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Mahan Lecturer Highlights “Plutopias”

Dr. Kate Brown of MIT delivered the eighteenth Howard F. Mahan Lecture in the Student Center Ballroom on March 14. The subject of her talk was the “Plutopia,” the industrial town dedicated to the manufacture of nuclear weapons material, in both the US and USSR during the cold war. According to Dr. Brown’s retelling, citizens of the plutopias lived under the threat of radiation poisoning yet received perks that seemed to offer compensation.

Following similar paths, both the Americans and Soviets realized that single men would prove to be unreliable workers in critical weapons industries. Craving stability, they therefore encouraged whole families to take the jobs, enticing them with generous salaries, luxurious homes, excellent schools, and fully-stocked supermarket shelves. Thus was

born the plutopias like Richland, Oregon in the US and Ozersk in



Dr. Kate Brown

Soviet Russia, whose citizens, in the photos Dr. Brown shared, always wore smiles.

Of course, the plutopias had their dark sides. Not only were their residents vulnerable to diseases and birth defects, but they

were surveilled and coerced to secrecy. Dr. Brown’s discovery of a falsified autopsy in Richland is typical of the low value placed on truth as well as health.

As Dr. Brown concluded, perhaps the most ironic thing about the plutopias was the complacency of their inmates. They were “wedded to upward social mobility,” putting up with appalling health risks, as several of them reported, “for my kids.” Living so much better than residents of nearby towns, many claimed to be privileged or “chosen.” Others felt like “front line soldiers,” proud to be doing their part.

Dr. Brown’s talk was as disturbing as it was fascinating. Conversation during the reception was somber, but this year’s Mahan Lecture reached its audience in a powerful way.

History Faculty Win Grants

History faculty have been remarkably successful in securing external grants.

Dr. David Meola won a Fulbright grant to conduct research in Goettingen, Germany over the next two summers for his book on Jewish Germans in the German liberal and democratic movements before 1848. Dr. Kelly Urban won the Albert J. Beveridge Grant from the

American Historical Association and the USA Faculty Development Council Grant to do research this summer in Cuba and Washington, DC for her book on Tuberculosis and public health in Cuba from 1925 to 1970.

Dr. Mara Kozelsky and Dr. Urban are part of a grant awarded to the International Studies Program at USA from the US Department of Education to ex-

pand USA course offerings in languages and global health issues; each will spend part of the summer developing new courses at the upper level.

Whether pursuing research or expanding course offerings, our professors are proving worthy of a high level of financial encouragement. By this measure, and by many others, USA historians are second to none.

Letter from an Alumnus: Matthew Peterson

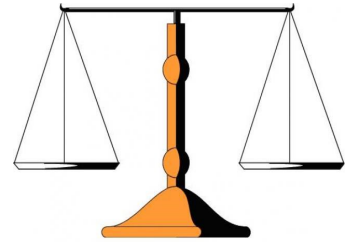
As a lawyer, I use the skills from my history education daily – whether it's reading, writing, or formulating arguments. Without my education from the history program at the University of South Alabama, I would not be the same person or the same lawyer I am today.

First, my history education has helped me read and understand complex works. When I was a history student, I would read hundreds of pages of secondary and primary sources, then have to draw conclusions and analyze arguments contained in them. This

is basically the same skill I need as an attorney – reading complex court opinions or briefs, then figure out the best argument to represent my client.

Second, my history education was invaluable in formulating arguments and honing my writing skills. As a history student, you do a lot of writing – anything from a three-to-five page paper to something much longer. Writing those papers and having them critiqued by the department's faculty trained me as a persuasive writer. That, again, is a skill I use daily as an attorney.

My history education at USA was unparalleled, and it has trained me to become the lawyer I am today. I cannot thank the faculty and staff enough for that opportunity and their guidance.



Matthew Peterson
USA Class of 2011
Harvard Law Class of 2015

“The essence of the independent mind lies not in what it thinks but in how it thinks.”

-- Christopher Hitchens

History Club News

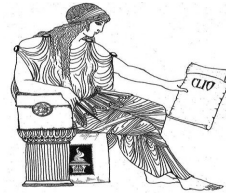
The History Club and the Rho Theta Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta have had a big semester.

Returning History Club President Shelby Brashaw is finishing up his last semester at the helm.

Aiding him in his efforts have been Vice President Courtney Tittle, Secretary Courtney Jones, and Treasurer Alyssa Brown.

The talented and enthusiastic cabinet put together a full agenda of meeting topics and special events. Topics covered

at this semester's regular History Club meetings. A full schedule of meetings, topics, and events can be found on the



History Club bulletin board on the third floor of the Humanities Building.

Finally, Rho Theta Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta welcomed several new members this year, including Josh Crowley, William G. DeMouy, II, Alisha English, Samantha Mata Hernandez, John B. James, Julius L. Harrison, Candace M. Pickering, Kenneth D. Sims, Jr., and Hunter Talley. Congratulations to all new members of our honor society!

The University of South Alabama History Club and Rho Theta chapter of Phi Alpha Theta invite you to join.

Research, Presentations, and Publications

Dr. Claire Cage, on sabbatical, spent January on a fellowship at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, researching the development of forensic science in France during the 19th century. Dr. Timothy Lombardo spoke at libraries in New York City and Philadelphia about his recent book, *Blue-Collar Con-*

servatism: Frank Rizzo's Philadelphia and Populist Politics. Dr. Harry Miller published *Southern Rain*, a novel set in 17th-century China.

