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From the Chair's Desk



Greetings from Bay State Road!

Below are some of the emails I received after we sent out the last 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.

You will also find two articles below, one by Assistant Professor of History Alexis Peri whose specialty is Russian History and who joined the department last year, and the other a reprint of an article by Robyn Metcalfe, who received her PhD from the department in 2010 and whose post-graduate work focuses on food related issues. I will continue to share with you our faculty and students' adventures in historical research and life.

Best wishes,
Louis Ferleger
Professor of History,
Chair, History Department

Alumni News:

Ellen R. Wald, Ph.D. 2013

I write regularly about energy pricing and investment strategies in *Modern Trader Magazine*, a leading commodities investment publication. In May, I was featured in *BBC History Magazine*, explaining the historical effect of OPEC on oil prices and the connection to current fluctuations in the oil market. Last fall, I was interviewed by the *New York Times* and cited in an article about energy and foreign policy ([Oil's Comeback Gives U.S. Global Leverage](#), Oct. 7, 2014). I am beginning a regular spot on *Smart Money*, a radio show about finance and investing based in Florida, where I will discuss a variety of energy issues and how they relate to the consumer and investor. I also teach Middle East policy and history at Jacksonville University and am completing a book about how U.S. diplomats and financiers can better understand Saudi Arabia's goals and intentions in the global energy industry.

Mark Zannoni, B.A. 1992

Thanks for the newsletter. I am alum of the department--Class of '92--and noticed in your note below that you asked for any news, so I thought I'd share. I recently came out with a book--a photodocumentary--examining Vietnam today from the perspective the war. Titled *Vietnam 35 Years After the Fall of Saigon*, the book covers the well-known impacts such as those from Agent Orange (still affecting children today) and injuries from unexploded ordnance to lesser known impacts such as how new houses of some ethnic minorities still use steel for their homes, which were introduced by the US after the Viet Cong burned down their homes (which was in retaliation for the US and South Vietnamese forces moving these people from the mountainsides to living in villages, which the US did to limit their contact and influence by the Viet Cong). The book looks not only at the war, but also peace and reconciliation, diplomacy, economic development, and cultural anthropology. The book is about 200 pages of color images and came out in September 2014. Also, the book's foreword was penned by US Ambassador Stephen Lyne, who I had met at BU, who taught, at the time, in the History and Political Science Departments.

Details on the book, including some sample images, can be found at:

www.vietnam35yearsafter.com

The War Within: Soviet Diaries of the Leningrad Blockade, 1941-1944

Alexis Peri

Assistant Professor of History

In November 1941, just two months after the Wehrmacht began their encirclement and blockade of Leningrad, a handful of Soviet officials gathered to determine the future legacy of this battle. Of course, they had no idea when or how it would end—in victory or in defeat. But they sensed that the fight for the city of Lenin would be one of the most monumental events of WWII and it warranted immediate interpretation.

They were more correct than they knew. The Leningrad blockade last longer than any siege since biblical times and would take close to a million lives. The siege, these officials agreed, must be documented so that future generations might someday understand the horrors of being starved and held prisoner in one's home city for 872 days. The question was: whom should they entrust to write this story? Professional writers who already had mastered Soviet rhetorical and political conventions? Or average citizens who were busy fighting for their lives? The committee made the risky choice. It asked ordinary Leningraders to chronicle the Blockade by keeping diaries. These diaries, the committee acknowledged, would be more "authentic" than professional prose. And, if the USSR survived the war, they would provide the basis for the official history of the Blockade.

But precisely the opposite happened. The story of the Blockade that was known to generations of Soviet people, that is celebrated in Russia today, was penned by professional writers. Guided by party and censorship directives, they crafted a triumphant narrative of the siege, one that acknowledged the community's suffering but emphasized its solidarity, heroism, and devotion to the Soviet motherland.

What happened to the plan for a "people's history" of the siege? While digging through the Russian archives, I discovered that many Leningraders *had* kept diaries and, true to their plans, city officials amassed over a hundred of them by 1945. Before the war's end, however, the Kremlin began to silence Leningraders. Within months, it restricted public celebrations and publications commemorating the Blockade. Archivists and officials associated with the diary campaign were fired. And hundreds of Leningrad's top military, state and party leaders were arrested. Many were executed. The diaries—

now politically dangerous to their authors—were shelved.

Eventually the diaries were forgotten. Even survivors do not know about them. When I interviewed *blokadniki* (or people of the Blockade) and their children, they insisted that no one wrote. Leningraders, they assumed, had neither the strength nor the inclination to record their experiences. Gradually, survivors have adopted the officially sanctioned narrative as their own. Many discouraged me from researching Leningraders' wartime writings because the story already had been told. What had to be said was said.

After three years of working with individual families and in nine archives, I discovered that the Kremlin had cause for concern. The 124 unpublished journals that I have analyzed articulate a narrative of the Blockade that stands in sharp contrast to the accepted state picture. They provide a documentary record of strife, struggle, and skepticism, where parents abandoned children, children abandoned parents, cannibalism was rampant, news published in *Pravda* was dismissed as fiction, and party tenets were scrutinized. My book project, *The War Within*, recovers this lost narrative of the siege experience.

Cut off from the Soviet Union and without reliable news or contacts to orient them, the *blokadniki* became estranged from Soviet society and from their prewar lives. In order to regain some semblance of normalcy, Leningraders used their diaries to construct their identities and their intellectual worlds anew. Isolation from the USSR also gave the diarists critical distance from which to analyze Soviet life. It emboldened them to reevaluate Soviet tenets and practices. Each chapter of this book reveals how the diarists tackled ideological principles like the New Soviet Person, class warfare, the Marxist-Leninist theory of history, or Soviet practices like policies on family life, food distribution, and medical care. In the process of crafting their personal narratives, the diarists reworked official ones. However, it is important to note that most of the diarists were not intentionally anti-Soviet. In fact, many were party members who arrived at these insights by virtue of their war experiences and without realizing that they would fall afoul of the shifting party line.

Such insights, articulated in the diaries, were lost after 1945 and they remain lost today. Both Vladimir Putin (whose older brother died during the Blockade) and Dmitri Medvedev hail from St. Petersburg, and they have worked to protect its triumphalist narrative of WWII. A 2009 the Russian Duma proposed a memory law passed to criminalize deviations from it as “the falsification of the history of the Great Patriotic War.” The law was not promulgated, but its spirit endures. For example, on 26 January 2014, Russia's only independently owned television station, *Dozhd'*, held a debate and a live poll over whether Leningrad should have been surrendered to the Nazis in 1941

to save Russian lives. Incidentally, the diarists also raised this question during the war. The Kremlin denounced the poll as illegal, initiated a federal investigation of the station, and demanded that the country's TV providers stop carrying *Dozhd'*. Seventy-two hours later, the station had lost 90% of its viewers.¹ More recently, in August 2014, shortly after Russia's annexation of Crimea, Putin expressed his support for the pro-Russian insurgents fighting the Ukrainian army by comparing Ukraine's oppression of ethnic Russians to Germany's siege of Leningrad.²

I hope that this book will not only give voice to those *blokadniki* who documented the siege, but that it will spark much needed discussion about this, still highly contentious and controversial, historical event.

¹<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/10/putin-war-dozhd-russias-last-independent-tv-channel>

<http://echo.msk.ru/blog/dymarskiy/1246200-echo/>

²<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/08/29/putin-thinks-of-the-past-when-talking-ukraine-but-the-arctic-is-where-he-sees-russias-future/>

Reprinted from <http://techcrunch.com/2015/04/22/the-coming-food-bubble/#.fndx9n:HMMo>

Fruits and Vegetables



Editor's note: *Robyn Metcalfe is a food historian at the University of Texas at Austin and the Director of [The Food Lab at UT](#), a catalyst for scientific and cultural exploration, experimentation and innovation in the food system.*

CRUNCH NETWORK

The Coming Food Bubble

Posted Apr 22, 2015 by [Robyn Metcalfe](#) (@FoodMiracle)

In 1851, Charles Mackay wrote his 600-page tome, [Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds](#). In it, he describes 86 economic bubbles, like the tulip and the South Sea bubbles during the 17th and 18th centuries, both which burst and caused thousands to lose their fortunes through speculation. Mackay believed this economic phenomenon was evidence of a reckless obsession.

We're seeing some of that same recklessness creeping into the food industry, as we rush to embrace a new surge of food-related startups. A bubble is coming.

Unfortunately, venture capitalists may not be subjecting food startups to the same due

diligence that they do for non-food-related startups.

Michael Lippold, CEO of FreshRealm, a startup that offers a cloud-based system for distributing food, [shares a growing concern](#). He notes that in December 2013, Instacart, a San Francisco-based grocery delivery service, raised \$220 million with a \$2 billion valuation. In 2014, Instacart's revenue was about \$100 million.

At least it had revenue. An increasing number of food startups aren't yet generating significant revenue. Deliveroo, a food delivery startup based in the U.K., received \$25 million on a previous valuation of \$100 million, though its annual revenue was only about \$1 million. The list goes on.

Money is flowing into the food sector; VCs [raised \\$48 billion](#) for food startups in 2014, the highest amount since 2000. We're facing an oversupply of capital even as water and arable land are in short supply.

We should celebrate this new enthusiasm for food-related innovation. Everyone from food activists to entrepreneurs, investors and technology providers are disrupting and (hopefully) improving how we eat. McDonald's is working hard to stay relevant. Fast food is no longer content to be fast; it now wants to be casual, local and green, tapping into an alert and voracious market. Entrepreneurs are the foundation of a growing economy and goodness knows, we need growth.

However, the coming food bubble may be more difficult to anticipate than others due to several obfuscating details.

The food bubble is nested and expanding within a general tech startup bubble. Delusions tend to be infectious, infusing the over-valuations of general tech startups into the food community, making it difficult to discern whether a food-delivery service has a solid value proposition or if the technology itself is overhyped.

And since most food startups today are brought on by the convergence of technology and food, investors should be cautious about technology as the inflator of a food business. The coming bubble is also complicated by its occurrence during an ongoing weak economic recovery when the fundamentals are changing and the future is unknown.

The overvaluations that we see in the tech sector are infecting food startups. Overvalued food startups aren't so different from overvalued tech startups. They have all of the necessary ingredients: a team of young rock stars; a segment that is rapidly

evolving that no one understands; and a well-designed pitch deck.

But a food startup is different from a tech startup because of the complicated emotional relationship between humans and their food. Make the product ugly, cause it to look like it might be unsafe, neglect the relationship between food and identity: Any one of these oversights will result in certain deflation, even if the market is ready and the product technology is stunning.

And then there is the fact that many who start a food business lack experience in the food industry. Pitifully few have been farmers, almost none distributors, and only a few know how to make food that tastes good. The only shared quality seems to be that everyone eats, which somehow qualifies us all as food entrepreneurs.

Is it okay if startups or their advisory boards fail to recruit members with experience in the food system? Maybe. It might be that our new food system will be so different from the old that we need ideas from outside the traditional agricultural, food and beverage sectors. But how do we weigh a lack of experience against a fresh start?

Many food startups avoid scale and see profitability as an anathema to their business model. Ask entrepreneurs how they will scale their businesses and half will say that they have no intention of scaling. For some food entrepreneurs, being big means being bad, unethical or – horror! – industrial. Some just want the pleasure of being a small business, being self-employed and in a business where low-volume/high prices make sense.

The pleasures of handling raw ingredients, making things with your hands, and building relationships is hard to resist. And while there is nothing wrong with artisans, we should be careful not to assume this is a sign of “the next big thing.” It’s simply small business in action around food. Laudable, yes. Revolutionary, probably not.

Let’s get ready for the food bubble. We can and should heed Mackay’s warning about delusional behavior, but we should welcome the bounty of startups, all seeding their place in the new, disruptive food system.

The more ideas the better as we prepare for the unexpected innovations, the unimagined connections and disconnections that will eventually put healthy food on more tables around the globe. Even if the bubble of food startups “have their little day” as Mackay said of those early bubbles, each entrepreneur will contribute to a new collaborative business culture that we hope will deliver healthy, affordable food to everyone.

Choose to be great! Join [The Campaign for Boston University](#).



Boston University Alumni Association | 595 Commonwealth Avenue
Suite 700 | West Entrance | Boston, MA 02215 | alumni@bu.edu
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