they are familiar with, investigating what or who it commemorates, when it was created, and why. By making historical commemoration relevant to students’ lives, the activity encourages personal investment, as students learn how to interpret monuments as historical sources and are introduced to the module’s core questions: Who and what is remembered and forgotten, and why? How do monuments convey meaning? How do those meanings shift over time?

In subsequent lessons, students examine key events, values, and motivations of three Atlantic revolutions. In class, they practice source analysis and engage in activities that explore each revolution's commemorative landscape. The module culminates in an activity that asks students to identify and revise an existing monument or design a new one. As they work, they are encouraged to reflect on the significance of these revolutions, including such abstractions as freedom and equality and the corresponding rights designed to protect them. We thereby invite students to see themselves as part of an ongoing conversation about both the pastness of the past and its contemporary relevance.

Over the past two years, we have adopted an evidence-based approach to assess the impact of our project, inviting student feedback and enlisting an educational research expert to help interpret their responses and guide future studies. In over 1,000 student replies, 70 percent indicated that they connected module content to their prior knowledge or experiences, 64 percent reported frequently linking their learning to contemporary issues, and 62 percent reported high levels of overall engagement. Given that these modules are often used in large introductory courses, these results are promising.

In open-ended responses, students elaborated on what they found engaging, inspiring, or thought-provoking. Many noted that primary sources helped them feel more connected to the past and better able to see history from multiple perspectives, emphasizing how the materials prompted them to broaden, nuance, and sometimes reconsider previous assumptions. In response to *Monuments and Memories in the Atlantic Revolutions*, for instance, many students described rethinking the meaning of statues they were familiar with or thinking more deeply about whose perspectives were excluded from existing monuments.

Two broad themes have emerged in students' descriptions of their learning: making connections between past and present, and synthesizing ideas across historical contexts to identify larger patterns. Many students reflected on the enduring legacies of colonialism. Others described making connections between topics they had not previously considered in relation to each another, such as slavery and piracy. Several noted that studying the global silk trade deepened their understanding of how commerce fostered interconnectedness both in the past and today. History for these students became not only more comprehensible but more personally meaningful as well.

Of course, modularized inquiry units run the risk of fragmenting historical understanding—"postholing" topics without sufficient connective fencing. These modules were designed with that risk in view. Thus, while bounded by specific

topics and time periods, all are anchored in enduring questions that support students in making connections across eras and to the present. That is, we design the units to augment, replace, or become part of history surveys we already teach. Future iterations will continue foregrounding "big questions" that facilitate student learning and engagement.

Areas for improvement remain. Some students reported needing additional background knowledge. Others struggled with pacing or overall reading loads. We will continue refining our module design to support the diverse range of learners we serve, knowing how and what to improve because our project deliberately integrates faculty and student feedback.

History became not only more
comprehensible but more
personally meaningful.

The abrupt cancellation of a multiyear NEH grant in 2025 disrupted our project, but successful litigation by the AHA and co-plaintiffs resulted in a ruling that the mass grant termination was unlawful. The grant is now in the process of being reinstated. This important victory will allow us to produce more modules in the coming months, and the experience has only strengthened our resolve to improve teaching and learning in introductory history courses. A pilot collaboration with faculty at the University of Arkansas demonstrated that adopting our modules not only enriched learning environments but also reduced faculty workloads by decreasing the time needed to prepare course materials and class sessions. Today, we are expanding our research into how we can better design lessons to facilitate transformative learning and enhance student engagement. We are also committing resources to materials targeted specifically at the new opportunities and challenges posed by artificial intelligence.

In all our initiatives, we rely on our greatest asset: collaboration and cooperation among history faculty. If you want to help—with writing, peer-reviewing, and/or testing modules, with project developments and long-term planning, or by allowing us to survey your students about their learning experiences—contact us at info@history21.com. There are many challenges facing educators today. We are better off when we face them together. **P**

Jesse Spohnholz, Brenna Miller, Eric Nelson, Alex Honold, and Trevor R. Getz are history faculty and members of the History for the 21st Century team.

KATHERINE PERROTTA AND LEAH PANTHER

“THINGS HAPPENED THERE”

Youth Participatory Action Research in Shermantown and Stone Mountain, Georgia



A young researcher documents his visit to Stone Mountain Park as part of a youth participatory action research project.
Katherine Perrotta

IN 2022, the Georgia legislature passed HB 1084, known as the “Protect Students First Act,” which banned the teaching of “divisive concepts” about topics including race. This law raised serious concerns about how to teach hard histories, particularly the Confederacy’s legacy. Georgia has a precarious role in ongoing debates over racial equity and its threats to white supremacist histories. Although Governor Roy Barnes eliminated the state flag’s “stars and bars” in 2001, Confederate vestiges remain throughout the state, including at Stone Mountain Park.

Located east of downtown Atlanta in DeKalb County, Stone Mountain Park is a major tourist and recreational attraction, popular for hiking, boating, and seasonal festivals. Stone Mountain Park is also the site of the world’s largest Confederate monument, where carvings of Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, and Robert E. Lee are brandished on the side of the mountain. During the early to mid-20th century, Stone Mountain was the site of Ku Klux Klan rallies and cross burnings. Only meters away is the community of Shermantown, which was established by emancipated African Americans after the Civil War and is rumored to be named for Union General William T. Sherman.

As former secondary teachers from the Midwest and Northeast transplanted to Atlanta as education professors, we learned a lot about the history of Georgia by visiting historical sites in order to teach place-based pedagogies to preservice and in-service teachers. After HB 1084 passed, we grappled with the question, How can we create curricular materials and support systems for educators to teach K–12 students hard histories about topics like Confederate monuments and race? We realized that creating such materials required engaging in place-based research about the complicated histories of Stone Mountain Park and Shermantown.

In 2023, we partnered with the Linguistic Justice Collaborative on their youth participatory action research (YPAR) summer literacy project. We worked with a high school social studies teacher and five high school students from DeKalb County, Georgia, on the history of Stone Mountain and Shermantown. YPAR refers to the 20th-century critical research methodologies, most notably by Paulo Freire, where youth and adult co-researchers work together to examine how their positionalities, knowledge, and perspectives play an integral role in collecting and analyzing data with the goal of enacting change in their communities. During this five-day project, students and adults worked together to create research questions, find primary and secondary sources to answer them, and identify ways to disseminate research findings to the Stone Mountain and Shermantown communities.

On day one of the project, students and adults shared their experiences with Stone Mountain and Shermantown, explained why they wanted to be part of this program, and brainstormed research questions. When asked why they wanted to participate in this project, individuals offered responses ranging from “I want to learn more about my community and Shermantown” to “I want to try new things” to “I’m living in a place surrounded with other people’s history.” The research questions included: What do community members think about the Confederate monument? What happened to buildings and places that used to be in the community, such as the granite quarry in Stone Mountain? And what is happening now in the community?

Community elders shared oral histories about Shermantown.

After the brainstorming session, the social studies teacher led the group on a walking tour of Shermantown. They learned how Venable Street was originally named after the Stone Mountain quarry owner and a Klan leader, but it was changed in 2019 to Eva Mamie Lane to honor two women, a mother and daughter known for their community organizing. One student said, “The street names should be representative of the community and . . . the values that they hold . . . I’m glad that that change was made and learning about that.” Students also considered the ramifications of changing street names. One student proposed that historical artifacts like “street names” that represent “bad things” need preservation to avoid being forgotten. The discussions about renaming streets engaged students in the complexity of historical thinking and research when making judgments about the past that are based on contemporary views.

Next, the group visited the local Baptist church, where community elders shared oral histories about their ancestors’ and their own experiences growing up and living in Shermantown and with school integration in the 1960s. One youth researcher reflected that it “really wasn’t that long ago when [the elders] lived here and had completely different experiences from the ones that we have right now.” Another student remarked that meeting with the community members helped them to realize “what things happened there,” like segregation, that are not visible today. This experience resonated with both the adult and youth researchers who realized how the civil rights movement was not in the distant past.

