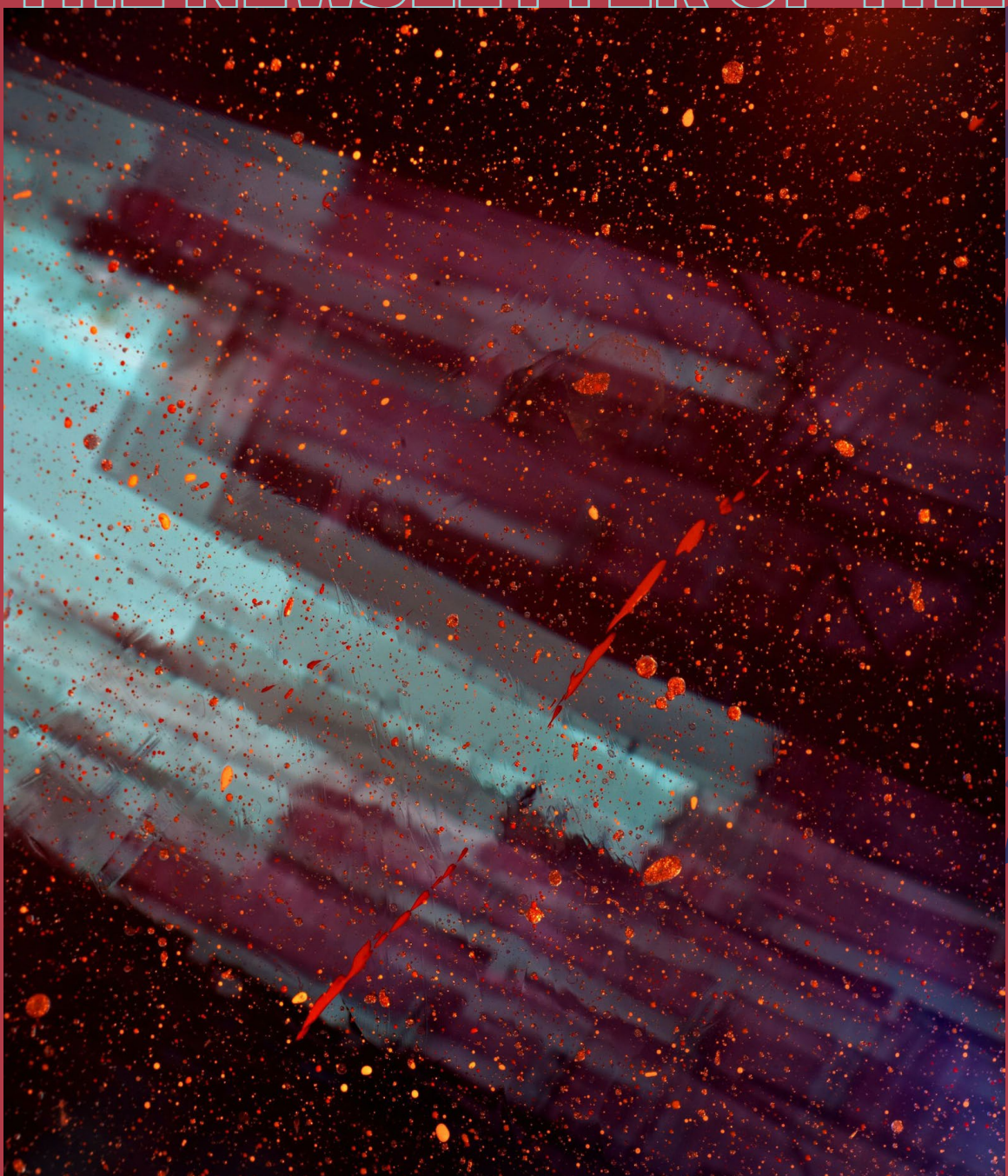


THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE



MARCH
2021

BU HISTORY DEPARTMENT

FROM THE CHAIR'S DESK

NINA SILBER, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR



Greetings from Bay State Road, from home offices everywhere, and from Zoom!

