

# THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST



**BU HISTORY**  
DEPARTMENT  
NEWSLETTER

**DECEMBER**  
**2023**

**BOSTON**  
UNIVERSITY



# LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT



The BU History Department sends warm wishes to all our friends as we recap special happenings from Fall and introduce thrilling news of next year. Most notably, this semester we welcomed two sets of faculty candidates and are delighted to announce that Dr. Bradley Craig will be joining our department in Fall 2024, pending final provost approval. Professor Craig researches African American History, and will teach courses in early African American history and the Atlantic World, as well as courses in Black sexuality. Another search in European imperialism, colonialism, and/or decolonization is also underway. The Department thanks all community members who partook in these searches.

This edition of *The Presence of the Past* celebrates numerous awards and book launches by our faculty, students, and alumni. We congratulate History PhD candidates Kacie Harris and Ethan Key, who were awarded Fulbright scholarships to conduct their

dissertation research in Germany and Ethiopia, respectively. The Center for Innovation in the Social Sciences selected undergraduate majors Kaitlin Howlett and Lillian Connor in the third annual cohort of funded research interns. In September we celebrated Professor Brooke Blower's newest book release, and congratulate book publications by Professor John Thornton, and PhD alumni Katherine Jewell and Katheryn Lamontagne.

This issue features profiles of the department's newest writing tutors, Julia Brukx and Sierra Wilkins, who are both taking their writing skills to the next level as they develop senior theses in our honors program. Other undergraduate news includes BU's History Journal *Aevum*, who released their Fall 2023 issue, as well as History's National Honors Society, Phi Alpha Theta, which inducted over 20 new members this semester.

In 2024, Professor Betty Anderson will debut her new course, Engineering Boston. Available as HI 400: Topics in History, this seminar offers students the chance to learn about Boston both in the classroom and on the city's own streets. Also making a recent debut is Version 2 of the China Historical Christian Database (CHCD). Professor Eugenio Menegon and PhD Student Greta Rauch both contribute to this groundbreaking digital humanities project. Lastly, be sure to save the date for History's annual Gaspar G. Bacon Lecture, featuring Yale Law Professor Reva Siegel on April 16th, 2024. Stay tuned for more information about this event, which will be sent out in the coming months.

Amidst all this activity, we continue to miss, and mourn, Professor Merle Goldman, whose death this past November saddened the extended BU History community. You can read about Professor Goldman and her accomplishments on page 4 of this newsletter.

Best wishes to all as we approach the holiday season and start of next year.

--BU Department of History

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# MERLE GOLDMAN, IN MEMORIAM



This past November, the BU community lost **Merle Goldman**, Professor Emerita of History at Boston University. Professor Goldman spent nearly thirty years as a faculty member of the History department, which she joined in 1972. She retired in 2001 as one of this country's leading scholars of Modern Chinese history.

Her scholarly work was dedicated to chronicling the fate of intellectual freedom under Chinese communism. Her books, all published by Harvard University Press, include *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (1967), *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (1981), *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China* (1994), and *From Comrade to Citizen: The Struggle for Political Rights in Communist China* (2005). She was co-author with John King Fairbank of the 2006 book, *China: A New History*.

Professor Goldman was a powerful and inspiring presence in the department. She combined principled tenacity with personal warmth and generosity. Her commitment to fostering community in the department was always clear, and her support of younger colleagues was especially valuable. We honor her life and work, and we mourn her loss.



**Brooke Blower** has done a number of events this fall semester connected to the release of her new book, *Americans in a World at War*. She appeared on the New Books Network podcast, YouTube's WW2TV, and at an event on researching the world wars for the New England Historic Genealogy Society. She gave the annual Gordon lecture at the University of Glasgow as well as talks at the University of York (in England), the University of Teramo (in Italy), and the Woodrow Wilson Center's Washington History Seminar. She was also elected by general membership to a three-year term on the Council of the Society for Historians for American Foreign Relations.

