

SPECIAL EDITION:

GIVING DAY

2023

**BU HISTORY
DEPARTMENT
NEWSLETTER**



**BOSTON
UNIVERSITY**

FROM THE CHAIR'S DESK

JAMES JOHNSON, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR

Dear Friends of the Boston University History Department:

This Special Edition newsletter is devoted to Giving Day, an annual occasion to join in common cause to promote the work of the History Department. Giving Day touches each of the University's many programs, centers, and departments, bringing an infusion of funds to help those closest to our daily work at BU—and most especially our undergrads and graduate students.



Giving Day, April 11, is also a chance to show local pride. The fact is, there's fierce disagreement about which department has the most loyal donors. BU's History Department regularly stands near the top. This is because folks can see the immediate benefit of the contributions students, staff, and faculty make each year.

This newsletter offers profiles of eight History graduate students whose research has been helped considerably from Giving Day contributions. Reading these accounts provides a vivid sense of the important work going on in the department. This includes research about the country's first gay student organization, which formed in 1965; the contentious atmosphere among school textbook-writers in the 1950s; women's political activism in postwar East Germany; and how perceptions of the city of London helped influence the women's suffrage movement in England.

Additional graduate work supported in part from Giving Day contributions includes research on party-going in the 1920s and '30s (with the unsurprising confession Evelyn Waugh made to his diary in 1926, "I got drunk"); the influence of religious thought in shaping British attitudes towards war and peace during the American Revolution; major water-development projects in India; and correspondence from hundreds of letter-writers in the 1950s documenting experiences of the paranormal, reincarnation, and psychic communication.

Your generosity on Giving Day has tangible, immediate effects. Please consider [giving](#).

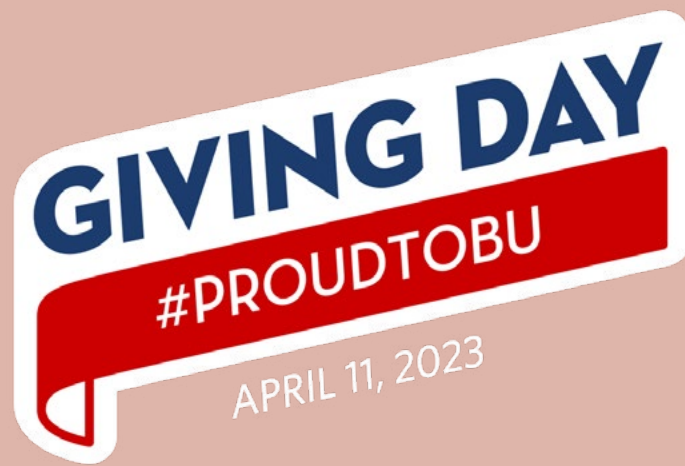
James Johnson,
Chair, Department of History

**CLICK HERE ON TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023
TO PARTICIPATE IN GIVING DAY**

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Boston University Giving Day 2023 is the ninth annual one-day online fundraising drive led by BU's Development & Alumni Relations team. Donors can choose to designate their gift directly to the Department of History which will earn us additional bonus funds, including a \$1,000 matching fund! As a result, every gift on Giving Day goes further, meaning that a donor's impact truly is everywhere!

This year, the Department of History plans to distribute our Giving Day earnings to all areas of our community:

For our graduate program, your donation can support individual students' research endeavors and sponsor our admissions open house for prospective students. 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.

For History's undergraduate program, your donation can support both independent student projects and group organizations. 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. For our undergraduate organizations – Phi Alpha Theta, Undergraduate History Association, and *Aevum* (our new Undergraduate History Journal) – your donations will fund their research, lectures, and publications. These students will have opportunities to broaden the scope of their projects and explore histories that are dearest to them.

To participate in Giving Day, access History's [unique website page](#) on April 11th, 2023. Users will be able to track the progress of the event in real-time throughout the day.

RESEARCH GRANTS

RACHEL WILSON

Last summer, I had the opportunity to conduct archival research in Los Angeles. My dissertation examines the lives of working mothers in the German Democratic Republic to argue that East German women actively participated in the project of building socialism. While my dissertation is based primarily on research conducted in Germany, the Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War in Los Angeles proved to be an invaluable resource. Specifically, I worked with the Wende's collection of East German women's magazines in order to analyze the ways women discussed marriage, motherhood, domestic responsibilities, leisure, and consumption. Surprisingly, I had been unable to locate these magazines in Germany, making my trip to the Wende crucial. Additionally, the Wende contains a substantial collection of women's diaries. Due to unexpectedly strict privacy protection laws in Germany, I was largely unable to access diaries or more personal accounts from everyday women, further necessitating my visit to the Wende. My trip to Los Angeles last summer contributed significantly to my project and would not have been possible without the generosity of donations from Giving Day. Thank you for supporting my research, I know my dissertation is much stronger as a result!