This newsletter, so ably compiled and edited by History Department staff members Jillian Nichols and Cady Steinberg, comes to you as a special edition, in recognition of BU's "Giving Day". Scheduled for April 7, "Giving Day" offers a moment when friends, students, staff and faculty, can show their support for Boston University

and, more specifically, for the BU History Department. As former history major Anna Stroinski explains, there are many, many ways the BU History Department would benefit donations, large and small. To name just a few examples: your contributions can assist individual undergraduate research projects; facilitate class field trips (once that becomes a thing again!); help fund undergraduate or graduate student conferences, or bring in special speakers for a classroom event or a lecture series.

Yet, aside from learning about the tangible benefits of giving, I hope, as you read this newsletter, you'll also appreciate the often moving testimony that's been compiled here – drawn from History students and faculty - about how much our lives have been upended by the coronavirus pandemic and how much we have found, sometimes even in small ways, rays of strength and resilience. How gathering with students on a regular basis, even in their tiny zoom boxes on a laptop screen, can be a means towards forging a community; how zoom classrooms can be a medium for sharing historic family documents; how even digital research can yield some exciting and unexpected finds; and how learning and teaching history amidst a pandemic can be a moment for reflecting on human resiliency during past moments of suffering. This semester I'm teaching a graduate seminar on zoom and while it has occasional moments of frustration (intermittent freezing, faulty microphones) it's also been a steady and even endearing time of gathering. I love getting the glimpses into kitchens and the fairly frequent appearance of feline pets. More than anything, without having the usual dynamics of the physical classroom, I appreciate the way we've all worked together to build something that works for all of us.

One other advantage of zoom is the ability to give a wider group of alums and supporters access to History Department programs. With this in mind, please join us for our annual Bacon Lecture, this year featuring the outstanding historian Manisha Sinha, on April 14 at 5:30 (ET). Elsewhere in this newsletter, you'll find more information about the talk and how to register.

Finally, if you are able, I hope you'll use the opportunity of "Giving Day" to **[make a contribution](#)** to the BU History Department. Please know, too, that *if you make your donation on the actual day (April 7), our department can benefit even more*, as we become eligible for bonus funds from the University. So put a circle around April 7 and **[follow this link to make your donation](#)**.

Thanks to all of you for helping build and strengthen the BU History Department!

Nina Silber
Chair and Professor, BU History Department

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GIVING DAY 2021

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 2021

For 24 hours on BU Giving Day, every gift to the programs of your choice has an even bigger impact. Thanks to a group of generous donors, bonus funds are up for grabs! Your gift helps earn bonus funds for CAS. Celebrate the cause that makes you #ProudtoBU by making your gift on BU Giving Day by using the department's [unique link](#).

For our undergraduate program, your donation will support a broad swath of independent student projects. Students working on senior honors theses will be able to fund travel and lodging costs to do meaningful archival research pertinent to their thesis topics. Along with local and digital archival research, thesis writers will have the opportunity to broaden the scope of their projects and explore histories that are dearest to them.

Your donation could also fund independent student projects that fall outside the scope of a formal thesis: including but not limited to oral history collections, short documentaries, and collaborative digital and public history projects. Support a student compiling invaluable oral histories of the Boston Marathon Bombing. Sponsor a short documentary film on the Velvet Revolution in 1980s Czechoslovakia. Help history majors work with computer science and graphic design majors from across campus to create an interactive website that maps the Boston busing crisis spatially as well as chronologically.

Your donation can also support the annual Undergraduate Historical Association conference, museum and archival outings, undergraduate lecture series, research and public history workshops, and the like. Support a peer-reviewed journal edited by undergraduate students. Fund innovative events with outside scholars like Historians at the Movies. Send a student or two to the AHA's undergraduate poster session every January and to relevant academic conferences across the world on a case-by-case basis.

For our graduate program, your donation can support our admissions open house. Help the department attract and retain talented new graduate students by fostering a strong sense of community among and between cohorts from the start.

Your donation can also sponsor History Graduate Student Organization (HGSO) professionalization workshops. Help graduate students bring junior scholars and alternative academics to campus for roundtable discussions, prepare for job talks, apply to post-docs, use social media effectively and professionally, create personal websites, write cover letters and teaching statements, and explore prospective careers outside of academia. Help BU History graduate students for life post-PhD.

