

Newsletter: Swarthmore College Department of History Spring 2018

Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends:

The 2017-18 academic year closed with very welcome news for the History Department. **Farid Azfar**, our specialist in early modern European history, was awarded continuous tenure and promoted to Associate Professor, securing one more piece of the future of history at Swarthmore.

The department faculty are now well engaged in their summer work. Some of us are already or shortly will be working in libraries and archives all around the world. Others are reworking old syllabi and developing new ones. We are writing and editing, reviewing the work of peers, and attending workshops and meetings. A few of us are also still engaged in the work of administration here at the College throughout the summer as well.

Summer is also a time for reflection. We think about the courses to come, the projects we are considering, the commitments already made. (The March alumni tour of Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa led by me is already sold out!)

Our reflections extend once more to the place of history in our troubled present moment. Understanding both the knowable facts and debatable meanings of the past seems to us a more urgent necessity than ever before but also a more and more remote prospect. We hope all of you, wherever you are and whatever your feelings on the issues of our day might be, will seek to bring historical understanding wherever it might be lacking.

As always, all our best. We are ever eager to hear from you!



Tim Burke

INSIDE:

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Alumni news from recent graduates **Susan Whaley**, **Blake Oetting**, **Elizabeth Whipple**, **Max Kassan**, and **Hannah Lichtenstein**. We also catch up with **Mairin Odle**, **Eleanor Joseph**, **Bryan Wolf**, **Evelyn Edson**, **M. Kelly Tillery**, **Ali Roseberry-Polier**, and **Barbara Pham**. Current students making the page are **Ariba Naqvi**, **Elizabeth Curcio**, and **September Porras Payea**. Our Faculty News catches up with **Professors Azfar**, **Altan**, **Chen**, **Bruce Dorsey**, **DuPlessis**, **Murphy**, **Shokr**, and **Weinberg**.

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See what the Department has been up to for the past semester in our Events section, including our department symposium on the future of archives with **Celia Caust-Ellenbogen '09**, **Nicole Topich '11**, and Amrys Williams.

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A feature on the department BBQ by **September Porras Payea '20**, and a brief teaser about our upcoming events in the fall, including the **Beik Lecture** and the quilt unveiling and discussion at *Responses to Gee's Bend*.

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A feature on one of our new faculty members, Ahmad Shokr, by **September Porras Payea '20**.

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See if our faculty will be in your neighborhood in the Faculty Talks section.



Alicia Nock with a hint of the quilt work you will be able to see at the unveiling in October at the *Responses to Gee's Bend* event.

Susan Whaley '18 earned a [Fulbright Grant](#) to teach English in Benin. Susan also graduated with her honors major in History, as well.

Mairin Odle '08 has earned her Ph.D. from NYU and now has a position at the University of Alabama as an Assistant Professor in their Department of American Studies. **Mairin** specializes in Native American history, the history of early America, and the history of the Atlantic world.

Blake Oetting '18 presented at this year's [Senior Showcase](#) on his senior thesis, which he wrote for his Art History major. His thesis, titled "Rhetorical Bodies: Ambivalence in the Portraiture of Carl Van Vechten," focuses on Van Vechten's photography through "three debates emerging in New York City at the time: racialized space, the construction of the African-American artist, and photography's social vs. aesthetic role." **Blake** minored in history and was most recently seen in **Bruce Dorsey's** seminar on Gender & Sexuality in America.

Eleanor Joseph '07 and **Bryan Wolf '84** [have both been named to Swarthmore's Board of Managers](#). Interestingly, both were Honors History Majors, and both took the Fascist Europe honors seminar.

Elizabeth Whipple '18 also presented at the Senior Showcase. **Liz** presented images of her

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Student & Alumni News

Faculty News

We must first mention that **Farid Azfar** was granted reappointment with continuous tenure. Congratulations, **Farid!**

Selda Altan has been appointed as a lecturer at the [University of Florida](#) in their History Department. She has moved down to Gainesville with her family. We appreciate her service to our department in her one-year post-doc position as a leave replacement for **Professor Chen**. **Professor Altan** treated her classes to a home-cooked meal at the end of the semester that was finished off with a delicious, homemade tres leches. Thanks again, **Selda**.