Faculty participated in conferences such as the Society for Military History (Kozelsky, Messenger), the American Historical Association (Messenger), the Organi-

zation of American Historians (Lombardo), a special conference in New York on the Cuban Revolution (Urban), and the Latin American Studies Association conference (Urban). MA student Regina Kirkland presented research on cemeteries in Mobile for the USA Graduate Research Forum.

How I Became a Historian of Latin America

In the middle of my undergraduate career, I changed my major. I was studying in a more “practical” field, but found myself drawn to history courses. However, I still felt little direction for what I wanted to specialize in. All of that changed once I enrolled in “Modern Latin American History”; I felt as if a strong ocean current had grabbed my ship, launching it resolutely in a new direction.

The region offers endless fascinating threads to unravel, and I have spent the last decade of my life working on Cuban ones. In my first Latin American history class, I read Louis A. Pérez, Jr.’s *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography*. In earlier U.S. History classes, I had learned about the Spanish-American War, which made the U.S. an imperial power outside of the North American continent; however, I had not learned that the war involved the U.S. squashing a three-

decades-long struggle between Cuban independence insurgents and their Spanish colonial masters, a particularly egregious move since the insurgents were on the brink of victory. From 1898–1902, the U.S. excluded Cuban rebels from key battles and negotiations, deradicalized the aims of the movement, militarily occupied



“If General Wood Is Unpopular with Cuba, We Can Guess the Reason.” From *Minneapolis Tribune* (1901), reprinted in *Literary Digest* 22 (March 30, 1901).

In Cuba, these events influenced national processes, such as the 1959 revolution, which brought Fidel Castro to power on a platform of nationalism and anti-imperialism. Beyond Cuba, these myths and patterns of action would define twentieth-century U.S. involvement in Latin America, and eventually, the world.

My studies of Latin America, then, have given me not only a better knowledge of this region on its own terms, but also of my own society and government. The connections between the two places—such as U.S. military intervention—are so frequent and significant that American students should be introduced to them long before they enter a college class on Latin America. It is also fruitful to compare the histories of the two regions, tracing the similarities and differences in how specific developments played out. In doing so, we more deeply understand imperialism, capitalism, slavery, emancipation, populism, and democracy.

In the end, then, the decision to switch my major and specialize in Latin American history was not only rewarding, but practical. To borrow the question of one famous poet, while flipping his imperialist intentions: “What do they know of [America], who only [America] know?”



decently occupied

Grad Student Spotlight: Victoria Watson

As part of my Master’s thesis, I am researching the history of a community of several thousand people located in Mobile and Washington counties in Alabama. The state of Alabama recognized this community as an Indian tribe, the MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians, in 1979. The aim of my research is to historically reconstruct the unique story of the MOWAs, who express a strong Indian identity today, while examining how they have defined themselves (as opposed to how outsiders have defined them) over two centuries.

The contemporary MOWA community began in the early nineteenth century as several small settlements of families of varied racial backgrounds in the Alabama territory. Some families migrated into this community from other states, likely as part of the labor migration patterns of the turpentine industry. Other ancestors of the MOWAs were from larger communities of color already a part of the landscape. My research is captivating to me as a scholar because the MOWAs’ story complicates and deepens historical understandings of race, political and cultural identity, and frontier communities of the antebellum South.



Photo by Victoria Watson

Fall 2019 Courses

HY 101 – History of Western Civilization I (7 sections)

HY 102 – History of Western Civilization II (8 sections)

HY 103 – History of Asian Civilization I (Miller)

HY 135 – US History to 1877 (11 sections)

HY 136 – US History Since 1877 (11 sections)

HY 390 – Special Topics: From Smallpox to Ebola - Global Health Challenges in the Modern World (Urban)

HY 390 – Special Topics: Central Europe, 1500-1861 (Meola)

HY 390 – Special Topics: Urban Crucible (Lombardo)

HY 443 – Research Seminar (World) - Modern Japan from the Meiji Restoration to WWII (Miller)

HY 458/558 – Sex and Celibacy in the Christian West (Cage)

HY 465/565 – Islamic Civilization: The Crusades from the Other Side (Williams)



Always Meet With Your Advisor!

HY 471W - The Atlantic World (Hamilton)

HY 477/577 – The Old South (McKiven)

HY 494 – Directed Studies: War and Memory (Messenger)

HY 498 - Internship in History (Hamilton)

HY 530 – American Historiography (Brazy)

HY 540 – Modern European Historiography (Strong)

HY 593 – Exam and Thesis Introduction (Messenger)

HY 597 – Professional Studies: Directed Field Research (Hamilton)

HY 598 – Comp and Thesis Preparation (Brazy)



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**The History Department welcomes donations!
Please contact the Department office.**

The USA History Department offers a wide variety of exciting courses, covering the histories of Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, as well as the history of the United States and the South. Faculty are committed to teaching research and writing skills and the critical thinking that is becoming ever more necessary for survival in the information age. Now, more than ever, a history education is a prerequisite for an informed global citizenry.

Please visit us online or in person and see what History has to offer!

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