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Stallworth Lecture Takes on the Bankheads

“Family biography as regional history,” was the theme of this year’s N. Jack Stallworth Lecture in Southern History. Dr. Kari Frederickson of the University of Alabama spoke of “The Bankheads of Alabama,” to an attentive audience on October 23 at Laidlaw.

Going against the grain of the anti-government dogmatist, John H. Bankhead (1842-1920) labored extensively “to expand the reach of the Federal government to aid economic development in the New South,” Dr. Frederickson reported. As a US senator and member of the Inland Waterways Commission, Bankhead secured Federal funding to dredge the Black Warrior River, allowing local coal mines (some of which he owned) to ship their product to market. He also managed the passage of the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916, gifting Alabama with the first decent roads it had ever seen. Dr. Frederickson cited a journalist who

dubbed Bankhead “the grand procurer of pork, a ‘getter’” and explained that Bankhead achieved his legislative goals through his network of personal connections. “There’s nothing



Dr. Kari Frederickson

that cannot be solved,” Bankhead once said, “in the haze of a good cigar and a glass of bourbon.” The Road Act resulted from his partnership with Republicans of the Western states who also

craved better infrastructure and was justified by the US Constitution’s provisions for postal service – “All roads are post roads,” Bankhead reasoned. “All this,” Dr. Frederickson observed, “fulfilled by a staunch states’ rights Democrat.” Sons John Jr. (1872-1946) and William (1874-1940) carried on their father’s legacy, with the former noted for the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937, a land-to-the-tiller program of the New Deal, and the latter serving as speaker of the House during President Franklin Roosevelt’s tumultuous second term (from 1936 to 1940), when he endeavored to maintain legislative discipline.

Dr. Frederickson devoted the middle third of her talk to the negative aspect of the Bankheads’ pragmatic attitude toward Washington, explaining that as much as the Bankheads solicited Federal assistance in Alabama’s

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Urban Wins Award

Dr. Kelly Urban won the 2024 Early Career Faculty Award from USA’s College of Arts and Sciences, and her award was presented to her at the College’s Dean’s Lecture and Award evening on November 6, 2024. Since coming to South in 2028, Dr. Urban has been an exemplary faculty member with superb research achievements, most notably her book, *Radical Prescription: Citizenship and the Politics of*

Tuberculosis in Twentieth Century Cuba, published by the



Dr. Kelly Urban

University of North Carolina Press in 2023.

Dr. Urban is also renowned for her innovative teaching in global public health and Latin American and American history and for her service to her colleagues, most significantly by making each semester’s schedule of classes. She also mentors new faculty at the University, across many disciplines, and is a terrific model for these new members of our University community.

Tannenbaum Collection Receives Donation

BY DAVID MESSENGER

Agnes Tannenbaum was a Holocaust survivor born in Hungary who lived in Mobile at the end of her life and died here in 2016. At the Marx Library there is a collection of Holocaust books donated every year by the Gulf Coast Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education in Tannenbaum's memory. On November 7, 2024, this year's donation was introduced in a small ceremony at the Library, with provost Dr. Andi Kent, Dean of Arts & Sciences Dr Andrzej Wierzbiki, Department of His-

tory Chair Dr. David Messenger, and Dr. Don Berry and Jerry Darring of the Gulf Coast Center, who all spoke about the collection and this year's books.

The collection now numbers over 2100 books, and is a wonderful resource for students in History classes like Dr. David Meola's HY 347 on the Holocaust or Dr. Messenger's HY 346 on the Second World War. The collection is overseen at the Library by Deborah Gurt, Director of the Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library within

Marx. This year's donation included books such as *Violent Space: The Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw*, by Anja Nowak (Indiana University Press, 2023) and *From Windhoek to Auschwitz?: Reflections on the Relationship between Colonialism and National Socialism*, by Jürgen Zimmerer (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023) as well as books focused on contemporary issues like *The 7 Deadly Myths: Antisemitism from the time of Christ to Kanye West*, by Alex Ryvchin (Academic Studies Press, 2023).



Agnes Tannenbaum (1922-2016)

Lecture Highlights Basque Situation

The History and the Modern Languages and Literature departments hosted Dr. Brittany Powell Kennedy of Tulane University who delivered her talk "After Terrorism: The Basques and Spain" to an engaged audience at the Marx Library auditorium on November 7. The talk highlighted Basque nationalists' quest for independence and raised broader questions related to political strategy and self-definition.

Basque country is in northern Spain, abutting the Pyrenees. In pre-modern times it was quite isolated and self-evolving. As Spain lost its overseas empire, it lost much in the way of national confidence as well, causing it to regard Basque uniqueness with unease. (France, as Dr. Kennedy pointed out, never had this problem, enabling the French people to delight in their country's sub-ethnicities.) The fact that the Basques, in exchange for promises of autonomy, supported the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War did not help matters. The Basque cities of Durango and Guernica were subjected to brutal bombing by Francisco

Franco's German and Italian allies, as Franco's Nationalists sought to tighten their grip.

In subsequent decades, the Basque separatist group ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) would employ terroristic violence against Spain. Its most spectacular action was the 1973 assassination of Franco's prime min-



Dr. Brittany Powell Kennedy

ister Luis Carrero Blanco by the bombing of his car. However, after ETA was falsely accused of the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings (the actual culprit was al Qaeda), ETA realized that its violent strategy was a liability. It announced a permanent cease-fire and soon disbanded.

The balance of Dr. Kennedy's talk recounted the rehabilitation of ex-ETA operatives and the softening of the Basque separatist approach, to increase the appeal of the Basque cause. An example of the former trend is the rebranding of ex-militant Arnaldo Otegi, leader of the Basque nationalist EH Bildu (Euskal Herria Bildu, or "Basque Country Unite") party, who has been shown to gentler advantage in the media, playing with his cats. The more general latter development involves the refinement of Basque identity, smoothing its rough edges to become something other than an "anti-Spain." Dr. Kennedy showed television and movie clips that portrayed the Basque issue as an amusing burst of local color (similar to *Sweet Home Alabama* in the US, she suggested) and left the question of Basque identity open and inviting, with expressions such as "We don't know who we were" and "Maybe this is who we are."

Animated questions and discussion followed. Dr. Kennedy's talk demonstrated how history can bear directly on the practice of politics and even on the concept of selfhood.

"People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them."

— James Baldwin

When History is Personal: Mixed-Race Children in the Post-Nazi Era

On October 9, Dr. Tracey Owens Patton of the University of Wyoming addressed a full house in the Marx Library Auditorium on the subject of her just-published book, *A Nation's Undesirables: Mixed-Race Children and Whiteness in the Post-Nazi Era*. Her talk was jointly sponsored by the History Department, the English Department, and the International Studies Program.

Dr. Patton's work is an autoethnography focused on her maternal grandmother, Greta, who came of age in Hitler's Germany and who in fact became a Hitler Maiden, expected to produce Aryan children. After the war, Greta took up with a Black American GI named Albert Flowers, attracted to his dancing ability and kindness. The result of their union was a set of mixed-race twins – Dr. Patton's mother and aunt – and a complicated family history of abandonment and denial, largely determined by the racism in both Germany and the United States.

American racism disrupted the family even before the twins were born, when the revelation of Greta's transgressive pregnancy prompted the Army to transfer Flowers stateside. Left without support, Greta employed race for her own supposed benefit on at least two occasions.

First, it is believed that she represented her children as white in order to claim that she'd been raped by Soviet soldiers, entitling her to compensation from the West German government, which she used to emigrate to the US.



Dr. Tracey Owens

Then, she conspired with a prejudiced California social worker who was only too happy to help her “get rid of the two mistakes she was saddled with,” offloading her daughters at an orphanage and resolving to start anew with a

white husband, claiming ever after to be childless.

Greta's conflicted psychology sounded the most powerful theme of Dr. Patton's talk. Raised by a liberal mother, who once calmed her at the prospect of a Black man in the neighborhood with the wisdom that “People are people,” Greta would later in life display a photo of African American gymnast Gabby Douglas on her refrigerator, while throwing photos of her own children and granddaughter, provided by Dr. Patton while in the process of establishing contact, into the trash.

“Why were we erased?” Dr. Patton asked her grandmother, at their tense first meeting.

“People are people,” Greta began mechanically, before answering, “Because we were embarrassed!”

Later in the conversation, Greta smiled, “You'd be a wonderful granddaughter. It's too bad you're the wrong color.”

The audience found Dr. Patton's presentation very involving. Her story of “Undesirables” was an exceptionally poignant weaving of scholarship and personal discovery.

The Bankhead Dynasty

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economic development, they obstructed even the most modest Federal effort to address racial issues. A former Confederate captain, John Sr. had opposed both the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments and helped institute the system of convict labor. John Jr. blocked the expansion of the franchise whenever he could. It was noted during the question and answer session that some of the Federal aid the Bankheads solicited would later come with civil rights stipulations, but such ironic consequences never caught up to the Bankheads in their own time.

The latter part of Frederickson's talk focused on larger family activities and dynamics. John Sr.'s daughter Marie

Bankhead Owen (1869-1958) served as director of the Alabama Department of Archives



Marie Bankhead Owen
and Tallulah Bankhead

and History, where she promoted the Lost Cause narrative of southern history, which not only buttressed white supremacy but also “convinced lower class whites of the wisdom of the ruling class” of which her family was a leading part. Marie also kept her eyes on William's famous daughter Tallulah Bankhead (1902-1962) and moved quickly to squelch the many scandals the flamboyant stage and screen actress often kindled.

The audience included many community members and students who will now think historically whenever passing through the Bankhead Tunnel or Bankhead National Forest. This year's Stallworth Lecture sounded a homey note and was all the more enriching for it.

Spring 2025 Courses

HY 101 – History of Western Civilization I (7 sections)

HY 102 – History of Western Civilization II (4 sections)

HY 122 – World Civilization II (Beasley)

HY 135 – US History to 1877 (11 sections)

HY 136 – US History Since 1877 (12 sections)

HY 290 – Special Topics: Native American Studies (Dees)

HY 312 – America in the 1960s (Lombardo)

HY 365W – Islamic Civilization Since 1453 (Williams)

HY 377– African-American Experiences (Vaughn-Roberson)

HY 431/531 – Studies in US History: Public History in Africatown (Messenger)

HY 442W – Research Seminar in European History: British Migration (Strong)

HY 457/557– Studies in European History: Antisemitism Then and Now (Meola)

HY 478/578 – The New South (McKiven)

HY 583 – Research Experience (Kozelsky)



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