While interviewing and finding a place to live, **Selda** also managed to present at the [Contacts, Collisions, and Conjunctions Conference](#) at the University of Hong Kong in May. Her talk was entitled, "The Yunnan-Indochina Railway and Nation-Building Across the China-Vietnam Borders, 1898-1910."

We are looking forward to having **BuYun Chen** rejoin us after a two-year stint at the [Max Planck Institute for the History of Science](#) in Berlin. **Professor Chen** will be teaching a survey on the history of premodern China and an upper-level course on China and capitalism.

Bruce Dorsey delivered a faculty talk on March 28 "The History of Fake News and Conspiracy Politics in Early America (from Murder in a Mill Town)" and was also moderator of the New York City Swarthmore Alumni Book Group in 2017-2018 based on the theme "Divided America: The Culture Wars over Lives that Matter."

Bob DuPlessis spent a portion of the spring teaching in Singapore. While there as a CLASS [Centre of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences] Academic Guest for two months, **Professor DuPlessis** gave a lecture entitled "Why Study Atlantic (of Pacific, or Indian Ocean) History When Everyone is Talking about Globalization?"

Marjorie Murphy taught her Honors seminar, Labor & Urban History, for the last time this spring. She served the usual 15 soups for different ethnic groups, sold her house, and retired the soup pot for good, and [University of Kansas](#) historian [David Roediger](#) came to examine the honors students at the end of the year.

A few of our new professors were getting their footing this year. Read about **Professor Ahmad Shokr** in the feature on [page 5](#).

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Events, Spring 2018

[Dominic Rubín](#) of The Higher School of Economics, Moscow, spoke about Islam in Russia on March 19 in a talk sponsored by [Arabic, Russian Studies](#), the [Department of Modern Languages and Literatures](#), [History](#), [Islamic Studies](#), and [Religion](#). The title of the talk was “Between ISIS and Kadyrov: What Is Islam in Russia?”

[Beshara Doumani](#) of Brown University delivered a lecture on March 26 entitled, “Between House and Orchard: Family, Shari’a and the Making of the Modern Middle East” which examined the lives of ordinary people and how they shaped the modern Middle East. This talk was sponsored by [Peace & Conflict Studies](#), [Arabic](#), [Gender & Sexuality Studies](#), [History](#), [Islamic Studies](#), [Sociology and Anthropology](#), and the [Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility](#).

[Political Science](#) brought Daniel Ellsberg to campus on April 3, and he delivered an enthralling talk entitled, “Secrets, Lies, and the Risks of Nuclear War.” As you may recall, Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers in the ‘70s. The [Center for Innovation and Leadership](#), [History](#), the [Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility](#), [Peace & Conflict Studies](#), the [President’s Office](#), and [Sociology and Anthropology](#).

[The Annual Jerry Wood Memorial Lecture](#) took place on April 5, with Barbara Weinstein of NYU delivering the lecture this year. “Looking at Race like a Brazilian: A Historical Perspective” aimed to distinguish racial attitudes between Brazil and the United States. This talk was sponsored by [Latin American & Latino Studies](#), [History](#), [Sociology and Anthropology](#), [Black Studies](#), the [Black Cultural Center](#), and the [Dean’s Office](#).

We also supported the [Peace & Conflict Studies](#) Program and the [Swarthmore Muslim Students Association](#) on April 5th as they had Sherine Tadros speak on the [Rohingyan crisis](#).

We welcomed our newly minted majors and minors on April 6 with a department barbeque in **Tim’s** backyard. **Diego** and **Tim** did the cooking with many students and faculty in attendance, including **September**, who wrote about it on [page 4](#). A delicious variety of meats and vegetables were grilled to perfection.

[Career Services](#) hosted a lunch in Sharples with **Becky Sielman ’85** on April 7 in order to discuss Careers as an Actuary. Becky earned her history degree here, so this provided students perspective on yet another way to put their degree to use.



Topich, Caust-Ellenbogen, and Williams.

The [Russian Studies Section](#) hosted Polina Barskova on April 12, and funding for the event was provided by the [William J. Cooper Foundation](#) with co-sponsorships from [the History Department](#), [the English Department](#), [the Creative Writing Program](#), and [the Comparative Literature Program](#). The lecture, titled “Besieged Cities and the Poetics of Trauma,” addressed “how poetry both shapes and is shaped by urban catastrophes.”