During the walking tour and while listening to the oral histories, youths carefully recorded audio and took notes, then

analyzed the data by asking questions of the differences and similarities among stories of racialized violence, intimidation, and co-existence. Through intergenerational dialogue, they found that different individual experiences within the same geographic space and time led to different historical narratives. This helped them to develop refined research questions and imagine possible ways to disseminate their findings.

To put the individual oral histories in conversation with larger regional histories, the group visited the Atlanta History Center on day two. The archivists displayed books, posters, newspapers articles, and maps relating to Shermantown, Stone Mountain, and DeKalb County history that students held, read, and analyzed as primary source evidence. These documents helped them answer their research questions and provided historical context to the oral histories from Shermantown community members.

Place-based historical research serves a public good.

Comparing individual historical narratives to larger regional narratives raised questions about verifying and corroborating sources. Therefore, on days three, four, and five, the research team strategized about what sources they needed to find and analyze in order to answer their questions. Youths spent time in Shermantown and Stone Mountain, taking pictures and interviewing people in restaurants, small businesses, and the park to learn what they thought about the Confederate monument and what they knew about the community's history.

The youths learned firsthand about people's differing perspectives on the history and contemporary legacy of Stone Mountain. For instance, one student thought it was "weird" that a white shop owner had different recollections of race relations in Stone Mountain compared to the Black elders. Students engaged in the complexities of historical research by realizing how people who lived in the same place at the same time could have different experiences. These insights show that youths can also corroborate the perspectives of living and past people through place-based research and analysis of multiple primary sources. By the end of the week, youth team members proposed disseminating their research findings through YouTube shorts, GIS mapping, podcasts, and local history placards placed throughout the community.

This project continued and expanded during the summer of 2024. Additional youth researchers, social studies teachers, education professors, and graduate students worked together to collect and analyze primary source data to create materials

for a community teach-in. At this event, the youth and adult co-researchers shared their findings and offered visions of Shermantown's present and future with photograph collages and original artwork, recordings with community elders, petitions to remove the Confederate monument at Stone Mountain Park, and public speeches at the community's Juneteenth event. The YPAR and historical research methodologies of this ongoing project exemplify how collaborations among educators, academics, youths, historians, and community members can enrich inquiry by preserving the past with methods that promote civic engagement and historical empathy.

Place-based historical research like this YPAR project serves a public good by bringing communities together to confront the complexities of the past and assess the past's impact on present-day values and potential futures. We learned that promoting dialogue about local history among youths, researchers, and community members can be a powerful approach to teaching hard histories, even in places with laws that limit education topics. Students can bring these place-based experiences back to their classrooms by making connections between the curriculum and their experiences conducting local history research.

Although a weeklong place-based research project may not be feasible for all classroom teachers, we encourage teachers to reach out to community members, historical organizations, libraries, local businesses, and other entities such as educational nonprofits that can support inquiry-based history instruction. Teachers and partners can facilitate access to multiple types of primary sources, which coupled with multi-modal digital and analog tools can provide youths with creative outlets to take informed action in their communities by sharing their research publicly.

Teaching about the complex histories of Confederate monuments and race in Stone Mountain and Shermantown is challenging, especially with executive orders and state laws that ban teaching "divisive concepts." However, these challenges can present opportunities for teachers to engage students in inquiry about how and why historical significance and memory are determined—and how they change over time. We encourage teachers and students to work together using curricular strategies we describe here to preserve living histories of places like Shermantown through place-based learning and public history that leads to informed action in their communities. 

Katherine Perrotta and Leah Panther are associate professors in the Tift College of Education at Mercer University.

ARMINDA LAWRENCE SR.

MAKING STUDENTS INTO HISTORIANS

Writing Monographs with High Schoolers



Pace Academy seniors sign copies of the books they researched, wrote, and edited at the completion of their history methodology course.
Arminda Lawrence Sr.

IN APRIL, I watched a group of high school seniors hold their finished books for the first time. In their hands were glossy paperbacks containing the historical research they had conducted, synthesized, and developed into original narratives. The pride on their faces confirmed that giving students the opportunity to *do* history is a transformative experience. Teaching students how historians work, rather than simply what historians know, has proved a powerful pedagogical tool—one that engages students and equips them with skills they need to be successful in college and beyond.

I teach a historical research methodologies course for high school seniors at Pace Academy, a private, independent school in Atlanta, Georgia. For their signature project, students spend nine months researching a topic of local interest to the Atlanta region and writing a manuscript that we then self-publish. In 2025–26, their dedicated effort resulted in two book-length monographs. It was the third time I have used this assignment, which has helped to make this an incredibly popular course.

I kick off the course by providing a solid foundation in historical writing and research methodologies. Most of my students have never read historical writing beyond the textbooks in their survey course or the paragraphs that precede short-answer questions on an AP assessment. Before we can begin the research project, they need to know the basics of doing history and how historians think and write. At the beginning of our year together, I ask students to read and critically evaluate book chapters or scholarly journal articles. I select interesting texts that feature descriptive, attention-grabbing writing and the creative use of diverse primary source material. I prefer to assign selections by working historians who can Zoom in (or visit, if they're local) to answer questions about their piece and the craft of writing history. Professors have been incredibly gracious with their time, and my students have benefited immensely from learning the tricks of the trade from experts in the field. In the first month, students also learn how to use research and citation tools. I train them in database search techniques and show them how to use RefWorks to organize research and manage citations, and then we practice properly formatting footnotes and bibliographies.

Though I help them hone their research skills, by and large the students are in charge of the future book's evolution. The course structure forces them to engage collaboratively in all aspects of the manuscript development process. They pitch potential book topics to their peers in a series of presentations and then cast a vote. In the latest course, students settled on two topics: "Atlanta, as a Host City" and "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles In and Around Atlanta." Because

they are involved in every aspect of the book's creation, they are also invested in its success.

With topics selected, students divide themselves into two groups (this year, each had 10 or 11 students) based on their interests and then start the research. Groups identify three secondary sources to read and discuss together. This reading assignment grounds their basic understanding of the history and is the foundation for their research. Once this is completed, I ask students to identify the major themes or topics needed to tell their story, which then determines the subject matter for their chapters. I assure them that these ideas will likely change as the research progresses. From there, they divide these potential topics among themselves, create a project schedule, and begin conducting research.

The students are in charge of the future book's evolution.

The historical research process is new to them. Before this class, students have never accessed physical or digital archival resources. But we are fortunate that our school is just a couple of miles from the Atlanta History Center, where students get their entrée into primary research. Before our visit, I coordinate with the center's research manager on an initial session that introduces primary sources available on their book topics and teaches them how to access the center's physical and digital archival materials.

Students excitedly pored over striking collections of Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority plans and Cotton States and International Exposition souvenirs that the archivists had graciously pulled in advance. I could barely tear a group of young men away from a late 19th-century map of Fulton County. Following our visit, students made subsequent appointments directly with the research manager to view materials during our scheduled class time or a free period.

Following their initial research, students write a draft of their chapter, which is usually due just before the December holiday break. Each student is responsible for researching and writing at least 10 pages of a chapter. While they're allowed to work together on longer chapters, most students choose to work alone. Beyond the length requirement, students must include a historically defensible thesis, properly formatted citations, and a diversity of primary sources for this first effort.

These drafts are very rough. My students need a lot of feedback on their initial effort and often considerably more

primary research to support their claims and enhance the historical narrative. I direct them to additional sources in one-on-one meetings. They revise their drafts, again and again, while also writing introductions and conclusions for the book to frame their narratives. This 10-week revision phase is especially difficult for high school students. They are unaccustomed to writing that requires multiple rounds of revision and editing. They often wonder aloud when their chapter will ever be done!

But the end result is so worth the effort. In April, we celebrate their hard work at a book launch party, to which we invite students' parents and school administrators. Each student receives a printed copy of their book, signed by their editorial team of classmates. In their hands is a celebration of their hard work and commitment to developing their craft as budding historians. On that happy day, I see truly transformed students who are now capable of reading and analyzing complex primary and secondary sources, weaving those sources into historical narratives, and grinding out a polished finished product that took months of concerted effort. The books are housed in the school library, and copies are also sent to the Atlanta History Center archives. These high school seniors are no longer simply students—they are published authors and, in a real sense, historians.

The book in their hands is a celebration of their hard work and commitment to developing their craft as budding historians.

My students certainly feel that the course was worth their effort too. Throughout the year, I survey the class for feedback to improve the course. When asked what skills they've learned from the class and whether they think they will use those skills in the future, repeatedly students have expressed the value of learning research skills. One student said it was "so important for future career opportunities. I've learned how to go into the archives and how to determine what I'm actually searching for." Others have identified citation management, targeted searching, and the ability to work in groups as areas of growth gained from the course. "Learning how to use RefWorks has changed my life," one wrote. Another shared that "the skills learned in this class are so important for college and beyond. I now know how to access better research than what ChatGPT provides." Describing the impact the course had on her, a student explained, "I understand now how history texts are constructed, and I have a

greater appreciation for the work that historians do and a stronger passion for history."

This assignment fundamentally reshapes students into critical thinkers and researchers. The skills are certainly transferable to other secondary and postsecondary school settings, but that said, I know that what has worked at Pace Academy would not work everywhere. Collegiate and public school applications may require variations to my model, such as limiting the output per student to just one polished chapter each, which is still a worthwhile opportunity to nurture historical research and writing skills. From my conversations with colleagues teaching at public schools, I found that it may be necessary in some districts to limit students' choice of research topics and scope to align with applicable state standards. And it would be hard to fit both the necessary skills training and manuscript development into a one-semester college course.

But there are ways to make this project manageable given the considerable budgetary and time constraints many educators face, while still providing students the opportunity to think and work like historians. My approach requires very little school funding. I invited historians to meet with my students via Zoom, relied on students for transportation to local archives, and used Amazon KDP to print books at a cost of four dollars per student—far less than the price of a textbook. If time is at a premium, educators can assign the research topic themselves and have students author shorter chapters that align with curriculum standards. Students can use Zotero, a free citation management tool, and other free online resources such as local digital archives or classroom-use versions of Ancestry.com and Newspapers.com.

When students are given the opportunity to do history rather than simply consume it, the results speak for themselves: greater engagement, stronger research skills, and a genuine passion for the discipline that extends well beyond my classroom. Whether teachers have access to a world-class archive or just an internet connection, the tools to bring historical methodology to life are within reach. The effort is real, but so is the reward: students who leave your classroom not just knowing history but knowing how to think and work like historians. **P**

Arminda Lawrence Sr. is a veteran high school history educator at Pace Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. A nationally recognized educator, she was named Georgia's History Teacher of the Year in 2023 and a James Madison Fellow in 2025.

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JOIN US IN NEW ORLEANS

The 2027 Annual Meeting at a Glance

The 140th annual meeting of the American Historical Association will be held Thursday through Sunday, January 7–10, 2027, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The online **program** will be posted on the AHA website at historians.org/program in mid-September, and members can look forward to receiving the printed program in mid-November. A meeting app will also be available for smartphones and tablets. Annual meeting sessions and events are scheduled at the New Orleans Marriott and the Sheraton New Orleans. Rooms will also be available at the JW Marriott New Orleans. The hotels are across the street from each other.

Preregistration begins in late September. The lower preregistration rates will be in effect through December 15; after that, the higher on-site rates apply. Registration will be available online from September 22 until the end of the meeting, and in person beginning at 11:00 a.m. on January 7 in Mardi Gras A–D at the New Orleans Marriott. More details can be found at historians.org/registration.

Admission to the Exhibit Hall requires a 2027 meeting registration badge.

Hotel reservations: Attendees will make hotel reservations through the AHA's housing service, Maritz. Reservations can be made online or by calling a toll-free number, beginning September 15. AHA rates are available three days before and after the meeting dates, depending on availability. See historians.org/hotels for detailed information.

The last day to make or change reservations through the housing service is December 16. After that date, rooms will be available at the AHA's convention rates on a space-available basis, and all reservations, changes, and cancellations must be made directly with the hotels. Hotel no-show policies will apply for reservations not canceled at least 72 hours before the first night's stay.

The AHA's annual **business meeting** will take place on Saturday, January 9, at 5:15 p.m. in Grand Ballroom C at the Sheraton New Orleans. All information about the business meeting, including the agenda and procedures, will be available on historians.org/business-mtg in advance of the event.

Opportunities for undergraduates: The Undergraduate Poster Sessions and the Undergraduate Lightning Rounds allow undergrads to share their research and get the valuable experience of presenting at a conference. Poster submissions are due October 15; Lightning Round presentation submissions are due November 15.

The AHA hosts an orientation for undergraduates on Thursday, January 7, and an undergraduate reception on Saturday, January 9. For more information on undergraduate events and resources, visit historians.org/annual-meeting/undergrads.

Group meetings and reunions: Societies and groups that have not already made arrangements to hold receptions or other meetings should send requests for room space as soon as possible to annualmeeting@historians.org.

ASL interpretation: The AHA offers complimentary sign-interpreting service upon request to our attendees, including for the presidential address and business meeting. Please notify the AHA of the sessions you plan to attend and register for the meeting by November 1.

Hotel and Rate Information

		SINGLE	DOUBLE	TRIPLE	QUADRUPLE
1	New Orleans Marriott (co-hdqrs) 555 Canal St.	\$195	\$215	\$235	\$255
2	Sheraton New Orleans (co-hdqrs) 500 Canal St.	\$195	\$215	\$235	\$255
3	JW Marriott New Orleans 614 Canal St.	\$207	\$227	\$247	\$267

Rates are subject to hotel occupancy tax and will be honored three days before and three days after the official meeting dates of January 7–10 based on availability. No additional destination fee will be charged. Information on booking a room at the discounted rate is available at historians.org/hotels.



Dates and Deadlines

SEPTEMBER 15	Housing opens.
SEPTEMBER 22	Preregistration opens.
SEPTEMBER 30	Deadline to submit membership dues and address changes in order to receive the program in the mail.
NOVEMBER 5	Program mailed to members.
DECEMBER 15	Last day for preregistration pricing.
DECEMBER 15	Deadline to submit registration refund requests. No refunds will be given after this date; no exceptions.
DECEMBER 16	Last day to make hotel reservations through the housing service. Subsequent reservations taken on a space-available basis at the convention rate.
JANUARY 7, 2027	Annual meeting opens at 11:00 a.m. Exhibit Hall opens January 8, 2027, at 9:00 a.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the New Orleans Marriott.

Meeting Registration

Take advantage of reduced rates by preregistering for the conference. Make sure your membership is up to date so you can enjoy member pricing at each level. Register online at historians.org/myaha.

	MEMBER		NONMEMBER	
	PREREGISTRATION	AFTER DEC. 15	PREREGISTRATION	AFTER DEC. 15
Attendee	\$282	\$328	\$424	\$498
Speaker	\$282	\$328	\$282	\$328
Student	\$132	\$152	\$186	\$219
Un-/Underemployed	\$83	\$97	\$202	\$256
Retired	\$163	\$186	\$240	\$279
K-12 Teacher	\$140	\$156	\$209	\$240
Bring Your Student discount	For members only. Add students to your registration for only \$25 each (\$35 on-site). Bring as many high school, undergraduate, and graduate students as you want for only \$25 each!			

Advance registration must be completed by midnight ET on December 15, 2026. Thereafter, on-site rates will apply. Everyone attending the meeting is expected to register. Admission to the Exhibit Hall requires a registration badge. **Special note for speakers: All US-based historians presenting on AHA sessions must be AHA members, and all participants must register.**

Advance registrants who are unable to attend the meeting may request a refund of their registration fee. Refund requests must be emailed to ltownsend@historians.org by December 15 and will incur a \$20 fee. Refunds will not be processed after that date; no exceptions.

Book a Room and Save \$50

Reserve a hotel room in the AHA block through the AHA housing service, Maritz, before registering for the meeting and receive a \$50 discount off meeting registration. (You will not receive a discount refund if you register before booking a room.)

Designing Introductory History Courses for Student Success

A publication from the American Historical Association

What is the value of an introductory college course in history?

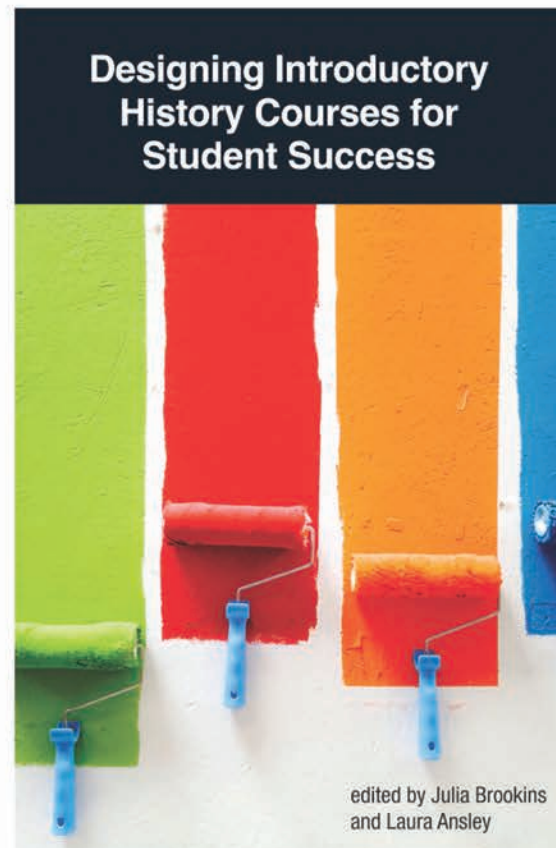
What are the most effective ways to train all incoming students in core elements of historical thinking?

How do we improve student success in these foundational courses?

The AHA's new booklet *Designing Introductory History Courses for Student Success* collects data and perspectives on what instructional faculty and other higher education decision-makers can do to put the history discipline to work for today's students. Even small, incremental changes can produce measurable improvements in student learning and success.

Available at historians.org/booklets.

AHA members receive a 30% discount on AHA booklets. Visit historians.org/booklets to learn more.



AHR EDITORIAL TEAM

NATURE'S ARCHIVE AND FAMILY ARCHIVES

In the September 2026 Issue of the American Historical Review

The September 2026 issue of the *American Historical Review* ranges widely across the archives, from Africa to Indonesia and the environment to the family.

In “Camera Time: Personal Photography and Modern Selfhood in Colonial Egypt and Beyond,” Lucie Ryzova (Czech Academy of Sciences) shows how in the early decades of the 20th century, scores of men, women, and children around the world used the camera to enact their aspirational selves. While the power relationship inherent in some photographic encounters has been amply theorized, historians have been less concerned with a deeper understanding of ordinary personal portraiture, and especially its mimetic and ludic character. Ryzova focuses on ordinary photographs commissioned or produced by middling urban Egyptians in order to make several methodological and historiographical interventions. Paying attention to ordinary photographic practices brings new insights into these debates, as it also highlights the centrality of the camera to the emergence of modern forms of selfhood.

Catherine Molineux (Vanderbilt Univ.), in “The Python God and the Empty Chair: Crafting Royal Power in the Early Modern Bight of Benin and Europe,” explores how African royal power over the slave trade shaped transatlantic and cross-cultural interactions around sovereignty in the early 18th century. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, she analyzes the rich visual and material culture archive produced by the coronation ceremony of King Hufon of Hueda. This event offers a window into how Africans and Europeans negotiated, displayed, and subsequently reinterpreted cross-cultural relationships as part of competing political projects. By tracing the evolution of the story of Hufon’s coronation in Europe over many decades, Molineux shows how authors, artists, and publishers altered the memory and thus the archival imprint of Hufon’s power, obscuring the political subservience European merchants experienced in the kingdom. Molineux argues that Hufon’s statecraft reverberated across African-European, inter-European, and inter-African relationships,

demonstrating that the deep reconstruction of actual African-European relations in West Africa is necessary for understanding both Hufon’s coronation ceremony and how African power projected through Atlantic commerce shaped European and African imperialism.

In “An Absent Mother Between Two States: Third World Internationalism and the Politics of Motherhood in Indonesia and China,” Taomo Zhou (National Univ. of Singapore) examines the centrality of motherhood to understanding the rise and decline of Third World internationalism. The article focuses on Francisca Casparina Faggidaej, a left-wing Indonesian activist in the Afro-Asian solidarity movements and a mother of seven who endured decades of forced separation from her family. Based on a close reading of her diaries, personal letters, and oral history interviews with family and friends, Zhou discusses the politics of maternal absence in Indonesia and China and explores how these two countries shaped the public and self-perceptions of nonresidential mothers through their welfare provisions and reproductive policies. Zhou argues that the fall of Third World internationalism signaled not only a missed opportunity to reconfigure global geopolitics but also a lost chance to redefine motherhood—not as the individualized enterprise of the birth mother alone but as a communal effort involving a diverse assemblage of caretakers including both kin and nonkin, men and women.

Safia Aidid (Univ. of Toronto) explores colonialism in Africa as a textual encounter in “A Revolution of Letters: Text, Sight, and Spectacle in Socialist Somalia.” Somalis, a predominantly oral people spread out across five colonial territories in the Horn of Africa, resisted Latin-based orthographies for their language. After World War II, Somalis vigorously debated the written form Somali should take. Following Somalia’s independence in 1960, the continued use of colonial languages for writing threatened the postcolonial nation-building project and its larger ambitions to unify the partitioned Somali territories into a Greater Somalia, a central objective of Pan-Somali nationalist politics. Aidid examines the history of the

The skeleton of a blue whale on the cover of the September 2026 *AHR* is among the forms of physical documentation that center “Reading Nature’s Archives,” a History Lab forum that foregrounds new approaches to the research and writing of environmental history. As a part of this forum, in “On the Uses of Whale Bodies for History,” Thomas Fleischman and Ryan Tucker Jones discuss the archival nature of whale biological artifacts that capture specific details of the whales’ individual lives and the societies in which they lived. The skeleton hangs in the Central Hall of the Natural History Museum in London.

Diego Delso/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0



Somali orthography and the making of a nationalist discourse ecology that brought together text, sight, and spectacle in revolutionary Somalia at a time when the Somali state looked beyond its borders and mobilized for war.

The History Lab includes a forum on environmental history, two History Unclassified essays, and the latest modules of the #AHRsyllabus project Authoritarianism 101: A Global History. “Reading Nature’s Archives,” a forum organized by David Biggs (Univ. of California, Riverside), brings together a team of distinguished environmental historians who each offer short essays centered on a reading of a particular object or visual form of documentation. Their “archives” range from ivory figurines, whale bones, roof tiles, porcelain earthenware, and botanical prints to a colonial-era cattle census, photographs of the sun, aerial imaging of former warscapes, and a 20-sided golden cosmic box. Together, the contributors provide a set of novel critical methods for reading these sources that are attuned to how longer histories of borrowing, theft, erasure, and resilience often shape forms of knowledge about nature.

The issue’s History Unclassified essays explore the complexities and rewards for historians in drawing on primary sources from and about their own families. In “From Here to There: Thinking with a Chinese Family Archive,” Tobie Meyer-Fong (Johns Hopkins Univ.) examines a small collection of documents, photographs, and artifacts preserved by her mother-in-law, Yueh-Kam Fong. Meyer-Fong considers how these intimate histories allowed her to write a different kind of transnational microhistory of war, revolution, and the migratory processes of isolation, engagement, and return for a Chinese American family during the second half of the 20th century. Today, she argues, “the family archive affords the opportunity to think expansively through that which is local, small, personal, and intimate and to amplify our understanding of an interconnected world.”

Family history is also at the center of Stephanie Palazzo’s (Franklin & Marshall Coll.) “Forever in Fiction: The Politics of Closure,” a reflection on her fieldwork on the closing of the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant in the wake of the most publicized civilian nuclear accident in the United States. Palazzo grew up in a Pennsylvania town near Three Mile Island. As a young girl, some years after the accident, Palazzo lost her sister. Years later, early in her fieldwork, she encountered a book at the local public library that purported to detail her sister’s illness and death. The tidy narrative the book told of grief and closure, at odds with the more ambiguous realities of her sister’s death and its aftermath, ultimately prompted Palazzo to reframe her approach to the everyday meanings of nuclear decommissioning. More broadly, she now resists what she sees as the urge to silence messy realities in prevailing narratives of historical closure.

