



GORDON
COLLEGE

Department of History

Fall 2011



History's 2011 graduating class.

Message from the Chair, Steve Alter

It's an honor to take up responsibilities this term as chair of the Gordon History Department: my predecessors have set a high standard for me to follow. I'd like to use this first newsletter "soapbox" to sum up a recent editorial emphasizing the importance of history education. You're probably guessing that this piece was written by an illustrious historian, likely for an historical publication. Actually the writer is a former Undersecretary of the Army and the retired chairman of Lockheed Martin (a major defense contractor); the editorial appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* ("The Education Our Economy Needs," 21 September 2011). The argument here is impressive, especially coming from someone who clearly knows the value of science, math, and engineering.

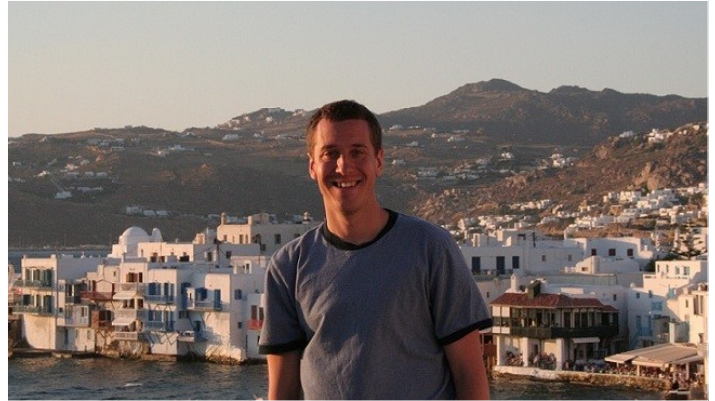
"Having traveled in 109 countries in this global economy," the writer says, "I have developed a considerable appreciation for the importance of knowing a country's history and politics." Such knowledge can't be overemphasized, but the bigger point is this: "A failing grade in history suggests that students are not only failing to comprehend our nation's story and that of our world, but also failing to develop skills that are crucial to employment across sectors." "Current and former CEOs like me," he says, are concerned about fostering the special capacities that "subjects like history impart: critical thinking, research skills, and the ability to communicate clearly and cogently." Again, in the writer's own organizational experience, "the factor that most distinguished those who advanced . . . was the ability to think broadly and read and write clearly." If this kind of worker is needed as an economic imperative, how much more so for those who aspire toward Christian excellence not only in the marketplace but in all aspects of our culture?

In passing on this message, I'm sure that I preach to the converted: no doubt this reinforces what you already believe. Still, why not spread the word? Perhaps you know young people who are trying to decide on a college major. If so, send them a copy of this newsletter. Give them an idea of what they will gain—and the fun they'll have doing it—as they pursue the study of history at a Christian school like Gordon.

Greece Through the Eyes of History (and Faith)

by Tony Hovel '12

I saw some amazing places on our whirlwind two and a half weeks in Greece this past summer. Each day I'd find myself gravitating toward our human encyclopedia on all things ancient, Dr. David Wick. He shared with us myriad stories of Greek culture, politics, biography, and warfare, creating before our eyes an ancient world for us to walk through. Somewhere between all the bus rides, and experiences such as discovering an ancient cave deep within a Mycenaean fort, I realized that I was seeing history, not as a timeline but right in front of me. As we traveled I made a point of visiting as many churches as I could, because my interest in the trip focused especially on Byzantine Christianity. When I stepped into these many places of worship I was awed by the beauty of the art. Everywhere I looked I was surrounded by images reminding me that this was my own biblical heritage and tradition. It was such a great experience to encounter God in a place with such a rich history. If you ever get a chance to go to Greece, go! You won't regret it.

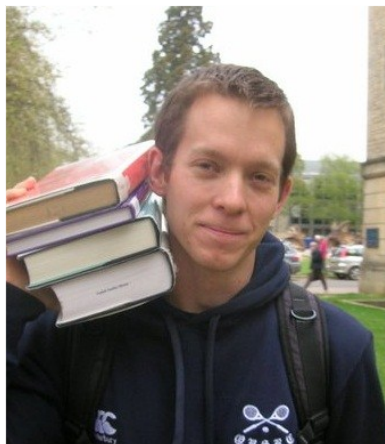


Zimbabwe and the (Mis-) Uses of History

by Josh Bell '12

During my time at Gordon at Oxford I was given the opportunity to conduct in-depth research into the recent history of Zimbabwe, my native country. Oxford has one of the best African Studies departments in the world and maintains close contacts with the famed School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. It was, therefore, an incredible opportunity!

As I explored various topics, I came in contact with Professor Terence Ranger, a well-respected historian of Southern Africa. He is best known for his books *The Invention of Tradition* (co-edited with Eric Hobsbawm) and *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia*. During my first semester at Oxford I wrote an extended essay on 'patriotic history' in Zimbabwe. This term was coined by Ranger in 2003 to define a particular version of nationalistic history made prominent by the Zimbabwe government during the 'Zimbabwe crisis' beginning around 1995. Patriotic history defines national identity in narrow and exclusivist terms. In my paper, I sought to define patriotic history and then examined how it was propagated during the Zimbabwe crisis. During my second semester at Oxford, I wrote a longer paper in which I compared the phenomenon of patriotic history in Zimbabwe with instances of this phenomenon in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa.



The opportunity to research and write on the uses of history as a political tool has made me keenly aware of the perils of ideologically-driven history writing, and its power over the lives of a nation's citizens. My research struck a personal chord, since I remember this difficult time in Zimbabwe quite well. It was an enlightening opportunity to view my country in the context of the nation-state throughout Africa. Sadly, the national project proved unsuccessful after Zimbabwe's independence; the state has been unable to build a national identity that encompasses the full breadth of Zimbabwean history, culture, and society.

Shapes of Things Long Past

by David Botticello '12

After five months back in America, I still feel the draw of a place that is not my home, but to which I feel bonded by my love for history. I studied in the Middle East last term, and for a time was able to be both an historian with his nose in musty textbooks and an adventurer in a new fedora. The Middle East Studies Program was abnormal last spring: the Egyptian Revolution altered the itinerary. Still, I would not trade the experience for anything in the world. Walking in the Valley of the Kings, through the remains of a civilization literally as old as history itself, was beyond comparison, and it alone would have made an unparalleled experience. But to be part of history in the making—to see a government toppled (albeit from a safe distance) because of grievances accumulating over the last century—is indescribable.



At the Mount of Olives in Israel.



It was when we set foot in Nazareth, in northern Israel, however, that the sense of history really hit home. The trip included a substantial travel component, and I knew we would visit places of immense historic import. Yet that knowledge could not prepare me for the impact of listening to a priest point out roads that Jesus walked down 2,000 years ago. History is not only alive in that land, it is abundantly relevant to everyday life: it is featured in the arguments of the marketplace as well as the politics of the Israeli Knesset. The traditions of civilization fill every building, every inch of land, and to actually walk in places that my textbooks reverently describe is truly humbling. The Holy Land is a wonderful, enigmatic place, just close enough to the edge of the map that there are still unknowns, but with a depth of historical tradition almost beyond understanding—a taxi driver in Jordan with an admittedly heroic sense of the past boasted that his ancestors “lapped ice-water in palaces while everyone else was eating locusts in the desert.” I ate falafel rather than locusts, but the layers of dust ingrained into my once new fedora are a testament to a land with a glorious past and, perhaps, a brightening future.

Athens by Way of Japan

I traveled to many places as a student of Gordon College, the last being Athens, Greece. Unexpected, unanticipated, I made my travel plans only two weeks before I left for Greece late in July, upon learning of the acceptance of an essay I had written for Dr. David Wick's historiography class. Flying standby, miracles abounding, I arrived in Greece for the Athens Institute of Research and Education's 9th Annual International Conference on History, which took place August 1-2. It was a surprisingly merry venue, the camaraderie between academics not unlike what I knew in the communities I lived amongst in Oxford, England my junior year. My essay, "A More Inclusive History of Sexual Crimes during the World War II Era: Situating the Comfort Women System Amongst the Sexual Crimes of Allied Forces in Japan" was received well. I left with two cards from Japanese universities, proof of a possibility I had not considered before—pursuing graduate studies in Japan.

I'm now working at Pioneer Village in Salem. You should come by; it's a wonderful place and I give very good tours. Best come soon though, as I'm harboring plans for further studies in Japan.

by Genevieve Peterson '11



History Alumnus Awarded Notre Dame Teaching Fellowship

Congratulations to Daniel Smith '03, who graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a Ph.D. in Theology in August 2011. He will be staying at Notre Dame for one year as a postdoctoral teaching fellow, teaching Theology and Latin. At Gordon Daniel majored in History and Spanish. His studies at Notre Dame were in the program in Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity.



History Department to Host CFH Annual Meeting

Coming next fall: the Gordon College History Department will host the bi-annual meeting of the Conference on Faith and History, to be held at Gordon October 3-6, 2012. We will welcome approximately 250 historians to campus for 3 days. (History classes will be suspended to allow our majors to attend conference sessions and present scholarly papers.) Stay tuned for more details on this exciting event!

Alumni and Student Updates

We would love to hear from you! Please send contributions to: elisabeth.whittet@gordon.edu.