

Off the Beaten Path...

So, where do Michigan History students wind up after graduation? This edition of the Newsletter highlights a few of the rich and varied careers chosen by U-M alums who took to history as undergraduates and graduates.



Joel Thurtell (ABD 1972) is allegedly retired after thirty years as a *South Bend Tribune* and *Detroit Free Press* reporter, but his blog, joelontheroad.com, was named “best example of an independent blogger raising hell” by the *Metro Times* in Detroit. Thurtell has recently been credited for his work breaking the Ambassador Bridge scandal. His books include *Up the Rouge! Paddling Detroit’s Hidden River*; *Shoestring Reporter: How I Got to Be a Big City Reporter without Going to J School and How You Can Do It Too*; and *Cross Purposes: If Newspapers Had Covered the Crucifixion* (a novel).

The Best Journalists? Historians!

By Joel Thurtell, *History Alumnus*

If you are one of the 1,100 people who received PhDs in history last year, let me express my condolences. You are looking at a pretty bleak future. According to the American Historical Association, there will be 685 jobs for new graduates. That works out to 1.61 wannabe profs for every college history job opening.

Pretty depressing, if the newly minted PhDs only look for academic jobs. It would also be pretty depressing if they wind up selling insurance instead of applying their knowledge of history and skills at investigating the past.

I understand the feeling, by the way. I passed my prelims in Latin American history at U-M back in 1970. Had I finished my dissertation, I would have graduated into the job market about 1972 or 1973, when the ratio of history PhDs to jobs was even worse — roughly 2:1.

I was able to finish my course work, pass the prelims and do dissertation research, but then life intervened and I spent a stint driving a Yellow Cab in Ann Arbor, followed by service in the Peace Corps, followed by farm work, factory work, and finally a gig as a radio reporter that led to a career that keeps on going even though, supposedly, I am retired. That career has been — and still is, thanks to books and blogging — journalism. And journalism is, I think, the perfect fit for people who have been trained as historians.

Here is the pitch I’d like to make: Why focus on a life in academia? Open your mind to another possibility. Think of the assets you bring.

As a historian, you are highly trained in the evaluation of evidence. You demand documentation from anyone trying to convince you that this or that, or such and such, is fact. You are conditioned to pursue exacting proof. Journalists tend to shun records in favor of what radio people call “actualities” and print reporters

Continued next page



Karen Samuels Jones (AB 1984), a partner in real estate law with Perkins Coie in Denver, was honored by the University of Denver with the 2011 Joy S. Burns Women of Enterprise Award, given by the Daniels College of Business, Burns School of Real Estate. This award recognizes a woman in real estate who demonstrates the highest professional achievement, outstanding leadership, ethical standards, and character in her industry and community. Karen is shown here with candidates for Colorado’s State Attorney General, Democrat Stan Garnett and Republican John Suthers, after moderating a debate between them during last year’s election campaign.



Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends,

Over the past year the Department has been especially focused on our undergraduate program. A special Working Group, chaired by Brian Porter-Szűcs, has been rethinking every aspect of how we approach undergraduate teaching. Our goal is to re-examine the importance of undergraduate education for our departmental culture, review the shape of the History major and all aspects of our advising, and make sure we are doing all we can to meet the changing needs of today's students. Proposed changes will give our students far more freedom to pursue their own program of interests along with greater access to specialist guidance.

This fall we welcome the arrival of four new faculty. As we announced last year, we will be joined by **Pamela Ballinger** (20th-century southeastern Europe), **Erdem Çipa** (state formation in the early modern Ottoman Empire), and **Sebastian Prange** (social, cultural, and political history of Islamic commerce in the medieval Indian Ocean). Additionally, **Katherine French**, a distinguished scholar of the late Middle Ages will be the first occupant of the J. Frederick Hoffman Chair in Medieval and Early Modern English History. Finally, **Will Glover** joins us with a half-time appointment; we share Will with the Taubman College of Art & Architecture.

In the face of this edition's theme, "History Off the Beaten Path," I would still like to take a moment to celebrate the success of our graduates *within* the academic world. Of the 131 recent PhDs we continue to track, 89 (68%) have secured tenure-track teaching positions and another 36 (27%) are engaged in non-tenure-track teaching. Producing great teachers and researchers also continues to be a Michigan tradition.

As always, the tremendous support of our friends and former students enables us to approach the future stronger than ever. And the future of Michigan History promises to be incredibly exciting!

Geoff Eley

The Best Journalists? Historians! *Continued*

call "quotes." Well, the "actualities" and the "quotes" may enliven the sound and brighten the page, but they're a poor substitute for verifiable fact. After earning a degree in history, you have a highly sensitive, thoroughly calibrated bulls--- meter. You have been trained, albeit unwittingly, to tackle today's world as well as the past.

Not only is your mental attitude honed for the kind of investigations journalists like to do, you possess a repository of knowledge about the world — history — that few J-school majors have. That knowledge can be a useful filter for accepting or rejecting so-called story ideas that all too often make their way into mainstream news outlets. The nation desperately needs people who can look at local, regional, or world events and analyze them, assign causes, and discern effects. In other words, as a historian, you can help fill the dearth of high-quality journalists.

You say you've never studied journalism? Good for you! You are light years ahead of those who have. Most journalists' training does not include knowledge of several fields and reading knowledge, at least, of one or more foreign languages. When you were studying colonial history or, say, European intellectual history, the wannabe journalist was banging his brain through a course in the Associated Press style.

But you didn't waste your time on style. You took classes that taught substance, and along the way, you learned to ask questions and to think. Journalism needs you!

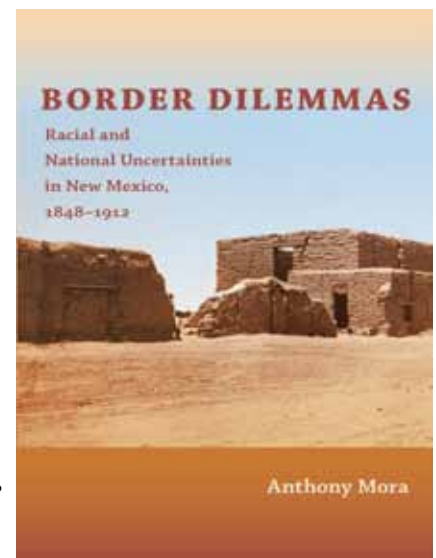
Adapted from Jan 8, 2011, Joelontheroad.com

What's the Past to the Present?

By **Anthony Mora**, *Assistant Professor*

Two political debates caught my attention just as my first book, *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848-1912*, appeared in print. Anxieties about immigration had escalated to the point that Arizona, Georgia, Alabama, and other states passed a slew of restrictive measures that targeted (implicitly or explicitly) Mexican immigrants. Meanwhile, unrelated deliberations about the future of Wisconsin unions took a surprising turn when the extent of academic freedom fell under question. At issue was historians' possible role in contemporary political discussions. These two strains of political debate about immigration and academia might seem unrelated, but as a historian who works on the U.S.-Mexican border, they are critically linked together in my mind.

Most people expect historians to provide the context and details for events that a society considers its finest triumphs. But historians also have the sometimes unenviable task of reminding people about the things from the past that they would rather forget. A history like *Border Dilemmas* challenges the notion that the current anxiousness about the growing Mexican American community is something unique to the present. My book centers on the first generations of Mexicans north of the new border following the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848). Their stories suggest that unresolved injustices from the past continue to haunt the present.



Continued across the fold

More History Grads **Off the Beaten Path**



Joshua Bilmes (AB 1985) is founder and president of JABberwocky Literary Agency in New York City, which specializes in sci-fi and fantasy books. Joshua represents bestselling authors such as Elizabeth Moon (Nebula Award-winning *Speed of Dark*) and Charlaine Harris (pictured here with Joshua in 2009), author of the Sookie Stackhouse novels, which are the basis of the HBO series *True Blood*. Other media adaptations of work represented by JABberwocky include the TV series *Blood Ties* based on the *Blood Books* by Tanya Huff and the film *Testosterone* based on the novel by James Robert Baker.



Eric Lefkofsky (AB 1991), venture capitalist, has been involved in founding and funding a number of Internet enterprises, many of which are now publicly traded. They include Starbelle, Inner Workings, Echo Global Logistics, Media Bank, and most recently Groupon.com. In 2009, *The Chicago Sun-Times* stated that since Starbelle, Lefkofsky has arguably emerged as the most successful and prolific Internet entrepreneur in Chicago. In August 2010, *Forbes* reported that Groupon is the fastest growing company in history. Excerpted from the *LSA Wire*, www.lsa.umich.edu/alumni/wire.



Anand Giridharadas (AB 2003) writes the "Currents" column for *The New York Times* and its global edition, the *International Herald Tribune*, exploring global culture and the social meaning of technology, among other subjects. In 2009, he completed a four-and-a-half-year tour reporting from India for the *Times*, covering India's transformation, Bollywood, corporate takeovers, terrorism, outsourcing, poverty, and democracy. His first book, a work of narrative nonfiction about his return to the India that his parents left, was published in early 2011. It is titled *India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation's Remaking*. Photo: Darshanphotography.

Our donors continue to help the Michigan History Department maintain its position as one of the top ten programs in the country. Thank you!

We welcome your ongoing or new support of these important funds:

- **History Strategic Fund** for initiating new programs
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Faculty Honors

John Carson received the 2010 **International Society for the History of Behavioral and Social Sciences Biennial Book Prize** for his *The Measure of Merit: Talents, Intelligence, and Inequality in the French and American Republics, 1750-1940*.

Martha Jones has won the 2011 **Harold R. Johnson Diversity Award**.

Tiya Miles' book, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story*, has won the 2011 **National Council on Public History Book Award** for the best work growing out of public history.

Farina Mir was awarded the 2010 **Class of 1923 Memorial Teaching Award**.

Douglas Northrop was honored in May with the Provost's **Teaching Innovation Prize (TIP)** for his class "ZOOM: A History of Everything."

Brian Porter-Szűcs has been awarded the 2010 **John Dewey Award** by LSA for his long-term commitment to the education of undergraduate students.

Rebecca Scott has received the 2011 **John H. D'Arms Faculty Award for Distinguished Graduate Mentoring in the Humanities**.

Class Act The Circle in the Square

By Amre Metwally, *Class of 2013* and Ellen Poteet, *Lecturer*

In 1517 Leo Africanus (ca. 1490-ca. 1550), traveler, scholar, and guide to 16th-century North Africa, met the Ottoman Sultan Selim I at Rosetta in the Nile Delta on the occasion of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt. On February 11, 2011, Leo Africanus brought the class of History 396 to the moment when President Mubarak stepped down and Egypt witnessed another revolution. When I drew up my syllabus, I had no idea we would read Leo's account of his travels in Egypt on precisely that day. Or that Amre Metwally, an Egyptian-American who spends his summers with family in Egypt, would be presenting on his second home, Cairo.

Amre had first planned to show pictures tracing the history of Cairo from its founding. He had put together scenes of Fustat, Old Cairo, Saladin's Citadel, Coptic churches and Ottoman mosques, and modern-day street life in the world's largest Muslim city. On the afternoon before our class, we watched the people of Egypt in Tahrir Square poised to hear the words they had been waiting seventeen days for: Mubarak's resignation. In seconds the mood of hope and anticipation turned to shock and anger as Mubarak announced he would stay in power. Amre looked up in dismay and said, "I can't now give the presentation I planned to, but I know what I want to do."

Until class the next day we and the world were unsure what Egypt's trajectory would be, and what actions the demonstrators would take. At 10:10 Amre had everything ready to go. On the classroom computer, he had Al Jazeera English paused, ready to take us to Tahrir Square. Then, on his computer he had Al-Jazeera streaming and his Twitter and Facebook pages open. Finally, there was his Power Point presentation, now on a Cairo in upheaval. He began by showing the square's location in Cairo and a street map of the roundabout at the square's center. The pictures that followed showed themes that had emerged during the demonstrations: celebration, courage, unity, protection, and the expression of the people's voice. One picture that brought these themes together was of Egyptian Copts forming a human circle around Muslims so they could pray. In other instances,

At 10:10 Amre ... had Al Jazeera streaming and his Twitter and Facebook pages open. Finally, there was his Power Point presentation, now on a Cairo in upheaval.

Muslims did the same for Copts. The last slide discussed developments up to February 10, 2011. We came back to our seminar table, with Al-Jazeera streaming on Amre's computer. Our discussion returned to Leo. Where would he have been in these protests?

At that moment Amre noticed that military helicopters had arrived at the presidential palace. He immediately resumed the stream of Al Jazeera English, so that we heard what over a million people gathered in and around Tahrir Square had expected to hear the day before: the 34-second announcement of Mubarak's resignation. A second later calls and texts from Cairo flooded Amre's phone. We had a direct line from Tahrir Square to our class at the University of Michigan!

After the initial shock and realization that we had witnessed and in some sense been present at this milestone in the Egyptian people's struggle, we came back to Leo. After that morning we read and discussed Leo in light of the Egyptian revolution and protests across North Africa where Leo traveled. Anil Lakehal-Ayat, an Algerian-American, also



Copts encircle Muslims at prayer in Tahrir Square. Photo accessed from Al Jazeera English, ca. March 3, 2011.

took us to Algeria with his slides and personal knowledge of that region. Amre believes that Leo had the mindset of a protester because of his desire for always seeing and discovering more, and traveling toward an open horizon. We, of course, cannot know for sure how Leo would have reported on the events of February 11, 2011, but we thank him for being the opening that brought us into the circle in the Square.

EISENBERG INSTITUTE *for* HISTORICAL STUDIES

Whence and Wither the Eisenberg?

The theme of Paucity and Plenty gives way to Spatial Imaginations in our upcoming two-year program. The process of coming up with a new theme for the Eisenberg lectures and workshops is a rather arcane one. We begin by soliciting ideas from the faculty. Few come in, but some of those have very determined and committed sponsors. The Steering Committee then sits down to discuss the variety of ideas that have been contributed. That meeting is particularly interesting, a real intellectual exchange that seems to take on a life of its own. It moves in various directions, reverses itself, comes back to the beginning, circles around themes, and then narrows in on precise language.

When two years ago we decided on “paucity and plenty” – an idea, by the way, that came from a graduate student after other ideas had won considerable support – it was as if that theme was a signal of the particular moment of crisis and possibility the United States and global capitalism faced in 2008-2009. Further discussion seemed irrelevant.

Not so with our new theme! Issues of space, geography, mobility – upward and outward – captured everyone at the table, but each of us emphasized a different dimension. The Steering Committee, it should be said, works more like a Quaker meeting than the Politburo (despite my particular interest in Stalin and Stalinism), and democratic exchanges take time and eventually acquire their own shape. The theme, as always, is merely a guide, a suggestion of direction in which to move. The real form and actual content the theme will acquire will only be known down the road, as the speakers and workshop participants run with their own ideas. I look forward to these next years of discovery.

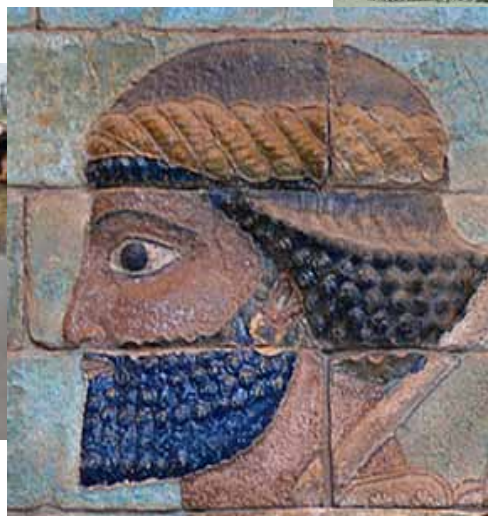
Ron Suny
Director

Be sure to look for this fall's schedule on our website:

www.lsa.umich.edu/eihs

Medieval and Early Modern Studies

The 40-year-old MEMS concentration may be ending, but it goes not without claiming its share of college-wide recognition. Since 2007, four MEMS seniors have won College Honors thesis prizes: Kathleen Bachynski (2007 Virginia Voss Prize); Lauren Humphrey (2009 Virginia Voss Prize); Jonathan Martin (2010 Robert Hayden Prize); and Christopher DeCou (2011 Robert Hayden Prize). Thanks to MEMS directors, Karla Taylor, Helmut Puff, and George Hoffmann, as well as MEMS faculty advisors for their attentive mentoring and support of our talented young scholars.



Retooling Undergraduate History

By **Brian Porter-Szűcs**, *Professor*

This past academic year the department undertook one of the most ambitious projects in recent memory: a top-to-bottom review of our undergraduate program. Striking a balance between coherence and diversity is always one of the biggest problems history departments face. On one hand, the time has long since passed for a one-size-fits-all curriculum, but the flipside—the richness and breadth offered by Michigan’s more than 80 faculty members who cover just about the entire globe—means the curriculum could become simply a grab-bag of content courses.

The Undergraduate Working Group organized over a dozen “listening sessions” to solicit the views of every constituency. We commissioned U-M’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching to carry out two large-scale surveys, one polled students in our classes and another those who had never taken a history class. All this input gave us a sense of how professors and students see the program we have now, and what they would like to change. We were delighted to discover a great deal of consensus in the responses, which helped us think through how to transform the undergraduate History degree.

In the globalized and ever more connected world of the 21st century, our students’ needs and interests are more varied and challenging. Some might plan a career that will require a solid background in the history and culture of Latin America or another region or country. Some students might want to focus on women’s history or labor history or military history, or any of dozens of subfields. Recognizing that the entirety of human history is far too vast to be covered in the handful of classes that students can take during their time at U-M, we recognize that we must both impart the bases for judging what is important and what is not, and give students leeway to decide what is

important to them. But how can this be achieved without stripping the degree of an overarching coherence? The answer seems to lie in combining a dramatically improved system of advising with a more globalized and flexible set of concentration requirements.



Mural by U-M undergrads at Kid’s First Village, Dong Ha, Quang Tri Province, Vietnam

Altering the concentration not only suits our diverse faculty, but will better prepare our students for engaging the ever more diverse world in which we live. We began by opening up the survey sequence requirement. Once upon a time, nearly every history major in the United States had to take a common set of courses in American and European history, and this was the foundation of the entire curriculum. We abandoned that narrow model at Michigan decades ago, offering instead six pairs of survey classes on Europe, the US, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, or Ancient Greece and Rome, from which students could choose. Now we have taken the next step, which will allow students to identify any set of paired courses as their core survey sequence. In addition to an expanded list of geographically defined pairings, students may request approval for classes that explore common themes in different contexts. For example, one could put together “Europe in the Era of Total War” and “World War II in the Pacific,” or “Roman Catholicism in the Modern World” and “Religion in America.” Distribution requirements going forward will expect every student

to study at least four world regions, which may include a Global/Transregional focus.

To help students find focus amidst all this flexibility, we will fundamentally rework our system of advising. In the past, students met with a list of faculty members that changed every semester, so there was not ideal continuity or area focus. That is going to change. Once a student declares a concentration, he or she will be assigned a faculty mentor who will work with him or her as long as that student

remains a History concentrator. This mentoring system will mean that students are guided through the program by professors in their field of interest who can recommend courses that will meet their particular interests and goals. This sustained, individualized guidance will provide coherence to each student’s training and experience. Now every student, not just honors and graduate students, will see the benefits of working one-on-one with a member of our world-class faculty.

Putting undergraduates at the center of our departmental culture is a long-term commitment—one we are eager to embrace. At a time when universities across the country are being asked to justify every program in the face of budgetary challenges, we are convinced that Michigan’s Department of History will continue to provide a model undergraduate education.

What's the Past to the Present? *Continued*

For many nineteenth-century Americans, those first Mexicans were simply unwelcome inhabitants of recently conquered lands. Their race and culture, many argued, made their presence incompatible with American interests. As U.S. Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan expressed it in an 1846 speech: "We do not want the people of Mexico, either as citizens or subjects," he declared, "all we want is a portion of territory." Despite such objections, the end of the war and the acquisition of Texas, New Mexico (which included modern-day Arizona), and Alta California did transform tens of thousands of Latinos into U.S. citizens. They were left with the challenge of fighting for an equal place in the nation, and their decisions about accommodation and resistance helped shape the meaning of the U.S.-Mexican border.

Still, a type of collective amnesia obscures Mexicans' long presence in this country. Every ten years or so, the media announces its surprise that Latinos constitute a significant portion of the population (most recently manifest in coverage of Latinos becoming the nation's largest minority). Even most university history classes tend to gloss over the U.S.-Mexican War, presenting it only as a precursor to the U.S. Civil War. This is astounding given how much that first war altered the politics, economy, and political geography of North America. It also intertwined Mexico and the United States for the next century and half. Forgetting or ignoring this history allows the fiction that Mexico, its populations, and its history were somehow always distinct from the United States. Mexicans can thereby appear to be an "alien presence" here. Their migration is imagined as an entirely one-sided affair rather than the product of an ongoing and imbalanced relationship between the two countries.

Uncovering and interpreting the stories in *Border Dilemmas* has suggested to me that historians have a critical obligation to be engaged with contemporary concerns. Their work cannot help but be political when the politics of the past weigh so heavily on concerns of the present.

Retirements



Thomas Trautmann, Marshall Sahlins Collegiate Professor of History and Anthropology, retired at the end of 2010. Tom's grace, wisdom, and good humor will be sorely missed.

Carol Karlsen, Professor of History and Women's Studies, retired at the end of May 2011. We wish Carol the very best in all her new adventures!



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Alumni News

Claude Clegg (MA, PhD 1995), professor of history at Indiana University at Bloomington, recently published his third book, *Troubled Ground: A Tale of Murder, Lynching, and Reckoning in the New South* (University of Illinois Press, 2010).

Kelly Goodman (AB 2010) and **Jim Mangenello** (AB 2009) were nominated by the Provost's Council for Rhodes and/or Marshall Scholarships.

William Ritchey Newton (PhD 1974) has published his fourth book on the French court: *Versailles-côté jardins* (Editions Tallandier, Paris).

Jon Parmenter (PhD 1999) has been promoted to associate professor at Cornell University. His first book, *The Edge of the Woods: Iroquoia, 1534-1701*, was brought out by Michigan State University Press in September 2010.

Millery Polyne (PhD 2003) published *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964* with University Press of Florida in 2010. He is currently assistant professor at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

Rose Mary Sheldon (PhD 1987) has stepped down as department head of History at the Virginia Military Institute to finish her latest book, *Rome's Wars in Parthia: Blood in the Sand* (London: Vallentine-Mitchell, 2010).

John A. Williams (PhD 1996) received the annual campus-wide teaching award in 2009. His edited volume, *Weimar Culture Revisited*, came out from Palgrave Macmillan in January 2011. In January 2011 John also became chair of the History Department at Bradley University.

In Memoriam

Hans Heilbronner (AB, MA, PhD 1954) served with distinction in the University of New Hampshire History Department from 1954 to 1991. Heilbronner was born in Germany and, after his father's release from a concentration camp in 1939, escaped with members of his family and settled in Detroit. A scholar of Russian history, he was honored in 2003 when UNH established the Endowed Fund for Holocaust Education and the Hans Heilbronner Lecture. He died at home on June 8, 2011, at the age of 85.

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A bit of the action from Michigan's 5-0 victory over Michigan State in the "Big Chill at the Big House" at Michigan Stadium on December 11, 2010. History student Shawn Hunwick tends the goal. This match drew a crowd of 113,411, the world record for an ice hockey game. Photos courtesy of UM Photo Services, Scott Gavin and Martin Vloet.