

Good Evening. Reflecting upon my study of history at BU, so many images came to mind, that I was not sure which best explained my fascination with the subject. Was it the satisfaction of successfully deciphering sixteenth century English, or the thrill of debating the modern effects of colonialism? The people and places I learned about in my history classes have intrigued and inspired me. At the same time, the skills I have worked on through the daily tasks of historical research excite me, and I know that I will continue to use them throughout my life. These two features of history—the skill-building methodology and the narratives we discover—are what have made it such a compelling area of focus for my undergraduate career.

Some days as a student of history are spent in solitude. The feeling of sitting in a library surrounded by seemingly ancient books is hard to describe to one who has not yet experienced it. I will never forget the power that I felt when I studied abroad in London and successfully acquired a reader's pass at the British Library. I could request, and have delivered to me, books, essays, and letters dating back hundreds of years. I could hunt on my own through towers of periodicals, and touch

the worn pages of old newspapers. And then I could find a way to weave the information I gathered from them into an original argument.

Other days, the study of history is all about the way that we interact with others. My favorite classes at BU were my colloquia, and my other small seminars where class time consisted almost entirely of sharing ideas and analyzing texts together. In these settings, I learned how to present an idea and defend it, while also listening to others' contributions and learning from them. These discussions, when each student participated and enthusiastically reflected on the meaning of the texts in front of us, made history feel dynamic and energetic. They made me realize, as my teachers had consistently tried to explain, that history is a conversation. Only by engaging with it as part of a group can our own individual work be fulfilling.

An appreciation for the daily tasks that make up historical work is an important foundation. However, beyond that, history requires one to engage with and feel connected to the past in a way that is meaningful in the present. I realized how important this was when I began working on my senior thesis. I struggled for months to formulate and refine a topic

using interesting, and perhaps even undiscovered, sources. I began researching the settlement house movement of the nineteenth century, in which young, educated, middle class men and women fought to eradicate urban poverty by moving into poor neighborhoods and forming clubs, classes, and social welfare programs. You might be familiar with the movement through the work of Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago. Over the course of several stages of planning, I learned about a small settlement house just a few miles from here in the South End. Denison House offered a setting for young women who had graduated from Boston's colleges to be part of a new experiment in charity work. These women broke social boundaries by living together in the middle of a poor, immigrant neighborhood. They created the field of social work, and turned charity into a much more personal, far-reaching, and eventually a more policy oriented system.

As I worked on this project I was also in the midst of trying to figure out what I wanted to be doing after graduation. In a surprising way, I found that I was much more connected to my study than I had thought. Just like the women of Denison House, and like many of you, I

was a young, educated woman, struggling to find some way to take all that I had learned in school and use it to make a difference in my community. I was struck by the many similarities between our lives and ambitions, but also by the divergences. Our conceptualization of important topics: like poverty, diversity, ethnicity, or privilege, depends on the time and place we inhabit.

Crucial to these discussions is attention to the past. The study of history is valuable in itself for the skills it teaches, but it is also critical to understanding the many questions and problems we care about today. Insight into the way that ideas develop, expand, and transform gives a unique perspective on the issues we debate in our own society. So while the discipline of history takes place in the library surrounded by books, at home writing, or in the classroom with other historians, it is all the more so taking place out in the world.