**Arianne Chernock** provided commentary in an article this past November for the Smithsonian Magazine, entitled [How Princess Diana's Death Transformed the Royal Family](#).

Professor Chernock also presented at the North American Conference on British Studies in Baltimore this past November. She spoke in a panel organized by BU History PhD Candidate Rachel Monsey on syllabus design and pedagogy. (Read more on [page 10](#))

**Bradley Craig** is the newest addition to BU History faculty! Professor Craig's research focuses on African American History Pre-1900 and will begin teaching in Fall 2024.

**James Johnson** delivered the keynote address in October at the International Musicological Conference in Warsaw, Poland. The topic of the conference was *Romanticism in Music: Poland in its European Context*. His lecture was "Chopin and European Romanticism."

**Simon Payaslian** presented a paper entitled ["U.S. Human Rights Policy towards the Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: The Obama, Trump, and Biden Administrations,"](#) at the annual conference of the British International Studies Association (BISA)

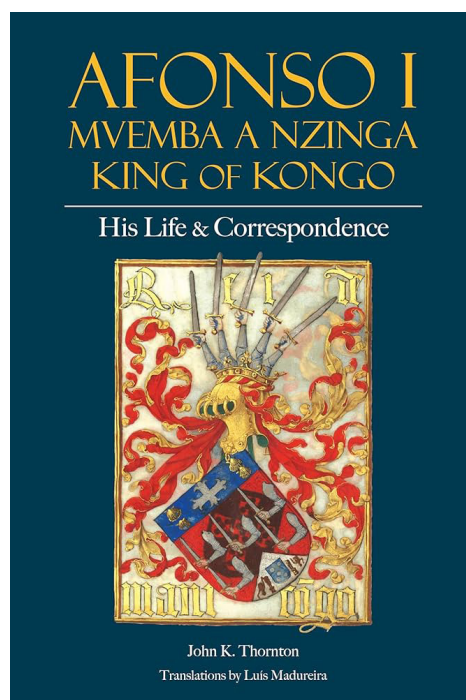
US Foreign Policy Working Group, School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), Queen Mary University of London, Sept. 14-15, 2023.

Professor Payaslian also presented a paper, entitled "Nasserism and the Armenian Exodus from Egypt and Syria," at the [Middle East Studies Association's](#) 57th annual conference, held at the Palais des congrès in Montréal, Canada, November 2-5, 2023.

**Alexis Peri's** book manuscript *Dear Unknown Friend: Soviet and American Women Discover the Power of the Personal* has been accepted by Harvard University Press.

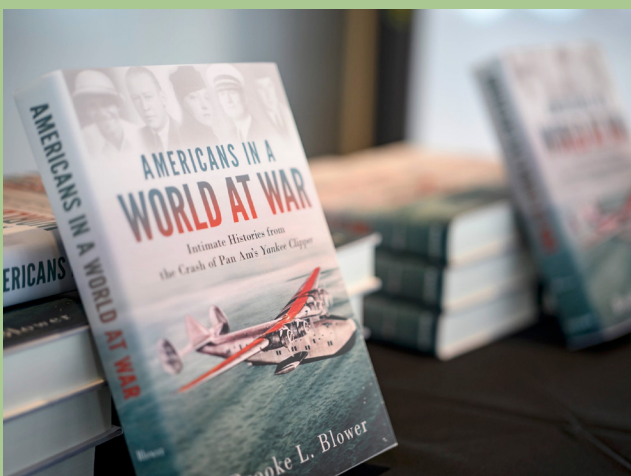
**Bruce Schulman** published an article, entitled ["Today's Media Landscape Took Root a Century Ago. Decisions Made Now Could Shape the Next 100 Years"](#) for the relaunch of ["Made By History"](#) at Time Magazine.

**John Thornton** published his new book, [Afonso I Mvemba a Nzinga, King of Kongo: His Life and Correspondence](#) (featured below) with Hackett Publishing Company and has English translations of all of his 22 extant letters.



# PROFESSOR BROOKE BLOWER SYMPOSIUM AND LAUNCH PARTY

The History Department community gathered in September to celebrate Professor Brooke L. Blower's publication of her book: *Americans in a World at War: Intimate Histories from the Crash of Pan Am's Yankee Clipper*. A discussion between Professor Blower and Brandeis Professor Chad Williams kicked off the event, followed up with a question and answer segment from the audience. A reception and book signing completed the celebration, which took place on the seventeenth floor of BU's newest building, Computer and Data Sciences.





# SPRING '24 COURSE SPOTLIGHT

## HI 400 D1: (TOPICS IN HISTORY) "ENGINEERING BOSTON" PROFESSOR BETTY ANDERSON



Boston has been engineered from the beginning, with landfill expanding the boundaries of the city far beyond the initial Shawmut Peninsula. In the process, city agencies have built parks; constructed streets and sidewalks; ruptured the city with the Central Artery; attempted to re-suture it with the Big Dig; enacted urban renewal projects; and designated sites to be explored by the city's tourists. In the midst of all these changes, Boston's residents have made homes for themselves in neighborhoods throughout the city.

Engineering Boston takes Boston as the primary source for studying cities and testing urban theories. Class sessions will toggle between in-class discussions of urban Boston with experiential walks through the city. The focus will be on the neighborhoods surrounding the Central Artery/Rose Kennedy Greenway: the North End, the West End, Downtown, and the South End. This class challenges students to creatively map and photograph the city's built environment in relationship to the stories of its residents. For the midterm, teams of students will produce and present to the class digital maps of the changes wrought by the Central Artery construction in the 1950s and then the later Big Dig project that placed it underground. The focus will be on the urban renewal projects that irretrievably altered the West End. At the end of the semester, teams will produce and present photographic essays of the neighborhoods under study during the class, with interviews conducted with previous residents of the West End. Cities like Boston are many-layered entities and the challenge in this class will be to determine how to represent that complexity.

*Featured above: Corner of Spring and Chambers Streets in Boston's West End, 1910.  
[Courtesy of the Trustees of Boston Public Library](#)*

**Andrew Bacevich** comments on President Biden’s “indispensable nation” claim in a [BU Today article](#), arguing that the reality is that over the past two decades, the unrestrained exercise of American power has made the United States a prime contributor to global disorder.

**James McCann** presented a Zoom lecture/seminar on December 5 to the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). The seminar was entitled: “Nature and the Supernatural: Meaning(s) of Water in the Upper Nile” and was presented jointly with co-author Izabela Orłowska from ZMO in Berlin. That audience included IWMI units in Ethiopia, India, Columbia, Sri Lanka, Italy, and Norway.

Prof. McCann published a chapter “Malaria in Africa” with Oxford University Press’s Handbook on African History available in print and on-line.

**Diana Wylie** spent June giving away the perhaps one thousand books in her office to former students, colleagues, and departments. Then she wrote an article entitled “Remember Me: Thami Mnyele

and the Question of Sacrifice” for publication in the American-South African journal *Safundi*. On September 9 she was exceedingly grateful to be accompanied by her former student Matt Lavallee to Logan airport where she boarded a plane to Morocco. She is now completing her third month upgrading the exhibitions in the Tangier American Legation Museum. This photograph offers a glimpse of one of the five galleries she has redesigned and for which she has written explanatory texts.



**Kacie Harris** won a Fulbright Study/Research award for her dissertation, which will begin in January. Read more about Kacie’s research and award on the following page.

**Ethan Key** won a Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship with Fulbright to aid in research of his dissertation. Read more about Ethan’s research and award on the following page.

**Greta Rauch** and **Aixin Yi** presented at a panel entitled “Mediating Beliefs and Realities: Rethinking the Role of Western Missionaries and Chinese Christians in Modern China” at the Association for

Asian Studies New England Regional Conference (NEAAS) at Wellesley College on October 14. Aixin’s paper studies American missionary involvement in agricultural improvement in China in the early twentieth century. Greta’s paper studies the theological understanding of suffering in the novel *Heart of Thorns* written by Su Xuelin a 20th century female Chinese intellectual, as the account of her conversion to Catholicism.

**Henry Tonks** published a piece for the revamped “Made by History” at Time entitled, [“Jimmy Carter Revolutionized Politics. We’re Still Paying the Price.”](#)



# HISTORY GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION

HGSO has had a full schedule this fall! In September, we kicked off the semester with a trip to Salem, where we visited the Peabody Essex Museum and enjoyed the nearby food truck festival. Then, to celebrate the fall season, we took a trip to Honey Pot Hill Orchards for apple picking! As those who attended can attest, the donuts and cider were delicious.

Closer to home, HGSO hosted an exciting coffee chat with new faculty member Jilene Chua, where grad students asked many insightful questions about her experience in graduate school and on the job market. Additionally, PhD candidate Tom Sojka gave a great presentation on how to pitch and write book reviews. Also throughout the semester, we continued our tradition of the “First Fridays” studying session.

To round out the semester, we are looking forward to an HGSO holiday party. Look out for more exciting events this spring!

*-- James Brueckel*



# FULBRIGHT RECIPIENTS

History congratulates two PhD candidates this year on winning Fulbright scholarships to aid them in conducting dissertation research:

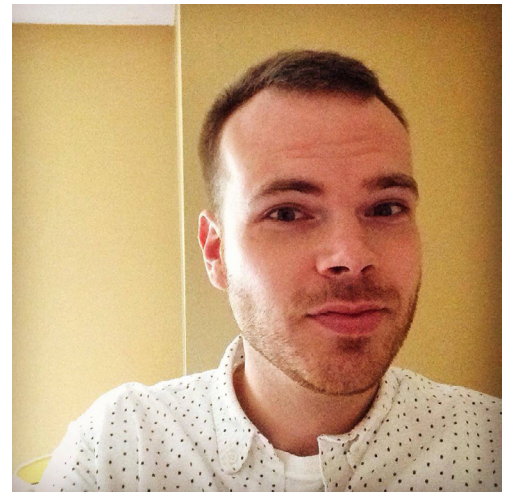


## KACIE HARRIS

I was granted a Fulbright Study/Research award for my dissertation “Nietzsche’s Afterlife: Truth and Myth-making in Twentieth-Century Discourse.” Beginning in January, I will be a visiting researcher at the University of Freiburg in southwest Germany, where I’ll participate in a graduate seminar at the Center for Modern and Contemporary History under the direction of its chair, Professor Jan Eckel. While on the Fulbright, I plan to wrap up my archival research and finish drafting my dissertation. I’m thrilled to have this time to devote to the dissertation and learn from colleagues abroad. More than that, I remain incredibly grateful for the support from the faculty and staff in BU’s history department, especially to my advisor Jonathan Zatlin, Charles Dellheim, and Alexis Peri for their help with the project.

## ETHAN KEY

This project is a study in how people dealt with their incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire and shaped its foundation as a multicultural nation-state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I assert that the people who were most capable of crossing river systems that divided languages, cultures, and provinces ended up as models who set the terms for ongoing negotiations about how the new periphery would relate to the central government. I therefore look at the lives of traders, religious teachers, and soldiers as people who – in very different ways – not only crossed rivers and mountains as physical barriers, but they also crossed conceptual boundaries between languages, faiths, and cultures. My project began with the life and legacy of [Onesimos Nasib](#), who had been enslaved as a child, translated the Bible into the Oromo language (1899), and then returned home to the “semi-autonomous” province of Wallaga as a teacher (1904-1931). As I learned more about his life story, in addition to how exceptional he was, I realized that he was not alone in providing examples for ordinary people to recognize their places in a rapidly changing world and learn to communicate across cultures, languages, and worldviews. Fulbright-Hays funds will provide me the opportunity to connect documentary evidence from the 1850s to the 1930s, interviews conducted by other scholars in the 1970s, and my own interviews from the present, giving me an overview of how these historical figures’ actions continue to resonate in different ways across generations.