- Anna Stroinski



BACON LECTURE 2021

ABOLITIONIST FEMINISM AND THE LONG NINETEENTH AMENDMENT

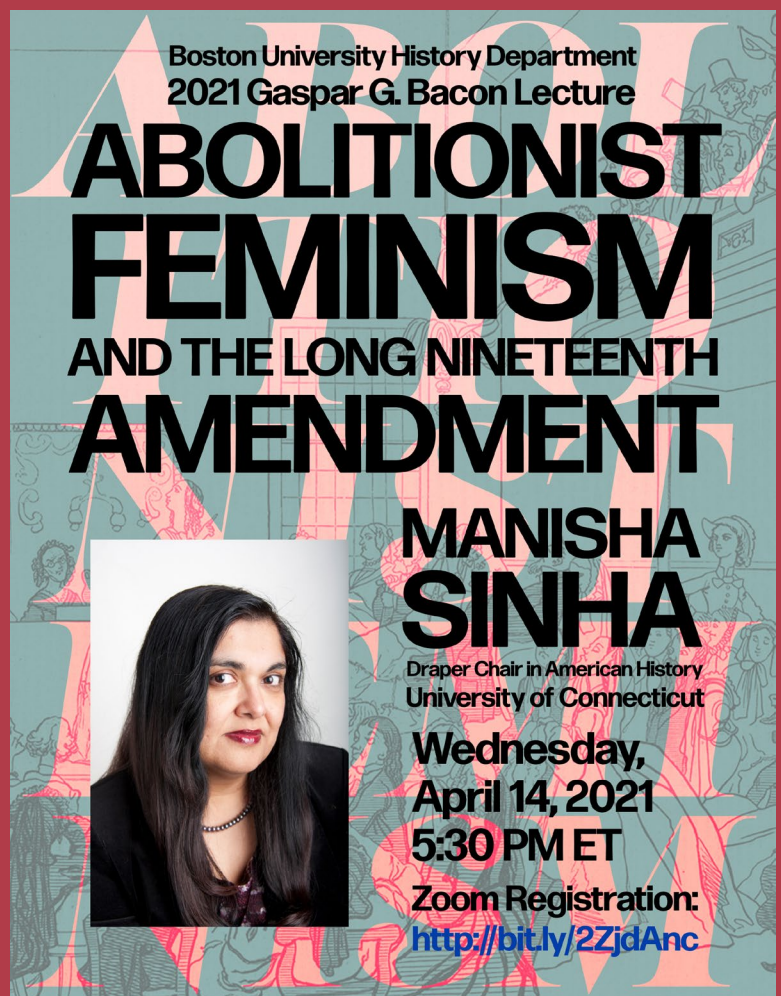
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 14, 2021 AT 5:30 PM ET

Manisha Sinha, Draper Chair in American History at the University of Connecticut

Please join the Boston University History Department for the 2021 Gaspar G. Bacon Lecture!

This talk will examine the long genealogy of the Nineteenth Amendment in the history of abolitionist feminism. It revisits the Reconstruction debates over women's suffrage to argue that rather than a setback, this period was a formative one in the emergence of women's suffrage. The roots of the Nineteenth Amendment lie in the nineteenth century especially among those black and white women who refused to give up on the intersectional nature of the struggle for black and women's rights.

Zoom Registration: https://bostonu.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_6Li-wBTtPQvq_Gy7ZLF42QA



Boston University History Department
2021 Gaspar G. Bacon Lecture

ABOLITIONIST FEMINISM AND THE LONG NINETEENTH AMENDMENT

MANISHA SINHA
Draper Chair in American History
University of Connecticut

Wednesday,
April 14, 2021
5:30 PM ET

Zoom Registration:
<http://bit.ly/2ZjdAnc>

HISTORY FACULTY DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH TEACHING DURING COVID-19

ARIANNE CHERNOCK

Like so many of my colleagues, I approached teaching last fall with some trepidation. Adapting to new technologies, overseeing students learning both from their BU dorm rooms and from overseas, managing the daily stresses of living through a pandemic – all sounded like a recipe for a suboptimal classroom experience. What I discovered in my seminar, though, was less a source of anxiety than of comfort. Week to week, my students and I in History 451 – Fashion as History – built a very real community, supporting each other, offering counsel, and sharing stories with humor, grace, and candor. Many of us never met each other in person, but we nevertheless found ways of connecting through the Zoom screen. During a discussion of the Cultural Revolution in China, one student pulled out photos of members of her family and shared their recollections of living through the experience. In a research presentation, another student marveled at the way in which she was able to use the Panama hat to tell a story about herself, her family, and US foreign relations. A further boon to our seminar was the addition of many guest speakers, who I invited into our virtual classroom. Over the course of the semester, we discussed the ethics of fast fashion with author Dana Thomas, explored the links between fashion and women’s emancipation with BU CFA alumna and fashion historian Raissa Bretana, and the art of podcasting with Dressed podcasters Cassidy Zachary and April Calahan. We also took a virtual tour of the Peabody Essex Made It exhibit with curator Petra Slinkard. I’m not trying to make a pitch here for online teaching. In fact, I can’t wait to get back to in-person instruction. But I did take away from last semester a deep appreciation for the technologies that enabled us to connect across great distances, that facilitated conversations with experts working in Paris, New Mexico, New York and beyond, and that allowed my students to pursue advanced-level undergraduate research using digitized collections across the world. When I do return to in-person instruction – hopefully very soon – I will bring some of these insights with me. My teaching won’t look entirely the same, and it will be the better for it.

DAVE SHORTEN

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, I am finding hope in the opportunity to experiment with new ways of teaching this year. My students have made memes, podcasts, and virtual galleries. They have chased their historical interests and composed thoughtful research papers about a multitude of historical topics (a great many of which had contemporary resonance). I admire students’ extra dedication to their studies, which I have witnessed week after week all year long. I believe that next year promises to combine the best of the old world and the new.

BENJAMIN SIEGEL

Teaching in a pandemic is no picnic, but there is an absolute joy in connecting with our talented students at a moment when the connectedness and sense of intellectual exploration that are at the heart of history classroom is in such short general supply. There's a particular and deep satisfaction that comes through giving our students access to the context and tools that they can use to make sense of our current moment, strange though not unprecedented, and helping them see what possibilities for growth and change are on the other side of it. Even when we wish the circumstances were different, I'm grateful to have colleagues who take similar pride in this work.

JAMES JOHNSON

Several weeks ago I heard from a student who graduated last year. The pandemic had made her reflective, she wrote, and she found her thoughts returning to a research paper she had written for "The Historian's Craft." It was based on letters and a journal from Frederick Augustus James, a Union soldier in the Civil War who was a captive in the Andersonville Prison. He would later die there. The student wrote that she has thought of James throughout the pandemic, when things have seemed so bleak. "He took the time to write to his daughters about a butterfly that he saw."

For this History major, the course was foundational, not only because of her passion for history but for "the broader appreciation for humanity" it gave her. Her words were moving, in part because they point to one of the highest rewards that studying the past can provide. Humanity is resourceful and resilient. We also know that the human story tells of suffering, loss, sympathy, condolence, and compassion. Especially in times like these, the perspective that comes from a serious study of history--and the broader appreciation for humanity that it brings--is invaluable.

GIVING DAY 2021

The History Department's community is enriched by programming for its alumni, students, faculty, and staff, and your gift can enhance that experience. On Monday, April 7th, 2021, use the History Department's [unique Giving Day link](#) to make your donation go even further.

SUPPORT
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HISTORY GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION

While we miss gathering at Cornwall's, HGSO hasn't let the pandemic stop us in creating opportunities for social interactions and professional development for history graduate students. Coffee chats with Harry Merritt, a lecturer at BU, and Sara Georgini, a BU PhD and current series editor of *The Papers of John Adams* at the Massachusetts Historical Society, provided an opportunity for informal conversations with recent grads on the ins and outs of the job market, both within and outside of academia. Last fall, we organized a workshop on "how to TF a history class" led by Brooke Blower and are currently planning a "how to succeed on your oral exams" panel for the spring. We also organized a joint panel with AMNESP, HAA, and English focused on applying for GSO travel grants.

We've deepened our partnership with AMNESP, joining them for a museum careers panel last fall and inviting them to a panel on publishing outside of academia this spring. Our regular Writing Workshop program has continued, with the Zoom platform allowing folks who are not in Boston to participate, and we've had the opportunity to read and comment on a number of papers, on everything from conservatism to scenic views.

We've also begun what we hope will serve as useful resources to graduate students for years to come. Thanks to the generous donation of a collection of books from Alix Rivière, we are starting a lending library, designed to provide graduate students easy access to books necessary for oral exams and dissertation writing. Several professors have also generously donated to the collection. Additionally, we have started a shared online drive with sample exam reading lists, grant applications, and a book exchange. If you have books you'd like to donate or sample reading lists or grant applications you'd like to share, we'd be thrilled for additional alumni support!

We're active on the social front, too: regular Zoom Happy Hours provide chances for graduate students to decompress and join colleagues in informal conversations about everything from takeout to teaching to whether a hot dog is a sandwich. A Halloween movie night gave us all a chance to figure out how screen sharing worked. And we're still holding out hope for a gathering at Cornwall's in May!

- *Courteney Smith*

HISTORY GRADUATE STUDENTS DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19

JEANNA KINNEBREW

I teach in the 8:00 AM slot this year, and I was worried about how to engage students early in the morning (and in a pandemic). I instituted the “1 to 10 Check-in” - essentially, we start every class meeting by sharing, on a scale of 1-10, how our energy levels and mental health are that day. It’s been a huge hit! If someone is at a 2 or a 3, I give them space to talk about how they’re doing (if they want); and if someone is on the higher end, I invite them to share what good things are happening in their lives. Through the check-in, I’m continually reminded how generous, kind, and intellectually curious our BU students are. For example, one student noted that she was stressed about a chemistry test, and one of her peers - who had taken the class the year before - offered to tutor her. Another student shared that he was grieving a relative, and it led us into a thoughtful discussion of grief, memory, and family histories. On our mid-year and final course evaluations, multiple students highlighted the daily check-in as an important piece of our class. Several noted that as first-year students they felt particularly lonely, and looked forward to the check-ins as a way to build connections with their peers - even though they are spread across the campus and the world.

CHARLEY BINKOW

My cat turned one on March fourth. She is basically as old as the national lockdowns, a walking reminder of my own time spent as an indoor graduate student. Incidentally, my older cat began his “weight loss journey” a year ago when we switched him to diet kibbles. As she grows and he shrinks, I make dents in my dissertation and mental health. After a year, we are all different. I did not tell them that my archives closed, my grandmother died, my third nephew was born, or my nation’s Capital was sieged—they had enough on their plates. Yet these events changed me, drained me, made me grow and shrink in different ways. I found, when productivity became a sign of perseverance, small victories tasted sweeter. Boston University’s History Department funded me through a struggling summer, my healthcare covered tele-health visits with my therapist, and the faculty helped in more ways than I can list here. After a year, I’ve racked up small victories because of a virtual but all-too-real community. Currently I am helping Dr. Nina Silber with her project on the post-war folk revival era, transcribing her interviews with history makers. Somehow, I’ve managed to write a chapter of my own dissertation with digitized archives. My growth was frustratingly slow, prone to backslides and plateaus, but I had supportive people who believed in my long-term success. I discovered how hard it is to write about the past when I can’t imagine the future. My mother offered the best guidance: “Every day, write as much as you can while you drink one cup of coffee. Go from there, but always start by writing ‘just a cup.’” I have no advice for overcoming grief or becoming more academically productive, other than what I tell my always-hungry cats: make the most of every cup you get.

RACHEL WILSON

This past summer, I had the privilege of teaching my own class. When I originally requested to instruct BU's Catastrophe and Memory course, I had no clue the contemporary relevance this class would have during the summer of 2020. Catastrophe and Memory explores how catastrophic events are remembered, both by the individuals who experienced them firsthand and by those who have come after. This course examines the role that museums and memorials play in shaping the process of coming to terms with past events—state-sponsored violence, war, genocide, natural disaster, public health crises, and domestic terrorism—and the politics of commemoration. Catastrophe and Memory tackled issues such as the often-problematic relationship between personal testimonies and public narratives, the difficulties reconciling individual and collective memories, and the tension between “history” and “memory.”

I was certainly nervous for the summer term to start. From navigating the technical aspects of remote learning to keeping nearly 40 students engaged over Zoom, a lot had the potential to go wrong. Yet looking back, I am still struck by how successful the course was. While there were numerous problems with connectivity and time changes, the remote learning enabled students from around the world to enroll in the course, an opportunity many of them likely would not have had if teaching had been solely in-person. The remote learning also enabled several fascinating guest lectures, such as the founder of Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive. Most importantly, the course provided important human contact for both me and the students. During months of isolation, our daily conversations proved to be source of community during unparalleled times.

Additionally, the nature of the course content allowed students to discuss, struggle with, and process current issues. For example, the original syllabus included a week dedicated to “Public Health Crises,” specifically looking at the AIDS pandemic. Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 crisis was a topic of much discussion and enabled students to make meaningful connections between the past and present. Similarly, a week devoted to debates surrounding Confederate monuments had particular salience this summer, as Black Lives Matter protests swept the nation. I will remember the summer of 2020 as uniquely challenging, but I will also remember the ways in which teaching Catastrophe and Memory provided a community, safe space, and platform through which to work through the past year. As a historian and future educator, it served as an important reminder for me of why we do what we do, and how much our history courses matter.

TOM SOJKA

I was fortunate enough to receive a Graduate Research Abroad Fellowship to support my research into sociability and leisure in 1920s and 1930s Britain, but have had to put travel to the UK on hold due to the pandemic. While I initially felt stuck and demoralized by the inability to visit archives, I've been reenergized by what is available digitally. The department has generously supported my subscription to an online repository of periodicals, the British Newspaper Archive, which has proved tremendously useful to my research. Access to these newspaper sources has allowed me to draft a partial chapter of my dissertation and I am presently writing a second chapter. Despite the challenges associated with doing research, I'm energized by my ability to still make some sort of progress on my project.

JIM WILLIAMS

Anno Domini 2020 was a befuddling year for Jim Williams (5th-year PhD student, History), but as he, his family, and friends have been spared the worst of it, he is most grateful. Squeezing in an appearance before the world shut down at the American Society of Church Historians conference in NYC, Jim participated in a panel on “Unexpected Preaching,” graciously chaired at the eleventh-hour by Dr. Catherine Brekus. After enjoying getting lost in Central Park, he delivered his paper “Sermons of Secularization” on the Garrisonian abolitionists’ anti-Sabbath convention of 1848.

When everything hit the fan in March, Jim successfully silenced his inner Luddite and clambered onto Zoom along with the rest of the BU, but he made sure to cover his webcam whenever not in use and regularly delete his cookies (just in case Big Brother was watching and/or hungry). He is particularly thankful for the cooperation and patience of the students in his discussion sections during the transition to virtual space.

In late summer, Jim found himself driving a U-Haul on old Route 66, helping his old undergrad roommate and wife move from St. Louis to LA. After detours to eat birthday cake at the Grand Canyon and to see the Pacific Ocean for five seconds, he bounced back to the Bay State, quarantining for two weeks before resuming efforts to rebuild his backyard shed. Jim’s dissertation research is benefitting immensely from the many digitized 19th-century primary sources available through Mugar. Especially in light of the past year, he is endeavoring to pay closer attention to the Black abolitionists among the figures he studies, foregrounding their efforts and amplifying their voices. While continuing on with the dissertation, Jim is also preparing to teach US II at BU during Summer Session I and waiting with bated breath for the third season of *The Mandalorian*.

PATRICK BROWNE

In some ways, I have been pursuing the typical balancing act of a PhD candidate this academic year—teaching while simultaneously trying to conduct research and get some substantive writing done. Of course, this has been anything but a typical year. Like everyone else, I’ve struggled at times. I have been teaching as a graduate fellow for the Writing Program and there is no doubt that the concept of hybrid teaching during a pandemic was daunting at the start. The social media stream from academics far and wide offered conflicting advice ranging from innovative pedagogical techniques to more skeptical insistence that now is not the time to innovate. Looking back on last semester I have to say with no small amount of surprise that it was the best teaching experience I’ve had. And it had little or nothing to do with me. The students brought an incredible enthusiasm and resolve to learn, to write and to discuss. They were every bit as determined to make this work as I was. It’s something I won’t soon forget. And now, the writing comes along—the research perhaps not so much. But as archives begin to reopen, I look forward to a busy summer and a productive final year ahead.

ADMITTED GRADUATE STUDENT OPEN HOUSE

The Open House I went to at BU, as an admitted-but-not-yet-committed PhD applicant, was not the only open house I attended while deciding on a PhD program – but it was the best. The schedule was brisk (arrive in Boston Sunday afternoon in time for dinner, leave Boston Monday afternoon) yet that twenty-four hours was enough for me to make a choice that felt confident and informed.

What I appreciated most about the Open House was how much time I got to spend with other History grad students, both the fellow prospective students who would be in my cohort and the current grad students. Of course, I also enjoyed meeting the staff and faculty, especially my future adviser. (Distinguished faculty, it turns out, get just as excited about free pizza as grad students do.) But the people you spend the most time with as a student are the other students. And it's current students who can tell prospective students what a department and university are really like. That Sunday, I didn't meet any staff or faculty. Instead, I had dinner with seven current grad students and all the prospective students who could make it to Boston. I loved that the History department let our first opportunity for conversation be with current grad students, in a way that we could speak candidly. We had a chance to do the same thing the next afternoon at Cornwall's, near but not on campus, which made it informal and unvarnished. It's difficult to get a feel for a university in the space of a day. Potentially overwhelming, when you're considering giving that university half a decade (or more) of your life. Listening to the perspectives of grad students who'd spent at least a year in the department was highly valuable.

The Open House I attended was in March 2019. In March 2020, a certain pandemic scuppered the anticipated Open House for that year's cohort. But this March, I'll be attending another History Open House as one of seven current grad students. It will be a bit different – entirely virtual – but I look forward to speaking with the prospective students and offering whatever perspective I can.

-Elizabeth Grumer

MAKE A DONATION

All year round, donations to the History Department will help support undergraduate and graduate programming, and professional development for all members of our community. Use the department's [secure donation page](#) any day of the year.

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THE DEPT

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ALUMNI PROFILE

STEPHANIE ROJAS, CAS '12



What have you been doing since leaving the History Department?

Since graduating from BU in 2012 I've been pursuing a career in book publishing. After earning an MA from Emerson College in 2013 I worked for a year as a sales assistant at Simon & Schuster. Next I took a job as a marketing assistant at Princeton University Press. I was there for four years and in that time I was promoted to social media specialist. In 2019 my partner was re-assigned to an Air Force base in Virginia so we moved to Yorktown and I took a job as a web manager in the marketing department at Busch Gardens Williamsburg. I stayed for six months before being hired to work remotely as the publicist at Georgetown University Press, where I am

now. In this job I publicize our academic and trade titles and manage our social media channels. During the pandemic I've been lucky to be able to work from home and spend more time with my fiance, stepson, and our foxhound Mary Ann.

How did your experience in the department shape your professional and personal life?

I think back to my time in the History Department at BU fondly! I learned valuable skills including how to communicate effectively, critically analyze a text, and find accurate information. I'm grateful that I had the opportunity to learn from a group of extremely talented researchers.

If you could give a piece of advice to your past self, what would it be?

I would say that it's ok to cut yourself some slack. You don't need to jump at the first opportunity that comes your way just because it's there--there will be always be others!

HISTORY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS DURING COVID-19

UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY ASSOCIATION

The Undergraduate History Association brings together students from across the university who share a passion for history. Members give presentations and hold trivia nights on a weekly basis. This semester, the History Department sponsored UHA's visit to the Museum of Fine Art's virtual Basquiat exhibit and on Sunday, April 2, UHA will host its sixth annual conference. The conference is open to all BU students regardless of major. This year's theme is "Ideology." UHA members are still celebrating their victory over Delta Mu in a recent trivia competition.

- Professor Dave Shorten

PHI ALPHA THETA

Phi Alpha Theta is a national history honors society whose members demonstrate excellence and dedication to studying history at the college level. The History Department sponsors BU's chapter of Phi Alpha Theta, Delta Mu. Members of this student-run group gather several times per semester for history-themed events. On February 11, members met for a 2-minute presentation night, where they took turns sharing slideshows. For example, one presentation highlighted "Five Unforgettable Facts About History," including the revelation that George Washington's teeth were not made of wood. This year, several members are participating in the New England Phi Alpha Theta Conference, hosted by Saint Anselm College, on March 27. The group is excited to welcome twenty new members this year.

- Professor Dave Shorten

HONORS PROGRAM

In the class of 2020, fifteen graduating seniors completed theses and graduated with Honors in History. This was a remarkably large number of honors students, who persevered through the stresses, limitations, and challenges of covid shutdowns and our shift to remote learning in the spring. This year, seven students in the honors program are grappling with similar challenges, but plodding away on theses ranging from Cold War citizen diplomacy to sex discrimination in job ads in 1970s New York City. Beginning last year, a new departmental program offers supplemental research and travel funding for students in the honors program. With your support we can continue this program, allowing students to visit archives once people can travel more freely.

