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Mahan Lecture Examines Labor and Health

The 2023 Howard F. Mahan Lecture was held on the evening of March 30 in the Marx Library Auditorium. Dr. Joe William Trotter, Jr., of Carnegie Mellon University addressed a nearly full house of students, faculty, and friends from the Mobile community on “African American Health, History, and Covid-19.”

As Dr. Trotter explained, it was his recent contribution to last year’s edited volume *The Pandemic Divide: How COVID Increased Inequality in America* that convinced him of the importance of a historical framework for understanding recent experiences. An urban, labor, and social historian, Dr. Trotter asserted that African-Americans have tended to be employed in exhausting, dangerous, and unhealthy occupations since the colonial period. As plantation agriculture devoted to tobacco, sugar, rice, and later cotton gave way to industrial production of

coal and iron, two glaring consistencies were the predominance of African-American laborers in



Dr. Joe William Trotter

such fields and the appalling effects on health that they suffered. Unhealthy working conditions for African-Americans have become a tragic, and a tragically-accepted, norm.

The more Dr. Trotter spoke of “work and how it made people

vulnerable,” the more the historical and the contemporary seemed to merge. The lament of yesteryear’s coal miner – “I have been sick and dizzy off that smoke many times....That deadly poison is there....It would knock you out too, make you weak as water” – and the complaint of the modern hospital worker – “I’ve come to accept the back pain and knee problems I have from lifting patients and being on my feet all day....What I can’t accept is the low wages” – sounded like two variations on the same theme. The multi-campus medical centers that dominate today’s landscape indeed resemble the plantations, mines, and factories of the past, in that they echo with the common refrain: “They constantly wanted you to put out, put out, put out,” recounted a healthcare worker in 2016. “Somebody left, they didn’t replace them. You had to work more hours, and it was really much.”

New Faculty Publications

Three History professors have published books this term.

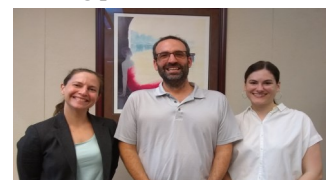
Dr. Claire Cage’s new book, *The Science of Proof: Forensic Medicine in Modern France*, examines cases from late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, to trace the acceptance of forensic techniques in legal proceedings. Dr. David Meola’s first monograph, *“We Will Never Yield”: Jews, the German Press, and the Fight for Inclusion in the 1840s*, examines the debates that played out in German newspapers and magazines, which

highlighted German Jews’ struggle for equality. Dr. Kelly Urban’s first book, *Radical Prescription: Citizenship and the Politics of Tuberculosis in Twentieth-Century Cuba* analyzes how the new Cuban government dealt with the problem of tuberculosis while following through on the Revolution.

These and other recent books by History faculty attest to the keen professionalism they bring to bear on the task of increasing our understanding of the past, even as they convey historical understanding to

students in the classroom. They remind us that our department’s scholarship is first-rate.

Please join us on May 4 at 4:00 PM in the Terrace Room for a reception celebrating these exciting publications!



Drs. Cage, Meola, and Urban

Mardi Gras Examined



Dr. Isabel Machado

It was a virtual homecoming for Dr. Isabel Machado, who earned an MA in History from our department in 2013. Dr. Machado told a Zoom audience on February 28 about her recently-published book, *Carnival in Alabama: Marked Bodies and Invented Traditions in Mobile*.

As Dr. Machado explained, the book grew out of her 2019 University of Memphis doctoral dissertation. Not so much a history of Mardi Gras per se, *Carnival in Alabama* examines the nature of history itself, what she calls “invented tradition.” Is there only one invented tradition of Mardi Gras, Dr. Machado asks, or does every

Mobile sub-community, including African Americans and LGBTQIA+ have a version of Mardi Gras too? When the “marked” communities – supposedly defined by their differences from the white “mainstream” – come to participate in the mainstream celebration, does that mean that the mainstream tradition of Mardi Gras was the only real one after all, now extended to raw initiates, or did the “marked” communities possess their traditions already? Dr. Machado finds that the inclusion of African American and LGBTQIA+ societies has opened a process of “negotiation and challenge,”

not just affecting the structure of Mardi Gras festivities but adding depth and complexity to Mardi Gras’ invented tradition. As more people come to celebrate Mardi Gras, the “history” of Mardi Gras will change.

Those attending Dr. Machado’s talk were enthralled by her remarks and palpably pleased that, of all the places Dr. Machado has lived, Mobile evokes the most “home-like” memories for her. It was indeed very gratifying to see that Dr. Machado, who got her start as a scholar here in our department, is now producing first-class work in the field.

History Society Visits Pascagoula

The History Society travelled to Pascagoula, Mississippi on Saturday, February 25 to visit the LaPointe-Krebs House and Museum. The house was originally an outbuilding of the plantation complex built in 1757 by Hugo Ernestus Krebs after he inherited the property from his father-in-law, Joseph Simon de La Pointe, one-time admiral in the fleet of Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, founder of Mobile. After the Civil War, the building became home to many generations of the Krebs family and others over the years. It is the oldest remaining structure on the Gulf Coast (and in the Mis-

issippi Valley), having been scientifically dated to 1757 and is the only surviving example of French Colonial era tabby construction on the Gulf Coast. The Society was warmly welcomed by the director, Glynda Smith, and her staff, who provided a fascinating demonstration of tabby and bousillage construction methods, some of which date back to the pre-historic Native American communities who inhabited the area. The Society then toured the Museum, the House, and the adjacent Cemetery. The complex sits on a beautiful waterfront that also contains a public dock and boat ramp. Ms. Smith

invited the Society to return for their upcoming Open House event on Saturday, May 13.

If you would like more information about getting involved in the History Society here at South, please contact faculty advisor Rebecca Williams at rwilliams@southalabama.edu



Making Tabby with Oyster Shells

On Statues and Slavery

Dr. Véronique Hélénon, of Roxbury Community College in Massachusetts, spoke to a receptive group of students and members of the community on the subject of “Statues and Historical Memory in France,” on March 16. Her remarks provided an interesting juxtaposition with the controversy surrounding Confederate and other statues in the US.

A 1997 doctorate from the School of Higher Education in Social Sciences in Paris, Dr. Hélénon highlighted the spotty memorialization of slavery in the Caribbean and near-total amnesia on the subject in metropolitan France. Using striking visual aids, Dr. Hélénon discussed the demolition of statues to the abolitionist Victor Schoelcher (1804-1893) in Martinique by activists committed to “fighting the narrative that Victor Schoelcher was responsible for everything” in the struggle for freedom. While some among Dr. Hélénon’s listeners gasped at the image of Schoelcher’s statue being toppled, the

point was nonetheless made that incomplete memorialization is a form of whitewashing that can be as galling as falsehood. Should monuments to white liberators be the *only*

commemorations of the experience of slavery? By contrast, statues of Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803), even in the Caribbean, are few and far between.

Meanwhile, in France, the history of slavery in the colonies or elsewhere is barely acknowledged, and more than passive insensitivity is evidenced in quotidian cases, such as the Code Noir (“Black Code”) brand of liqueur and the confection known as the Congolese – and other examples even more offensive. It became quite clear during the course of Dr. Hélénon’s talk how important historical memory is in the full reality of political and social relations of the present day.

It is unlikely that any who attended Dr. Hélénon’s talk will soon forget the perspective she shared. The History Department is fortunate to have hosted such an important event.



Dr. Véronique Hélénon

Book Review: When True Love Came to China, by

Lynn Pan

BY HARRY MILLER

Lynn Pan’s *When True Love Came to China* argues that China was a stranger to love – or at least to “true love” – until the New Culture and May Fourth movements of the 1910s, when love was imported to China from its Western place of origin.

To make her case, Pan reviews Chinese and Western literary sources and shows that China, where “feeling” and “lust of the mind” were indeed well known, nonetheless fostered only a pragmatic experience of coupling, due to the prevalence of arranged marriage and also to the Confucian preoccupation on moral perfection, which left little room for frivolous pursuits such as being in love. It fell to the Western mind, with its predisposition toward religious ardor, to develop the tradition of ecstatic devotion to one person. When Pan quotes from Yu Dafu’s (1896-1945) letter to Wang Yingxia (1908-2000) – “Oh Yingxia! You are truly my Beatrice.” (p. 204) – she clinches the argument.

Other sections of *When True Love Came to China* highlight the role played by Ellen Key (1849-1926) and her book *Love and Marriage*, as well as the better-known effect in



A Doll's House (Chinese poster)

China of Henrik Ibsen’s (1828-1906) play *A Doll's House*, in which the protagonist Nora walks out on her family. Nora is shown to be the role model proposed by the ardent Xu Zhimo (1897-1931) to the married Lu Xiaoman (1903-1965) in Xu’s exhortation for her to leave her husband and run off with him (p. 217).

For love to flourish, freedom and the idea of personality (see p. 163 and thereabouts) must also be secured, and Pan traces China’s quest for these latter prizes as well. The liberation of women, obviously, becomes an important part of the story, and students of this subject will find much in the way of further reading in Pan’s bibliography.

When True Love Came to China is enthralling from many angles. It is essential reading for life – and it may find its way onto a course syllabus here at South.

Fall 2023 Courses

HY 101 – History of Western Civilization I (5 sections)

HY 102 – History of Western Civilization II (6 sections)

HY 103 – History of Asian Civilization I (Miller)

HY 121 – World Civilization I (Wertelecki)

HY 135 – US History to 1877 (8 sections)

HY 136 – US History Since 1877 (12 sections)

HY 228 – Latin America (Urban)

HY 338 – History of Russia (Kozelsky)

HY 347 – The Holocaust (Meola)

HY 368 – Japan (Miller)

HY 384 – Japanese Film (Miller)

HY 390 – Special Topics: The Civil Rights Movement (Vaughn-Roberson)

HY 390 – Special Topics: The Urban Crucible (Lombardo)

HY 429W – Studies in Latin American History: Twentieth-Century Revolutions (Urban)

HY 431/531 – Studies in US History: America and World Power (McWilliams)

HY 442 – Research Seminar in European History: Migration and the British Empire (Strong)

HY 456/556 – Body, Medicine, and Society in European History (Cage, 2 sections)

HY 457/557 – Studies in European History: War and Memory in Twentieth-Century Europe (Messenger)

HY 478/578 – The New South (McKiven)

HY 498 – Internship in History (Messenger)

HY 565 – Studies in Islamic Civilization: The Crusades from the Other Side (Williams)

HY 597 – Professional Studies: Directed Field Research (Kozelsky)



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The USA History Department offers a wide variety of exciting courses, covering the histories of Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, as well as the history of the United States and the South. Faculty are committed to teaching research and writing skills and the critical thinking that is becoming ever more necessary for survival in the information age. Now, more than ever, a history education is a prerequisite for an informed global citizenry.

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



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