

## Header Image



*From the Chair's Desk*



Greetings from Bay State Road!

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Below are some of the emails I received after we sent out my 1st alumni newsletter. I encourage you to contribute stories to share with the community of folks who have studied history at Bay State Road. Send stories, adventures, misadventures, cautionary tales, and any other material to me at [ferleger@bu.edu](mailto:ferleger@bu.edu).

Below, you will find two short articles, one by the chair and another by one of the department's graduate students. I will continue to share with you our faculty's and student's adventures in historical research and life.

Best wishes,

Louis Ferleger  
 Professor of History,  
 Chair, History Department

### **Alumni News:**

Patrick Lyons (1964)

I went into the Navy in 1964 after graduating from BU with a history major in 1964 and an MA in history the following year. The Navy saw all those history credits and assigned me to the Naval History Division which at the time was located near the Washington monument. (That plot is now a formal garden, nice to stroll in.) My main job was "Naval Documents of the American Revolution," now complete. I remained interested in history over the years. At the other end of life, I am a member of the Foxboro historical society, assigned to booking speakers for our monthly meetings. You come across some interesting historical people " thanks to the start I got at BU.

Kyle E. Wackenheim (2003)

After I graduated Boston University, I joined Teach For America and taught on the Navajo Reservation at a small Bureau of Indian Affairs School called Pueblo Pintado in New Mexico. It was very remote and was a boarding school for approximately half of the 300 enrolled students. I spent three years teaching Social Studies to 7th and 8th graders and coaching the basketball and cross country teams. I applied to the University of New Mexico Law school and was accepted, graduating in 2009. I accepted a position as a law clerk for a state appellate judge. My wife, who graduated from the University of Oklahoma, persuaded me to apply for the position of a Death Penalty law clerk at the Federal Court in Oklahoma City. I was lucky enough to get hired, and worked there for about a year and a half. When the funding for that position ended, I became a public defender in the State court system in Oklahoma County. Recently, a famed and well-respected criminal defense attorney offered me a job, and that's where I work now.

Steven Abrams (2013)

After graduating in May I undertook a month long cross-country road trip. Following the historic Route 20, a friend and I drove from Boston to Newport, Oregon and then down the West coast. I kept up a travel blog during the trip which can be accessed here: [twentyfor20.wordpress.com](http://twentyfor20.wordpress.com). I am currently searching for both a job and publications to submit material based off my travel experiences.

### **The Rise of the New England Patriots**

*Louis A. Ferleger*

Every day throughout the season there are thousands of print and web articles, blogs, podcasts, NFL telecasts, and twitter messages that provide reams of information and trivia about football teams. On game days there are hundreds of radio and TV shows that discuss upcoming games and on the internet there are chat rooms where you can talk about "live" ongoing games. The flood of information about NFL teams and almost anything else associated with football is greater today than ever and TV ratings testify to the enormous interest in the game.

With all this information, is it possible that something is missing?

Yes.

Despite the information overload, students and fans of the game lack a sufficient understanding of how the history of the American corporation influenced the way football organizations build their teams.

Let's look at one example, the New England Patriots (NEP). Their success since Bill Belichick became head coach is beyond dispute. The NEP record is stunning; other than in the team's first year 2000, in every other year the team has won nine or more games, played in five Super Bowls and won three. Sustaining a high level of success is difficult and no other NFL team from 2000â€”2013 has consistently won as many regular season games.

The history of the NEP is filled with tributes to the head coach. While Bill Belichick deserves credit, I think that ownership deserves equal if not more credit for making committed financial investments to build an organization (from players to top management) similar to the business model adopted by successful corporations in the late nineteenth century to the present. The enterprises that emerged during the rise of big business adopted a business model that created organizations that were committed to building organizational capabilities throughout the company.

How do we apply this business model to a football team?

A successful football team must plan and coordinate the development and diffusion of players, at times make important investments (long-term contracts), and understand and accept that an investment in a particular player may turn out to be a mistakeâ€”that is, that investments yield uncertain results and that every investment will not yield the same return. The football team must commit to develop players who are specialists as well as generalists. By adopting this approach some players accumulate knowledge that is useful for a variety of

positions (offensive, defensive, special teams, kick offs, etc.). As these generalists accumulate knowledge the organization integrates their capabilities with other existing capabilities (other players). The team may decide a player is more of a specialist "and that the player should concentrate on one position. Over time the organization may expand the skill set of the player so that he can play more than one position, that is, develop knowledge based skills so he can be both a generalist and specialist. Developing capabilities across the entire organization enables the team to react, refocus, and adapt when a player is hurt or an offensive and/or defensive scheme needs adjustment during a game. Building capabilities is not easy but it is necessary to maintain a sustained competitive advantage (win games). If a team adopts this strategy they must also be innovative in planning and coordinating complex specialized divisions of labor. In other words, the team (organization) must make committed investments to a process "selecting players" that involves uneven and uncertain results to achieve success.

The rise of the NEP stresses selecting players in the draft and free agents who are willing to commit to the team (organization). The players must be "all in." That is, each player must be willing to play according to how their capabilities are developed during practices; how the coaches decide to scheme and approach every game (every game plan is different, though there may be overlapping defense and offensive schemes). The players selected must be committed to the organizational development of diverse skills "skills that may be only called upon infrequently. Over the years the NEP have made poor investments (high draft picks who were cut or traded) but the emphasis on developing organizational capabilities remains unchanged.

Bill Belichick frequently states that statistics "are for losers." By this I think he means that if you are only looking at statistics and not the organizational effort "in particular how the team uses its capabilities to generate high effort per game" your team is likely to be less successful.

The NEP head coach is always reminding people that they give him too much credit. He frequently thanks his staff, his players, and sometimes ownership but hardly anyone notices. Bill Belichick is a top manager of an organization that is committed to promoting organizational capabilities similar to a highly regarded top manager of a successful company. Companies commit scarce resources to create managerial structures and top managers work with other managers to bolster organizational capabilities company-wide. The NEP has built a managerial structure that is committed to team-wide development of skills. In a crisis, top managers must make hard choices that they hope will turn the company around. During a game the head coach will, at times, take charge and make a difficult call.

I have no doubt that other teams that are successful use some variant of this model. On the other hand, sometimes the best ideas fail to command market shares and the company must start over again. In football, even the best organizations sometimes fail to adjust and lose games. No matter. The next time you sit in front of your TV or attend an NFL game ask yourself whether the team you are watching has the organizational capabilities to succeedâ€”if they do they probably have adopted the business model that produced some of America's most successful corporations.

### **PhD Student Mark Kukis on Going from Journalism to History**

Before joining the PhD history program here at BU I was a journalist for roughly a decade, including three years as a correspondent for Time magazine covering the war in Iraq. On campus over the years some have asked me why I chose to leave journalism for academia, and I can understand the curiosity. At first glance the fields seem like worlds apart. Reporters don't tend to debate the profundity of history scholars at length, for example. And I have not heard any historians discussing the literary significance of Gay Talese. Coming to graduate school certainly marked a change in lifestyle for me personally after years spent immersed in a war zone. But in many ways the worlds of journalism and history merged easily, making doctoral studies seem like a natural progression in my intellectual life.

The first time I seriously considered becoming an historian came in early 2009, when I was in Baghdad. At that time I was in the process of gathering dozens of Iraqi oral histories for a book I was planning. With the help of the Time Iraqi staff, I interviewed roughly one hundred Iraqis at length about their experiences during the American invasion and occupation. On rare occasions Iraqis who spoke with me would comment on the news of the day, and their quotes would appear in my dispatches for Time. But generally we simply talked about the past -- the history of the U.S. presence in Iraq, the history of their own experiences amid the saga. The conversations were to me the most fascinating ones I had throughout my time covering the war. I was hearing what amounted to a social history of the conflict from the Iraqi perspective. It totally altered my perceptions about a time and place I thought I knew. And it changed the way I perceived the past. I began to sense I knew far too little about Iraq specifically and history generally. If one history research project could so profoundly reshape my understanding of things, then imagine what a career of studying history could do.

Time shuttered its Baghdad bureau later that year, and I wound down my oral history research and left Iraq. I remained a contributor with the magazine but took a hiatus to complete the book, *Voices from Iraq: A People's History, 2003-2009*

(Columbia University Press, 2011). A number of trade and academic presses were interested once I was done, and I was fortunate to be in a position to make a choice about what kind of life I wanted the book to have. I could give the book to a trade publisher. Or I could hand it to an academic press, one that could nurture the book long-term as history to be included in future studies of America's war in Iraq. For me the choice was easy. I loved the idea of the book on college campuses, hopefully for years to come. That was where I felt the book would find its most important readers.

Shortly after finally completing the book I began to wonder whether the world of news reporting was still the right place for me anymore. I had for many years relished covering news, reporting literally all over the world in locales ranging from the White House to war zones. But in all that time the most meaningful work I felt I had done really focused on history, not headlines. I found myself wanting more experiences exploring the past rather than the events of the day. The questions of history, to me, seemed bigger, deeper, more challenging. Finding their answers struck me as more profound, more illuminating. I wanted to keep going down a scholarly path that journalism had unexpectedly opened to me, and the next step appeared clear.

I still write for Time and other outlets occasionally and hope to continue doing so. Reporter friends of mine have told me more than once that no one ever really leaves the business. Once a journalist, always a journalist. The more I think about it the more I suspect they are right. I'll always be partly a journalist -- and happily so. I'm just becoming an historian too.

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Boston University Arts & Sciences History | 226 Bay State Road  
 Boston, MA 02215 | [history@bu.edu](mailto:history@bu.edu)  
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