

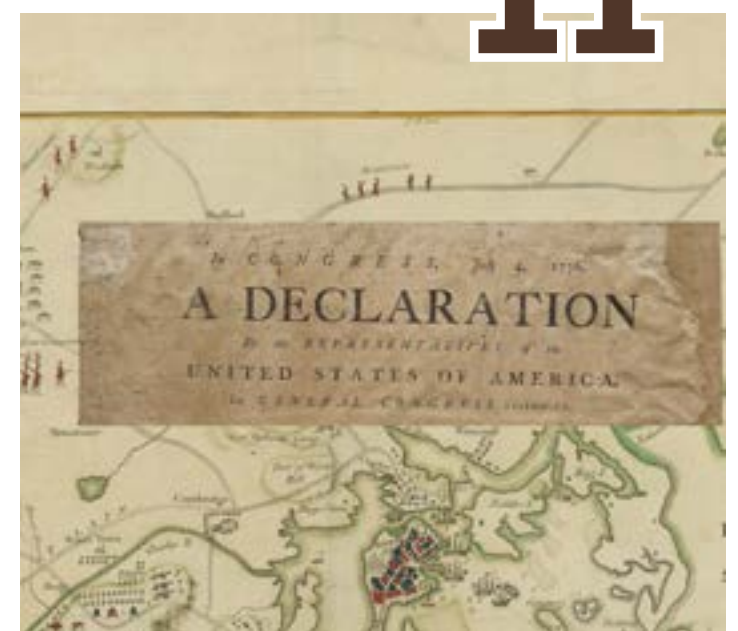
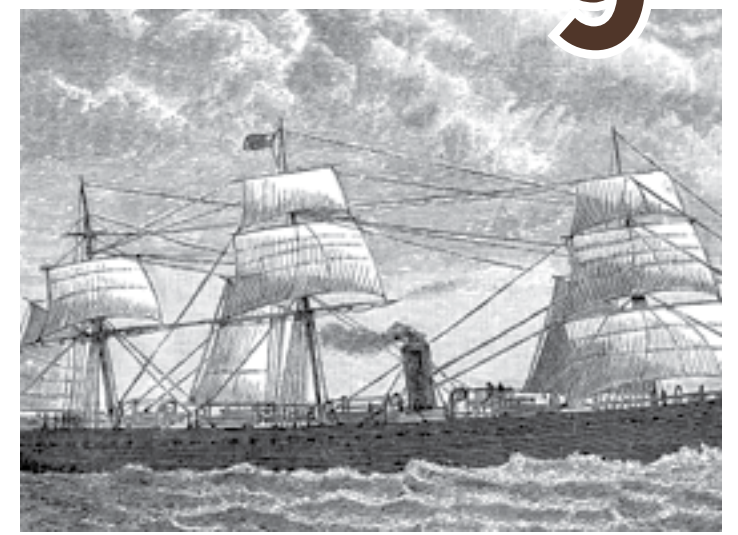


# History Matters

Brown University Department of History / Volume 40 / Spring 2026

## Table of Contents

About the Cover Image .....	3
A Word from the Chair .....	5
Recent Faculty Books .....	7
Exploration .....	9
How a Study of 19th Century Germany Brought Me to America   Benjamin Hein .....	9
1776 Across the Americas: A Hemispheric History   Karin Wulf .....	11
Faculty Activities .....	13
Undergraduate Program .....	19
Reflections from the Director of Undergraduate Studies	19
Undergraduate Research Spotlight: Carlo Kim '27 .....	21
Award Recipients .....	22
Honors Recipients .....	23
Graduate Program .....	25
Reflections from the Director of Graduate Studies .....	25
Graduate Research Spotlight: Ria Modak .....	26
Master of Arts .....	27
Doctor of Philosophy .....	27



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Thank you.

The campus-wide initiative Brown 2026: Marking 250 Years of American Democracy has involved several members of the department, including courses taught by history faculty that will continue through next year



## Brown 2026: Marking 250 Years of American Democracy

**Rebecca Brenner Graham, Postdoctoral Research Associate**  
**Karin Wulf, Beatrice and Julio Mario Santo Domingo Director and Librarian of the John Carter Brown Library, Professor of History**

We hope you've heard at least a little bit about Brown 2026: Marking 250 Years of American Democracy, a campus-wide, faculty-led initiative focused on the role of research and teaching universities in and for democracy — and about the fullest histories of the American Revolution. Brown 2026 is leveraging the semiquincentennial moment to coordinate events, create programs and curate curricula across campus and beyond.

Since its launch in January 2025, Brown 2026 has worked with dozens of centers and departments across campus and with community organizations in Providence on over 60 events. The Department of History unsurprisingly has been a frequent and important partner. Indeed, the department lays claim to the most members of the Brown 2026

[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

Steering Committee: Keisha Blain, Seth Rockman and Karin Wulf (its co-chair). Blain recently hosted a Brown 2026 event in conversation with Black studies scholar Zinga Fraser about *Shirley Chisholm in Her Own Words*. Rockman recently hosted a lecture and workshop by historian M.J. Rymysza-Pawlowska, exploring models of historical expertise. History faculty have also been frequent participants in Brown 2026 Reads, a biannual series in partnership with the dean of the College offering undergraduates an opportunity to discuss books with faculty authors.

Stay tuned for information about a late June gala event with the Rhode Island Historical Society sponsored by Brown 2026. Professor Emeritus Gordon Wood will be honored, as well as high school students from across Rhode Island who participated in National History Day.

The Brown 2026 curriculum features courses with relevant themes across departments. Again, the history department plays a special role. The Spring 2026 signature course is HIST 1501: The American Revolution taught by Seth Rockman and Phil Gould, who also provided pop-up lectures for both Family Weekend and Commencement and Reunion Weekend. The Fall 2026 signature courses are HIST 1950: The Indigenous Worlds of the American Revolution taught by Lin Fisher and HIST 0592: American Revolution in Popular Culture, a first-year seminar taught by Rebecca Brenner Graham, Brown 2026's postdoctoral coordinator.

Of course, 2026 is not the first major anniversary of the United States in living memory. The U.S. bicentennial of 1976 coincided with a formative era for Brown: the start of the New Curriculum now known as the Open Curriculum, the beginning of Title IX and acceleration of women's sports, campus protests in local and national contexts, and more. UTRA students Mary Lynch '29, Ian Cressman '28 and Michael Zhu '26, along with Brenner Graham, have been working on the Brown 2026 Class of 1976 Oral History Project, conducting interviews with '76 alumni that will be housed in the University Archives in partnership with the Hay Library. A unique opportunity for current students to connect with alumni, the Brown Class of 1976 Oral History Project also preserves institutional memory and celebrates the Class of 1976 for their 50th reunion.

Brown 2026 continues through June 2027. Among its legacies will be opportunities to think about the distinctive role of universities as institutions in creating and sharing knowledge. A series called Cross Talk, featuring faculty from across diverse disciplines speaking to how they approach a common issue or topic, kicked off in April with researchers from computer science, English and sociology discussing labor, moderated by Rockman. Among other ambitions, these Cross Talk events, co-sponsored with the University's Discovery Through Dialogue initiative, aim to encourage our sense of curiosity and generosity about our common mission.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# A Word from the Chair

## **Tara Nummedal**

Chair, Department of History

I reflect on my first year as chair with profound admiration and gratitude for the Department of History's community of students, staff members, faculty and alumni. There is no question that these are challenging times, at Brown, in the U.S. more broadly, and in our world.

Most acutely, our fall semester came to an abrupt and tragic end with the shooting on December 13. Offering a bright light at that dark moment were the many emails and texts that we received from former students and colleagues, checking in and letting us know that we were in your thoughts. Thanks to those of you who reached out; these messages were deeply moving and affirmed the strength and thoughtfulness of the history department community. This same care and expertise also have served as a resource in grappling with the many other national and international events that have touched us this year. I feel immensely fortunate to be surrounded not only by colleagues whose historical expertise offers insights into a challenging present, but also curious and inspiring students who push us to ask new questions and the skilled staff members who support our activities and nourish our community in innumerable ways.

Despite the challenges, our department continues to thrive. This year we welcomed a number of new colleagues into our community. Assistant Professor of Southeast Asian History Anthony Medrano joined us after several years on the faculty at Yale-NUS College in Singapore and the Department of History at the National University of Singapore. Medrano's research explores human interactions with nature in Southeast Asia, focusing in particular on the production and mobility of cultural and environmental knowledge about plants and fishes. This year several new postdocs also joined us, including Leila Blackbird, a scholar of colonialism, slavery and Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous peoples in the U.S. and Atlantic. Ayodeji Adegbite, who specializes in the history of medicine in Africa, co-organized a two-day workshop in February on "Medical Technology: Science, Medicine, Healing and Global Health in African History." Ramiz Üzümcüker came to our department on a Fulbright after earning his Ph.D. in history from Boğaziçi University, Turkey, and works at the intersection of political



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

and economic history in the 18th century Ottoman Empire; his year with us culminated in May with a small workshop on the comparative history of early modern states. In addition, we were delighted that [six new Ph.D. students](#) began their graduate studies with us in the fall. Finally, a new colleague joined our staff team: Student Affairs Manager Pargol Borojerdi, who supports our graduate program.

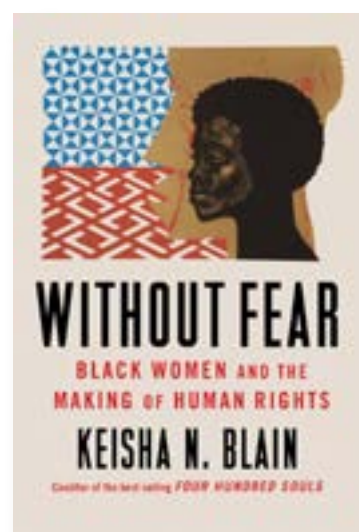
We have had a lot to celebrate this year, including five faculty book launches (you can read about these new books on [page 7](#)); Linford Fisher's promotion to full professor; and the completion of over a dozen inspiring and rigorous new undergraduate honors theses on topics ranging from war, money and fiscal capacity in Early Ptolemaic Egypt, to peasant resistance in modern Peru, to elite sociability in the 18th century Philadelphia Dancing Assembly. A particular joy was the news of four faculty prizes acknowledging the extraordinary contributions of our colleagues to Brown's mission: Tiraana Bains won the 2026 Henry Merritt Wriston Fellowship, which recognizes early career faculty who are fulfilling Brown's dual mission of excellence in both teaching and research; Françoise Hamlin won the Karen T. Romer Prize for Undergraduate Advising and Mentoring; Holly Case won the 2026 Graduate School Faculty Award for Advising and Mentoring in the Social Sciences; and Evelyn Hu-Dehart won the President's Award for Excellence in Faculty Governance for vital contributions to faculty governance. It is not unusual for our faculty to win prizes, of course, but these local recognitions of faculty dedication reflect the best of our department. As we celebrate our undergraduate graduates and a bumper crop of thirteen new doctoral students this year, it is a good time to remind our alums to please reach out if you come to town. We love to see what you are up to! Please stay in touch.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

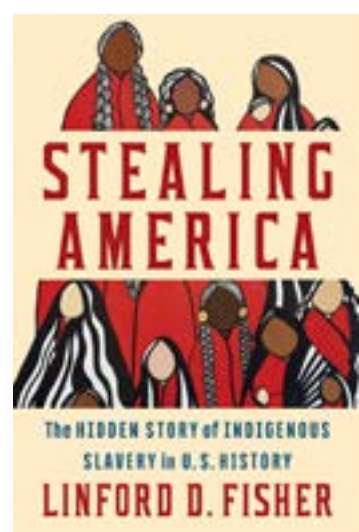
# Recent Faculty Books

## New Books



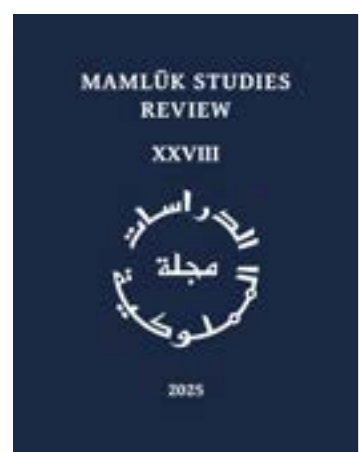
### **Keisha N. Blain**

*Without Fear: Black Women and the Making of Human Rights*  
W.W. Norton (September 2025)



### **Linford Fisher**

*Stealing America: The Hidden Story of Indigenous Slavery in U.S. History*  
Liveright (April 2026)



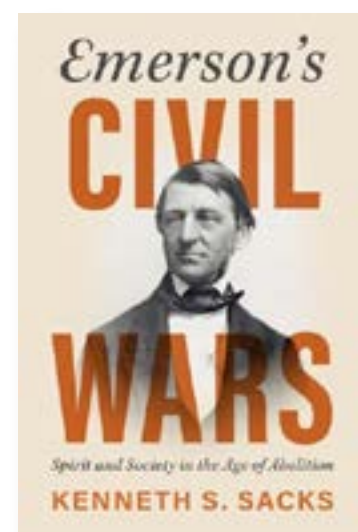
### **Elias Muhanna**

*The Languages of the Mamluk Empire*  
Mamluk Studies Review  
(December 2025)



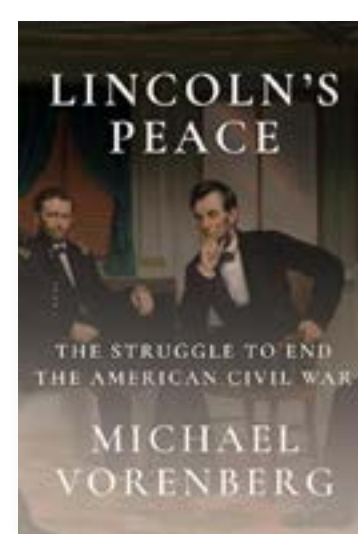
### **Amy Russell**

*The Roman Republic and Political Culture: German Scholarship in Translation*  
Cambridge University Press  
(January 2025)



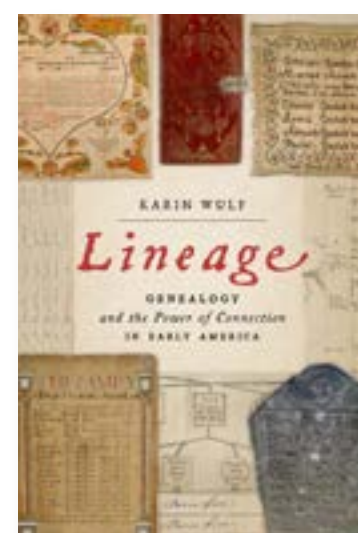
### **Kenneth Sacks**

*Emerson's Civil War: Spirit and Society in the Age of Abolition*  
Cambridge University Press  
(January 2025)



### **Michael Vorenberg**

*Lincoln's Peace: The Struggle to End the American Civil War*  
Alfred A. Knopf (March 2025)



### **Karin Wulf**

*Lineage: Genealogy and the Power of Connection in Early America*  
Oxford University Press (July 2025)



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

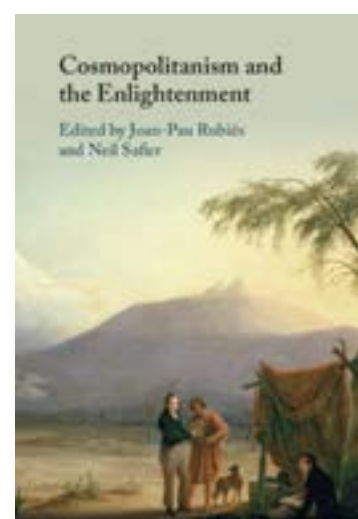
# Reprints, Paperback Editions & Translations



## **Omer Bartov**

*Genozid, Holocaust und Israel-Palästina: Geschichte im Selbstzeugnis*

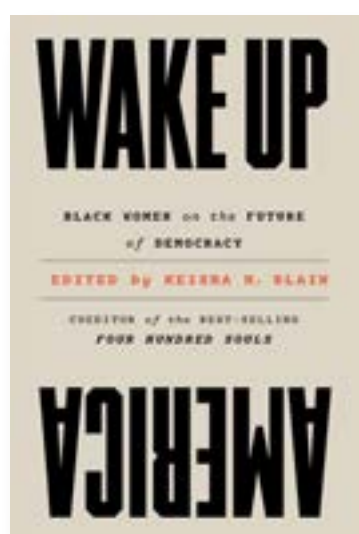
Suhrkamp (German translation, April 2025)



## **Neil Safier**

*Cosmopolitanism and the Enlightenment*

Cambridge University Press (Paperback, February 2025)



## **Keisha N. Blain**

*Wake Up America: Black Women on the Future of Democracy*

W.W. Norton (Paperback, September 2025)



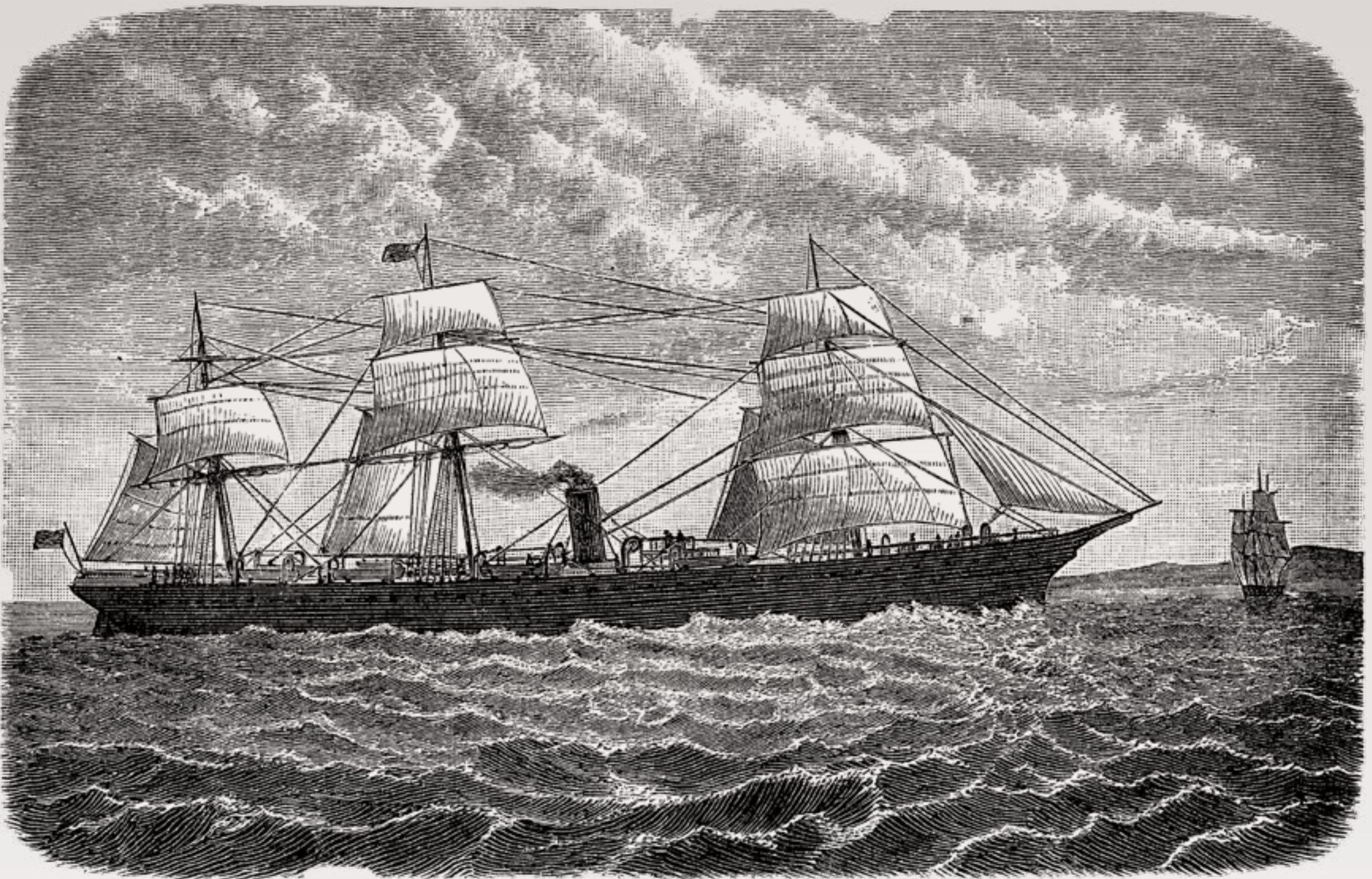
[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# Exploration

## How a Study of 19th Century Germany Brought Me to America

**Benjamin Hein**

Director of the History Honors Program, Assistant Professor of History



A question that motivates my research in history is how people in the past navigated worlds unsettled by major technological innovation and change, and how their choices in turn shaped the force and impact of said innovation and change. Take, for example, the steam engine. Its perfection in the 19th century enabled a radically new regime of production that would, by the end of the period, upend the lives of millions of people around the world. But the steam engine did not triumph on its own merit alone. The industrial modernity that we often associate with the technology also required a certain level of societal acceptance, less of steam power itself than of the adjustments that individuals had to make in their daily lives in order to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that it opened up. Historians have argued that a better understanding of how acceptance of these adjustments was won can offer crucial insight into the geography and timing of industrialization in the 19th century.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## EXPLORATION

In [\*The Migrant's Spirit: How Industrial Modernity Came to the German Lands\*](#) (Oxford University Press, 2025), I consider these and other questions regarding the emergence of a new economic modernity in the context of Germany. The country is an interesting place to study for a number of reasons. First, since at least the 18th century, Germany — by which I mean that region within central Europe that is associated with German language and culture — was considered ripe for industrialization due to its large, relatively skilled population, its abundance of capital and natural resources, and its extensive connections to world markets. Yet for a long time, indeed well into the 19th-century, Germany saw only very gradual change. This, to me, was an interesting puzzle, and it hinted at the fact that shifting attitudes may have played a key role in the region's abrupt change in trajectory in the middle of the century, when Germany experienced a noticeable acceleration of economic growth.

Second, while researching debates about the industrial regime of production in this time period, I discovered an unusual twist in the story: Like many people who are forced to reckon with life-changing decisions about how to be “modern,” 19th century Germans often turned to family and friends for advice and encouragement. However, because of a quirk in the region's history, those family members and friends were often not local. Since the 18th century, a sustained migration from the region to North America had produced a burgeoning diaspora, which by 1850 was second in size only to the Irish diaspora in North America. Widespread literacy meanwhile enabled the German diaspora to stay in close contact with kin back in Europe via mail.

All this implied that the coming of industrial modernity in Germany may have had an unexpected Atlantic dimension. In *The Migrant's Spirit*, I reconstruct such transatlantic exchanges among families and friends who, though separated by an ocean, nevertheless worked extraordinarily hard to maintain contact. I argue that this exchange represented an important, and largely underappreciated, site for contemporaries' wrangling over how to navigate the challenges and opportunities of a new economy. Some of the foundational pillars of 19th-century industrial modernity, such as the breadwinner-homemaker household, corporation or universal banking model, won widespread acceptance and appreciation in the context of a lively and intimate cultural exchange between Germany and North America.

While attentive to global developments and structures, *The Migrant's Spirit* zooms in on the lives of individuals who faced painful choices and moral quandaries as they navigated a new economic order. I contend that in their idiosyncratic and contingent struggles lie the seeds of many of the great historical transformations associated with this period.

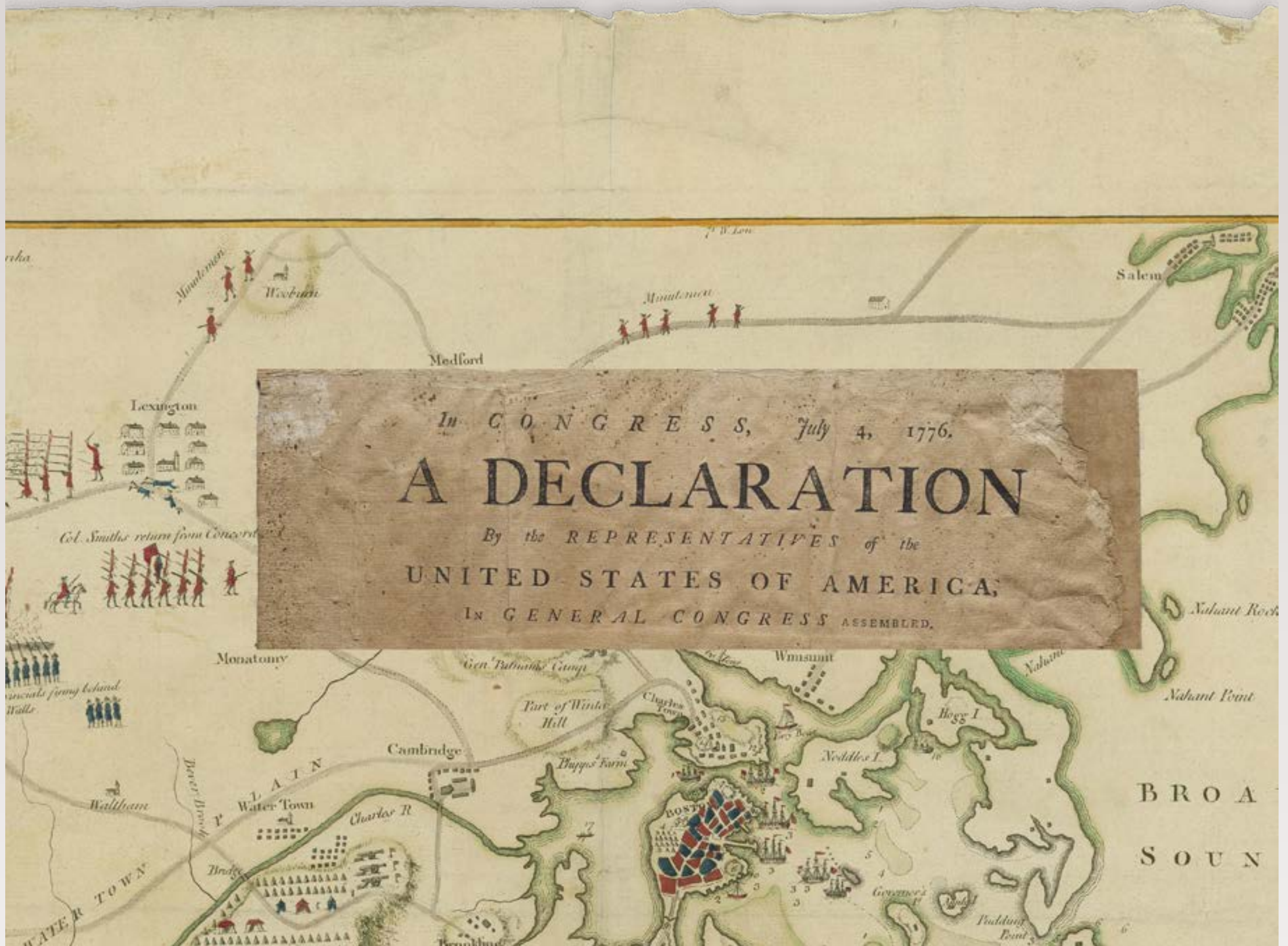


[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# 1776 Across the Americas: A Hemispheric History

**Karin Wulf**

Beatrice and Julio Mario Santo Domingo Director and Librarian,  
John Carter Brown Library; Professor of History



If 1776 seems like a legible year because of its significance for the American Revolution, in many ways it was also just another year. For the semiquincentennial of the Declaration of Independence, the John Carter Brown Library (JCB) has developed events, projects and programs that reflect the library’s focus on the full hemisphere, distinctive capacity as a collecting institution and an institution located at Brown and in Rhode Island.

A centerpiece of the JCB’s [2026 and Beyond](#) initiative is the exhibit that opened in January: “1776 Across the Americas: A Hemispheric History from the Collections of the John Carter Brown Library.” The exhibit features materials that are recognizable for the era of the American Revolution in addition to a wide range of items that were created c. 1776 around North and South America (including the Caribbean). We were interested in showing through the JCB’s remarkable collections both the wider context in which the American Revolution was taking place, but also how the JCB’s collections can illustrate that.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## EXPLORATION

We know that the JCB's collections can't represent a comprehensive or holistic perspective on 1776 in any one place, not least the full hemisphere. But the collections provide a unique vantage on how largely printed materials — from books and pamphlets to broadsides and maps — were produced in that year and reflected diverse experiences. The centerpiece of the exhibit that speaks to this approach is a copy of the [Declaration of Independence](#) with a published [British author's riposte](#), alongside the [first map of San Francisco](#) and [the journal of the Franciscan missionary](#) who made it, Pedro Font — all, of course, created in 1776. Around the exhibit are materials not only from broad American geographies but also representing different formats, purposes and topics. We included a [smallpox certificate](#) for Nicholas Brown and his children from fall 1776, a [map of Tobago](#) and an image of [Christ of Ixmiquilpan](#). This exhibit ([also online](#)) asks what 1776 meant or simply what was paramount in that phenomenal year, both and in and aside from what was happening in the new United States.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# Faculty Activities

## Tiraana Bains



James Gillray's caricature of Charles James Fox (1797)

Tiraana Bains spent much of the past year writing, thinking and speaking about the British Empire in the 18th century with occasional forays into the 19th. Her book manuscript, now titled “Rage of Empire: The Origins of British India,” has consumed much of her attention. She has also enjoyed the process of learning more about 18th century visual culture and trying her hand at writing about satire (see image). On campus, she continued to serve as the director of undergraduate studies for South Asian studies and started a new South Asia-focused workshop for graduate students alongside Vazira Zamindar and Holly Shaffer. Within the department, she and Benjamin Hein have had the pleasure of hosting both Brown colleagues and scholars from elsewhere at the European History Workshop. While teaching classes on the British Empire and early modern India, she has especially valued the opportunity to introduce students to the myriad British and South Asian manuscripts and artifacts held at the John Carter Brown and John Hay libraries.

## Keisha N. Blain



Photograph of Paulette Nardal

This academic year, Keisha Blain has been conducting research for a book she is writing on the global impact of Black intellectual thought. Drawing insights from an array of sources, including archival collections, historical newspapers and organizational records, the book highlights the ideas of a cadre of influential Black intellectuals across the globe. It brings together a core group of intellectuals, including Jane and Paulette Nardal of Martinique, Steve Biko of South Africa and French West Indian Frantz Fanon. From the 1940s through the 1990s, these figures engaged Black internationalist ideas in diverse and expansive ways — to describe the political and cultural ways Black communities collectively raised questions of struggle and liberation on a global scale; to underscore how Black people across the diaspora envisioned themselves beyond the boundaries of nation states; and to capture how people of African descent forged transnational collaborations and solidarities with other people of color. The intellectuals featured in the book, which will be published by W.W. Norton, underscore the global and enduring impact of Black thinkers.

## Holly Case



During the “Democracy of Others” Sommerfrische, Case and the other participants visited the The House of Words (Dom Słów) in Lublin (photo by Deb Marini; special thanks to Paulina Gąsiorowska '27)

This has been a difficult year for many at Brown and beyond, so Holly Case is all the more grateful for every chance to interact and think with students and colleagues. During summer 2025, she co-organized with history grad students Giorgi Tsintsadze and Kate Creasey two week-long summer seminars (Sommerfrisches) on the themes of “Attention” and “Democracy of Others” in Czechia and Poland, respectively. She had work published in the London Review of Books and History Today, among other venues, and chaired a search for a Mellon postdoctoral research associate in the history of computational technology, as a result of which Michael McGovern will join the department for two years starting in the fall.

Her teaching included a two-semester group independent study on the history of chat bots, a first-year seminar on the history of AI and a new graduate course, From Big Data to Lilliputians: Considerations of Scale Across the Disciplines, the latter as part of the three-year Models-Scale-Context: AI and the Humanities collaborative humanities lab at the Cogut Institute, which she is co-running with Suresh Venkatasubramanian in computer science. Together with graduate student Monty James, she co-ran the OstPol reading/discussion/workshop group which discusses scholarship related to East-Central, Southeastern Europe/Russia/Eurasia; and, with fellow history faculty member Shelley Lee (history and American studies) and graduate student Jakob Lippert, she co-organized the panel discussion series “University in the Middle — Past and Present.”



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## FACULTY ACTIVITIES

### Caroline Castiglione

Caroline Castiglione continues her research on the 16th-century author Moderata Fonte and legal reform in early modern Europe. She presented a talk titled “Conversations Across Generations: Women Debating the Life Course in Moderata Fonte’s *The Worth of Women*,” at the New College Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Studies, March 2026. She also published an article, “How to Argue against Evil: Cesare Beccaria Confronts



Giovanni Lapi, Frontispiece illustration for the third edition of Cesare Beccaria, *Dei delitti e delle pene* terza edizione rivista, corretta, e notabilmente accresciuta dall'autore colle risposte dello stesso alle note e osservazioni pubblicate in Venezia contro quest'opera. Si aggiunge il giudizio di un celebre professore (Lausanne: s.n., 1765). Harvard Law School Library, Historical and Special Collections

Doubting Readers in *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764),” in *Law as Life in Italy, 1200-1800: Essays on Property, Gender, and Legal Practice in Honour of Thomas Kuehn*, eds. William Caferro and Robert Fredona (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2026), 461-488. She also gave a comment on the panel “Elite Noblewomen and their Siblings” at the Sixteenth Century Society conference in Portland, Oregon, in October 2025.

### Bathsheba Demuth



A rainbow emerges over a bend in the Yukon River (Photo taken during a summer research trip)

Bathsheba Demuth spent much of her time this year working on hiring, curriculum development and other activities in her role as faculty director of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Initiative. In between, she took research trips to Alaska and Canada and launched a new history seminar for seniors. Demuth also fit in a bit of writing this year, including essays in the *New York Review of Books* and the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and scholarship in *PLOS Water*. She’s looking forward to a summer of research back on the Yukon River before starting sabbatical next fall at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where she will be a distinguished visiting scholar at the Kluge Center.

### Linford Fisher



Fisher running in the Canyon de Chelly ultramarathon in Arizona

Linford Fisher enjoyed a busy year that was interesting on a number of fronts. In May 2025 a project for which he has served as the principal investigator went live ([stolenrelations.org](https://stolenrelations.org)), which led to a series of talks and presentations at places such as Harvard, Yale and the Brooklyn Center for History, often with tribal collaborators. Much of this year was also spent guiding his book through the final phases of projection. The book finally was released in April 2026 as *Stealing America: The Hidden Story of Indigenous Slavery in U.S. History* (Liveright). Spring 2026 brought an extensive three-month book tour that included stops in Montreal, Florida, California, Bermuda and Paris.

He also enjoyed the new challenge of serving as the faculty director of the Center for Digital Scholarship, which collaborates with faculty and students at Brown to build digital projects and publications. His classes this year included a lecture class on Native American history and a Ph.D. seminar on digital humanities methodologies. Fisher also successfully passed through the promotion proceedings to full professor.

Outside of his work at Brown, Fisher enjoyed seasonal sailing, traveling with his family (including to Iceland), helping his kids move in and out of college and running his first ultramarathon in October 2025 in Canyon de Chelly, in Navajo territory.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## FACULTY ACTIVITIES

### Christopher Grasso



Cornelia Chisolm, one of the victims of the Chisolm Massacre (courtesy Chisolm Papers)

Christopher Grasso completed eight of 10 draft chapters of his book project “The Chisolm Massacre: The Politics of Violence and the End of Reconstruction.” The project was accepted for publication by the University of Virginia Press. He also prepared and/or taught three new courses: Reconstruction and the Politics of Violence, American Religious Freedom (with Dan Vaca in Religious Studies) and a humanities course for the Cogut Institute based on the rich primary sources in the family archive that is the foundation of his “Chisolm Massacre” book. The Cogut course will be offered in a future semester.

### Françoise Hamlin



Luna Celeste in her eye-tracking goggles for the final experiment before graduation

Françoise Hamlin is the director of graduate studies in the Department of Africana Studies and continues to advise undergraduates and graduate students. This spring break, after a pandemic hiatus, she took students to Mississippi with the Brown-Tougaloo Partnership, where she conducted a civil rights tour. Beyond Brown, Hamlin is the co-editor of *Boundless South*, a book series at the University of North Carolina Press, and she serves as the inaugural editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Black Military Studies* that launched in the fall. Hamlin also co-chaired the Southern Association for Women Historians’ Program Committee to plan the 2025 Triennial Conference held at Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach. Lastly, *From Rights To Lives: The Evolution of the Black Freedom Struggle* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2024) was named a 2024 Hooks National Book Award finalist. In other news, Luna Celeste (#lunacelestechronicles) passed her “Dogtor of Philosophy” by taking part in a multilevel series of experiments on dog behavior and intelligence at the Brown Dog Lab.

### Tim Harris



Research Trip, Cambridge, UK, Summer 2025

Tim Harris has been on leave for the academic year 2026-27. He has completed a draft of a two-volume study of the British revolutions of the 17th century (which covers England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the empire and the rise of the slave trade). He gave talks about his research at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge in January and February 2026. He is editing *The Oxford Handbook of Restoration England, 1660-1689* (with Kate Loveman and Stephen Taylor) and a special issue of the *Huntington Library Quarterly* on “New Directions in Early Modern Irish History.” He attended the North American Conference on British Studies in Montreal in November 2025 and is helping Pembroke College, Cambridge, organize a conference in July 2027 to commemorate the quatercentenary of the graduation of Roger Williams from the college. He continues to edit the book series *Studies in Early Modern Cultural, Political and Social History* for Boydell Press (with Stephen Taylor and Andy Wood) and to serve as president of the American Friends of the Institute of Historical Research, London, and on the editorial board of the journal *The European Legacy*.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## FACULTY ACTIVITIES

### Nancy Jacobs

Over the past year, Nancy Jacobs worked on two books, both now nearly finished. The first is her monograph *The Global Grey Parrot: How a Charismatic African Animal Became an International Commodity*, which will appear in fall 2026. The second is *The Oxford Handbook of Global Animal History*, co-edited by Emily Wakild and Faisal Husain, which will appear in 2027. In addition to the introduction, Jacobs co-authored the chapter on cats.



The Grey Parrot Museum design team, left to right: Nick Byaba, Stephen Ogunbiyi, Nancy Jacobs and Alyssa Gorman

This year she worked with three undergraduates (Anna Zulueta, Stephen Ogunbiyi and Alyssa Gorman) to help her friend Nick Byaba set up a grey parrot museum in Bigodi, Uganda. She also gave several talks at American universities and participated in a plenary panel at the SOLCHA (Latin American Society for Environmental History) conference in Rio de Janeiro. Her 2025 presidential address to the American Society for Environmental History is being published in three installments in the ASEH's new e-journal [\*Germinate: Environmental History Review\*](#).

### Jennifer Johnson



This year was a busy one as Jennifer Johnson learned the ropes of the director of graduate studies role. She enjoyed teaching the first-year graduate seminar History Now and working closely with undergraduates in upper-division classes on North African history and the politics of gender and the family in global perspective. She had the good fortune of collaborating with history department postdoc Ayodeji Adegbite and co-hosting an energizing conference titled “Medical Technology: Science, Medicine, Healing and Global Health in African History.” By some minor miracle, the conference went on as planned in the immediate aftermath of the historic February 2026 snowstorm. Johnson was honored to be invited to deliver the keynote address at the annual Society for French Historical Studies conference in March and has benefitted from sharing work in smaller workshops and conferences throughout the year. She can't wait for summer, which will surely include some beach time, lobster rolls, gardening, traveling near and far, and leisurely family time.

### Jennifer Lambe

Jenny Lambe began this academic year with a semester-long sabbatical following the end of her term as director of graduate studies. It was both energizing and exciting to work with two UTRA students on the development of a new undergraduate lecture course focused on the history of popular culture in the Americas. From the American Gothic in hemispheric perspective to the Spanish-language version of Dracula (filmed at night!), the course gave her the opportunity to revisit longstanding interests and dip her toes into new archival waters. Lambe looks forward to teaching the course for the first time next fall, along with two new seminars focused on popular science (Fall 2026, co-taught with Debbie Weinstein) and twins (FYS, Spring 2027), both of which will help her conceptualize new research projects.

### Brian Lander



Just as humans transformed the land by domesticating terrestrial animals, they domesticated the wetlands of South China by domesticating fish, like these carp photographed at the Wuhan Botanical Gardens

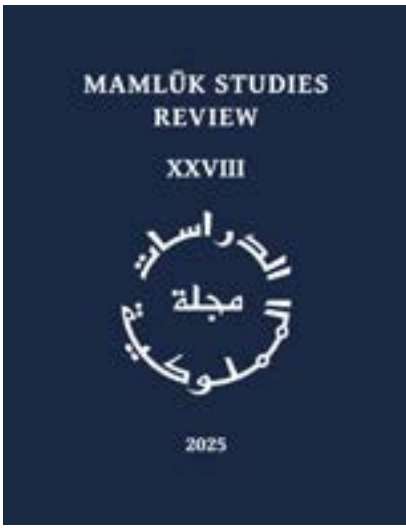
Brian Lander spent this academic year on a fellowship at NYU's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, where he learned a lot about the interconnectedness of the ancient world. He spent much of the year researching how the early Chinese empires colonized the lowlands of the Yangtze river valley, transforming a region of great ethnic and ecological diversity into what we now call South China. Along with Xiangli Ding of RISD he published a chapter on the newly founded People's Republic of China's efforts to transform the lakes of central China into rice paddies in the 1950s. In the summer he spent six weeks in China doing fieldwork in the Yangtze valley. He gave several lectures on how the endangered Yangtze alligator might tell the story of that region's environmental history.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## FACULTY ACTIVITIES

### Elias Muhanna



In 2025-26, Elias Muhanna published an edited volume titled *The Languages of the Mamluk Empire* (MSR special issue, vol XXVIII), which brought together several papers presented at the Ninth Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies, held at Brown in June 2023 with the support of the history department. The volume explores the rich linguistic landscape found in the Mamluk realms, shedding light on such topics as multilingualism, translation, orality and literacy, vernaculars and cosmopolitan languages, sociolects, and language acquisition. During this academic year, Muhanna has served as director of the Center for Middle East Studies, and has taught courses in both the departments of History and Comparative Literature.

### Seth Rockman



Seth Rockman continued his work as Director of Undergraduate Studies and traveled widely to speak about his recent book, *Plantation Goods: A Material History of American Slavery*. Highlights included talks at Florida International University, Amherst College and Birmingham University (UK). After being named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in History last May, the book won the Philip Taft Labor History Award; the Beveridge Family Prize in American History from the American Historical Association; the Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz Book Prize from the Bard Graduate Center; the James A. Rawley Prize from the Southern Historical Association; and the James P. Hanlan Book Prize from New England Historical Association.

### Kenneth Sacks



Kenneth Sacks' new book, *Emerson's Civil War: Spirit and Society in the Age of Abolition*, received a Choice recognition.

### Kerry Smith

Kerry Smith is working on two research projects in parallel. The first focuses on wealth and the wealthy in modern Japan, with a particular interest in their emergence in the postwar era. His work over the summer looked at Japanese and American official efforts to craft new policies to correct what both camps viewed as unsustainable levels of wealth inequality. The Americans and the Japanese had very different perspectives on how to address these newly legible signs of inequality (and, to some extent, why), and part of what Smith has been trying to excavate from the sources is a clearer understanding of the beliefs underpinning those differences.

He also has been working on an article-length side project that explores the ideas about the future of Tokyo that surfaced in popular media from the mid-1930s, through the end of the American occupation in 1952. The architects of these visions of "Future Tokyo" were figures like urban planner Ishikawa Hideaki, someone whose career and ideas have been the focus of a great deal of Japanese language scholarship of late. Smith has been drawn to Ishikawa in part because he was just a lot more imaginative than most of his urban-planner colleagues, and in part because he went out of his way to win the public's support for his visions of the capital's possible futures. It's fortunate that many of the popular magazines and other publications in which his work appeared in the first few years after Japan's surrender are held in the Prange Collection in the library at the University of Maryland, and Smith has been spending some time there exploring those sources.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## FACULTY ACTIVITIES

### Tracy Steffes



Tracy Steffes chaired the Department of Education for her seventh (and final!) year, leading conversations about department priorities for the future following a successful external review. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to support a sabbatical next year to conduct research on her book project, “Education Inc.: For-Profit Businesses and the Development of American Public Education.” She co-organized the Humanistic Inquiry in Education Working Group for humanities and humanistic social scientists interested in education, and co-edited a book series, [\*Histories of American Education\*](#), at Cornell University Press.

### Michael Steinberg

Michael Steinberg’s review of *Martin Jay, Magical Nominalism* will appear in the *Journal of Modern History* (June 2026); his essay “Marcel Proust and the Merry Wives of Klingsor” in the journal *Critical Inquiry* in Spring 2027; and his essay “Moses and the Critique of Violence” in *The Oxford Handbook of Moses*, forthcoming.

### Michael Vorenberg

In the wake of the release of Michael Vorenberg’s 2025 book *Lincoln’s Peace: The Struggle to End the American Civil War*, he delivered a number of lectures on the topics of war powers and war endings, at both public venues and universities. The lectures drew not only from the book but from his recent article in the *Journal of the Civil War Era* on states of exception and states of emergency in the U.S. today as compared to the Civil War era. In the meantime, he continued to work on his next project, a study of a U.S. military prison in the Gulf of Mexico known by some today as the “Guantanamo of the 19th Century.”



The poster advertising Michael Vorenberg’s lecture at the Athenaeum of Claremont McKenna College, March 23, 2026

### Karin Wulf



Margaret. No, she’s not supposed to be on the table.

Karin Wulf has had a marvelously hectic year. As an early Americanist and in her role at the John Carter Brown Library, Wulf is overseeing programs and publications for 2026 and the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States that have been the work of many, many years. She has written scores of pieces both academic and for public audiences, on topics from Martha Washington to Revolutionary-era archival storage. She has been on podcasts, done livestreams and traveled a lot for events of all kinds — for 2026-related work, but also associated with her new book about the potency of family connection as early American infrastructure, [\*Lineage: Genealogy and the Power of Connection in Early America\*](#), published by Oxford University Press in July 2025.

Wulf is proud of the work she has done with colleagues on campus and beyond for Brown 2026, a faculty-led initiative supported by the Office of the President and which she co-chairs. And among service to boards for different kinds of nonprofits, Wulf also started her three-year term as a vice president of the American Historical Association. In a year of challenges for historians and humanists and humans, working with colleagues and spending time with her family — including Margaret, the fiercest terrier of all terriers, is the best and most important thing.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# Undergraduate Program

## Reflections from the Director of Undergraduate Studies

### **Seth Rockman**

Director of Undergraduate Studies,  
George L. Littlefield Professor of American History

If you ask a history professor about the 2025-26 school year, you're likely to get an answer about how it has been a difficult year, and rightly so. But if you press a little, you'll hear about the things that buoyed our spirits and gave us hope for the future. Almost without fail, you'd hear about our undergraduate students and their curiosity, their intellect and their enthusiasm for learning. From the first day of classes last September, our students were eager to confront the past in its numerous complexities; at a moment when our sense of "living through history" is palpable (and often not in a good way), students had new and pressing questions about the world that made our classrooms exciting spaces of collective inquiry. And after the tragedy of December 13, the undergraduates displayed a resilience that inspired us to teach with ever greater purpose and commitment. Speaking for myself and my colleagues, I can say that our undergraduates gave us desperately needed energy at a moment when it seemed like the world was conspiring against higher education generally, and Brown specifically.

Our curriculum has continued to expand, with new offerings to appeal to concentrators and nonconcentrators alike. Professor Tiraana Bains piloted Early Modern India, 1500-1800 in the fall, while Professor Anthony Medrano offered a tasty treat with his Southeast Asian Food History seminar. Professor Neil Safier's Curators, Hoarders and Looters: The Long and Curious History of Collecting found a robust audience this spring, as did Professor Robert Self's lecture on American urban history and inequality. Postdoctoral fellows and graduate teaching fellows contributed courses (to name just a few) on natural disasters, the material culture of Tibetan Buddhism, the early modern Mediterranean, and the American Revolution in Popular Culture. Indeed, we have several courses on offer this spring and next fall to engage the American semiquincentennial.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

Let me close with thanks to my colleagues Nancy Jacobs, Mark Ocegueda, Anthony Medrano and Jeremy Mumford for serving as concentration advisors. Benjamin Hein stewarded our honors students to the completion of their theses, and streamlined opportunities for undergraduates to pursue funded research. And all of us received wonderful support from Mary Beth Bryson in keeping everything organized and running. It feels like a victory to have reached this moment in the school year, but I am confident that we will return next fall even more energized to work with the best undergraduates at Brown.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## Undergraduate Research Spotlight: Carlo Kim '27



I'm interested in how everyday people change their world. Eighty years ago, over a third of working people used their labor unions as forums to shape their workplaces and, by extension, their lives. But today, less than 10% of workers are unionized. What happened? And what role does organized labor — and its absence — have in shaping the present day?

As a sophomore, I worked closely with dining, library, facilities and other campus workers on their contract campaigns at Brown University. In the process, I became alive to the labor movement in Providence and to the power that working people have to create change. As a leader of the Student Labor Alliance, delegate to the Providence Central Labor Council, summer intern with the United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Healthcare Professionals, and founding member and inaugural vice president of the Brown

University Labor Council, I've had the chance to meet individuals as wide-ranging as the self-proclaimed oldest Teamster in America, to the current president of the largest public employees union in the country.

My advice to students of history is to think about what the demands of social history mean for us. As academicians, we are not neutral, and knowing that fact doesn't make us neutral. We should never take what exists for granted, and we should never forget the fact that everything works because billions of people toil everyday to make it work. When we write about how enslaved people in Virginia survived and pushed against the margins of their lives, we're tugging at one human thread that connects our lives to theirs. How are people surviving today, and how are we pushing back? And, just as interestingly, when, where and why aren't we?



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## Award Recipients

### **The John Thomas Memorial Award**

To the best thesis in the Department of History

**Samuel Dunn**

### **The Skidmore Family and Friends Thesis Prize**

To the best thesis in Latin American studies

**Isabella Ramos**

### **The Christian Yegen History Thesis Prize**

To outstanding honors theses in the Department of History

**Axel Martinez**

**Esha Patel**

**Piper Wallace**

**Talia Yett**

### **The Marjorie Harris Weiss Memorial Premium in History**

To an outstanding undergraduate student concentrating in history

**Owen Blair**

**Mary Clarke**

**Evelyn Daigneault**

### **The Gaspee Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution**

To the student who represents the best paper written as a class assignment in an American history course

**Ayla Kattler**

**James Reinke**

### **The David Herlihy Prize**

To the best student in Medieval or Renaissance history (ancient history is included)

**Fiona Mathews**

### **R. Douglas Cope Memorial Award**

To honor Professor R. Douglas Cope's legacy of service

**Indigo Mudbhary**

### **Herbert and Claiborne Pell Medal for U.S. History**

Awarded annually to one student for excellence in U.S. history

**Henry Robbins**



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# Honors Recipients

**Owen M. Blair**

“The Road to Health: Medical Travel and the Landscape of Suffering in Seventeenth Century England”

**Advisor: Tara Nummedal**

**Katherine A. Butts**

“Purchasable Patriotism: The Market for Soldiers in the Civil War North”

**Advisor: Seth Rockman**

**Mary L. Clarke**

“‘Hold On to the Land’: Maintaining the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation Through Identity, Culture, and Autonomy”

**Advisor: Linford Fisher**

**Evelyn Daigneault**

“‘The Usual Flaming Cross’: Discourses of the Ku Klux Klan in Rhode Island, 1905-1935”

**Advisor: Michael Vorenberg**

**Samuel H. Dunn**

“Controlling the ‘Addiction Disease’: Public Health and Punishment in New York Drug Policy, 1951-1973”

**Advisor: Françoise Hamlin**

**Sarah L. Farbiarz**

“‘Monument...to our love’: Brooklyn’s Sephardic Home for the Aged, 1951-2015”

**Advisor: Christopher Grasso**

**Maria Gomberg Shkolnikova**

“The Unlikely Homelands of George Abramovic Koval”

**Advisor: Ethan Pollock**

**Axel U. Martinez**

“Paisa Produce: The Architecture of Erasure and Agricultural Labor in South Jersey”

**Advisors: Mark Ocegueda and Evelyn Hu-Dehart**

**Fiona C. Mathews**

“Fragmenting the Medieval Body: Castration, Martyrdom, Relics, and Resurrection in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries”

**Advisor: Tara Nummedal**

**Esha C. Patel**

“Institutional Overstretch: War, Money, and Fiscal Capacity in Early Ptolemaic Egypt (320-200 BCE)”

**Advisor: Graham Oliver**

**Isabella C. Ramos**

“Who is Going to Force Us?: Peasant Resistance, Autonomy, and Self Governance in the Peruvian Upper Huallaga Valley (1966-1995)”

**Advisor: Daniel Rodriguez**

**Henry C. Robbins**

“Reconstructing the ‘Ancient City’: Annapolis, Maryland, 1862-1875”

**Advisor: Michael Vorenberg**

**Laudomia R. Tarantelli**

“Witchful Thinking: Gender, Authority, and the Construction of Truth in the Witch Trials of Early Modern England and Scotland”

**Advisor: Tiraana Bains**



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# Honors Recipients

**Tyler A. Tjan**

“Shadow Play: American Journalists in Indonesia, 1958-68”

**Advisor: Anthony Medrano**

**Piper J. Wallace**

“Performing Distinction at the Philadelphia Dancing Assembly, 1748-94: The Legibility and Stakes of Elite Heterosociability Across the Revolutionary Divide”

**Advisor: Seth Rockman**

**Ginu Yang**

“Tracing the History of the Exact Sciences Through the Logic in René Descartes’ La Géométrie”

**Advisor(s): Harold Cook and John Steele**

**Talia G. Yett**

“Fetal Fabrications: Death, Spectacle, and Monstrosity in the Fetal Personhood Movement”

**Advisor(s): Grace Argo and Karin Wulf**



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# Graduate Program

## Reflections from the Director of Graduate Studies

**Jennifer Johnson**

Director of Graduate Studies, Associate Professor of History

This year I began a three-year term as the director of graduate studies and it has been a pleasure getting to know the vibrant group of graduate students in the history department. Their intellectual interests span every geographic region and time period and their research topics are imaginative, thoughtful and pressing. Whether they are studying the medieval Mediterranean or the contemporary Middle East, environmental histories of the Atlantic world or modern Africa, histories of medicine in China or indigenous communities in Latin America and North America, it is clear that graduate students in the history department are poised to offer incisive analysis on the critical questions of our time.

The department is excited to welcome another dynamic cohort of nine graduate students in the fall who will contribute to these important conversations. They will matriculate into an active community of graduate student life. I am heartened to see the warm and collegial environment that the students foster amongst themselves. Moreover, they have demonstrated tremendous leadership in the wake of the terrible tragedy of December 13, 2025.

While graduate student education, and higher education more broadly, are facing some challenges, it is inspiring to see the graduate students pursue and receive a range of internal and external fellowships and professional opportunities. This year students received Brown fellowships from the Pembroke Center, the Cogut Institute, the Watson School of International and Public Affairs, the John Carter Brown Library, the Center for Digital Scholarship and the Institute at Brown for Environment and Society, just to name a few.

As we look ahead to the summer, when the Ph.D. students will be researching all over the world, learning relevant languages and skills and studying for preliminary exams, I want to close by wishing them continued success wherever they may be. I also want to thank the tremendous staff members who support the graduate students: Cherrie Guerzon, Julissa Bautista and particularly Pargol Borojerdi, the new student affairs manager, as well as Michael Vorenberg (director of graduate advising), Christopher Grasso (director of admissions), and former director of graduate studies Jenny Lambe, who went above and beyond facilitating the transition.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# Graduate Research Spotlight: Ria Modak



I'm a Ph.D. candidate in history, composer and musician from New York. My current research focuses on linguistic nationalism and cultural politics in postcolonial India, particularly in Bombay from the 1940s to 1966. I'm particularly interested in the efflorescence of vernacular forms of theater, music, poetry and fiction produced by an ideologically eclectic range of activists, lawyers, artists and labor organizers — including Communists, Socialists, Gandhians, Dalits and figures on the Hindu Right — in service of a “United Maharashtra.”

At Brown, I've been fortunate to combine my interests in cultural history with my work as a musician. In my first year, I served as a teaching assistant for Pakistani American singer Ali Sethi, the Saxena Center for Contemporary South Asia's first artist in residence (and whose band I tour in regularly!), and collaborated with Pakistani American visual artist Shahzia Sikander through a course she co-taught with Professor Holly Shaffer (History of Art and Architecture). Last year, I was invited

by Professor Leela Prasad (Religious Studies) to speak and perform at the American Academy of Religion's Annual Meeting, and designed the soundscape for RISD alumna Aiza Ahmed's solo exhibition at Sargent's Daughters in New York.

This semester, I was thrilled to have organized a performance and conversation at the Saxena Center for Contemporary South Asia with Sangat, a rabab, trumpet and percussion trio that draws inspiration from the mystical poetry of Sikh, Sufi and radical bhakti traditions to center oneness and connection. I was also a part of a concert and panel at the Yale Center for British Art on the hybrid musical culture of 18th century Lucknow alongside vocalist Sherezade Panthaki, harpsichordist Jeffrey Grossman, Ahona Palchoudhuri (Anthropology) and Professor Holly Shaffer as part of the center's “Painters, Ports, and Profits” exhibition. As I prepare for my year of fieldwork, I look forward to planning more interdisciplinary collaborations with artists, scholars and musicians in Mumbai and New Delhi.



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

## Doctor of Philosophy, 2025-26

### **Amanda Arcenaux**

*“To Know an Herbe: Early Modern Scientific Knowledge Production through Vernacular Manuscript Herbals, 1570-1750”*

**Director: Tara Nummedal**

### **Maximilian Bridge**

*“Oceanic Listening: Sound, Cetaceans And the History of Sensory Environments”*

**Director: Bathsheba Demuth**

### **Kimonee Burke**

*“Paūsuck Naünt Manit: The Role of Tribal Churches and Christianity in the Federal Acknowledgment of Southern New England Indigenous Nations”*

**Director: Linford Fisher**

### **Sarah Christensen**

*“Intimate Histories of Enslaved Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400-1200”*

**Director: Jonathan Conant**

### **Augusta de Oliveira**

*“Entendidas or Women in the Know: Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century Brazil”*

**Director: James Green**

### **Michael Aoki Deruelle**

*“Captive Press: The Newspapers of Carlisle Indian School and Topaz Japanese American Incarceration Camp”*

**Director: Evelyn Hu-Dehart**

### **Taaja El-Shabazz**

*“The Many-Threaded Hydra: A Patchwork Labor History of the American Womenswear Industry, 1924-1941”*

**Director: Françoise Hamlin**

### **Phoebe Labat**

*“Débouya pa péché: A History of Surviving Slavery and Natural Disasters in the Francophone Atlantic, 1624-1783”*

**Director: Bathsheba Demuth**

### **Alexandra (Ola) Morehead**

*“Four Seasons: Life and Death in the East European Forest, 1941-1945”*

**Director: Omer Bartov**

### **Devon Newhouse**

*“Entangled Roots: Cashew in Goan Food, Landscapes and Trade”*

**Director: Vazira Zamindar**

### **Fernando Norat**

*“The Infinity Mirror: A Cuban-Soviet Experience (1925-1962)”*

**Director: Jennifer Lambe**

### **Jorge Rosario Rosario**

*“Life of the Uprooted: A Microhistory of the Zeilsheim and Lampertheim Displaced Persons Camps, 1945-1949”*

**Director: Omer Bartov**

### **Qizhen Xie**

*“Land Tenure and Imperialism in Early Seleucid Asia Minor”*

**Director: Graham Oliver**

## MASTER OF ARTS, 2025-26

Sam Bisno

Isabel Cole

Erin Hardnett

Daniel Mensah

Nikki Shaner-Bradford



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)



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