The Lab concludes with new modules from the Authoritarianism 101: A Global History project, designed to offer teachers and students a broad historical perspective on the history of authoritarianism in all regions of the world. Each module features a single textual or visual primary source to focus on big questions about the global histories of authoritarianism and provides a brief contextual essay and teaching plan. The Authoritarianism 101 modules featured in this issue engage with histories in China, the United States, Egypt, Cuba, India, Argentina, and Korea through a variety of primary sources, including short texts, photographs, and film. All the modules in Authoritarianism 101: A Global History are free to access. They are available on the project website along with supplementary teaching materials. [P](#)

ACTIONS BY THE AHA COUNCIL

January to June 2026

Through email communications from January 12 through June 2, 2026; at teleconferences held on January 16, January 19, March 2, April 24, and May 26, 2026; and at meetings on June 6 and 7, 2026, the Council of the American Historical Association took the following actions:

- Signed on to a letter from 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 classes, and the closure of the university's Women's and Gender Studies Program, through which history courses are cross-listed.
- Appointed Megan Porter (Lenox Memorial Middle and High School) and Jennifer Sayed (Southern Methodist Univ. and Islamic School of Irving) to the AHA Working Group on K–12 Education.
- Endorsed the resolution submitted by Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) recognizing and celebrating the significance of Black history museums and cultural institutions.
- Sent a letter to Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt urging him to rescind the executive order requesting the State Regents for Higher Education eliminate tenure at most Oklahoma public universities.
- Signed on to a letter from the Alliance for Higher Education opposing the Oklahoma governor's executive order, which was sent to the State Regents.
- Sent a letter to members of the Tennessee Senate Education Committee registering serious concerns about pending legislation that would require politicized instruction on the history of communism in public K–12 schools.
- Approved the January 8, 11, 16, and 19, 2026, Council meeting minutes.
- Reappointed Kenneth Ledford (Case Western Reserve Univ.) as AHA parliamentarian for a three-year term to end January 2029.
- Appointed AHR consulting editors Danna Agmon (Virginia Tech) and Laura McEnaney (Whittier Coll.) for three-year terms to end June 2028.
- Eliminated the Council Committee on the Annual Meeting.
- Appointed Karin Wulf (John Carter Brown Library and Brown Univ.) and Paul Gardullo (National Museum of African American History and Culture) to serve as chair and co-chair, respectively, of the 2028 Program Committee.
- Eliminated the Annual Meeting Local Arrangements Committee and created two local liaison positions on the Annual Meeting Program Committee to plan sessions and tours.
- Signed on to a letter from the Alliance for Higher Education opposing the proposed changes to the federal System for Award Management.
- Determined the deadline to receive petitions for amendments for consideration on the annual ballot is January 15.
- Decided to pursue, as lead plaintiff, a legal challenge to the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel's opinion that the Presidential Records Act is unconstitutional.
- Submitted an amicus brief in support of Philadelphia's lawsuit over the Freedom and Slavery Exhibit at the President's House in Independence National Historical Park.
- Appointed Devyn Spence Benson (Univ. of Kentucky), Andrea Burns (Appalachian State Univ.), Jacob S. T. Dlamini (Princeton Univ.), Rowan Dorin (Stanford Univ.), and Rochona Majumdar (Univ. of Chicago) to three-year terms on the AHR Board of Editors beginning July 1, 2026.
- Reappointed Melani McAlister (George Washington Univ.), Kennetta Hammond Perry (Northwestern Univ.), Bianca Premo (Florida International Univ.), and Sherene Seikaly (Univ. of California, Santa Barbara) to one-year terms on the AHR Board of Editors beginning July 1, 2026.

- Appointed Thomas Barton (Univ. of San Diego), Carolyn Biltoft (Geneva Graduate Inst.), Stacy D. Fahrenthold (Univ. of California, Davis), Arvind Elangovan (Wright State Univ.), and Brian Luskey (West Virginia Univ.) to three-year terms as *AHR* associate review editors beginning July 1, 2026.
- Reappointed Theodora Dragostinova (Ohio State Univ.) to a one-year term as an *AHR* associate review editor beginning July 1, 2026.
- Approved a statement expressing concern about the Florida FACT US History course framework, which seeks to offer a state-endorsed alternative to AP US history through which high school students can earn college credit before enrolling in higher education.
- Approved the March 2, April 24, and May 26, 2026, Council meeting minutes.
- Approved the interim meeting minutes and ratified Council votes taken from January 12 to June 2, 2026.
- Approved nominations for the 2026 Awards for Scholarly Distinction and Tikkun Olam Prize, to be announced in October.
- Approved changes to the AHA's affiliated societies program and policy to regularize the program, clarify ambiguous language, and encourage societies to engage with the AHA and with one another.
- Established a Governance Committee to review the Association's Constitution and Bylaws, recommend any needed revisions to Council for approval, and prepare the pro and con report for any amendments in advance of a full membership vote.
- Approved the FY 2027 budget and membership dues rates. **P**

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COMPILED BY LIZ TOWNSEND

2026 AHA ELECTION RESULTS

Anthony J. Steinhoff (Univ. du Québec à Montréal), chair of the Nominating Committee, announces the following results of the 2026 balloting for officers and committee members of the American Historical Association. The committee wishes to thank all candidates who stood for election; their willingness to serve is much appreciated.

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Tobie S. Meyer-Fong, Johns Hopkins University

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Lara Putnam, University of Pittsburgh

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Samantha Futrell, William & Mary Strategic Cultural Partnerships and Virginia Council for the Social Studies

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Nominating Committee

Slot 1: Brett Rushforth, Huntington Library

Slot 2: Jennifer L. Foray, Indiana University

Slot 3: Baki Tezcan, University of California, Davis 

Liz Townsend is manager, data administration and integrity, at the AHA and the staff member for the Nominating Committee.

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July 1, 2025–June 30, 2026

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Gabor S. Boritt

1940–2026

Historian of the
American Civil War

Gabor S. Boritt, the Robert C. Fluhrer Professor of Civil War Studies emeritus at Gettysburg College, founding director of the Civil War Institute, co-founder of the Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize, and winner of the National Humanities Medal, died on February 2, 2026. He was 86.

Born Róth-Szapannos Gábor in Budapest, he was four years old when the Nazis invaded Hungary, which forced his family into hiding. Gabor's maternal grandparents boarded a train bound for Auschwitz, where they were executed. In Hungary, Nazi defeat yielded to Soviet occupation and, later, communist tyranny. In 1956, Gabor joined the Hungarian Revolution. Weeks later, Russian tanks trundled into Budapest to suppress the rebellion. Gabor sought refuge in the United States, taking advantage of Operation Safe Haven, a program that supplied sanctuary to perhaps 30,000 Hungarian refugees.

Gabor arrived in New York City, where Horace Greeley's advice to "go west, young man" still resounded a century after it was written. A single suitcase in hand, Gabor followed that counsel out to Yankton, South Dakota. Inspired to study Lincoln after devouring a pamphlet of his speeches, Gabor graduated with his BA from Yankton College in 1962, before earning an MA at the University of South Dakota in 1963 and a PhD in history from Boston University in 1968.

Gabor wrote in many registers about the Civil War era, but at heart he was a prose poet who bore his soul on every page. In 1978, he published *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream*, a revision of his doctoral dissertation; the book remains the finest treatment of Lincoln's economic thought. With Harold Holzer and Mark E. Neely Jr., he co-wrote a trio of books on popular lithography: *The Lincoln Image* (1984), *Changing the Lincoln Image* (1985), and *The Confederate Image: Prints of the Lost Cause* (1987). He edited a dozen books featuring now canonical essays, including *Lincoln, the War President* (1992), *Why the Confederacy Lost* (1993), and *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows* (1997). Gabor's final book, *The Gettysburg Gospel: The Lincoln Speech That Nobody Knows* (2006), reanimated the

Gettysburg Address by recovering its immediate context: the aftermath of the Civil War's bloodiest battle.

Gabor was a public historian by instinct, understanding the capacity of Civil War history to reach many audiences. He arrived at Gettysburg College in 1981 and two years later, decades before such centers became fixtures on many campuses, founded the Civil War Institute. Gabor harnessed the power of place and good storytelling to build a signature annual event in late June—a sprawling conference that brings together seasoned and emerging scholars, high school students, and an enthusiastic public for lectures, panels, film screenings, and battlefield tours. Each session for more than 30 years began with Gabor's recitation of a self-authored poem, celebrating how "old friends" and "new ones" gathered each year, just as reliably as fireflies glowed and orange tiger lilies "proclaim[ed] their eternal message."

The Civil War Institute was but one piece of Gabor's mission to make history accessible. In 1990, to encourage new scholarship aimed at a "broad literate public," he co-founded (with philanthropists Richard Gilder and Lewis Lehrman) the annual Lincoln Prize, which awards \$50,000 to the best work on Lincoln or the Civil War era. His legendary battlefield tours introduced Gettysburg to the likes of Colin Powell and Sandra Day O'Connor. In his later years, he released an audio battlefield auto tour as a companion to a documentary produced by his son, filmmaker Jake Boritt.

Until his final days, Gabor lived on a historic Gettysburg farm (appropriated during the battle as a Confederate hospital) that he lovingly restored and frequently opened to students and colleagues. No visit to "Farm by the Ford" was complete without Gabor showing off buckets brimming with Civil War bullets he had plowed up on the property.

Gabor leaves behind his wife of 57 years, Liz; three sons, Beowulf, Jake, and Dan; five grandchildren; and generations of students inspired by his remarkable life and exacting lessons. We will miss his beaming smile; the endless trove of aphorisms, each delivered in a thick Hungarian accent; and the quiet dignity of the refugee, immigrant, scholar, teacher, and mentor we were so fortunate to call our friend.

Brian Matthew Jordan
Sam Houston State University

Photo: Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman
Library, Gettysburg College



Travis Beal Jacobs

1936–2025

Historian of the United States; AHA Life Member

Travis Beal Jacobs, Fletcher D. Proctor Professor emeritus of American History at Middlebury College, died on September 16, 2025.

Travis was born in New York City on April 22, 1936, the son of Albert C. and Loretta Beal Jacobs. His father's career as a law professor took the family from Alexandria, Virginia, to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to New York City, where at Columbia University Albert was professor of law, then provost under President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Albert later became the chancellor of the University of Denver and then president of Trinity College, Hartford. Travis attended Deerfield Academy and Princeton University, graduating in 1958. Initially, he planned to attend Columbia Law School, but at the last minute, he decided to pursue a PhD in American history at Columbia under William E. Leuchtenburg. In 1965, he joined the faculty at Middlebury College.

Travis became a legendary figure at Middlebury, teaching thousands of undergraduates over 43 years, especially in his popular two-semester lecture course on 20th-century US history. He brought the past to life through his lively lectures and adept use of audio recordings and film clips (well before the advent of PowerPoint presentations). He had high expectations of his students, which helped ensure that they came to his seminars well prepared and ready to engage with the assigned materials. He was a vigorous proponent of students doing original research and was an advocate of a required senior thesis for all history majors. He was a meticulous editor of student writing, and he helped transform tentative writers into confident crafters of essays and longer papers. I was one of those Middlebury undergraduates whose love for the study of history grew because of Travis's tutelage.

Travis was also an exemplary departmental chair. During his 17 years as chair, he helped make the history department one of the most respected and largest on campus. He retired from the Middlebury faculty in 2008.

Throughout his career, he was an active scholar with wide-ranging interests. With Beatrice Berle, he co-edited *Navigating the Rapids, 1918–1971* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), the diaries of Adolf A. Berle, one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's brain trusters. Next came *America and the Winter War, 1939–1940* (Garland, 1981), based on his dissertation, an analysis of the Roosevelt administration's response to the Russo-Finnish War. Inspired by his father's experiences, he wrote *Eisenhower at Columbia* (Transaction Publishers, 2001), an examination of Eisenhower's first civilian leadership post after his military career. He also edited the *Middlebury College General Catalogue: Bicentennial Edition* (2000), a who's who of the college. In his last years, he was at work on a study of Robert T. Stafford, a former governor, US congressman, and US senator from Vermont.

Travis received several Earhart Foundation Fellowships, taught in Tunis on a Fulbright fellowship, served on the *Presidential Studies Quarterly* editorial board, and attended many Salzburg Seminars in American Studies. A tireless advocate for public history, he served as the president of the Henry Sheldon Museum of Middlebury during a capital campaign that led to the creation of the Paris Fletcher Community Center. He was a strong supporter of its research center, with its valuable Vermont history collections, which he enthusiastically encouraged Middlebury undergraduates to mine for their research projects. He also skillfully curated the immensely successful Charles S. Grant Memorial Lectureship in American History, which starting in 1966 brought dozens of the leading interpreters of the American past to Middlebury for public lectures.

Travis was known for his friendly demeanor and good cheer; his dedication to Middlebury College and higher education (as well as his healthy skepticism about administrative decision-making); his mentorship of younger colleagues in the history department; his support of former students as they made their way through life; his enjoyment of Chappaquiddick Island of Edgartown, Massachusetts, and Chazy Lake in the Adirondacks; and his love for his family, especially his two sons, T. Beal Jr. and Holmes, and his three grandchildren.

James R. Ralph Jr.
Middlebury College

Photo courtesy Jacobs family



R. Emmet Kennedy Jr.

1941–2026

Historian of Europe

Robert Emmet Kennedy Jr., professor emeritus of modern European history at George Washington University (GWU), passed away on January 24, 2026, after a battle with Parkinson's disease spanning close to two decades.

Kennedy was born on December 19, 1941, and received his BA from Johns Hopkins University (1963), his MA at Boston College (1965), and his PhD from Brandeis University (1973). After teaching at Kent State University (1968–69) and the Université de Toulouse II–Le Mirail (1969–73), Kennedy accepted a position at GWU, where he enjoyed a distinguished career until his retirement in 2011.

Kennedy was a dedicated and meticulous researcher who focused chiefly on the cultural and intellectual history of the French Revolution. His first monograph, *A Philosophe in the Age of Revolution: Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of "Ideology"* (American Philosophical Society, 1978), remains among the most often cited and significant studies of Destutt de Tracy and the revolutionary school of *Idéologues*.

Hot off the presses in the bicentennial year of the French Revolution's outbreak, Kennedy's second monograph, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (Yale Univ. Press, 1989), remains in many ways Kennedy's crowning achievement. Written in stirring but approachable prose, the work was nominated for four national book prizes. Anchored in archival research in France, Britain, and the United States, *Cultural History* also synthesized the earliest revisionist historiography of French revolutionary origins, which generally privileged developments in cultural history and political culture over socioeconomic determinism. Ranging broadly across theater, opera, salon culture, architecture, practices of Enlightenment sociability, and religion, Kennedy approached the revolution by situating it in the context of longer-term structures, *mentalités*, and institutions, as well as transformations associated with the Enlightenment. In the book's third part, he focused on 1789–99—a period of wide-ranging “disruption, if not destruction, of [Old Regime institutions],” but also creative

“regeneration.” In the 1790s, he argued, revolutionaries attempted to culturally instantiate the value (if not always the practice) of popular sovereignty by promoting a “civil religion” based on the “apotheosis” of humanity, and a species of “secular messianism” in an “ever-future revolution” to come.

Throughout his career, Kennedy remained an active scholar. With Marie-Laurence Netter, James P. McGregor, and Mark V. Olsen, he co-authored *Theater, Opera, and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris: Analysis and Repertory* (Greenwood Press, 1996). In 2006, he published a provocative book, *Secularism and Its Opponents from Augustine to Solzhenitsyn* (Palgrave Macmillan). His last book, *Abbé Sicard's Deaf Education: Empowering the Mute, 1785–1820* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) is among his very best. Based on an impressive array of archival work in Paris and departmental archives, Kennedy's book paints a multifaceted portrait of Abbé Roch-Ambroise Cucurron Sicard, who survived the September Massacres to become a pioneer of deaf education and whose “codification of grammatical signs” and “dictionary of pantomimic gestures,” Kennedy argues, proved influential on sign language systems not just in France but in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia.

Beyond his scholarship, Kennedy was a dedicated teacher of both undergraduate and graduate students, and for his pedagogy, he won the George Washington University Trachtenberg Prize for Teaching in 1997. To his great credit, Emmet understood that good teaching is best anchored in the art of attentive and active listening. His graduate seminars turned on wide-ranging and thought-provoking discussions, which Emmet deftly facilitated with just a few judiciously chosen questions or remarks. He approached his role as dissertation director with an open mind, trusting his graduate students and giving them space to cultivate their own distinctive interpretations. Emmet was a tireless advisor and, in later years, an erudite colleague and a good friend. His quiet generosity, good humor, and pervasive kindness will be greatly missed.

He is survived by his wife Jane McMahon Kennedy and his children: Mara Pufko (George), Gaelle Frazer, and Daniel Kennedy (Naomi) and Brother Maximus Marie Kennedy. He was predeceased by his son Peter. He is also survived by his grandchildren: Christopher and Kate Pufko; Jason, Natalia, and Alison Frazer; and Adrian Kennedy.

Jeffrey D. Burson
Georgia Southern University

Photo courtesy Kennedy family



Sung Bok Kim

1932–2026

Historian of Early America

Sung Bok Kim, noted historian of early America and distinguished professor emeritus at the University at Albany, State University of New York, passed away on February 23, 2026, at his home in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts.

Born and raised in South Korea, Kim developed in childhood an interest in early American history that was later magnified by his contact with Americans during his service in the Republic of Korea Army near the end of that peninsular conflict. As he told the story, he lied about his age to enlist as a means to establish connections he hoped would assist him in his quest to study in the United States. Following his army discharge, he enrolled at Kyungpook National University, where he undertook the first translation of *The Federalist Papers* into Korean, which he published in 1959. Upon graduating, he emigrated in 1960 to pursue an MA at the University of Wisconsin before proceeding to doctoral work at Michigan State University, earning his PhD in 1966.

During a postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of Early American History and Culture (today's Omohundro Institute), Kim expanded his dissertation on New York's Van Cortlandt family to include other prominent 18th-century Hudson Valley grandees, specifically the Livingstons, the Van Rensselaers, and the Philipses. He then accepted a position as assistant professor at the University of Illinois in 1971. Enamored as he was with the Hudson Valley region, when a position at the University at Albany opened in 1973, he leapt at it and made his career there. His first book, *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664–1775* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1978), made his reputation as the authority on the region's sociopolitical landscape and remains a touchstone for anyone exploring that field. Challenging the prevailing scholarship characterizing the valley's "great lords" as ruthlessly exploitative and the tenants as nearly powerless, Kim argued that the tenant farmers collectively exerted considerable influence that, when exploited by expansionist-minded Massachusetts politicians, resulted in violent "disturbances" in the 1750s that gained the tenants some

important concessions that radiated outward to empower tenant farmers elsewhere in the American colonies.

In 1978, Kim's essay "The American Revolution and the Modern World" in *Legacies of the American Revolution* (edited by Larry R. Gerlach, James A. Dolph, and Michael L. Nicholls) argued convincingly that the ideological origins of the French Revolution – and by extension all subsequent revolutionary movements – lay in the American revolutionaries' ideology. In "Impact of Class Relations and Warfare in the American Revolution: The New York Experience" (*Journal of American History*, 1982), he argued that the agrarian disturbances of the 1750s influenced the tenant farmers of the 1770s to embrace Whig ideology, thus turning many of their landlords into reluctant revolutionaries. Reflecting on his memory of the impact of the Korean War on the people living in the most active war zones, he devoted attention to the effects of the War for Independence on the people of Westchester County, New York, published as "The Limits of Politicization in the American Revolution: The Experience of Westchester County, New York" (*Journal of American History*, 1993), in which he argued that the people there became progressively depoliticized by the concussions of the war.

During his time at UAlbany, Kim served as department chair and later as dean of undergraduate studies before returning to full-time teaching as Evan Revere Collins Fellow and Distinguished Service Professor of History. Along the way, he built a collaborative relationship between UAlbany and Seoul National University to foster the study of American history in Korea. His students remember him as a stern, demanding, yet good-humored fatherly figure who expected the best from his mentees and always knew exactly how to cultivate excellence.

Kim spent his retirement with his family and enjoying the company of his pugs and Bouvier des Flandres dogs, as well as working on a comprehensive history of the American Revolution. He is survived by his wife Leda, daughter Briana, and twin sons Cortland and Blakeley. His ancillary study of Iroquoian Indian history and cultures made him a fervent fan of lacrosse, which he watched his sons play with enthusiasm. Remembrances may be made in his memory to the University at Albany's lacrosse program.

John Howard Smith
East Texas A&M University

Photo courtesy University at Albany



Carl E. Prince

1934–2026

Historian of the
United States

Carl E. Prince, professor of history emeritus at New York University (NYU), died peacefully at age 91 at his home in Hoboken, New Jersey, on February 6, 2026.

Prince was born in Newark on December 8, 1934, the son of Phillip G. and Ann (Silver) Prince. His father was a noted communist labor organizer. His childhood neighborhood was home to numerous Holocaust survivors, and the Nazis had murdered much of Prince's extended family in Europe. Overcoming dyslexia, Prince graduated from Newark's Weequahic High School in 1953. Guided by the diplomatic historian Henry Blumenthal, he earned a BA with honors from Rutgers University–Newark in 1956, an MA from Rutgers in 1957, and a PhD in 1963 under the mentorship of Richard McCormick Sr.

Carl's first publication came when his MA thesis, "Middlebrook: The American Eagle's Nest," a study of General George Washington's 1777–78 encampment, was published by the Somerset Press in 1958. His dissertation became the influential *New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans: The Genesis of an Early Party Machine* (Univ. of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1967). His subsequent books were *The Federalists and the Origins of the US Civil Service* (New York Univ. Press, 1977); with Mollie Keller, *The US Customs Service: A Bicentennial History* (Dept. of the Treasury, 1989), covering from the department's origins through the Prohibition era and the war on drugs; and *Brooklyn's Dodgers: The Bums, the Borough, and the Best of Baseball, 1947–1957* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1996). Rather than focus on the team's wins and losses, Prince wrote eloquently about its significance to Brooklyn, with evocative chapters on the women of the Dodgers, the saga of Jackie Robinson, and owner Walter O'Malley's betrayal in moving the team to Los Angeles. Writing was so central to Carl's identity that he was working on a new project the night before he died.

Carl was also involved in important documentary editing projects. With Barbara Oberg, he edited a 51-reel microfilm collection of the papers of Albert Gallatin, an early secretary of the treasury and founder of NYU, which was released in 1970.

Carl next undertook an edition of the Revolutionary War papers of William Livingston, New Jersey's first patriot governor. Presented in a five-volume book set and a 25-reel microfilm format, the papers recovered a neglected founder. Carl secured sizable grants from the American Revolution Bicentennial Association, the New Jersey Historical Commission, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, funds that supported employment for Carl's graduate students for the next 15 years. Carl was not deferential to the famed Livingston family. Doctoral candidate Larry Spinelli recalled when a Livingston family matriarch visited NYU and informed Carl that she was descended from passengers on the *Mayflower*. Carl replied that his ancestors arrived from Russia in a cattle boat.

Prince taught at Fairleigh Dickinson and Seton Hall Universities before moving to New York University in 1967, becoming the first Jewish faculty member in the department's history. His undergraduate courses on early national and Jacksonian American history and, later, on baseball were highly popular. A skilled bureaucratic battler, Carl served as history department chair from 1978 to 1986. He acquired new departmental offices and established MA programs in archives, historical editing, and historical society management (1977) and public history (1983). He energized the department to focus on women's history. Prince retired in 2001, though he continued to teach his baseball course for several years. His book collection is now housed at the New Jersey Historical Society.