## SEVERAL MEMBERS OF BU HISTORY PARTICIPATED AT TWO CONFERENCES THIS SEMESTER:

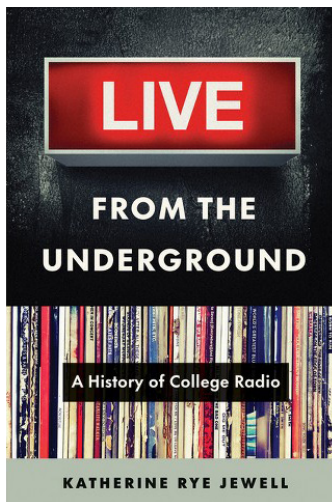
The Northeast Conference on British Studies took place in October in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Graduate students **Elizabeth Grumer, Rachel Monsey, Courteney Smith, and Tom Sojka** all gave papers. **Kathryn Lamontagne** (GRS'16,'20) also participated in a roundtable discussion. *(Students featured exploring Halifax in top image, below)*

The North America Conference on British Studies took place in November in Baltimore. Graduate students **Elizabeth Grumer, Courteney Smith, and Tom Sojka** all gave papers. Tom also participated in a roundtable as part of the NACBS-Gale partnership, while **Rachel Monsey** chaired a roundtable on designing a British history syllabus, which featured **Professor Arianne Chernock**. Graduate Student **Chenguang Zhu** also participated in the poster session. *(Students and Professor Chernock featured at dinner in bottom image, below)*

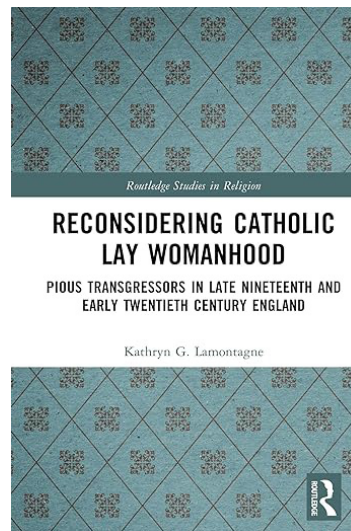


**Zach Fredman (GRS '16)** earned tenure in September and was promoted to the title of [Associate Professor of History](#) at Duke Kunshan University.

**Anne Blaschke (GRS '12)** was interviewed by NBC on the projected revenue growth of women's sports in the new piece ["Women's Sports to Rake in More than \\$1 Billion for First Time in 2024."](#) She also recently co-authored an academic article, ["The Paradox of Integration: Racial Composition of NFL Positions from 1960 to 2020,"](#) in the journal *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*.



**Katherine Jewell (GRS '10)** just published her new book, [Live from the Underground: A History of College Radio](#) (featured above) with The University of North Carolina Press.



**Kathryn Lamontagne (GRS '20)**, a lecturer in CGS Division of Social Sciences, published her first book (featured above) with Routledge UK in the summer 2023 entitled [Reconsidering Catholic Lay Womanhood: Pious Transgressors in Late 19th and Early 20th England](#). It is part of the series Routledge Studies in Religion. She has been invited to give a plenary address at Blackfriars, Oxford on the book in early Summer '24. Kathryn attended the NECBS Conference in Halifax in October, 2023 and organized a panel on new pedagogies for teaching English history. She spoke on the use of experiential education and student retention as it relates to the CGS BU London programme.

The Center for Innovation in Social Sciences announced their [third annual cohort](#) of funded undergraduate research interns and their faculty mentors. The internship program matches undergraduate students with faculty researchers, and provides interns first-hand experience with all aspects of the research process – including data collection, analysis, and writing. A research showcase in April 2024 will feature presentations by the 2023-24 cohort of student intern-mentor teams. For the first time, interns will have the opportunity to participate in a [new one-credit Hub co-curricular](#) focused on the fundamentals of social science research.