WOCHENENDE



COURTENEY SMITH

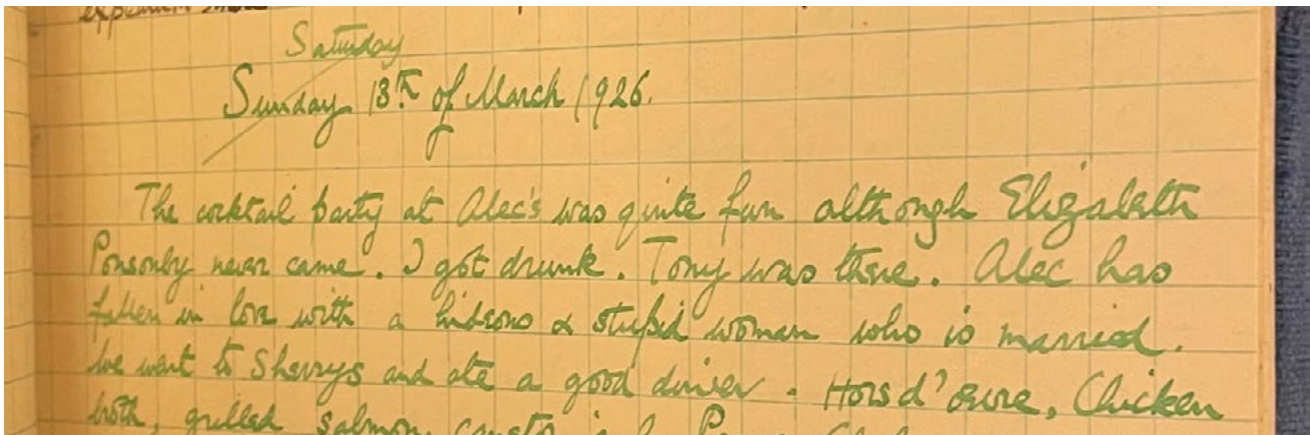
Thanks to the generous support from Giving Day and the department, I traveled to London last summer to conduct dissertation research. I spent a week at the Women's Library at the London School of Economics. There I examined the records of the Women's Freedom League and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, as well as correspondence between key figures in the women's suffrage movement and the library's extensive suffrage postcard collection. All of these documents helped inform the argument for a dissertation chapter on the role perceptions London played in shaping the suffrage movement. Because I could conduct this research over the summer, I was able to present a paper derived from this chapter at the Women's Archive Wales annual conference in October 2022 and another at the North American Conference on British Studies in November 2022. Thank you to our fundraisers and the department for their support of my research!



RESEARCH GRANTS

TOM SOJKA

Last summer, I spent a week conducting research at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, TX. There, I worked with collections related to Nancy Cunard, Christopher Isherwood, and Evelyn Waugh, among others. Waugh's fiction, particularly *Vile Bodies*, satirizes the elite social world of interwar London that my dissertation explores—so to have gotten the chance to look at his diaries and letters, many of which discuss party-going in the 1920s and 1930s, has been hugely helpful. Pictured below, for instance, we have a description of a cocktail party given by his brother Alec in March 1926, at which Evelyn “got drunk.” The absence of Elizabeth Ponsonby is interesting, given that her brother had been arrested for drunk driving with Waugh the previous year—the Ponsonby parents were not particularly fond of Evelyn as a result.



SETH ANDERSON

In April, I had the chance to complete necessary research at the New York Public Library. A chapter in my dissertation examines the Student Homophile League (SHL) formed at Columbia University in 1966 and the NYPL holds the collection for Stephen Donaldson, the founder of the SHL. The collection contained many important documents including letters, speeches, fliers, transcripts, copies of essays he wrote for class, and official statements made by the SHL between 1967 and 1970. It also contained Donaldson's handwritten diary which provided tremendous insights about the formation of the SHL, the opposition Donaldson faced from the administration as well as from other students. The diary also contained the names of people who helped him navigate through the circumstances. By reading his diary I got a sense of who he was as a young man during his sophomore and junior years of college. This helped me historicize the social climate he lived in and allowed me to track his political and philosophical development before, during, and after the tumultuous student uprising in 1968 at Columbia. The chapter I wrote using the data I collected at the NYPL is significantly stronger thanks to the funding that allowed me to travel to New York and spend time looking at this (and other) collections during my week at the library.

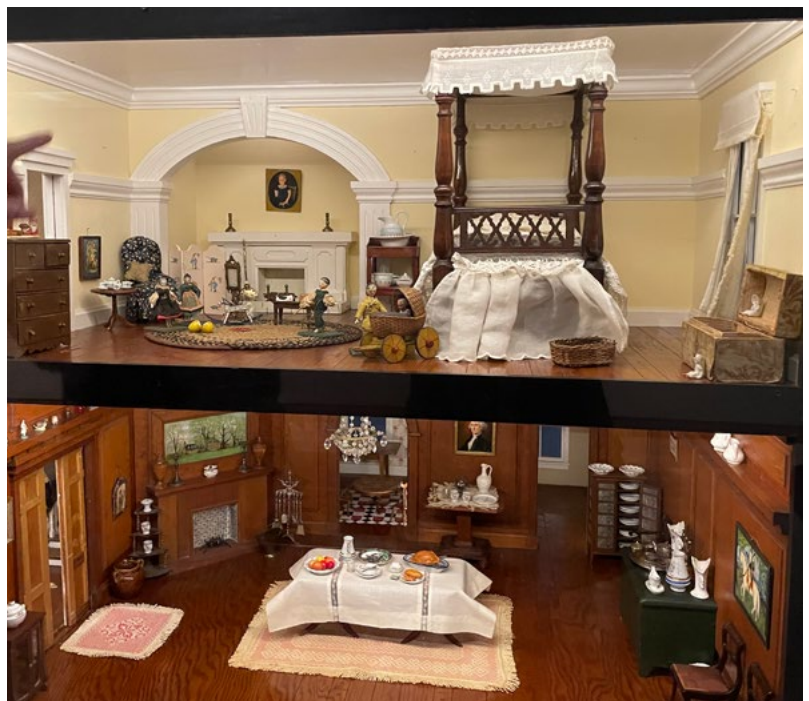
RESEARCH GRANTS

GREGORY TIRENIN

In July of 2022 I was privileged to undertake archival research for roughly two weeks in London thanks to funds raised by generous donors on the department's annual Giving Day. The material that I consulted at Lambeth Palace Library, the Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, and the British Jesuit Archives eliminated certain avenues of research and opened others, thus shaping my prospectus and the topic of my dissertation, which will explore the theological doctrines of passive obedience and nonresistance in the age of the American Revolution. Some of the documents that I consulted at Lambeth also led to the creation of an article manuscript about a little-known Loyalist clergyman with a surprising personal backstory connecting Methodism, Anglicanism, and Eastern Orthodoxy.

MEREDITH BARBER

I am so thankful for the History Department travel grant that funded my travel to Williamsburg, Virginia in 2022. From my preliminary research on the collection, I initially intended to find correspondence between textbook authors, teachers, and state-appointed members of the Virginia History and Government Textbook Commission (1948-1972). Once I began research at the archive, I found that the collection was a lot richer. It included the drafts, comments, and edits on multiple editions of Virginia: History, Government, Geography, a textbook initially published in 1957 and dismissed from classroom use in 1972. I could find, on one draft, the thoughts of state officials, a classroom teacher, a William & Mary History professor, and the textbook company's editor. With these drafts I was able to tell a story about the way these individuals reframed and adjusted Lost Cause narratives in light of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. This research continues to prove its relevance as states debate what their schools will allow students to learn about the nation's racist past. Thanks to my research trip, I now plan to write my dissertation on a similar topic. I was also able to visit the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum on the weekend, where I spent at least 45 minutes studying the largest doll house I have ever seen (featured right)!



RESEARCH GRANTS

AYUSHI CHAUHAN

In the summer of 2022, I was awarded a department research grant to conduct a preliminary PhD field trip to India. Unlike other fellowships, department travel grants provide crucial financial support to students in their early stages of research. My research focuses on the Governance of Disappearing Rivers in India, for which, I accessed multiple documents in national and regional archives in India. Thanks to the grant, I was able to make daily trips to the National Archives of India (NAI) for a month, where I had the opportunity to study NAI's files on interstate water disputes, as well as the history of international assistance for Indian hydrology projects. Along with discovering official correspondence, inquiries, notices, and reports in the archives research room, I also established valuable connections to cherish in this journey.

To further explore the history of interstate water disputes, I used the grant to visit the UP-State Archives in the city of Lucknow. Here, I was pleased to find an abundance of official correspondence on the fixation of state borders, UP flood committee, and water usage. Next, I visited the Gujarat State Archives in Gandhinagar to learn about the development of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River. After sifting through regional files on the World Bank's international monetary assistance for the development of one of the most controversial dam projects, I was invited to the Gujarat State Secretariat to review the dam development files. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to visit the Kevadia district of Gujarat to observe the Sardar Sarovar Dam (featured right) and to talk with people about how the dam development had impacted their lives and post-dam livelihoods. Through these experiences, I gained a deeper understanding of the various aspects of development projects.



RESEARCH GRANTS

ELIZABETH GRUMER

Last summer, I found myself unexpectedly conducting dissertation research at the John Hay Library in Providence. I had originally applied for departmental funding to visit the archives of the American Society for Psychical Research in New York. However, after months of unanswered emails and voicemails to the ASPR, I was forced to conclude that I would not hear back from that organization any time soon. Digging into internet sources from the more active Society for Psychical Research (the original nineteenth-century British society that the ASPR sprang from) gave me the impression that no researcher had gained access to the ASPR archives since before the pandemic began. I needed to pivot. Two questions were paramount: how could I access ASPR archives without the ASPR, and how could I do it with a budget allocated for New York? Clearly, a jaunt to London for the SPR archives was out.

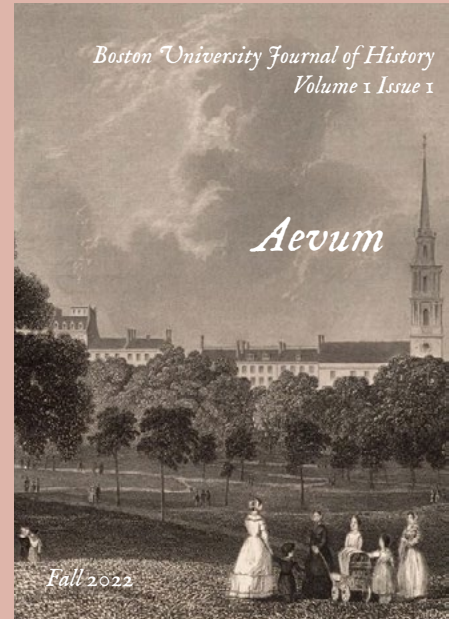


The answer proved to be the papers of Curt John Ducasse, proud ASPR member and Professor of Philosophy at Brown University. Brown holds Ducasse's papers in the John Hay Library, including myriad correspondence, ephemera, and internal publications relating to the ASPR. Looking through Ducasse's papers gave me insight into Ducasse specifically; his views on reincarnation will be especially useful for my dissertation. It also granted me a more general sense of the ASPR and its demographics in the mid-twentieth century. For instance, I learned from the January 1958 President's Report that the ASPR board saw a clear gender disparity in the writers of letters to their organization. Out of 1,618 letters received in response to a series of articles by Gardner Murphy, a whopping 1,087 were from women, compared to 488 from men and 43 from people of unidentified gender. The President's Report noted that this gender breakdown for 1957 was consistent with that of 1950 as well. It's a small piece of the puzzle I'm currently working on, but one that offers key insight into my subjects.

UNDERGRADUATE ORGANIZATIONS

AEVUM: BU JOURNAL OF HISTORY

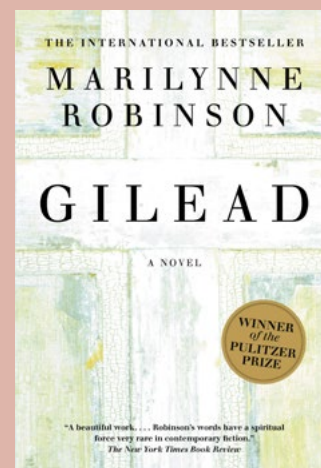
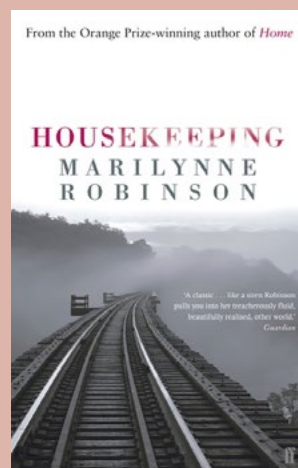
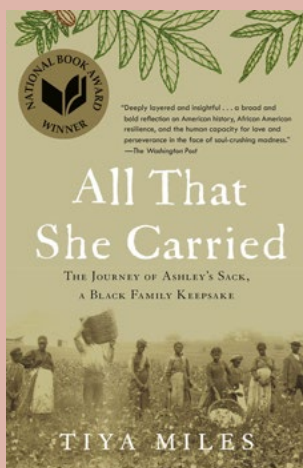
Founded in Fall, 2022, Aevum: Boston University's Journal of History is a new student-run, peer-reviewed research publication that aims to feature excellent student work and to raise the visibility of the History Department. Our ultimate goal: to develop student writing and scholarship and to increase our presence and visibility at BU and beyond by publishing historical work of the highest caliber. To read our most recent issue, please visit [here](#).