On April 23, we hosted our Department Symposium. This year, we discussed the future of archives with Celia Caust-Ellenbogen ’09 of the [Friends Historical Library](#), Nicole Topich ’11 of [SUNY Upstate Medical University Library](#), and [Amrys Williams](#) of [The Hagley Museum & Library](#).

The [Russian Section](#) proved busy in April. On April 25, Mikhail Shishkin hosted a reading and conversation about migration stories and the refugee crisis and invited all members of the Swarthmore Community [to share their stories here](#). The event was sponsored by the President’s Office Andrew W. Mellon Grant, the Global Affairs Program at the [Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility](#), the [Intercultural Center](#), the [Swarthmore Libraries](#), [Russian Studies](#), [German Studies](#), [Peace & Conflict Studies](#), and the [Bryn Mawr Russian Department](#).

On May 8, **Philip Decker ’18** and **Max Kassan ’18** presented their Senior Honors Theses, for which they both took home the **Paul H. Beik Prize**. Philip’s thesis counters the idea of Eastern Bloc societies as rigid and uncompromising through “Jiu-Jitsu Socialism: Dean Reed and the Cultural Revolution in East Germany,” while Max’ thesis examines “Baseball and Masculinity During the Reagan Era.” Many of our award-winning theses are available through the TriCo Library’s [Triceratops Institutional Scholarship Collection](#).

On May 20-22, we hosted honors exams, and all of our students earned honors. Our examiners this year were: [Rebecca L. Davis, University of Delaware](#); [Sarah Ifft Decker ’09, Indiana University, Bloomington](#); [Matthew Kadane, Hobart and Williams Colleges](#); [Maya Peterson ’02, UC Santa Cruz](#); [Woody Register, Sewanee: The University of the South](#); [David Roediger, University of Kansas](#); [Eli Rubín ’97, Western Michigan University](#); and [Drew Thompson, Bard College](#). ♦



Shishkin delivers his talk in a full McCabe Atrium. Photo courtesy of José Vergara.

Department Welcomes Sophomores

By September Porras Payea '20

Spring semester means a host of young Swatties deciding what course their liberal arts education will take, so as Sophomore Planning wrapped up, the History Department held a cook out in order to welcome sophomore majors and minors to the department.

Professor Tim Burke opened his home to faculty, staff, and students from each of the classes to celebrate the growing department. It was a full house, and tables and chairs were spread onto the lawn and around the grill as professors and students mingled while eating delicious, freshly-made food and discussing everything from future courses to embarrassing college stories. As one student brightly explained their summer plans to work on a film in the Ukraine, another spoke with a professor about their recent course, and another laid out their study abroad plans. The event lasted well over two hours, everyone caught up in avid discussion (in a variety of languages) and soaking in the winter's missed sunshine. **Will Marchese '20**, a rising honors major in the department, reflected on the event fondly: "I love how accessible the professors are in the department, I love that we can all come together and relax – I feel like I haven't done that in a while. It's also helpful to know you have people supporting you when you're making decisions like these." **Gabriel Brossy de Dios '20**, a minor in the department, agreed: "It was a great oasis in a crazy week for me. I spent much of my time talking in Spanish to **Professor Armus**, which was nice, as I hadn't spent much time with the department before. I felt really welcomed by the other students as well, and I'm looking forward to the next years."

The department looks forward to continuing to work with its new students and has taken into account course considerations and student wishes that came up in conversations. From honors courses to more outlets on the second floor of Trotter, the event was a success for students, faculty, staff, and the department hallway itself!♦

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for the **Beik Lecture** the week of **October 21**. [Dr. Jennifer Sessions](#) of the University of Iowa will be delivering the lecture this year.

As part of the *Piece Together: The Quilts of Mary Lee Bendolph* exhibit at [The List Gallery](#) beginning September 6 through October 28, the public reception and curator's talk for *Responses to Gee's Bend* will take place in McCabe's Atrium on **October 23**. The quilts on display in McCabe will have been created by artists inspired by Gee's Bend's history and aesthetic and will be featured alongside the two quilts created in **Alicia Nock** and **Allison Dorsey's** course Black Art: Quilting as History and Culture course.