Congratulations to History major award winners **Kaitlin Howlett (CAS '25/History)** and **Lillian Connor (CAS '25/Political Science and History)**.

Kaitlin Howlett's Project Topic is "Mapping Southwest: Counter-Mapping (Segregation and) Black Life in the Jim Crow Capital." Her faculty mentor is History Professor Paula Austin.

Lillian Connor's Project Topic is "Historical Changes in the U.S. Constitutional Identity." Her faculty advisor is Political Science Professor Amber Vayo.



# UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

## UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY ASSOCIATION

The Undergraduate History Association has hosted various member presentations this semester, covering topics such as Labor History, Roman History, American Prohibition, Pre-Colonial African History, Welsh History, and Caribbean History. Additionally, the Association has hosted various game nights and events such as Jeopardy, Lego Night, and Historical Debates. UHA hosted collaboration events this past semester with the BU Debate Society and the BU Undergraduate Classics Association, and we are looking forward to hosting our annual academic conference next semester, where our theme will be Opulence and Survival.

-- UHA E-Board

## AEVUM: BU JOURNAL OF HISTORY

Founded in Fall, 2022, *Aevum: Boston University's Journal of History* is a student-run, peer-reviewed research publication that aims to feature excellent student work and to raise the visibility of the History Department. Read their recently released [Fall 2023 issue](#) as well as [previously published issues](#). Any inquiries about the journal may be directed to their [email](#).

-- Journal of History E-Board

## PHI ALPHA THETA

Do you love history? Consider joining Phi Alpha Theta, a national history honors society whose members demonstrate excellence and dedication to studying history at the college level. Membership requirements are as follows:

- Minimum 3.1 GPA in at least 12 credit hours of History
- Overall minimum GPA of 3.0
- History major is not required

The chapter meets monthly for discussion, support, and the occasional guest presentation. Alongside field trips to museums and historical sites, there are also volunteer opportunities, such as tutoring local students in history through the Massachusetts Historical Society. Interested in joining? Please reach out to [Professor Johnson](#) and chapter president [Elle Nicoletti](#).

(Featured above: Phi Alpha Theta Fall 2023 Induction)



-- President Elle Nicoletti

# UNDERGRAD PROFILES

## HISTORY WRITING TUTOR JULIA BRUKX (CAS '23)



### **What has been your favorite History class you've taken at BU?**

Last fall I took History of Imperial Russia with Professor Peri, and even though it was at 8 am, I actually enjoyed going because the lectures were so interesting. Prior, the extent of my Russian history knowledge came from the Anastasia movie. Professor Peri made a point to connect the historical narrative to current events in Russia, as Putin regularly uses history to justify his actions. Also, the creative project for that class was fun!

### **Do you have any current research projects you're focusing on?**

I'm currently working on my senior thesis in history, which is about the shipbuilding industry in Northern Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century, but I think it's more fun to call it my Titanic Thesis. I'm mostly interested in the time of the industrial revolution, and I find the concept of nation-building incredibly interesting, and Titanic is my favorite movie of all time, so it kind of all fit together to get to discuss the ways that Ireland, at a time when it was debating its place within the British Empire, dealt with the consequences of the industrial revolution in such a tangible way of the biggest ship in the world sinking on its maiden voyage.

### **What advice do you have for students considering a major or minor in History?**

Make sure you actually like writing because you will have to do a lot of it! Also, I know everyone says this, but we have insane resources available at BU, so make sure you are taking advantage of them! I got to travel to the UK this past summer and visit archives as part of my thesis research, which I never would've thought was possible when I was just starting out.

### **What is one interesting or fun fact about you?**

I was in the Washington Post for my Barbenheimer (Barbie + Oppenheimer double feature) outfit.