HISTORY BOOK CLUB

The department launched the History Book Club at the start of the Spring semester. Students met twice in February to discuss *All That She Carried* by the Harvard historian Tiya Miles. The book tells the story of the belongings an enslaved mother left to her nine-year-old daughter before the girl was auctioned off by their South Carolina enslaver. Professor Miles later spoke about her work to nearly 200 students, faculty, and staff in a lecture sponsored by BU's Center for the Humanities.

More recently, students have gathered to discuss *Housekeeping* and *Gilead* by the novelist Marilynne Robinson. Ms. Robinson, who received the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for *Gilead*, will appear in BU's *Conversations in the Arts & Ideas* on April 11th. For details and to reserve a place, visit the [Eventbrite page](#). To learn more about the History Book Club, e-mail James Johnson at jhj@bu.edu.



UNDERGRADUATE EVENTS



The Department of History hosted the History Undergraduate Spring Party on March 15! History students, faculty, and staff gathered to enjoy an array of Spring themed treats and discuss courses that faculty will be offering during the Fall 2023 semester. During the event, Professor and Chair James Johnson spoke to the crowd about all of the upcoming events that our students can look forward to, before encouraging all of the present faculty to introduce themselves.



UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY ASSOCIATION (UHA) SPRING CONFERENCE

On Sunday, April 2, the Undergraduate History Association will hold its annual Spring conference. Undergraduates will present papers based on original research, with responses from students in the History Department's Ph.D. Topics include the peasantry in medieval England, the 1975 Helsinki Accords, and the Jewish diaspora in late nineteenth-century Poland. Each presentation will be followed by questions from the audience.

The conference, held in CAS 426, will begin at 10 a.m. All are welcome.



BACON LECTURE 2023

DOBBS, DEMOCRACY, AND DISTRUST

THURSDAY, APRIL 27TH, 2023 AT 4PM IN CDS 1750


Thanks to a major donation, the Department of History at Boston University sponsors a talk on the U. S. Constitution each year. This year's guest is **Melissa Murray, the Frederick and Grace Stokes Professor of Law at NYU**. Her topic is "Dobbs, Democracy, and Distrust." This timely and important presentation begins at 4 p.m. on Thursday, April 27th in the Computer and Data Sciences Building (665 Commonwealth Ave), Room 1750. To reserve a seat, visit our [Eventbrite page](#).

Boston University History Department
2023 Gaspar G. Bacon Lecture




MELISSA MURRAY
Frederick I. and Grace Stokes Professor of Law, NYU

DOBBS, DEMOCRACY, AND DISTRUST



April 27, 2023
4-6PM at CDS, Room 1750
665 Commonwealth Ave
[RSVP via Eventbrite](#)



ALUMNI PROFILES

IN SUMMER 2022, THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT LAUNCHED A PAGE ON OUR WEBSITE FEATURING A GROWING SERIES OF ALUMNI PROFILES! [READ STORIES FROM HISTORY UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE ALUMNI](#) (SUCH AS CARYNE NICHOLAS, FEATURED BELOW) REGARDING WHAT THEY'RE DOING NOW, AND HOW HISTORY HELPED SHAPE THEIR LIVES.

Caryne Nicholas – CAS '21

“

I graduated from Boston University in 2021 with my BA in History. Professor Phillip Haberkern's Reformation Era course was my first introduction to college history, and his ability to garner interest from his students reinforced my love for the field. History became much more than narratives from textbooks; it was interactive and far more intersectional than my high school classes led me to believe.

The engaging classes I took and wonderful professors I worked with all encouraged me to reconsider what history was and what I thought was possible for myself. They valued my contributions, and I began to see the value in myself. My professors' immense support facilitated the successful completion of my senior thesis and my eventual enrollment in BU's History doctoral program in Fall 2021. I owe my personal and professional development to them.



INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING YOUR OWN STORY? FILL OUT THE [ALUMNI PROFILE FORM](#) AND YOU'LL GET A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT WHEN WE POST YOUR PROFILE!

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY ON OUR SOCIALS:

