

# NEWS



## *of the History Department at Boston University*

November 2006

### History Department Seminars



The following department seminars have been scheduled for the coming months. All will be held in Room 504 at 226 Bay State Road; faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate majors are invited.

■ Wednesday, November 29, 12 noon

John K. Thornton, Professor of History, Boston University:

“Angolan States and the Formation of Palmares (Brazil), 1630-1695”

■ Wednesday, December 6, 12 noon

Jonathan Karp, Assistant Professor of History, State University of New York at Binghamton:

Topic (exact title to be announced): economic constructions of Jews in the early modern period

■ Friday, January 26, 2007, 2 p.m.

Jan Gross, Norman B. Tomlinson Professor of War and Society, Princeton University:

Topic: anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz

### in brief

## EVENTS OF NOTE!



On October 10 Professor **James Schmidt** gave a talk on “Catastrophe and Cultural Memory: John Adams, Art Spiegelman, and the 9/11 Attacks” in a series run by the students in the College of Fine Arts Graduate Painting and Sculpture Department. On October 13 Terry Renaud, a senior History major who is writing his senior distinction project with Professor Schmidt on the émigré anti-Nazi activist Paul Hagen, gave a talk on his research at the UROP Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Professor **Thomas Glick** attended a one-day symposium, “Uses of Periodization: Beyond Positivist History,” held in Prague on October 7 on the subject. His paper, entitled “Periods without Chronology,” was a defense of a particular positivist approach to periodization in history.

In October Professor **Betty Anderson** gave a paper entitled “The American University of Beirut (AUB): Conflicts of Coeducation” at the American Studies Association Conference in Oakland.

Professor **Andrew Bacevich** reports a series of publications in the past month: “Chickens Are Home to Roost in Iraq,” *The Australian* (September 27); “The Cold War Inside the Pentagon,” *Los Angeles Times* (October 3); “On the Offense” *The American Conservative* (October 23); and the introduction to a new edition of *Empire as a Way of Life* by William Appleman Williams.

Professor **Julian Zelizer** presented a chapter from his new book, “Thunder from the Right,” at the Johns Hopkins University History Seminar. As the election season heats up, he has also appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, *U.S. News and World Report*, the Associated Press, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Detroit News*. In addition, he was a guest on WBUR, Minnesota Public Radio, and WNYC in New York. Finally, his last book, *On Capitol Hill*, was featured in a cover story in *The American Prospect*.

Graduate student **Jolanta Komornicka** has been invited to give a guest lecture at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota, on November 22. The lecture, which will be for Dr. John Mazis’s course on Imperial Russia, is entitled “A King in Woman’s Clothing: Jadwiga of Anjou and the Transformation of Fourteenth-



Century Poland.”

Professor **John Thornton** recently published “Central Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade” in Jane Landers and Barry M. Robinson, eds., *Slaves, Subjects and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America* (University of New Mexico Press). On September 15-16 he and Professor **Linda Heywood** attended an organizing meeting for Project NEMOS, a project to use new media for the presentation of the history of the Atlantic world in the seventeenth century. They were interviewed by Voice of America Portuguese Africa service (in Portuguese) on September 13 for a show on the connections between Angola and Jamestown; Heywood was interviewed by Radio One in Baltimore on October 12 about African history and working with the exhibit at Jamestown.

On September 29 Professor **Jonathan Zatlin** was a commentator for the panel on “Perpetrators, Displaced Persons, and the Politics of Occupation” at the German Studies Association meeting in Pittsburgh. His comment will be published on H-Net. His forthcoming book, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany*, has been named a finalist for the President’s Book Award of the Social Science History Association.

Professor **Richard Landes** had an article entitled “How French TV Fudged the Death of Mohammed Al Durah” included in *The New Republic Online*. It concerns the controversial 2000 death of 12-year-old Mohammed Al Durah and his father in the Gaza Strip. Landes maintains that the film footage of the event reveals “pervasive staging,” and now there are lawsuits against a French TV network over the coverage; as someone involved in the investigation of the controversy and as a medievalist who has written on the power of images, of narratives, and of forgeries, Professor Landes has been asked to testify in two of the trials.

Professor **William Keylor** presented a paper in French titled “New Directions in the Study of International History in the United States” at the graduate seminar of Professor Georges-Henri Soutou at the University of Paris I (Sorbonne) on October 14. ♦

## Update on Spring 2007 Courses

One course, which will appear in the schedule as soon as it has received administrative approval, has been added for spring 2007:

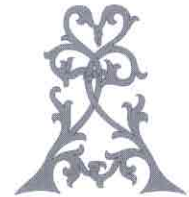
CAS HI 277

A Country at a Crossroads: Modern Armenian History and Literature

Taught by Visiting Assistant Professor Susan Barba, the course provides an introduction to modern Armenian history and literature from the nineteenth-century “cultural renaissance” to the upheavals of the twentieth century—genocide, independence, and Sovietization—and the literatures of Soviet Armenia and the diaspora. Consult the class schedule for meeting time. For History concentrators, the course counts as non-Western.

As was announced in the October newsletter, the department has begun a search for a permanent faculty member in Armenian Studies.

## NEWS OF UNDERGRADUATES



The following students received the BA in History in September:

Katherine Ann Acker, Double Major in French, *Magna cum Laude*, and a Bachelor's degree from the School of Education  
Michael Vaughan Butler  
Christian Tyler Evans  
Allison Heather Finkel, Double Major in English  
Kevin Neil Gardner  
Winston Hao Gu, Double Major in Economics, *cum Laude*  
Agnes Julia Gyórfi, Triple Major in English and International Relations  
Andrew Douglas Harmon  
Kiera Rae Larsen  
Michael Martucci, Double Major in Political Science  
Pedro Santos Silva, Double Major in International Relations, *Magna cum Laude*  
Tetje Jenna Vaisman  
Joseph Patrick Vincent, Double Major in Political Science, *Magna cum Laude*, with a Master's degree in Political Science

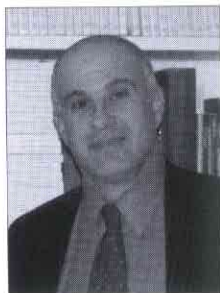
## American Political History Seminars

The last presentation for the fall semester in the American Political History Seminar series will be held on Wednesday, November 8, in Room 504 in the department building: Marjorie Spruill, University of South Carolina, speaking on “Gender and America’s Right Turn: The 1977 IWY Conferences and the Polarization of American Politics.”



## Bruce Schulman wins Roelker mentoring award

Professor Bruce Schulman has been named winner of the American Historical Association's Nancy Lyman Roelker Mentorship Award, an honor to be announced at the annual meeting in January 2007.



This award was established "to honor teachers of history who taught, guided, and inspired their students in a way that changed their lives. Mentoring is as important to the discipline of history as fine scholarship and good teaching. The ideal mentor is forthright, supportive, and constructively critical, committed to the student as a person, regardless of age or career goals."

The AHA describes the essential elements of the successful mentor: belief in the value of the study of history and commitment to and love of teaching it to students regardless of age or career goals; consistent personal commitment by the mentor to the student as a person; honesty and integrity of the mentor; the mentor's contribution to the process of mentoring as a one-to-one partnership in learning that is comfortable to both, that is likely to endure and develop beyond the initial context as each learns from, gives to, and shares with the other, enriching both professional and personal lives.

The Nancy Lyman Roelker Mentorship Award is given on a three-year cycle, and Professor Schulman won in the category of graduate mentor (which includes combined graduate and undergraduate teaching).

The award, established in 1991, is named for Nancy Roelker (1915-1993), who was Professor of History at Boston University from 1971 until 1980. She specialized in early modern French history.

## NEWS OF ALUMNI



Pamela Walker Laird (PhD 1992) is the author of *Pull: Networking and Success since Benjamin Franklin* (Harvard University Press, 2006). The book has won the 2006 Hagley Prize for the Best Book in Business History and the 2006 Harold F. Williamson Prize in Business History. Pamela is Associate Professor of History at the University of Colorado, Denver.

## News of the Undergraduate History Association

On Saturday, November 11, the Undergraduate History Association will host a day trip to Salem, Mass., where the group will take a tour of the Salem Witch Museum and explore historic downtown Salem. Those attending should meet in front of the Hotel Commonwealth subway entrance at 9:45 a.m. If there are any questions, contact Peter Erhartic at [erhartic@bu.edu](mailto:erhartic@bu.edu).

Professor Nina Silber (Director of Undergraduate Studies) and Professor Arianne Chernock met with students interested in the concentration in history at the department's "Major Choices" event held on October 20.



## Graduate Student Weddings



Devon Hansen writes: "I got married on October 7 to David Atchison—we had a beautiful wedding in Newport Beach, California, and were lucky to have perfect weather and a wonderful time! We won't honeymoon until January, when I'm on vacation from school; we'll be heading to Roatan (an island off the coast of Honduras) for a week for scuba diving, relaxing, and some sun. This is, of course, fitting, since I will have defended my dissertation on suntanning by then. Otherwise, teaching at Grossmont College is still going great and San Diego is still gorgeous!"

And from Katie Cramer: "My wedding to Jason Brownell was on October 8, a beautiful and sunny fall day on Nantucket Island, and the reception was at the Nantucket Whaling Museum—even the wedding had a historic touch. Afterwards, we went to Maine for a mini-honeymoon and will travel to the Dominican Republic for our extended honeymoon in January. Currently Jason runs his family business on Nantucket, and I split my time between the island and Boston."





## Doctoral dissertation defense à la française

BY WILLIAM R. KEYLOR

Last month I was invited to serve on a dissertation defense committee at the Sorbonne. After accepting the invitation, I received in the mail a 1,750-page dissertation in four volumes dealing with the relations between the United States and France during the Eisenhower administration, with particular attention to the role of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. After recovering my breath at the prospect of having to plow through such a gargantuan piece of scholarship, I began to read and was astonished at the extent of the student's research in the relevant primary sources. In his exhaustive labors in archives on both sides of the Atlantic, from the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, to the French Foreign Ministry in Paris, he seemed to have seen every scrap of paper that came across the desk of anyone even remotely connected with his subject. But the thesis turned out to be no mere recitation of dry-as-dust facts. The author marshaled the extensive evidence gleaned from the government archives and private papers in support of an audacious argument that directly contradicted the conventional wisdom about Dulles's foreign policies in general and toward France in particular. His evaluation of those policies was uniformly harsh, whether dealing with the war in Indochina, the abortive effort to create a European army, the new American defense strategy based on nuclear deterrence, the transatlantic brouhaha over the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt in 1956, or the reaction in Washington to Charles de Gaulle's early efforts to challenge US hegemony in Europe.

In my last encounter with the French university system, I had served as an "invited professor" at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris (Sciences

Po) to share my ideas with its students on the recent history of Franco-American relations. Unfortunately for me, I happened to arrive a few weeks after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by American forces in the spring of 2003. Since French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin had directly challenged American Secretary of State Colin Powell's justification for armed military action against Iraq, and since no evidence of the weapons of mass destruction had yet been discovered by the occupation forces, I was hardly surprised to receive a barrage of indignant comments and pointed questions from the students at Sciences Po about American foreign policy. I thought that I would lighten up the conversation a bit by playfully assuring the students that I was not being paid as a spokesman for George W. Bush or Colin Powell. Although I had personally opposed the American invasion before the weapons inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency had had an opportunity to complete their investigation, I decided to serve as the "devil's advocate" in order to stimulate discussion among these critics of my government's foreign policy by summarizing the various justifications for the invasion provided by the White House.

As I entered the Sorbonne last month to discuss another French critique of the foreign policies of an earlier American president and his secretary of state, I again decided to adopt the role of "devil's advocate" in order to encourage the candidate to sharpen his case against Eisenhower and Dulles. The event began at 9 a.m. in a spacious amphitheater. The five members of the "jury" were seated at an elevated table, beneath which sat the candidate (I almost said "defendant"). Behind him were at least sixty people (who I later learned were members of his family, friends, colleagues, as well as other PhD students eager to see what lay ahead for them). Each member of the five-person jury delivered a formal half-hour commentary on the thesis, to which the candidate was required to reply. After all comments and replies were completed, the amphitheater was emptied so that

the jury could deliberate. The choices ranged from "passable" (the kiss of death for an academic career) to "very honorable mention with the congratulations of the jury." After a lengthy discussion of the thesis as well as of the candidate's replies to each commentary, the vote (which was conducted by secret ballot) was unanimous in favor of the highest designation. After the candidate and the audience returned to the amphitheater, the announcement of the judgment elicited prolonged applause from the audience and a glow of pride and satisfaction from the candidate. I glanced at my watch and was amazed to see that it was 1:30 p.m., four and a half hours after we had begun. But that was not the end of the proceedings. All present were invited to a reception in a room filled with bottles of champagne and a lavish spread of delicacies from various regions of the country.

This experience left me with an acute appreciation of how steeped in old-fashioned academic tradition graduate education remains in France. More specifically, I was reminded of how much the dissertation defense in that country represents an important rite of passage to be honored and celebrated by the candidate's family, friends, and peers. I once wrote a book about the creation of the historical profession in that country's university system during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The experience of the young man who defended his thesis a month ago was virtually identical to the experience of his predecessors a hundred and thirty years ago as they defended their dissertations before the founders of the historical discipline in France in the presence of an interested and appreciative audience. When I recall the distant memory of my own dissertation defense at Columbia University—a casual two-hour conversation in a small room with only myself and the five members of the board present—as well as my more recent memories of the dissertation defenses at Boston University in which I have participated, I feel a tinge of regret at the absence of the combination of formality and celebration that I observed during my brief Parisian sojourn last month. ♦

*William Keylor is Professor of History and International Relations.*

Department of History  
Boston University  
226 Bay State Road  
Boston, MA 02215

