

# THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST

**Boston University** Arts & Sciences  
Department of History Newsletter



2024  
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BOSTON  
UNIVERSITY



# FROM THE CHAIR'S DESK

## JAMES JOHNSON, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR



Dear Friends of the Department:

The start of this academic year opens a fresh chapter in the History Department. The past two years have seen the retirement of eight colleagues, whose expertise spanned the globe. Together, their work touched virtually every branch of the discipline, including Economic History, Diplomatic History, the History of Warfare, and the History of Food, Agriculture, and Disease, encompassing the History of Art, Urban History, Cultural History, and the History of Ideas.

This marks a generational change in the department. How to fill the great gaps these retirements have created? This year brings the first set of what we hope will be a series of new appointments, which will define the department's coming decades.

This edition of *The Presence of the Past* introduces three new colleagues. Bradley Craig is a historian of early America and the Black Atlantic whose work treats themes of historical memory and reconciliation. Brook Durham writes and teaches about France and the French Empire with an emphasis on Algeria. Madeline Williams studies American social movements through the lens of disability. Chad Williams, an American historian whose new book *The Wounded World: W.E.B. Du Bois and the First World War* has drawn widespread praise, will also join the department this year. He will be profiled in the Spring.

In these pages, you'll read about the notable accomplishments of our majors, graduate students, and faculty. These include new books by Professors Brooke Blower and John Thornton, presentations by our grad students at professional conferences in Nashville, Montreal, Chicago, and Hong Kong, and a prestigious merit scholarship awarded to our History major Lily Johnson, one of four recipients out of an applicant pool of 4,000.

This summer saw the resignation of the History Department's Senior Program Coordinator Molly German, who will enter graduate school in Social Work at the University of Chicago. Having joined the department in 2021, she has been essential to virtually every part of making this program, maintaining our website, managing enrollments, revitalizing our communications and branding, and mentoring our work-study staff. She did all of this with professionalism, good humor, grace, and efficiency.

We welcome Elle Nicoletti, a History major who graduated in May, as our new Program Coordinator. She knows the department well. She served as the President of Phi Alpha Theta, BU's chapter of the History honor society. Her senior honors thesis, which entailed research in the Library of Congress, was on the 1968 Chicago Conspiracy Trial, or the Trial of the Chicago Seven. She joins the superb administrative staff that keeps this department and its many moving parts running smoothly.

I wish you a good start to the semester. May it bring new discovery, the right mix of productivity and reflection, and the satisfactions of continuing to learn, teach, and create.

James Johnson  
Chair and Professor, Department of History

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# CONGRATULATIONS!

The History Department celebrates the Class of 2024 on their graduation. The ceremony itself was a reflection of the academic journeys undertaken by each graduate throughout their time at Boston University.

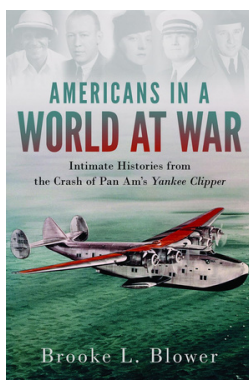
Student speakers included Lauren Gotard and Eitan Marshall-Pinko. Elizabeth Sepper, a 2002 graduate of the department and now Professor of Law at the University of Texas School of Law, delivered the convocation address.





**Brooke Blower's** latest book, *Americans in a World at War: Intimate Histories from the Crash of Pan Am's Yankee Clipper*, won the New Deal Book Award from the Living New Deal Society, received honorable mention for the Myrna Bernath Book Award from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, and has been named one of three finalists for the Gilder Lehrman Military History Prize.

This summer, Professor Blower also presented on two panels at the annual meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, held in Toronto: one on microhistory methodologies and the other on the strategic importance of World War II peripheral cities. At the annual conference for Historians of the Twentieth-Century United States (HOTCUS), held at the University of Southampton, she participated in a classic books retrospective on Dan Rodgers' *Age of Fracture* and Jefferson Cowie's *Stayin' Alive*. Her own book was the focus of a plenary panel on the conference's first day.



**Kathryn LaMontagne**, GRS '16, '20 was promoted to Senior Lecturer at CGS/Social Sciences this summer. In June, she spoke at University College London on the role of the Catholic Women's League in World War I. In July, she gave a plenary address at Blackfriars, Oxford on depictions of Catholic women in the English novel. She was also recently elected to the Board of Directors at the New England Historical Association.



**Bruce Schulman** published a new article in *Time Magazine*, "The Surprising Legacy of Watergate in Today's Politics." He reconsiders the meaning and impact of the events that drove Nixon from the White House and shook up American public life.

**John Thornton** has three forthcoming articles on his current research: "How Jesus Became Black: Kongo's Discovery of its Role in the Nativity and Creation Stories" (*Journal of Early Modern History*), "Mwene Muji: A Medieval Empire in Central Africa?" (*Journal of African History*), and "Muna Ntete: As origens do reino de Kongo" (*Áfro-Asia*).



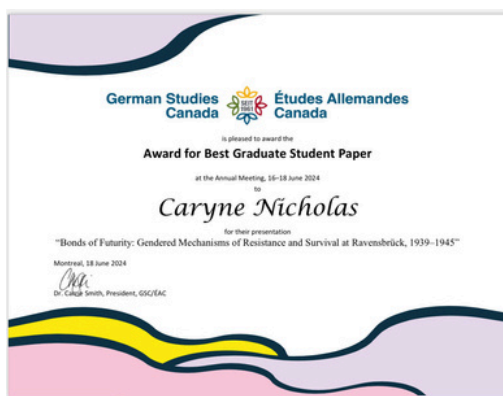
BU History Department alumni (**Cari Babitzke**, **Kathryn Brownell**, **Katherine Jewell**) and current graduate students (**Henry Tonks** and **Meredith Barber**) attended the American Political History Conference in June at Vanderbilt University.



**Ethan Key** (far right), a PhD student specializing in African history, continues his research thanks to a 2024 Fulbright-Hays scholarship. His work has taken him to archives in Rome, Paris, London, Oxford, Uppsala, and Addis Ababa. He was recently in the city of Jimma, where he interviewed Abdul Karim (center), the great-grandson of Abba Jifar II, ruler of Gibe Kingdom of Jimma for nearly five decades. Key's translator and friend, Girma Garedew, is on the left.



**Caryne A. Nicholas**, a fourth-year PhD candidate and recipient of a BU fellowship sponsoring graduate research abroad, is now doing archival work in Berlin, Germany. In June, Caryne presented at the German Studies Canada conference on gendered resistance at the Ravensbrück concentration camp, a talk that received the award Best Graduate Student Paper. Nicolas and fellow PhD student Keara Sebold have accepted positions with BU's LGBTQIA+ Center for Faculty and Staff to record the experiences of queer faculty, students, and alumni.



**Greta Rauch Frie** is co-author of an article published in Data describing the China Historical Christian Database. With work as well from Eugenio Menegon (BU History), Daryl Ireland (BU Theology), and Alex Mayfield (Asbury Univ. History, PhD from BU), the article introduces the database to a wide audience of engineers, data scientists, and statisticians. In early August, Frie presented her research and discussed the CHCD at the US-China Catholic Association's 29th International

Conference, held at DePaul University.

She presented on a panel entitled "Friendship as Ministry" which focused on engaging with Chinese international students in the US. Her presentation introduced the CHCD and discussed the work of our student volunteers, many of whom are from China.



Merhaba! **Maria Zabaneh**, pictured below, completed an 8-week intensive Turkish summer program through Indiana University, earning "Intermediate Medium" in Oral Proficiency and receiving the "Greatest Improvement in Turkish I Language and Culture." She writes that she's looking forward to putting Türkçe to use in her research.



**Aixin Yi** presented “Christian Efforts of Rural Reconstruction on the Chinese Home Front During the War of Resistance (1937-1945)” at the 13th International Symposium on the History of Christianity in Modern China. Delivered in early June at the Hong Kong Baptist University, the paper discussed agricultural and social welfare improvement projects designed by Chinese Christians and Western missionaries who worked in rural areas during the war.



During the summer, Aixin conducted research and fieldwork in archives, libraries, and museums in Sichuan and Chongqing, China. This trip, which is preparation for her dissertation research, was made possible by a research grant from the History Department.



# HISTORY SENIOR NIGHT



On May 13th, 2024, senior undergraduates gathered with History faculty and administration to celebrate the culmination of their four years at BU. Professor Andrew Robichaud told the story of the structure's original owner, William Lindsey, a businessman who made his fortune by supplying 300,000 cartridge belts to the British army during the Boer War. He retired at 42, Robichaud said, and began pursuing his true passion: writing fiction, poetry, and plays...And, in 1905, building a castle.





# UNDERGRAD SPOTLIGHT

## Lily Johnson

History major **Lily Johnson** ('25) received the “America 250!” scholarship from the Daughters of the American Revolution. Over 4,000 applicants wrote an essay on America’s founding or their own volunteer work. Lily was among four students in the nation chosen for this prestigious award.





# NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

## Bradley L. Craig

**Bradley L. Craig** is a historian of early African American and Black Atlantic politics and culture. Broadly, his research examines the felt and embodied dimensions of diasporic belonging. His current book project, *Oathbound: Sovereignty and Belonging in the Revolutionary Atlantic World*, tells the story of Jamaica's Trelawny Maroons and their forced migration to Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone following the Anglo-Maroon War of 1795-96. The book shows how the Maroons participated in an Atlantic political culture of oath-taking, binding themselves to a particular vision of imperial belonging and diasporic kinship. Other research in progress considers the sensory history of race and slavery in the Atlantic world.



Professor Craig teaches courses on African American history, the history of the Black Atlantic, historical memory and reconciliation, black queer and feminist studies, and histories of the body and the senses. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Studies of Women, Gender & Sexuality, a Master's in History, and a PhD in African and African American Studies from Harvard University. Prior to joining the faculty at BU, he was a Barra Postdoctoral Fellow at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies (University of Pennsylvania) and an Assistant Professor of History at Concordia University in Montréal, Quebec.

# NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

## Brooke Durham

**Brooke Durham** is a historian of France and the French Empire. Her research approaches the end of the French Empire through local, interpersonal interactions in France and Africa after 1945. Dr. Durham examines how students, social workers, teachers, and international volunteers negotiated the politics of the Cold War, development, and decolonization.



Professor Durham's book, *The Politics of Proximity: North Africans, Europeans, and the Fight for Equality in Revolutionary Algeria*, traces European and Algerian efforts to work together on human development projects during the Algerian War of Independence. European and Algerian teachers, social workers, students, and international volunteers managed to find common cause in assisting the most marginalized Algerians.

Professor Durham teaches courses on the French Empire and Modern European history. She advises graduate students working on Modern France, Europe, and North and West African history. Before coming to Boston University, she taught at West Virginia University. She earned Bachelor's degrees in History and International Politics from Penn State University and a PhD in History from Stanford University.



# NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

## Madeline Williams

**Madeline J. Williams** is a historian of disability and of the United States. Her work positions disability as both a kind of lived experience and a powerful framework for analyzing politics and culture. She writes and teaches about the ways disability intersects and interacts with race, class, gender, and sexuality.



Her current book project is *Disability Democracy: Blind-Led Organizing and the Making of Modern America*. Her work tells the story of the early crucial chapter in the long history of social movements built around disability, with particular attention to political associations led by blind Americans.

Professor Williams' work has been supported by research and funding bodies including the American Historical Association; the Center for American Political Studies; the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History; the Consortium for History of Science, Technology, and Medicine; and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. She holds a Bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College and a PhD from Harvard University.

# FALL '24 COURSE SPOTLIGHT

## XCC 410 C1: BACK TO THE PAST

“Back to the Past” engages students through an interactive, game-based scenarios. Through the creation of the “Reacting to the Past” consortium, this immersive role-playing approach emphasizes experiential learning as students adopt roles and participate in some of the great social, political, and cultural debates from the past, such as the Boston busing crisis or controversies around the naming of Indigenous Peoples’ Day. “Back to the Past” captures the dynamics of conflict and cooperation, leadership, and persuasion in the light of specific social norms and values.



### Instructed by:

Kathryn LaMontagne  
(GRS '16, '20) and Seth  
Blumenthal (GRS '13)



# UPCOMING EVENT:

# **BLACK2BU**

**Friday, September 27th, 2024**

**5:00-8:00pm**

**138 Mountfort Street**

Join faculty, staff, students, and alumni of the African American and Black Diaspora Studies program in our annual celebration of the start of a new academic year.



**KEEP IN  
TOUCH**

Email [HISTORY@BU.EDU](mailto:HISTORY@BU.EDU) to share research, events, publications, or other milestones. Consider filling out a GRADUATE STUDENT, UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT, or ALUMNI profile form to get featured on our website or in the newsletter!