### **What is your favorite historical fact?**

In 1911, the RMS Olympic collided with a smaller ship, the HMS Hawke, off the coast of Great Britain. Hawke was cleared of any wrongdoing. The captain of the Olympic had been planning to retire, but since he was so beloved, people thought that this would be a sour note to end his career on, and thus suggested that he captain the newest ship to join the fleet: the RMS Titanic. Also Eleanor Roosevelt's maiden name was Roosevelt.

### **If you could have dinner with any historical figure who would it be?**

This is more art historical (I'm also an art history major), but Johanna Van Gogh-Bonger, Vincent van Gogh's sister-in-law who, after Vincent & Theo van Gogh died, inherited all of the paintings and basically single-handedly became responsible for making Vincent van Gogh the household name he is now.



# UNDERGRAD PROFILES



## HISTORY WRITING TUTOR SIERRA WILKINS (CAS '23)

### **What inspired you to become a History major?**

I was never a student who had a favorite subject growing up during my elementary and middle school years. That all changed when I took a World History course in the ninth grade at my military academy. Our teacher was a graduate of The Citadel, and the spartan lifestyle left an impact on her teaching strategy. Our course was as regimented as possible: there were slides every day we had to take notes on, and then we would have exams based on the information. This went on for the entire year, full stop. Everyone in the class was bored to death by the end. I practically fell in love. I haven't looked back since!

However, I do enjoy more uniquely structured courses in history today, which thankfully the professors of the History department often provide.

### **What has been your favorite History class you've taken at BU?**

This is a tough question for me since I honestly cannot think of a History course I've taken at BU that I haven't at the very least enjoyed and learned from. That said, if I had to pick one, Prof. Alexis Peri's HI 279 The War Experience has had one of the greatest impacts on me as an aspiring historian. The course's in-depth analysis of primary sources mixed with using your knowledge in creative writing exercises is eye-opening on how one can become a historian by practicing learning how to read in-between the lines, so-to-speak.

### **What advice do you have for students considering a major or minor in History?"**

Don't hesitate to try courses in areas/timelines you may not be planning on specializing in. I'm primarily focused on modern East Asian history, but I basically spent my first two years taking European history courses and I don't regret it whatsoever. Go to your professor's office hours, or department writing tutors, or reach out to study with fellow students when you don't understand readings/sources from your courses. I guarantee you that you are never the only person confused. Historical analysis is meant to be tough! It is our equivalent of a lab session for a STEM major. Don't be afraid to ask seemingly obvious or trivial questions in class. Nine times out of ten the professor adds another useful piece of knowledge you wouldn't have gained if you hadn't asked in the first place.

# CHCD & BACON LECTURE

## CHINA HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN DATABASE

The [China Historical Christian Database](#) (CHCD) is a digital humanities project that quantifies and visualizes the place of Christianity in modern China (1550-1950). It provides users the tools to discover where every Christian church, school, hospital, orphanage, publishing house, and the like were located in China, and it documents who worked inside those buildings, both foreign and Chinese. Collectively, this information creates spatial maps and generates relational networks that reveal where, when, and how Western ideas, technologies, and practices entered China. Simultaneously, it uncovers how and through whom Chinese ideas, technologies, and practices were conveyed to the West.

**Dr. Eugenio Menegon** is one of the principal investigators for this project, as well as **Dr. Daryl Ireland** in the Theology Department and **Alex Mayfield** at Asbury University. History PhD Student **Greta Rauch** started as the Project Manager for the CHCD in May. They released [Version 2 of the database](#) in October which included significant technical updates as well as new data on the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS), and Löwenthal's book *The Religious Periodical Press*.

### SAVE THE DATE:

**Gaspar G. Bacon Lecture - April 16th, 2024**

Reva Siegel, Nicholas deB. Katzenbach Professor at Yale Law School will be this year's featured speaker. Reception to follow.

READ MORE ABOUT THE  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY ON OUR SOCIALS:

