Hello from Van Dyck Hall!

As I write this, the trees on the Voorhees Mall are starting to flower, giving us the sign that spring is here once again. Spring is a time of celebration in the History department, as we prepare to graduate a new class of undergraduate majors and minors and to recognize the PhD and MA students who completed their degrees in the past year. The calendar is crowded with joyful events, including the annual Phi Alpha Theta initiation ceremony, the Susman conference, the undergraduate Honors conference and commencement. This spring, we are also celebrating the achievements of faculty members retiring at the end of June: Carolyn Brown, Stephen Reinert and Deborah Gray White. And we celebrate the inaugural volume of *Old Queens*, a new online historical journal produced entirely by Rutgers undergraduate History majors.

June: Carolyn Brown, Stephen Reinert and Deborah Gray White. And we celebrate the inaugural volume of *Old Queens*, a new online historical journal produced entirely by Rutgers undergraduate History majors.

Inside the History office, we started the semester by welcoming two new staff members, graduate administrator Kate Rizzi and business specialist Jessie Chan. Now, as the semester nears its end, anticipation is in the air as faculty and graduate students sketch out plans for summer adventures in the archives or plot an escape to their preferred writing location. It hasn’t always been an easy year; we’ve faced budget crises at Rutgers and turmoil in the world. But we’ll nonetheless keep on at it, writing history that matters.

-- Melissa Feinberg
Professor of History
and
Chair of the History Department
FACULTY NEW BOOKS

SAMANTHA KELLY,
TRANSLATING FAITH: ETHIOPIAN PILGRIMS IN RENAISSANCE ROME. HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024

MATT MATSUEDA,
GENEALOGIES, GENOMES, AND HISTORIES IN THE PACIFIC: GENETIC DRIFT. PALKRAVE PRESS, 2023
After 29 years, Dawn Ruskai, the heart and soul of the History Department's graduate program, retired in August 2023. Dawn looks forward to new adventures in the next chapter of her life in sunny Florida.

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From left to right: Fabian Paredes, Michaela Forbes, Samantha Braff; Dr. O’Brassill-Kulfan with Harriet Tubman; Rutgers History Alumni Dave Trabilsy (RU 1970) and Michael C. Barr (RU 1969)

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From left to right: Dr. Kenny Linden with Harriet Tubman; Jeongeun Park plays history trivia with Kristin O’Brassill-Kulfan; History major Jackson Sroka (RU ’26) poses with Napoleon Bonaparte
Meet Kate Rizzi

Sarah Coffman: Tell us about your educational and career background.

Kate Rizzi: I was born and raised in New Jersey, and I'm a product of the public education system. As a high schooler, I was a teenage journalist and wrote for my high school paper and wrote as a stringer for the Star Ledger and for my town paper. At the same time, I also developed my love of history. I always had wonderful history teachers.

For college, I initially went to Skidmore College. I wasn't planning to be a history major. But one day my history professor (a newly-minted History Ph.D.) pulled me aside and said, “You know, you got 100 percent on the midterm. What are you thinking about doing for your major? Are you considering history?” It was the first time I ever really thought about history as a major, and after that, the deal was sealed. I transferred to Rutgers College, majoring in history, minoring in political science, and graduated in 2002. So, I’m a product of the History Department’s undergraduate program, and it was incredibly rigorous—a wonderful education. My Henry Rutgers Thesis advisor was Professor John Chambers, who took me on as an advisee even though he was on sabbatical that year.

I’ve basically had three parts to my career. The throughline for all of them is public education. For part one of my career, I was a high school social studies teacher at North Plainfield High School. During that time, I got my Master’s in Educational Leadership. As I learned about systems and pedagogy and curriculum, I realized I really liked that administrative component to educational leadership. Nobody dreams of becoming an administrator when they’re a child. But as you go through your career, you realize what you’re good at and what you’re best suited for. That whole part of my initial journey and my career has been really foundational.

Then, part two of my career was the Rutgers Oral History Archives. I have two children; they’re 16 and 12. When they were small, I was a full-time parent, and I worked part time at the Rutgers Oral History Archives. Then, in 2018, I had the opportunity to work full time, and I became the assistant director at ROHA, from 2018 up until the end of 2023 and into early 2024, when I took on this current job, which is part three of my career, being the administrator of the graduate program.
Sarah: Tell us your role at the Rutgers Oral History Archives and some of the projects you facilitated or worked on. What was your proudest accomplishment at ROHA?

Kate: The most formative thing about my undergrad experience in the History Department was finding a home at the Rutgers Oral History Archives. I started at ROHA as a public history intern and then I stayed on as a part-time student worker at ROHA. As an undergrad at ROHA, I got the opportunity to interview my grandfather, a lifelong New Jerseyan, and a World War II veteran. His interview is archived at the Rutgers Oral History Archive. For my proudest accomplishment, there's a New Jersey PBS program called *Here’s the Story*. The executive producer is Steve Rogers, and he recently did a feature on the Rutgers Oral History Archives. I was interviewed, and twenty plus years later, it was really great to talk about my grandfather, the power of oral history in history in general, but also in family history.

When I was assistant director, I conducted interviews, taught undergraduate and graduate students how to interview and co-interviewed with them, and edited transcripts. I designed the website and I developed the Rutgers Oral History Archives Podcast. Then, I worked on archival aspects, which are the unglorious part of oral history: metadata compilation. I did a lot of programming in public history, working with partnering projects on their oral history projects, planning events, and social media outreach. The most important projects to me were helping to develop the women’s history section, so interviewing women alums and faculty members of Rutgers. I conducted interviews and developed transcripts of the first class of women at Rutgers College who graduated in 1976. I interviewed women involved in activism, politics and policy, and women in the military.

At ROHA, I particularly enjoyed working with the graduate student researchers who were working on *Scarlet and Black* Volume III. Working on the the Latino/a New Jersey History Project, which was started by Lilia Fernandez, was also a highlight of my work at ROHA. Professor Fernandez worked with students to interview Latinx individuals in New Jersey and Rutgers communities. I helped with the transcript production, metadata, the archiving, and the making those transcripts available on the ROHA website. Even though Lilia has left Rutgers, that project still continues with Kathy Lopez. Project wise, those are the highlights of my time at ROHA.

Sarah: How do you feel your experiences at ROHA prepared you for this role in the department?

KR: Working at ROHA, I got to work in the world of history while also honing my administrative skills, so that's incredibly valuable to what I do now. ROHA has two full-time staff people, so when you work at a two-person center that serves the History Department, the School of Arts and Sciences, the alumni community, and the world of public history, you have to wear many hats. I learned to be agile, and what I mean by that is I had a huge workload. When I would be doing something, I would think, “Is this the most efficient way to do this? How can I do it better? What systems can I use to do it better?” I was constantly learning and trying to improve and never doing something the same way twice, and I think the ability to be agile will serve me well in my new role.

Photo above: Kate Rizzi at the ROHA display at the 50th anniversary of Livingston College in 2019.
Sarah: What are you enjoying most about your new position in the History Department?

Kate: The people are the essence of the department, and they're all really great. The best thing is meeting graduate students. Judith Surkis is absolutely amazing. She has taught me to use the word fantastic, and she is truly fantastic. Then, the history faculty and staff have all been amazing in helping me get oriented.

Candace, Marilyn, Kenny, and Jessie help me all the time, and they're always there to answer questions.

Sarah: Do you have any particular hopes or goals for the department during your tenure?

Kate: My hope is to connect students with opportunities and resources to help them best develop as academics. With the graduate program being number one in African American history and in women's history, I want to help the program sustain that level of excellence, particularly amidst the challenges in this post-pandemic, politically-divided, humanities-challenged, fiscally-constrained world of higher ed.

Down to a micro level, in terms of public history and oral history, I'd like to help students develop their toolkits in oral history and in public history and public humanities, since that's something that I've done before. I would really like to continue creating pathways in the department to make that a department-wide effort.

Learn more about

The Rutgers Oral History Archives
ROHA

1,292 life course oral history interviews
32,000 pages of fully text-searchable transcripts
Content is free of charge for educational purposes
1 Spring Street, 4th floor
New Brunswick, NJ
848-932-0454
Director:
Shaun Illingworth, MLIS
Click link to website
Meet Jessie Chan
Business Specialist

The History Department is delighted to welcome Jessie Chan to the History Department as our new Business Specialist. Jessie joined our department in December 2023.

Jessie has worked for Rutgers for 10 years and most recently worked at the Honors College.

History faculty, undergraduate students, parents, and staff enjoy the senior speeches.

From left to right: Leyla Kaja ('24), Johan Mathew, Jennifer Mittelstadt, Matthew McCormick ('24), Amy Smith ('24) Brandon Popescu ('25), Lou Masur, Paul Hanebrink, and front center right Bella Ruiter ('24)
Anthony di Battista,  
Director of the Rutgers High School Teachers Institute

2023-2024  
SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Leslie Alexander
"Antebellum Black Political and Intellectual Thought"

Paola Tartakoff
"Muslims, Christians, and Jews: Interactions Past and Present"

Chie Ikeya
"Gender, Sexuality, and Colonialisms"

Anthony di Battista
"The World of Henry VIII: Understanding the Tudors"

Nicole Burrowes
"Freedom Summer"

David Foglesong
"Did the Cold War End? The United States and Russia since the 1980s"

Jennifer Mittelstadt
"New Histories of the American Soldier during WWII"

Sandy Russell Jones
"The Historical Roots of Islamophobia"

Samantha Kelly
"The Other Italian Renaissance"

Paul Clemens
"Teaching the American Revolution during the 250th Anniversary of the War and Independence"

Dr. Anthony di Battista, Rutgers Ph.D. in Medieval History, retired superintendent for the West Morris NJ school district, and lecturer in Medieval and Renaissance History at Rutgers since 2012, has directed the Teachers’ Institute since 2014.

Founded in 1988, the Rutgers Institute for High School Teachers represents a collaboration between New Jersey’s secondary school teachers and the faculty of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

Each year the Institute offers new and varied seminars focusing on classroom usable topics in the social sciences and humanities. Participants explore the use of primary documents and teaching aids (such as videos, images, and electronic resources) as well as the latest scholarship. The Institute helps educators meet state-mandated teaching standards and provide certificates for professional development credit.

Dr. di Battista has also served as the project director for a United States Department of Education’s Teaching American History grant and a part of the New Jersey State Standards in History committee. He has served as the president of the New Jersey Council for History Education and on the executive board of the National Council for History Education. He currently chairs the New Jersey History Teacher of the Year selection committee.

Rutgers students know Dr. di Battista best as their inspiring professor in courses such as “Medieval Italy,” “Early Medieval Europe,” “Harvest of the Middle Ages,” and “The Reformation.”
Rutgers History Department professors and students enjoy the Spring 2024 Senior Celebration

Belinda Davis and Kristin O’Brassill-Kulfan

Luke Spaltro, our first Senior Speaker

Bella Ruiter, our second Senior Speaker

Paul Clemens and Barbara Cooper
Reclaiming Black Women’s Lives: A Symposium Honoring the Intellectual Work of Deborah Gray White

Hundreds of Deborah Gray White's students, former students, and colleagues from across the globe met at Rutgers on March 21-22, 2024 to celebrate her pathbreaking intellectual work and long career building the field of African-American history at Rutgers and beyond.

Keynotes:

Jennifer Morgan
(New York University)

”Sister Scholar and Heavy Loads: Archives, History, and Mentorship in the Work of Deborah Gray White”

Nell Irwin Painter
(Princeton University, Emerita)

”Deborah Gray White: Scholar, Citizen, Midtown New Yorker”

The Rutgers History Department is immensely grateful to Dr. Marisa Fuentes and Dr. Tiffany M. Gill for organizing this historic conference and true intellectual feast.

Panel 1
“Breaking the Silences: Black Women Historians in the Ivory Tower”
Sharon Harley, University of Maryland
Brenda Stevenson, University of Oxford
Crystal Feimster, Yale
Wanda Hendricks, U of South Carolina, Emerita

Panel 2
“The Art and Practice of Institution Building: African American History at Rutgers”
Kim Butler, Rutgers
Kendra Boyd, RU Camden
D’Weston Haywood, Hunter, CUNY
Nancy Hewitt, Rutgers, Emerita
Carolyn Brown, Rutgers

Panel 3
Ar’n’t I a Woman- ”More History than Myth:” Rethinking Black Women, Gender, and Slavery
Marisa Fuentes, Rutgers
Stephanie Jones-Rogers, UC Berkeley
Deirdre Cooper Owens, UConn
Daina Ramey Berry, UC Santa Barbara

Panel 4
“In Defense of Themselves:” Black Women, Activism, and Organizing
Francille Rusan Wilson, USC
Crystal Sanders, Emory
Rhonda Williams, Wayne State
Kellie Carter-Jackson, Wellesley
Shennette Garrett-Scott, Tulane

Panel 5
“Writing the Past... Conjuring the Future: Black Women’s History in the 21st Century.”
Erica Dunbar, Rutgers
Ula Taylor, UC Berkeley
Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Harvard

If you wish to enable African American History to thrive at Rutgers, please donate to the Deborah Gray White Endowed Dissertation Completion Fund by clicking HERE.
Deborah Gray White Symposium

Photos by Anh Adams, History Ph.D. student, Rutgers

Deborah Gray White surrounded by current and former students.

Above: Deborah Gray White and Nell Painter raise a toast to African American history.
Immediate right: Jasmin Young, Kendra Boyd, and Jesse Bayker
Far right: Francille Rusan Wilson, Crystal R. Sanders, Kellie Carter Jackson, Shennette Garrett-Scott, Rhonda Williams

Rhonda Williams hugs Deborah Gray White.

Nell Painter poses a question.

Kim Butler, Carolyn Brown, Nancy Hewitt, Kendra Boyd, and D’Weston Haywood

Multiple generations celebrate DGW!
A Celebration of
Dr. Carolyn A. Brown,
Professor of History
Rutgers University

March 28, 2024
Hosted by the Rutgers
History Department and
the Center for African Studies

On March 28, the Rutgers community came together to celebrate Carolyn Brown’s scholarship, teaching, and many contributions to African History and African Studies.

The day was filled with scholarly presentations by historians trained by Dr. Brown as well as her colleagues and scholarly collaborators on topics including slavery, nationalism, gender in labor history, and public history. The symposium culminated with a festive dinner and a celebration of global Hip-Hop that lasted well into the night, providing a fitting celebration of Carolyn’s rich and multifaceted career.