Prince mentored over 20 doctoral students, dispensing tough, sympathetic criticism via extensive notes on numerous drafts. His personal advice was pithy. When this writer fulminated over a dismissive rejection letter, Carl interrupted, asking, "Isn't that a bankrupt attitude?" He advised one early career professor: "Spend half your time on your work, the other half on cultivating colleagues." At a luncheon with his doctoral students before his retirement, he announced that he loved us equally and that we were all high maintenance.

Family was central to Carl Prince's life. He is survived by his daughter Elizabeth Prince, son Jonathan Prince, and their families. Always generous, Carl often helped to move his children's families cross-country and spent countless hours with his grandchildren. His family, students, and friends across the historical discipline mourn Carl Prince.

Graham Russell Gao Hodges
Colgate University

Photo courtesy Prince family



Alfred J. Rieber

1931–2025

Historian of Russia
and the Soviet Union;
AHA 50-Year Member

Alfred J. Rieber, who died on September 9, 2025, lived a long life of scholarly exploration and achievement that spanned the better part of the turbulent 20th century and its increasingly dramatic aftermath.

Born at the height of the Great Depression, he enrolled in Columbia University's doctoral program in history in 1954—a year after Stalin's death—and participated in the first American-Soviet academic exchange. From the late 1950s, Rieber's research trips to the USSR and post-Soviet Russia brought him in touch with leading figures of Russian cultural and artistic life. These trips also sustained his lifelong interest in Russian and Soviet foreign policy, the subject that he first addressed in *Stalin and the French Communist Party* (Columbia Univ. Press, 1962), based on the dissertation he completed in 1959.

Rieber's engagement with the persistent factors of Russian foreign policy continued with his extended introduction to *The Politics of Autocracy: Letters of Alexander II to Prince A. I. Bariatinskii, 1857–1864* (De Gruyter, 1966) and culminated in his two-volume magnum opus *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014) and *Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015). Influenced by Owen Lattimore's *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (American Geographical Society, 1940), Rieber's preoccupation with the Russian and Soviet borderlands was also shaped by insights from the dynamic and vibrant work in social history during the 1960s and the 1970s. Apart from his book *Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982) and his foundational essay on Russia as “the sedimentary society” (*Russian History*, 1989), Rieber explored the social roots of (foreign) political developments in pioneering studies of different interest groups in mid-19th-century Russia, which were collected in *The Imperial Russian Project: Autocratic Politics, Economic Development, and Social Fragmentation* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 2017).

Rieber's dedicated scholarship was matched by an equally long and distinguished teaching career. He spent nearly three

decades at the University of Pennsylvania, serving as the head of its history department in 1967–72 and 1983–88. In 1995, he headed the history department at the Central European University (originally in Budapest, Hungary, and later moved to Vienna, Austria). At an age when many of his colleagues would retire, Rieber used his inexhaustible energy to help establish the CEU doctoral program in history and introduce eastern European graduate students to the fundamentals of the historian's craft. His memorable lectures on Jules Michelet, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Fernand Braudel combined academic rigor with the vividness of a lifelong lover of theater. In his modern historiography course, Rieber emerged as a living embodiment of the historiographic tradition and a proof that US historians are disciples of Leopold von Ranke, several times removed.

Some time ago, I presented a paper on a panel with a senior Canadian historian and was surprised to find out that we were both Alfred Rieber's doctoral students, even though my co-panelist defended his dissertation well before I was born—illustrating the special place that Rieber had in the study of imperial and Soviet Russia. In his long scholarly journey, he demonstrated a remarkable ability to cross cultural barriers while treating cultural differences in a delicate and unprejudiced way. A grandson of an immigrant from Wilhelmine Germany, he was at the same time unmistakably American—walking down the streets of Budapest in a straw fedora—and yet his contagious enthusiasm and encyclopedic knowledge helped me and other natives of eastern Europe discover the history of our region.

Above all, Alfred Rieber was uniquely capable of becoming a true friend of his numerous students well before our doctoral defenses made us comfortable to call him by his first name. For this and many other reasons, he will be long and fondly remembered by his disciples. Those who never met Rieber or engaged with his academic work can still discover his remarkable personality by reading one of his four historical novels. Published under the pen name G. K. George and featuring protagonist Inspector Vasiliev, these novels lead the reader into the complex world of tsarist policemen, aristocratic plotters, and revolutionaries of late imperial Russia, and offer a rare combination of captivating storytelling and the expertise of a master historian.

Victor Taki
Concordia University of Edmonton

Photo courtesy Marsha Siefert

ROBERT ANTONY

ROCK FIGHTS

On a winter morning in 1870, as the Lunar New Year approached, the quiet fields outside a Panyu village erupted into chaos. What began as boys casually tossing stones swelled into a mass spectacle, with hundreds of youths surging across open ground, hurling rocks and shouting at one another while spectators roared with delight. A local gazetteer complained that these annual bouts “inevitably degenerated into bloody affrays,” where boys ignored serious injuries for fear of being mocked as milksops. Officials condemned the practice as a “barbarous custom,” but for many villagers of the Canton Delta, these ritualized rock fights were not senseless but essential.

Although rock fighting once existed across China, the Canton Delta preserved the custom well into the 20th century. Because written materials are sparse—scattered gazetteer entries, newspaper notes, and the occasional missionary account—oral history is an indispensable source for historians. During my fieldwork in Panyu County in 2002 and 2010, elderly villagers recalled stories they heard from their elders about rock fights, offering rare glimpses into an ancient tradition whose living memory has nearly vanished.

Rock fighting has deep roots in East Asian folk culture. In ancient China, *jirang* contests began as hunting and martial training games before evolving into children’s stone-throwing battles by the 18th century. Korea’s *seokjeon* and Japan’s *injiuchi* shared similar origins, blending martial practice with seasonal rites meant to ensure agricultural fertility. These battles clustered around Lunar New Year festivals seeking abundant harvests and protection from pestilence.

The 20th-century rock fights in the Canton Delta fit squarely within this ritual world. Held at the start of spring just as the agricultural year began, they served as rites of renewal. Villagers believed that without bloodshed, misfortune—poor harvests, typhoons, illnesses—would follow. As one villager told me, the newly awakened earth needed to be “fed.” The blood of adolescent boys, charged with potent *yang* energy, was considered

especially efficacious. Rock fights thus functioned as fertility rites in which blood symbolically impregnated the soil with life.

The Cantonese version of these rites had a distinctive social character. They were working-class affairs rooted in the rough culture of the delta’s laboring poor. According to eyewitnesses, fights took place in the “village wilds”—neutral spaces on the outskirts of settlements. Participants were overwhelmingly adolescent boys from marginalized communities: tenant farmers, boat dwellers, and residents of subordinate satellite villages. Locally called *dazai*, “pugnacious youths,” many later became guardsmen, bandits, and pirates who used rock throwing in close-range combat and naval warfare. For these boys, rock fighting was both training and a rite of passage, a way to prove toughness, earn respect, and assert masculine identity in a world offering few other avenues for status.

The fights were chaotic, ruleless, and intentionally bloody. Eyewitnesses described hundreds of fighters armed with stones, sticks, and makeshift shields, cheered on by crowds of villagers. Women and teenage girls tended the wounded, supplied rocks, and sold snacks to spectators. The atmosphere was carnivalesque: brawling, boasting, gambling, drinking, and the mingling of the sexes, all of which scandalized officials and literati, who viewed such gatherings as disorderly and morally dangerous.

Rock fights reveal a world where violence was normalized, meaningful, and socially productive. For the laboring poor, toughness was cultural capital. In marginalized communities where survival demanded physical strength, violence offered dignity, status, and a sense of belonging. What elites dismissed as barbarism was, for villagers, a ritual of renewal, a test of manhood, and a celebration of communal vitality—an annual bloodletting that bound the community to the rhythms of the agricultural year and to one another. **P**

Robert Antony retired as distinguished professor at Guangzhou University in 2019 and now lives in New Jersey.



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Ansel Adams Photographs of Japanese-American Internment at Manzanar collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, public domain



Courtesy Netflix



National Archives and Records Administration / NAID 295136787

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