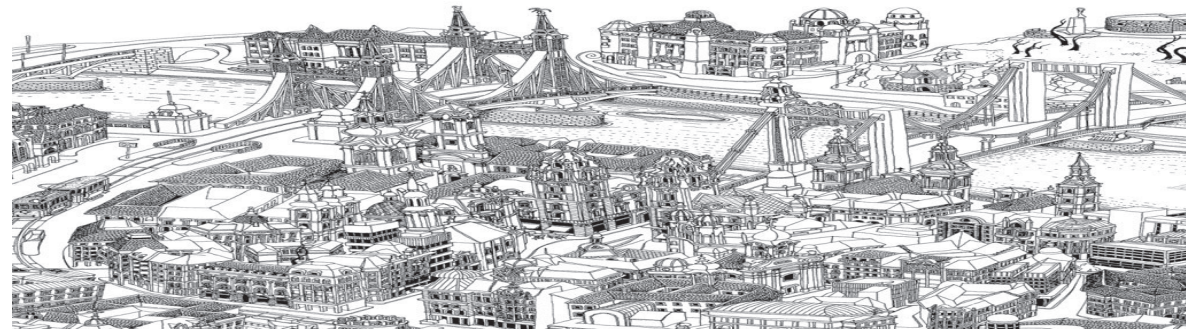


Fall 2024 Courses

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| HY 101 – History of Western Civilization I (6 sections) | HY 228 – Latin America (Urban) | HY 429W – Studies in Latin American History: Latin American Revolutions (Urban) |
| HY 102 – History of Western Civilization II (6 sections) | HY 355 – French Revolution (Cage) | HY 435/535 – Civil War and Reconstruction (McKiven) |
| HY 104 – History of Asian Civilization II (Miller) | HY 357 – Europe Since 1945 (Messenger) | HY 443 – Research Seminar in World History: Early Islamic History, 500-945 CE (Williams) |
| HY 121 – World Civilization I (Messenger) | HY 366 – Traditional China (Miller) | HY 461/561 – Studies in Asian History: The Cultural Revolution in China and Beyond (Miller) |
| HY 135 – US History to 1877 (8 sections) | HY 375 – Recent US History (Lombardo) | HY 530 – American Historiography (Vaughn-Roberson) |
| HY 136 – US History Since 1877 (9 sections) | HY 390 – Special Topics: Gaming and History (Meola) | |
| | HY 405/505 – War and Society in 20th-Century History (Messenger) | |



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“Historians can process information in a systematic way. They recognize patterns that other people cannot.”

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH ALABAMA

History News

HISTORY DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER SPRING, 2024

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Mahan Lecture Sheds Light on Abortion

The twenty-first Howard F. Mahan Lecture took place this March 27 at Laidlaw Hall. Dr. Mary E. Fissell, of Johns Hopkins University’s History of Medicine Department, addressed an attentive audience of over sixty students, faculty, and community members on “Regulating Reproduction in the Early Modern World.”

Dr. Fissell began with her conclusions: that women throughout history have always had the option of ending pregnancies; that prohibition of abortion rarely works; that abortion is alternately tolerated and repressed; and that repression is often in response to changes in women’s roles in society. Concern for the unborn did not figure in debate about abortion until recently. Dr. Fissell took the audience on a grand tour of classical, medieval, and early modern medical culture, showing that the same abortifacient herbs were recommended for centuries. The malodorous herb savin was especially well known. Testing the hypothesis that abortifacient herbs constituted a branch of

gendered female knowledge (which sometimes meant “witchcraft”), Dr. Fissell found instead that both men and women employed such knowledge to end pregnancies, usually motivated by the desire to cover up indiscretions and preserve reputations.



Dr. Mary Fissell

Although much of Dr. Fissell’s source material consisted of legal proceedings, generated when these efforts to conceal indiscretions ran afoul of the law, she emphasized that abortion per se was not a crime. The dramatic 1651 Maryland case she discussed, involving a gentleman

administering savin to his lover, detailed the prosecution not of abortion but of generally depraved behavior attendant to atheism. Other legal issues related to heirs and inheritance of property, but “abortion in and of itself,” Dr. Fissell underscored, “was not what landed these cases in court.”

Dr. Fissell informed the audience that abortion was criminalized in Great Britain only in 1803, while in the United States, the medical establishment sought to ban abortion in the 1860s, partly as a response to first-wave feminist activism. The Pope didn’t declare that life began at conception until 1869.

Dr. Fissell’s talk was timely and topical, with abortion remaining a fraught political issue. While some might argue that Americans have always abhorred abortion, her talk demonstrated that “ending a pregnancy might be an ordinary part of an early modern woman’s life.” As always, historical context has its importance. “Historians bear witness,” Dr. Fissell declared. “It’s what we do.”



Scholars Shine at Conference



Dr. Meola and Ms. Williamson

From February 22 to 24, scholars from around the world gathered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to attend the Annual Conference of the Consortium on the Revolutionary Era, 1750-1850. The History Department had two participants - Dr. David Meola (a regular at these conferences) and Laura Williamson, a current Master of Arts student.

Ms. Williamson presented part of her research for her Master's thesis, which focused on French depictions and fetishization of Algerian women after the French colonized Algeria in

1830. She spoke about paintings from Delacroix and others while showing how these pictures fit within the Orientalist paradigm that depicted life within harems and focused on aspects of polygamy. She spoke eloquently and forcefully about her topic and impressed both audience members and other panelists.

Dr. Meola presented about the relationship of Judaism to Modernity during the late Enlightenment and early 19th century, focusing on how the Jewish Reform movement became

the impetus for splintering Jewish religious practice while also becoming the reference for traditional responses and the creation of Jewish Orthodoxy.

One of the highlights of this conference is the ability for graduate students to mingle and talk with leading scholars in cultural, social, and military history of this era. Every year there are three keynote speeches, this year highlighted by David Blackbourn (Vanderbilt), Elizabeth Cross (Georgetown), and Darrin McMahon (Dartmouth).

Center Explores Confederate Naming in Mobile

On March 12, Dr. David Messenger unveiled a set of informative displays on the naming of Mobile's streets, schools, and parks after Confederate officers. The event took place on the third floor of the Marx Library.

Completed under the auspices of the Center for the Study of War and Memory and funded by a grant from the Alabama Humanities Alliance, the project is the work of Dr. Messenger, Dr. Susan McCready of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literature, and a number of student researchers, and is intended to inform decisions that may in future be made by the City

of Mobile to resolve controversies stemming from Confederate names. The group's hope is to provide context, rather than to propose policy. It may be helpful for local leaders to know, for



example, that Maine and Connecticut Streets were changed to Palmetto and

Selma Streets in 1904, long after the Civil War, when "Southernization" could not have entailed political independence but must have signified something else.

About thirty students, faculty, and community members attended Dr. Messenger's remarks, and some discussion ensued afterward. Dr. Susan McCready, Director of the Center, pointed out that, since street and other names were changed at least once, the argument that any further change would compromise Mobile's original character is rather faulty. History, as this exhibit shows, is about change.

"History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it."

Winston Churchill

Medical History Talk Recalls an Unsung Hero

This year's Medical History Lecture was delivered on March 14 by Dr. David Barton Smith, professor emeritus at Temple University. Dr. Smith's talk was on "Mobile and the Persistence of Jim Crow Health Care," and it told the story of Dr. Jean Cowsert (1925-1967), an unsung martyr of Mobile's civil rights movement.

Dr. Cowsert earned her MD in 1954 from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, one of only two women in a class of sixty. Returned to her hometown, she had by 1965 become President of Medical Staff at Providence Hospital. So credentialed, she desegregated Providence, simply by admitting her Black patients to its wards. In 1966, she began acting in clandestine cooperation with the Federal government to bring Mobile Infirmary, where she also held a staff position, into compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which would have required Mobile Infirmary to desegregate in order to retain Federal funding. In the course of fraught negotiations that lasted

into January of 1967, Dr. Cowsert's role as informant became known. On January 29, she was found dead of a gunshot wound in front of her home on Cottage Hill Road. Her death was promptly ruled accidental.



Dr. Jean Cowsert

Dr. Smith described the process by which recalcitrant institutions such as hospitals became dependent on Federal money, compelling them to desegregate, at least in theory. Civil rights activists, as well as whistleblowers such as Dr. Cowsert, made sure that the desegregation was genuine. Leveraged by Washington and by local citizens, Mobile's hospitals soon gave up on segregation. Today, Alabama's health care system is one of the most integrated in the nation, with racial inequities in healthcare at a low level, though inequities persist.

Dr. Jean Cowsert was honored at a luncheon at the University of Alabama at Birmingham this year, attended by her friends and family, and a medical school scholarship is expected to be named for her. She is also the subject of an Emmett Till Cold Case, opened by the US Department of Justice in 2022.

The Medical History Lecture is co-sponsored by the History Department and the Mobile Medical Museum.

New Book Highlights Alabama Unionism

Former *New York Times* executive editor Howell Raines regaled an audience of students, faculty, and visitors from the community with the subject of his new book, *Silent Cavalry: How Union Soldiers from Alabama Helped Sherman Burn Atlanta – and then got Written Out of History*. Mr. Raines' January 31 talk was part family history, part military epic, and part historiographical corrective.

Growing up in Birmingham, Mr. Raines could not shake memories of his grandparents, who hailed from Winston County, whispering ominously about their "Democratic" neighbors. Other tidbits of family lore pointed to ancestors "lying out" – avoiding Confederate conscription – or even donning Union blue, during what he'd been told was the War Between the States but which seemed more and more to have been a war within the states. Off to college at Birmingham-Southern (where he roomed with Tenant McWilliams, who later taught in our Department), Raines grew skeptical of the Lost Cause narrative of the war, in part since its references to "scalawags" – defectors from the Cause – seemed to point to his own family.

Thus began a long historical hunt, which, with the aid of recent scholarship on Southern Unionism, led Raines to the First Alabama Cavalry, United States Volunteers. Dismissed by Lost Cause historians as militarily negligi-



ble, the First played huge roles in scouting and espionage and served under Sherman during the approach to Atlanta and subsequent March to the Sea, even being selected to lead the parade through surrendered Savannah. Although the story of the First Alabama is no longer suppressed, the details of its past obscurity form an epic tale that Raines delights to relate. During his talk, he opined that the Alabama Department of Archives and History may have concealed documents relevant to the First, and he also wondered aloud if Mississippi historian Shelby Foote might have skewed the narrative of the 1990 Ken Burns documentary *The Civil War*, underemphasizing the history of Southern Unionism.

Lively Q & A followed, which included some musings about the people of North Alabama, who seem chronically defiant but who ended up being on the right side of things in 1861-1865. Mr. Raines' talk amply demonstrated that the way history is written is often as important as what happened.