Equally fascinating and important is Carolyn’s public history project, Global Timbuktu: Meanings and Narratives of Resistance in Africa and the Americas, which links African and African-American history. This multi-faceted project focused on two free Black settlements in antebellum America named after the Malian city of Islamic learning, Timbuktu.

Carolyn’s extensive leadership with the historical profession and the field of African Studies includes serving as senior editor of the journal *International Labor and Working Class History* and as president of the African Studies Association.

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Symposium Speakers

Dorothy Hodgson
Stephane Robolin
Ousseina Alidou
Guy Weston
Kristin O’Brassill-Kulfan
Robin Chapdelaine
Paul Lovejoy
Laura Ann Twagira
Ahmad Sikainga
Abosede George
Judith Byfield
Moya Bedward
Ben Twagira
Gregory Mann
Bredan Kibee
Dedan Anderson

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Dr. Carolyn Brown enjoying dinner at the end of the symposium, surrounded by colleagues, family, and friends.

The photographs on these pages were taken by Jennifer Jones and conference guests and participants.

Dr. Carolyn Brown with multiple generations of family and friends

Laura Ann Twagira, Paul Lovejoy, Abosede George, Robin Chapdelaine, & Ahmed Sikainga

Above and below: Dr. Deborah Gray White gives the toast.

Far left: Marisa Fuentes & Deborah Gray White
Immediate left: Emily Marker & Nancy Sinkoff

Dr. Ousseina Alidou presents on panel with Dorothy Hodgson and Stephane Robolin
MISSION STATEMENT:

Old Queens is a student-run digital journal dedicated to allowing undergraduate students of all majors to have their historical essays published. Students will have a chance to be recognized for their work, discover the publishing process, and improve their historical writing skills.

We encourage students to submit their work not just from history classes they have taken, but any class in which they have taken a historical approach to topics in the humanities, social sciences, and STEM.

In compiling this journal we seek to explore well-known historical topics, as well as hidden historical narratives that students have explored both inside and outside of the classroom.

The title of the journal, Old Queens, serves as both a celebration of Rutgers’ history and an acknowledgment of its troubled past due to the use of enslaved labor in the beginnings of Rutgers’ establishment.
OLD QUEENS ONLINE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF HISTORY

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Click to Read Old Queens Online
Spring 2024 Public History Field Trip to Washington, D.C.

Article and photographs by Sarah Coffman,
Third year doctoral candidate and Public Outreach Graduate Assistant

On April 8th, 2024, thirty undergraduate and graduate history students rose before the sun to board an Amtrak bound for the nation’s capital. Professor Kristin O’Brassill-Kulfan collaborated with the David M. Rubenstein Curator of Philanthropy and historian of the early American Republic Dr. Amanda Moniz to arrange a behind-the-scenes tour and curator talks at the Smithsonian National American History Museum in Washington, D.C.

As a discipline, public history utilizes experiential learning opportunities, site visits, and hands-on engagement to share knowledge and questions about the past with diverse audiences. Going behind the scenes at a museum, literally and figuratively, gives students a chance to see how curators interpret, narrate, and conserve objects, and how historians work outside of traditional educational settings - great exposure for students in the Public History Program!

During our visit to the National American History Museum, talks with the museum staff enlightened students about several job trajectories within the museum industry, including curation, exhibit text writing and editing, fundraising and donation management, object storage, and preservation. Because many students expressed a deep appreciation for museums, it was special to learn about the different kinds of expertise and skill-sets behind the exhibits.

In addition to these discussions, students had the opportunity to view several items from the museum’s philanthropy collection. Museum specialist and rail collections manager Norman Storer Corrada took students on an object retrieval trip. The group boarded a massive service elevator to go up to the manuscript archive and artifact repository, collecting the items from storage and viewing museum offices. These objects included African American ballerina Misty Copeland’s ballet shoes, John McCain’s Navy hat from the 2008 presidential campaign, and other items donated to the collection by American philanthropists.

Following the day’s tours, students had several hours to explore Washington, D.C. independently. Many students basked in the partial sun on the National Mall and cautiously viewed the eclipse through solar eclipse glasses. Others enjoyed the National Gallery of Art, walked through the United States Holocaust Museum, or took in the sights of the Tidal Basin at the tail end of cherry blossom season before returning to New Brunswick in the late evening.

Many thanks to Dr. Kristin O’Brassill-Kulfan for working to make this trip happen, and to Dr. Amanda Moniz for creating the day’s schedule!

Tour Schedule

April 8, 2024
National Museum of American History
1200 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20560

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM
Arrival and greeting by Amanda Moniz, the David M. Rubenstein Curator of Philanthropy
Tour of the "Giving in America" and "Art in Industry" exhibits, led by Amanda Moniz

11:00AM - 12:00PM
Walkthrough of museum object archives and storage
Viewing of philanthropy collection objects out of storage and discussion of collections management with Amanda Moniz and Norman Storer Corrada, Museum Specialist

1:30 PM - 2:15 PM
Discussion on writing for museum audiences with Leslie Porter, Supervisory Writer/Editor

2:15 PM - 3:00 PM
Q&A about fundraising for public history projects with Dana Martine, Manager, Museum Affairs, Board and Communities, and Lea Silverman, Major Gift Officer
“The Smithsonian tour allowed me to see how a degree in History leads to a position in the museum world.... I wish there could be more of these field trips for History majors, since the chance to see what goes on behind the scenes in the process of historical interpretation from professionals is so inspiring.”

-- Michaela Forbes, History Major, Class of 2024

“What I loved most about the trip was the ability to see first hand the lessons I have learned throughout the Public History course be applied by professionals in the field of collection management and curation.”

-- Daniel A. Dias, History Major, Class of 2025
HISTORY MAJORS STUDY ABROAD IN LONDON

UK Spring Semester Study Abroad

Gianna Rosa (RU ‘25)
History major
Philosophy minor

Melissa Marvinny (RU ‘25)
History major

What happens when best friends and history majors study abroad in London for a semester? A LOT!

How and when did you first get to know each other at Rutgers?

We met each other in our Honors College Forum class and bonded over our shared interest in History in a History class (Ancient and Medieval Europe, 510:101) during our Freshman year.

Melissa’s favorite courses in London:

In “Historic London” every Wednesday we visit a historic site or landmark and learn of its significance. We have been to the British Museum, Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, and many other places. I am also taking a course which focuses on the sociological side of London and one on the 20th-century history of Europe.

My most interesting course is a business / history class on football (soccer) where we learn about the sport’s cultural importance and how it correlates with history while also touring different stadiums like the Emirates. One cool thing we focused on was the way in which the 1982 Falklands War impacted the 1986 World Cup Quarterfinal match between Argentina and England.

Gianna’s favorite course in London:

I am taking “The Making of Modern South Asia,” “Historic London,” “The American Century 1945-Present,” and “Popular Music in Britain.” My favorite class is definitely “Popular Music in Britain” because it incorporates music history with political and sociological ideas that I find super interesting. I have learned a lot about English pop-culture through the lens of musical eras. I am also able to write a final essay based on any topic of my choosing which gives me a lot of creative freedom.

Melissa’s favorite experience so far:

One of my favorite experiences here was going to a park with all of the friends we made here and playing football / soccer together and then grabbing a Sunday roast. A Sunday roast is a British staple where you traditionally have meat, potatoes, Yorkshire pudding, and vegetables. And a pint of Guinness... It was such a simple yet fun day doing normal British things and we spent it with people we have become so close with in these past few months.

Another thing that I love here is how walkable it is and the views you have while doing it. From where we live there are clear views of St. Paul’s Cathedral and it is so beautiful to see just simply on the way home, especially lit up at night.
Gianna’s favorite experience so far:

A peak experience for me was taking a day trip to Dover with my friends. We hiked the White Cliffs of Dover and also explored Dover Castle. I really loved learning about the history of the castle (built in the 11th century and claimed to be Britain’s oldest standing building) and also enjoyed the beautiful views from the top of the cliffs.

What has surprised you the most about studying abroad and/or living in London?

Gianna: One thing that has surprised me the most was how easy it is to get around the UK compared to the US. The lack of car dependency and efficiency of railroad systems is very different from the US and quite convenient. It also surprised me that I felt almost no culture shock. I feel like sometimes—especially on the internet—British culture and American culture can be portrayed as very different, but I did not find it difficult to adjust to at all. Especially compared to other European countries I have travelled to such as Hungary, Spain, and Greece where the culture feels very different from what I’m used to.

Melissa: So far, studying abroad in London has allowed me to travel very easily and see all new parts of the world. While London might not culturally be that different from the U.S., I have been lucky enough to be able to go to different places and experience their lives there such as Budapest, Cologne, Athens and a few Greek islands, Amsterdam, Paris, Dublin, Edinburgh, and different cities in Italy and Portugal. To explore different historical sites that I have been learning about throughout my education is so cool, especially in Athens since one of my favorite things to study is Ancient Greece and Rome. We have also been all around England to cities like Dover, Bath, Oxford, Cambridge, Canterbury, etc..

What is the most touristy thing you’ve done in London so far?

Gianna: The most touristy thing I have done besides the more obvious answers (Tower Bridge, Big Ben, and Buckingham Palace) is get chocolate covered strawberries at Borough Market. These strawberries were all over social media and also somewhat overpriced, but they were really delicious and I would recommend them to anyone who visits London!

Photos above: Melissa, Gianna, and friends enjoy travelling in Europe.

Photo on right: Melissa and Gianna enjoy the Kensington neighborhood in London.

Photos provided by Melissa and Gianna.
Max’s Journey:
From Undergraduate History Major to History PH.D. at Ohio State to Assistant Professor at Wilson College

The Rutgers History department "sat down" over email with Maxine (Max) Wagenhoffer to learn what she has been up to since graduating Rutgers in 2016.

It turns out she has been up to a lot! She completed her PhD in US History at Ohio State and is now an assistant professor at Wilson College in Chambersburg PA and the Director of the Hankey Center for the History of Women’s Education. We hope you find her story of how she approached her History thesis and her enduring relationship with her advisor, Rachel Devlin, inspiring.

When and why did you decide to major in History at Rutgers?
I had a feeling prior to my arrival at Rutgers that I would major in History. I had great history teachers in high school, and I was excited to go to Rutgers, which is known for its strong history program. I was hooked on history from my first semester.

Did a particular undergraduate course or professor inspire you to pursue the study of history?
During my first semester at Rutgers, I took Leah DeVun’s “Development of Europe” class. We read awesome texts like Plato’s Symposium and Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, and her lectures were captivating. Leah’s class opened my eyes to the directions that historical scholarship could go in. Her course made me want to study women’s and gender history.

How did you select your senior thesis topic? And how and why did you select Rachel Devlin as your advisor?
Spring semester of my sophomore year, I took Melissa Feinberg’s "The Modern Girl" course. In the course, she mentioned celebrity testimonials. Alice Roosevelt Longworth came up during a discussion about Pond's Cold Cream. Throughout my childhood, my parents took me to a presidential homes and historic sites. I knew about Theodore Roosevelt but was not as familiar with his eldest daughter. During the fall semester of my junior year, I had to come up with a thesis topic, and I was still intrigued about Alice; I realized that she was born the same year as her cousin Eleanor Roosevelt. Yet Eleanor and Alice have different political trajectories. The thesis topic, which compared the political trajectories of Alice and Eleanor, came very organically.

Now, how Rachel came into the picture was more complicated. I had been working with David Greenberg as a research assistant on his Republic of Spin book. David was going to be on leave during the Spring Semester of my junior year, which was not going to be ideal when I was tackling the early stages of my project. At the time, I was in Rachel’s U.S. women’s history course, and we had really connected, even though it had been only about two months (I had read Relative Intimacy, Rachel’s first book, for fun the previous summer). I loved U.S. women’s history, and as much as the rise of Eleanor and Alice is tied to American politics, it was also a story about changing expectations and opportunities for women at that time. Rachel agreed to serve as my advisor, and I was thrilled.

Left: Max teaching a course on the 1950s at Wilson College

“I first met Maxine—or Max as she prefers—when I was teaching Women and Gender in U.S. History. What I remember most about Max was her trenchant comments in class. She is such a great talker (as she remains) and she gave the class a kind of buoyancy and joy.

I especially remember Max walking with me from class back to Van Dyck (the class was in the river dorms). She always had wild stories to tell about the people in her life and students she knew.

She was a raconteur, with a wicked sense of humor. I believe that her humor informs her teaching now and is one (of many) reasons that students love her.

When she was writing her senior thesis on Alice Roosevelt we talked often about Roosevelt’s underappreciated role as a diplomat in Asia and elsewhere. When the researching was frustrating, we would talk about it, and then she would go off and keep working. She applied that same commitment and determination when writing her dissertation. “

-- Prof. Rachel Devlin, Max’s thesis advisor at Rutgers
Do you have advice about what makes for a productive student/advisor relationship?

An overarching sense of mentorship is key. Advising goes beyond the database searches, the drafting, the editing, etc. During my thesis process, I was applying to graduate programs. Having input from someone like Rachel was critical to my success in graduate school and beyond. I channel that into my mentorship of students—I do what I can to support their endeavors outside of the classroom. I am all about making connections that go beyond the material and the classroom, and I was fortunate to have mentors at Rutgers that did that for me. Ultimately, my time at Rutgers shaped me as a scholar, teacher, and mentor.

How did you grow and mature as a scholar and researcher through the process of writing your history thesis?

My thesis served as a foundation for my career as an historian. A lot of the work I did was researching via newspaper databases—I had so many primary sources to comb through during the early research stages. I learned to stay organized in the process, which set me up well for graduate school, particularly when it came to my dissertation. The whole thesis process helped me think about big historical questions that eventually led to my dissertation on Alice Roosevelt Longworth and the intersections of celebrity, politics, and gender. I also realized how much I loved doing research.

Can you provide an anecdote of about a specific way that your advisor, Rachel Devlin, helped you with your thesis research, writing, or organization?

Biography is known to be difficult. Tackling two famous, and related, women and trying to create a compelling historical narrative is even more difficult. Rachel pushed me to create a chart that compared Alice and Eleanor early in the process to get myself organized. It was about 13 pages long. Rachel taught me that getting feedback in the early stages of a project can be extremely beneficial in the long run. It can be daunting to show early and unpolished work. I remember being nervous about sending her my first draft. I joked that it was rough like sandpaper. Rachel promised me that it would get smoothed out. And she was right.

What advice would you give to current Rutgers History majors about their studies at Rutgers?

Enjoy learning from top scholars in their respective fields. I read amazing articles and books, and I enjoyed the lectures and discussions. I grew intellectually in every class that I took. I am still in touch with several of my professors from my Rutgers days; they have been stalwart mentors to me. Moreover, I incorporate some of the sources/readings from my undergraduate years into my teaching. I even tell students that “I remember learning this in X course.” Ultimately, soak it all up.

What advice do you have for current Rutgers History majors considering graduate school in History and/or a career as a historian?

Be prepared to read. And READ.

Photo: Max graduates Rutgers, Douglass Residential College ceremony

Max and I have kept in touch since she graduated Rutgers. We text and talk on the phone with some regularity. Max has taken on a job at Wilson with a level of responsibility that an experienced scholar and administrator would find difficult. She manages the Wilson Archive and the building it is housed in. She oversees staff AND teaches a 1-2 load.

We have laughed at the quirks of academia and the people in it—but she is a very serious scholar and teacher. Rutgers should be so proud that our students and alumni are carrying the torch into the mid-twenty first century. Often, it is the only way that women’s history is kept alive.

-- Professor Rachel Devlin, Max’s undergraduate thesis advisor at Rutgers

Click here to read more about Dr. Wagenhofer’s career in Wilson College Magazine.
**Patrick McPolin**

“Violence in Pre-Viking Ireland”  
Advisor: Alastair Bellany

**Daniel O’Sullivan**

“Friends and Allies under Athenian Hegemony”  
Advisor: Tom Figueira

**Luke Spaltro**

“‘Stir it up’: The Anti-Apartheid Struggle at Rutgers University”  
Advisor: Belinda Davis

**Amy Smith**

“Why the Dutch Created the Tulipmania Myth: A Reaction to Crisis in a Period of National Anxiety”  
Advisor: Jennifer Jones
HISTORY HONORS CONFERENCE

Students, faculty, parents, and friends enjoy the first-rate presentations of cutting-edge scholarship.

Daniel O’Sullivan presents his research on Athenian hegemony.

Right before her presentation on 17th-century Dutch Tulipmania, Amy Smith enjoys a moment with her friends Dannika Lundgren (left) and Alexandria Chastain (middle).

Left: Patrick McPolin with future honors thesis scholars Elias Johnson and Winifred Oyem (in background).

Anthony di Battista, Paul Israel, Melissa Feinberg, and Belinda Davis.
Senior Celebration
April 30, 2024

Anthony di Battista & Yeon Kim
James Delbourgo and Alexander Hall
Daniel O’Sullivan
Kristin O’Brassill-Kulfan & Bella Ruiter
Henry Shotwell VI
Below: Matthew McCracken & Lou Masur

Amy Smith
Brandon Popescu & Jennifer Mittelstadt
2024 UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY AWARDS

DEPARTMENTAL AWARDS

Ceil Parker Lawson Memorial Prize:
  Michaela Forbes
  Mathew McCracken

Dr. Martin Siegel Prize in History:
  Brandon Popescu

Edward McNall Burns Award in History:
  Alexander Hall

Edward Romano Memorial Award:
  Luke Spaltro

Harold L. Poor Memorial Award:
  1st Place, Daniel O'Sullivan
  2nd Place, Patrick McPolin
  Amy Smith
  Luke Spaltro

Society of Colonial Wars Prize:
  Ava Feldman

James Reed Award:
  Amy Smith

Joseph B. Bradley Memorial Award:
  Daniel O'Sullivan

UNIVERSITY AWARDS

Helen Prager Miller:
  Allison Gonzales

Henry Rutgers Scholar Award:
  Luke Spaltro

2024 Public History Certificate Recipients

Carmen Bisignano
  Gareth Conway
  Christopher Eglin
  Michaela Forbes
  Allison Gonzalez
  Gabriel Izquierdo
  Lanai McCauley
  Matthew Melo
  Fabian Paredes
  Isabella Ruiter
  Varun Saroha
  Henry Shotwell VI
  Luke Spaltro
  Lauren Sultzbaugh
  Erin Walker
  Ruizhe Yin
PHI ALPHA THETA
INDUCTEES
2024

FAITH ALE
ANDREW CHEN
SANJIT CHIDAMBARAN
SARAH COTTER
EDWARD DANIELS
DANIEL DIAS
RICHARD DIFALCO
JULIA FAHY
SARAFAJARDO
CHIANA FISHER
GRACE FOOTE

JULIA PELLICANE
CAMILLE PINTO
PRIYA RAMAN-BOGAN
GIANELLA ROSADO
RACHEL SCHULMAN
GONZALO SEVILLANO
CORY SHISHANI
DIARRA THOMPSON
WILLIAM TSANG
ALICIA WEYER
CLARE WINSTON
NAOMI ZAFRIR

MICHAELA FORBES
LINDSEY GIL
JOE GINDI
ALLISON GONZALES
STEVEN GUACHO
GABRIELA HIZGILOV
KAROLINA JAMIOLKOWSKA
ELIAS JOHNSON
LEYLA KAJA
MATTHEW KENT
ALLAN LIN
DARLENE KINTSANGOUA-MBAYA
ZAMIRA KNIGHT
CHRISTOPHER LINK
STEVEN MAYGERS
EMILY MADONIA

Leyla Kaja
Daniel Dias
Melissa Feinberg, History Department Chair, welcomes inductees and families.

Sanjit Chidambaran

Jackson Lears delivers the keynote address, “Becoming a Historian: My Pivotal Moment”

James Delbourgo and Kenny Linden

Family, friends, and faculty enjoy the ceremony.

Gianella Rosado and Prof. Jennifer Jones

James Delbourgo and Steven Gaucho
Alison Hight, a doctoral student in the History Department focusing on modern British history and modern global and comparative history, enjoys taking a phone call outside Van Dyck Hall on the first warm day of the spring 2024 semester.

Congratulations to Alison!
Starting in Fall 2024
Alison will be an Assistant Professor in the History Department at Mississippi State University.

Stay in touch!

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THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

PH.D. DEGREES CONFERRED
October 2023-May 2024

October 2023

SAM HEGE
Advisor: Toby Jones

January 2024

HENRY CROUSE
“Captain and Kings: One Native Family’s Journey Through American History”
Advisor: Camilla Townsend

May 2024

IAN GAVIGAN
“Socialist Stronghold: The Socialist Party, Labor, and the Making of U.S. Politics from the Gilded Age to the New Deal”
Advisor: Jennifer Mittelstadt

ANDREA DITKOFF
“‘Healthy Women, Healthy Lives’: The Nurses’ Health Study and American Women’s Health Research, 1960s-2000s”
Advisor: Johanna Schoen

DANIEL BOTTINO
“Colonizing the Landscape: Memory, Ritual, and Perceptions of Place in Seventeenth-Century Maine”
Advisor: Alastair Bellany

Masters’s Degrees Conferred
Global and Comparative History

May 2024

JEONGEUN PARK

WENDY ALLEN

WINSTON JEAN-PIERRE

MARIA GULAKOVA

KIMBERLY NEE

LAUREN ROSTASH

Top photo: Maria Gulakova, M.A., with Jochen Hellbeck
Bottom photo: Dr. Andrea Ditkoff and Dr. Daniel Bottino
Photos from the School of Graduate Studies Convocation, May 10, 2024, were provided by Jochen Hellbeck and Jennifer Mittelstadt.
A. J. Boyd

I am a 3rd year PhD student and I will be heading to The National Archives in College Park, Maryland; The Library of Congress in D.C; Florida State University Special Collections in Tallahassee, Florida.