- Professor Andrew Robichaud

"HISTORIANS IN THE ARENA"

BU HISTORY PHD KATHRYN BROWNELL CO-EDITS "MADE BY HISTORY" SECTION FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A 2011 graduate of the History Ph.D. Program at BU, Kathryn Brownell is currently Associate Professor at Purdue University, where she teaches classes and conducts research on twentieth-century United States political history with a focus on the relationships between media, politics, and popular culture. Her first book, *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Politics*, analyzed the key personal relationships, institutions, and government policies that established the foundation for a celebrity political culture and made entertainment a central feature of American politics. Her current research tackles the rise of cable television, exploring the political origins, economic pressures, and cultural implications of the of twenty-four-hour news cycle.



In addition to her writing and teaching, Brownell also co-edits the Washington Post's "Made By History" (MBH) section, a daily feature that brings the fruits of historical analysis to a broad, international audience. Taking its title from a remark of BU alumnus Martin Luther King, Jr, Brownell and her collaborators believe that making history, and being made by it, form two parts of the same essential process. "In order to make history," the sections editors explain, "we first have to understand how history has made us." Making sense of the history behind the news, MBH brings the insight of hundreds of historians into the public arena. Together with her colleagues, Brownell shapes this influential player in public debate—reviewing submissions, commissioning pieces, and editing all of the entries.

In March 2021, the Newsletter sat down with Brownell to discuss her experiences.

BU History: What are some of the things you've like best/been most proud of with MBH?

Brownell: What I'm definitely most proud of it would be the diversity of people that we publish. As an editor, it's been really exciting to meet so many historians and to learn about the really amazing scholarship that historians are doing right now. There are certain gender and racial dynamics that have long shaped Op-Ed writing, and we work hard to bring new voices, especially those of women and people of color, into public debate. The career diversity has been great as well. We're having graduate students who are writing for us along with independent scholars, early career faculty, and professors at community colleges. It's a reminder that talented historians work in a variety of places, both inside and outside academia.

BU History: Anything surprising or unexpected?

Brownell: The biggest surprise was the amount of work. Of course, the pace of the work is something that I understood going into the media world. But the Trump era accelerated everything, so that I was really surprised at how quickly events could move. On the flip side, though, I'm really impressed by how fast we could respond. In these moments of crisis, historians have stepped up time and time again. They were pitching us immediately and would work into the late hours of the night to turn around stories. It's been really incredible to see so many of my colleagues willing to spend the time to hit the news cycle to make their historical expertise resonate and reverberate in the most effective way possible.

BU History: Have there been any particularly sort of controversial or difficult moments?

Brownell: Yes! One of the most challenging things that we have faced is when our pieces have gone viral and they've become fodder in the culture wars. And our authors have been attacked in unfair ways on social media. Fox News latched onto a recent piece and the author received terrible, vicious emails and threats and it just it's really, really tough to see that.

Still, we believe that bringing the work of historians into the national conversation is really important and that is one of the reasons we launched Made By History. Debates about American history, in particular, have become so politicized and partisans want to weaponize historical narratives. That's why it is so important for historians to have opportunities to shape public conversations about history. We can show what our profession does and what we really provide to society more broadly.

And I'm proud to say that BU faculty, students, and alumni have been among the most frequent contributors to MBH.

BU History: Thanks so much!

APRIL 2021 MOVIE NIGHT



JOJO RABBIT

MONDAY, APRIL 5, 2021
AT 7:30 PM

With comments from Professor Jonathan Zatin

More information including a Zoom link to listen to the discussion and watch the film will be forthcoming.

NIKKI ROJAS

@nrojas0131

I was a journalism major, but I absolutely loved Prof. Silber's women's history class. I appreciated taking a class that didn't ignore all the contributions women have made throughout history. #proudtoBU

#PROUD
TO BU

KEEP IN TOUCH!

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! EMAIL HISTORY@BU.EDU TO SHARE RESEARCH, EVENTS, PUBLICATIONS, AND OTHER MILESTONES. OR FILL OUT A [CURRENT STUDENT OR ALUMNI PROFILE FORM](#) ON OUR WEBSITE.

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