We are planning to host a panel on graduate school and beyond with three women of color on **September 27**. The panelists will include **Dr. Cecilia Márquez**, **Dr. Justene Hill Edwards**, and **Ana Rosado**. **Dr. Dorsey** has been working to pull this together, and we will be sharing the event with our Mellon Mays Fellows, as well.

Stay tuned to our Facebook page for an announcement of a dedication of a historical marker at the cave of Benjamin Lay. **M. Kelly Tillery '76**, inspired by the visit of Marcus Rediker in the fall of 2017, worked with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission to get the marker placed and collaborated with Dr. Rediker on the text for the Marker.

As always, be on the lookout for details of upcoming events on [our webpage](#) and [Facebook page](#). ♦

Introducing: Professor Ahmad Shokr

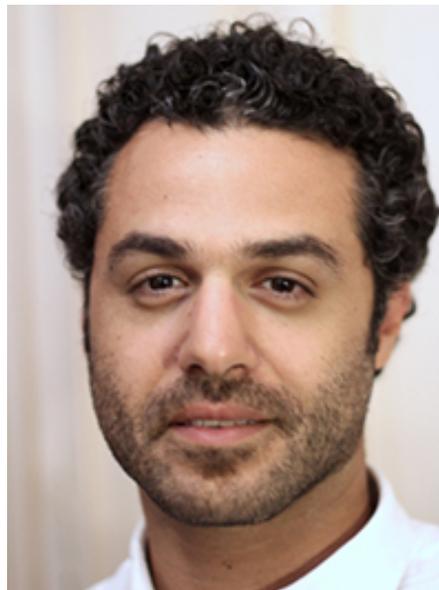
By September Porras Payea '20

Ahmad Shokr joined the History Department in the fall of 2017 with a background in the history of colonialism, capitalism, and the politics of decolonization, bringing the much-anticipated critical look at the modern Middle East. His experience in journalism and Middle Eastern politics informs much of his studies and teaching.

Shokr was born to Egyptian immigrants in Toronto, Canada, where he grew up. He spent much of his childhood in and out of Egypt and went on to attend the University of Toronto to study history. He then moved to New York, where he received an MA in Middle Eastern Studies from New York University, which is also where he completed his PhD work. He earned his doctorate a bit unconventionally, spending much of that time doing fieldwork in Egypt. At this time, some of his friends began an English edition of one of Egypt's largest independent daily newspapers, *Egypt Independent*, and Shokr decided to work part time as a journalist, editing their Opinions section. For Shokr, journalism was merely another route to engage with the same questions of

government and politics that he was grappling with as a historian: "Journalism really is the first draft of history." This

became very evident when, a year later, the 2011 Arab Uprisings launched the Egyptian Revolution. He remained in Cairo (and traveled to Libya several times), writing and becoming heavily involved in activism, until 2013 when a coup d'état occurred, overthrowing the Islamist government. He then returned to



Professor Ahmad Shokr

New York and wrote his dissertation.

He was drawn to a position at Swarthmore for a variety of reasons, first of which being its place as a liberal arts college that engages seriously with research. He wished to work at an institution that placed value on both student engagement and faculty research. Furthermore, Swarthmore's reputation for outstanding students was a large

draw, and upon visiting the college he felt immediately welcomed by the History Department. He enjoys teaching at Swarthmore as it allows him to step out of his specialization and think about history more broadly, engaging with concepts of identity, power, social change, etc.

Though he no longer works in journalism, he has a penchant for weaving it into his courses-- using the news as a way to think about how and why stories are told the way they are. Just as with history, one must be careful how they frame news articles and fit them into a historical timeline. To explain, he reflected on Egypt, "When the revolution happened, it was impossible not to think historically." He now looks at history in his courses as impossible to divide from the experiences of those who lived it.

In his free time, Shokr enjoys traveling, especially to the Middle East, for both work and leisure. He also loves to play basketball and read novels of all genres. He has just moved from New York to Philadelphia.

He is currently writing a book on the political economy of decolonization in Egypt from the 1920's to the 1960's, following cotton as a commodity in the interwar period. ♦

Continued from "Student & Alumni News"...