My project analyzes how Black Women’s Army Corps officers in World War II navigated the tension between their access to state power and gendered Jim Crow to practice Black women’s articulations of citizenship through the U.S Army.

At the Library of Congress, I hope to read the personal papers and memoir drafts of one of the then-highest ranking Black officers, Charity Adams Earley. At Florida State, I hope to read the oral history transcripts of enlisted women and access handbooks of the Women’s Army Corps.

A. J.’s tips for students new to research:

“As you’re taking notes, don’t forget to write down the box/file/folder number.”

Enjoy the ‘puzzle-solving’ of following archival trails!”

Joshua Anthony

I am a 5th year doctoral candidate returning from an extended research trip in Mexico City. I’ll be spending most of the summer at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C. for a writing and research fellowship.

My research examines intimate connections and empire in central Mexico from the late Aztec era through the first century of Spanish rule. Using Indigenous-language annals and Spanish archival materials, I followed one extended Indigenous family across two centuries, exploring how they adapted to colonial rule and how Indigenous kinship evolved during this period.

At Dumbarton Oaks I’ll be looking mostly at their collection of print material created by Spanish friars in Mexico in the 16th and 17th centuries. Over the last academic year I’ve looked at archival material kept by the Spanish colonial state and Catholic church which showed how Indigenous people interacted with the structures of colonial government. I found a bunch of very exciting documents written in Nahuatl in this material, never before translated.

Joshua’s research tips:

“Create a system to organize your citations and photos ahead of time, keep a daily log, and be really nice to the archivists.

Research can be exhausting, especially if you’re in a foreign country far away from home. And reading 16th-century handwriting is excruciating!

But to be able to see the places you read about, and connect the past with the present, makes the history come alive like nothing else.”
Eleanor Lenoe

I am a third year student and this summer I will do research in National Diet Library of Japan + Tokyo Diplomatic Archives.


I’m hoping to find newspaper articles concerning Japanese mascots as well as first-hand sources, such as interviews or letters or diaries! I’m hoping to track down some mascots who are still living to conduct oral history interviews with those who are willing.

Doing archival research in Japan can be challenging and it can be tiring to translate documents. At the same time, having the privilege of doing research overseas has been a long-term dream of mine. I get to stay with my family, eat great food, and engage in meaningful discussions about my research in an entirely different community, which almost always provides me with different perspectives on my work!

Eleanor’s research tips:

“Don’t isolate yourself. Seek out friends and family to talk to or hang out with before, after, and during your archival trips. And make friends at the archive!

I’ve met some awesome historians at the food court of the National Archives – College Park that are now great professional connections today.”

Jesse Siegel

I am a sixth year ABD doctoral candidate. This summer I will conduct research at Princeton University Special Collections and the National Archives (College Park).

My dissertation is on German-Czechoslovak businessmen in the European market after World War I. I explore how these businessmen negotiated a series of political, cultural, and gender identities to maintain their socioeconomic status as European entrepreneurs.

In Princeton I plan to explore the John Foster Dulles papers. At the National Archives, I will explore records of the Economic Tribunal at Nuremberg.

Jesse’s research tips:

“Make use of ScannerPro, an app that allows you to create PDF versions of archival documents.

Back documents up to a citation/note-taking program, linking your sources to the citation and research notes in one place (I use Zotero).

Always plan for taking more time than you expect for boxes of material.”
SUMMER 2024 RESEARCH PLANS

Sarah Coffman

I am a third year ABD doctoral student. I will begin my dissertation research in July, visiting the Temple University Special Collections Research Center and Urban Archives, the Philadelphia City Archives, and the Philadelphia Area Archives at the African American Museum in Philadelphia.

My research focuses on how Black Philadelphians in each property ownership category—homeowners, renters, housing-insecure, and unhoused—navigated the violent constraints of the urban real estate market on a daily basis between 1890 and 1985.

I will view organizational records from the Octavia Hill Association, the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, and the Armstrong Association (a Philadelphia Urban League affiliate), organizations which tried to address the city’s Black housing crisis at the turn of the twentieth century. I will also view personal archival collections of Philadelphia’s Black elites (Marion Turner Stubbs, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, M. Lee Montgomery, Clarence Farmer, Anna Russell Jones, Joseph E. Coleman) who were involved in labor and housing activism and philanthropy.

I enjoy “aha” moments in the archive when I am reading a source and an answer to the “how we got here” question becomes just a tad clearer. Though it has been a topic of heated discussion in recent years, I deeply believe that the Black present is intimately tied to the past. Finding these continuities in the archive is both satisfying and bittersweet, but overall I love feeling closer to understanding more about both the past and the present when I wrap up a day in the archive.

Sarah’s pro tip:

“Lunch is the most important part of the day because it allows you to step away from the sources for a while, think about what you saw, and give your eyes a break.

Try to go outside during lunchtime and bring a notebook with you so you can jot down some notes about your main takeaways from the first half of your day.

These notes will help you sort out your thoughts when you get home, because you won’t have to reflect on an entire day’s worth of sources.”

Nathan Darmiento

I am a first year student studying Central American migration in southern Mexico in the 20th century and how it intersects with regional/national/international political and economic histories.

In the summer of 2024, I will be visiting municipal, ecclesiastical, and university archives in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. I am hoping to find some interesting material on the role the Catholic Church played in advocating for migrants’ rights and its efforts in negotiating with the Mexican government.
Kyra March

I am a first year student interested in the ways African American women and children embodied freedom during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods in the South.

This summer I plan to explore digital archives and materials such as the Freedmen’s Bureau Search Portal through the National Museum of African American History and Culture and digitized journals and newspaper articles written by relief workers like Charlotte Forten, Susie King Taylor, Harriet Jacobs, Laura Towne, and Elizabeth Botume.

I hope to explore correspondence, complaint records, Teacher’s Monthly Reports, and descriptions of not only violence against Black people, but what Black people were seeking out during these periods.

Thankfully, my archives are extensive and digitized; however, this is both a large blessing and a challenge due to having to read through thousands of pages and transcribe information. Even so, this work is meaningful to me because I am eager to figure out in more detail what Black women and children’s freedom dreams were, along with the ways they chased after these dreams.

Kyra’s tips for new researchers:

“Have an organization system or spreadsheet to keep up with all of your research so that nothing is lost!”

Elissa Branum

I am a fourth year ABD doctoral candidate. My dissertation is a critical legal history that analyzes previously unexamined qualitative evidence from the archives of Black and white southern evangelical colleges to chart student governance from 1860 to 1969, providing needed context for recent legal battles over religious education’s role in American society.

This summer I’ll conduct dissertation research at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library; Briscoe Center for American History; Smith County Historical Society; Dominion Robert Glass Library, Texas College; Olin Library, Jarvis Christian University; Wood County Historical Commission Archive and Research Center; Thomas W. Cole, Sr., Library, Wiley University; Southwestern Christian College; and the Kaufman County Historical Commission.

At the Johnson Library, I am examining materials related to the National Youth Administration, a 1930s federal program that partnered with evangelical colleges to provide college students with jobs. At the other institutions, I will be looking at student yearbooks and handbooks, collections of alumni, and papers of legislators.

One of my biggest challenges is that I am creating my own “archive” of various small collections to chart student governance across several institutions. What I find most meaningful about archives and traveling to research sites is the tangible experience of walking the same streets and campuses that my historical actors walked, and getting a physical sense for their experience in a place.

Elissa’s tips for new researchers:

“Plan ahead and understanding finding aids before the trip;
Use the TurboScan app for taking photos; organizing your notes in Notion and your files in Tropy;
Write immediate takeaways and summaries of what you find, at least 500 words.”
MEET OUR MASTERS STUDENTS

Kenny Cordasco
from Holland Township, New Jersey is interested in 20th- and 21st-century U.S. foreign policy, with an emphasis on Latin America, the Middle East, and the Soviet Union.

Samuel Newby
from Arlington, VA is interested in a comparative environmental and cultural history of Europe and Japan.

Joshua Wilk
from West Long Branch, New Jersey researches the politics and culture of Yiddish speaking Jews in early 20th-century Eastern Europe.
MEET OUR MASTERS STUDENTS

The Master’s Program in Global & Comparative History

Daniel (Connor) Brennan from Sea Girt, New Jersey, is interested in the shift from chattel slavery to systems of surveillance, racial segregation and the criminalization of movement in the Jim Crow southern United States, pre-Apartheid South Africa and other early 20th-century African colonies.

Andre Eldred from Old Bridge, New Jersey, is interested in the history of the Cold War. His previous work has dealt with the CIA and its relationship with American business entities.

Thomas Hall from Freehold, New Jersey, is interested in early modern European history.

Find out more about the Master’s Program at https://history.rutgers.edu/academics/globalhistoryma/program-description
KENDRA BOYD (RUTGERS PHD 2017)

Assistant Professor of History
Rutgers-Camden

**Freedom Enterprise: Racial Capitalism and Black Entrepreneurship in Great Migration Detroit, forthcoming with the University of Pennsylvania Press.**

*Freedom Enterprise* is the first monograph to explore the development of a black business community throughout the Great Migration years and engage entrepreneurship as a central category of analysis. The book traces the rise and fall of the black business community in Detroit, Michigan and uncovers the ways migrant entrepreneurs worked to gain economic freedom within the confines of US racial capitalism. Black migrant entrepreneurs were able to achieve considerable success from the 1920s through the 1940s, and built a thriving business community in Detroit, particularly in the neighborhoods known as Black Bottom and Paradise Valley, where African Americans could have almost all their needs met by Detroit’s black business community.

However, migrant entrepreneurs’ “freedom enterprise”—their undertaking of attaining freedom through business—was curtailed by the reality of operating within US racial capitalism. In the 1950s and 1960s, Detroit’s thriving black business community was demolished to make way for highway construction and various urban renewal projects. Postwar redevelopment efforts cast aside black entrepreneurs’ property rights and generated glaring racial and economic injustices in the city. While ostensibly undertaken for the public good, this urban planning essentially functioned as a state-sponsored wealth redistribution program that benefited white citizens and helped maintain a system of economic white supremacy. It ravaged Detroit’s black business community and dealt a severe blow to migrant entrepreneurs who had relocated seeking economic independence and upward mobility.

*Freedom Enterprise* illuminates an understudied aspect of the ways structural racism has prevented African Americans from obtaining economic security, and the state’s complicity in racialized economic injustices. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed several well-known victories for the Black Freedom Movement, particularly at the federal level. However, this book shows that the civil rights era was also a time of devastating loss, with state initiatives rolling back the economic advancement made by the African American business community.

*Freedom Enterprise* joins the ongoing national conversation related to the long-term implications of urban planning policies, including the racial wealth gap. It provides valuable historical context for one aspect of contemporary concerns around generational economic regression in the black community: urban entrepreneurs’ accumulation and subsequent loss of wealth.
SHIKHA CHAKRABORTY (RUTGERS PHD 2019)

Assistant Professor of History
The College of New Jersey


Colonial Caregivers provides a cultural and social history of South Asian ayahs (nursemaids) who worked for British imperial families from the late-1700s to the mid-1900s. The book argues that the South Asian ayah not only provided domestic labor, but also provided important moral labor for the British Empire in India. During the transition from the Mughal Empire to the British Empire in the late-eighteenth century (under the aegis of the East India Company), the desexualized Indian ayah emerged as a cover-up for respectable British families to hide the shameful prevalence of inter-racial concubinage, mixed-race children, and domestic slavery from their imperial biographies.

The figure of the professional ayah also helped to differentiate the British imperial home from South Asian Hindu and Muslim aristocratic households which had long been hospitable to homoerotic mistress-maid intimacies and ambiguously gendered domestic laborers. In British family portraits, the racialized desexualized ayah served as the foil highlighting the whiteness and racial/class purity of British women and children. Throughout the nineteenth century, particularly during anti-British violence and Indian rebellions, the Indian ayah's fidelity and her selfless sacrifice for the white family became legendary in British culture. Idealization of the racialized ayah's loyalty provided moral and emotional security to British rulers at a time of growing anti-colonial Indian nationalism.

Although cultural archives desexualized the ayah, personal papers and official archives reveal that many ayahs began their lives as bibis or concubines of European men. Throughout the colonial period, many ayahs provided unpaid sexual, reproductive, and emotional labors in addition to paid domestic labor. Ayahs experienced bodily and social anxieties regarding the loss of caste-purity for touching out-caste white European bodies. While drawing attention to British cultural usage of the ayah to construct imperial morality, this book foregrounds the struggles of colonial servant women themselves to live up to British and South Asian patriarchal notions of morality.

Colonial Caregivers brings together South Asian and British imperial historiographies by interweaving the gendered histories of caste and race, which are typically studied separately by historians. The book demonstrates how caste entered British imperial homes and race entered South Asian elite homes and shaped mistress-maid relationships. Using ephemeral sources and speculative approaches, theoretically and methodologically, my work puts into conversation postcolonial subaltern studies and Black feminist intersectionality, which rarely interact despite their shared critiques of the Eurocentrism, positivism, and empiricism of history. Although inspired by African American intersectionality, my research in British colonial and South Asian vernacular archives shows that hierarchies based on race, caste, gender, and class did not always intersect, but remained competing and clashing forms of social experiences.
HANNAH FRYDMAN (RUTGERS PHD 2020)

Assistant Professor of French Studies
Adjunct Assistant Professor of History
University of Washington, Seattle

Between the Sheets: Classified Advertising, Sexuality, and Moral Threats to the Free Press in France, forthcoming from Cornell University Press.

Between the Sheets explores how, in a world before the internet, the emergence of classified advertising in the mass press was a quiet revolution. For a small fee, anyone could communicate--anonymously if they chose--with the newspaper’s public. Parisian newspapers, omnipresent and widely-read under France’s secular Third Republic (1870-1940), saw the classifieds as an important revenue stream and a useful service provided to readers looking for jobs, lost pets, or used goods.

Readers used the classifieds for these approved reasons but also for an important and always growing number of more disavowed ones, as people solicited sex (paid and unpaid, queer and straight), sold an expanding array of sexual goods, and offered abortions and abortifacient drugs. By enabling the expansion of the free press (and the classifieds along with it), the French Third Republic, despite its attempts at growing and norming the population through the heterosexual family, also participated in creating a space where deviant sexualities and lives could be experimented with and financed. The newspaper was of course a tool of normalization and a site of “dominant discourse” but it also, through the classifieds, was a tool for living lives otherwise. This is not a utopian argument, the classifieds contained much exploitation and many forms of survival and thriving outside of social norms required exploiting others.

Ethical or otherwise, Between the Sheets, attends to these lives and livelihoods enabled by the classifieds and demonstrates that queer and non-normative lives in this period were lived in the center, as well as on the margins, thanks to new innovations in media technologies. It was their central location that inspired efforts to place new (moral) controls on mass cultural forms and technologies, controls that continue to reverberate today, in recurring debates about the place of sexual content and communication on media platforms.
MELISSA REYNOLDS (RUTGERS PHD 2019)

Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Wolf Humanities Center
Lecturer, History and Sociology of Science
University of Pennsylvania

Assistant Professor of History
Texas Christian University (starting Fall 2024)

Reading Practice: The Pursuit of Natural Knowledge from Manuscript to Print, University of Chicago Press, 2024

Reading Practice tells the story of how ordinary people grew comfortable learning from commonplace manuscripts and printed books, such as almanacs, medical recipe collections, and herbals.

From the turn of the fifteenth century to the close of the sixteenth century, these were the books English people read when they wanted to attend to their health or understand their place in the universe. Before then, these works had largely been the purview of those who could read Latin. Around 1400, however, medical and scientific texts became available in Middle English while manuscripts became less expensive. These vernacular manuscripts invited their readers into a very old and learned conversation: Hippocrates and Galen weren’t distant authorities whose word was law, they were trusted guides, whose advice could be excerpted, rearranged, recombined, and even altered to suit a manuscript compiler’s needs.

This conversation continued even after the printing press arrived in England in 1476. Printers mined manuscripts for medical and scientific texts that they would publish throughout the sixteenth century, though the pressures of a commercial printing market encouraged printers to package these old texts in new ways. Without the weight of authority conditioning their reactions and responses to very old knowledge, and with so many editions of practical books to choose from, English readers grew into confident critics and purveyors of natural knowledge in their own right.

Reading Practice builds its argument through close analysis of more than 180 fifteenth-century manuscripts and over 475 editions of early printed books. By refusing to abide by a traditional medieval-early modern divide—paying equal attention to the circulation of natural knowledge in manuscript and in print and following patterns of belief both prior to and after the Reformation—

Reading Practice illuminates the threads that connect medieval beliefs and ways of knowing to those that continue to animate our modern world.
Signed, Sealed, Delivered: How Black and White Mothers Used the Box Project and the Postal System to Fight Hunger and Feed the Mississippi Freedom Movement, forthcoming with the University of North Carolina Press

Signed, Sealed, Delivered tells a new yet hidden in plain sight story of women’s social movement participation during the 1960s through the story of the Mississippi Box Project. The project unfolded through the U.S. postal service, an overlooked government service that, in reality, was a contentious site in the battle for civil rights. It allowed ordinary Black women in Mississippi and white women in New England to participate in the Civil Rights Movement through the exchange of goods, letters, and movement information, what I call “postal benevolence.” By the end of the decade, more than six thousand individuals traded goods and letters through the postal system across the Mason-Dixon.

While Mississippi has been called a “closed society,” interstate postal channels bridged great distances, fostered interracial connection, and galvanized movements. Signed, Sealed, Delivered argues that the Civil Rights Movement and its inherent networks of transregional support cannot be fully understood without discussion of the United States Postal System and the complicated cross-racial activism it sustained. Rural Black women made use of the postal service and its connection to private benevolence as a strategy to navigate the paltry state programs and discriminatory state administrators of federal welfare in Mississippi after 1964. Civil Rights Movement historiography has not only overlooked this aspect of the local movement but has often misrepresented the everyday, unheralded women who participated in the Box Project as passive bystanders to the movement. Letters from the Box Project reveal, by contrast, that rural Black women were creative and determined agents of their own survival and freedom.

Finally, Signed, Sealed, Delivered also examines the women who used the post offices up north. It tells the story of how New England women wove their racial justice and anti-poverty engagement to prior, predominantly regional interests of pacifism, social reform, and their desires as mothers to help build healthy, peaceful, and sustainable communities. Locating within the Box Project an “acceptable” avenue for civil rights participation, I argue that progressive white mothers participated in postal benevolence for their own ethical validation and to absolve themselves of personal guilt after reading headlines of racial violence and political disfranchisement in the South.
JASMIN YOUNG (RUTGERS PHD 2018)

Visiting Scholar in the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History (2023-24)
Assistant Professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies
University of California Riverside

Black Women in Armed Resistance: SNCC and the Black Liberation Struggle, forthcoming

Mainstream historical accounts of the Civil Rights Movement frequently praise the efforts of a few courageous men and women committed to nonviolent protest and see the embrace of armed resistance as an indication of frustration and despair. Similarly, popular narratives typically reduce the Black Power Movement’s endorsement of armed self-defense to a tactic used by gun-toting men wearing leather jackets and berets.

Black Women in Armed Resistance: SNCC and the Black Liberation Struggle is the first book to center on Black women’s use and theorization of armed resistance as a strategy to achieve freedom. It focuses on the period from 1955 to 1979, when the Civil Rights and Black Power movements represented distinct approaches within the Black Liberation struggle. The book clearly distinguishes between armed resistance and masculinity, which have too often been seen as entwined. The book demonstrates that armed resistance predated the modern Civil Rights Movement and was not the main thrust of the Black Power Movement. Instead, armed resistance was necessary for Black survival during the height of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power advocates understood its utility for Black liberation. The book traces the debates about the uses of armed resistance within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to illuminate the shifting dynamics among activists as the movement’s objectives changed over time from integration to self-determination. The book enlarges our understanding of the Black Freedom struggle by recovering a history of Black women who thought of armed resistance as generative, liberating, and necessary. It examines their theory and practice by drawing on diverse sources, including organizational records, meeting minutes, correspondence, interviews, oral histories, newspaper accounts, and government records.

Reconsidering the place and scope of Black women’s armed resistance in the Black Freedom struggle broadens and deepens our understanding of the movement. This is a key intellectual intervention. It expands the range of those we recognize as political activists and what we regard as political thought and action, revealing a more diverse and multifaceted struggle whose objectives and strategies were continually contested and evolving. The book probes the complex issues that arose when women’s self-conception as protectors conflicted with men’s desires to safeguard Black women and communities from racial and sexual violence, which scholars have ignored for far too long. It chronicles the power struggles over gendered ideas, specifically over who bore the responsibility of protecting the Black community. The battles among leaders and within organizations over the question of white violence significantly affected the course of the movement.
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