Studio Art thesis show of ceramic sculpture and shared the ideas behind her artist's statement, including that her inspiration comes from "ambiguous organic forms." **Liz** also graduated with a minor in history and could most recently be seen in **Allison Dorsey** and [Alicia Nock's](#) Black Art: Quilting as History and Culture class.

Evelyn Edson '62 recently had her book published. This edition and translation of *Cristoforo Buondelmonti | Description of the Aegean and Other Islands* from the Latin is available from [Italica Press](#).

Ariba Naqvi '20 was [chosen for the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship](#), which supports underrepresented groups pursuing Ph.D. programs in core fields in the arts and sciences. Ariba just selected History as her major, and we are welcoming her as an honors major, as well. Ariba recently took **Ahmad Shokr's** Modern Middle East class.

M. Kelly Tillery '76 recently published [Sidebar: Reflections of a Philadelphia Lawyer](#).

Cam Wiley '19, honors minor, **Max Kassan '18**, honors major, **Hannah Lichtenstein '18**, major, **Elizabeth Curcio '19**, major, and **Blake Oetting '18**, minor, managed some success outside of the classroom. **Cam** was named to the Academic All-District Team, Academic All-Centennial Team, the Inquirer Academic All-Area Team, the Second team NABC All-District, and Second Team for the Middle Atlantic for D3hoops.com All-Region for [Men's College Basketball](#) while the team finished its run in the NCAA Quarterfinals this year. **Max** was a member of the [2018 Baseball](#) team which made it all the way to the DIII Baseball College World Series and finished the season ranked 6th in the nation, the deepest finish of any baseball team in Swarthmore's history. **Hannah** was named the Centennial Conference Sportsmanship Award Winner for 2018. The Conference selects one female, one male, and one coach or administrator each year. **Elizabeth** earned All-Centennial Honorable Mention for her play on the 2018 Softball team. **Blake** was named the Men's Tennis Scholar-Athlete of the Year in the Centennial Conference as well as being named to the Academic All-Centennial Team for Men's Tennis.

September Porras Payea '20 presented her paper, "Devine Acts of Torture: Father Von Wernich and the Ideology of Repression" at the *Latin America Through Many Lenses* undergraduate and graduate student conference hosted by Drexel University on April 20.

Ali Roseberry-Polier '14 [committed a rogue act of historical commemoration](#) by placing a marker near 30th Street Station in Philadelphia to memorialize Mary Miles, who refused to move to a segregated train car in 1867.

Barbara Pham '18 presented at Villanova's Gender and Women's Studies Student Research Conference in April. Barbara will also be pursuing her graduate degree back home in California next year. ♦

Continued from "Faculty News"...

Professor Shokr rounded out his semester giving talks at The University of Pennsylvania, The University of California, Santa Barbara, and [The Annual Conference of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies](#) in London.

Bob Weinberg found himself at Birkbeck, University of London, repaying Brendan McGeever a visit. **Bob** delivered a talk entitled, "The Jewish Question in Soviet Film." He was due to deliver another talk, but the university faculty were striking and **Prof. Weinberg** refused to cross the line. In fact, he picketed with the striking faculty. ♦

Faculty Talks, 2018

July

7/4-6	Megan Brown	"Integration, Competition, and the 'Eurafrican Lake.' "	Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici Naples, Italy
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September

9/8	Diego Armus	"Hybrid healers and ostracized health practitioners during Buenos Aires' tuberculosis years" at <i>The grey zones of medicine(s). Towards a history of healers in colonial and modern Latin America</i> . Co-organizer.	University of Wisconsin Madison, WI
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October

10/10-12	Diego Armus	"The Historiography of Medicalization: Problems, Approaches, Gaps." Keynote speaker at the 8 th <i>International Workshop on the History of Health and Disease in Latin America</i>	Universidad Nacional de Córdoba Córdoba, Argentina
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November

11/12	Diego Armus	"Notes for a History of smoking in modern Buenos Aires" for the Department of History and Sociology of Science	University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, PA
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Join the conversation!

Go to our [Facebook page](#) and join the discussion on the article from the AHA: "[The Decline in History Majors: What Is to Be Done?](#)"

You can "[Like](#)" [us on Facebook](#) for more regular updates about the Department.

As always, you can find more information on our [department website](#).