

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY



Letter from the Chair

In this issue. . .

<i>Antisemitism, the Left, and Anti-Racism: A Lecture on Opposition to Antisemitism Within Anti-Racist Discourse</i>	2
<i>Faculty News</i>	3
<i>Student & Alumni News</i>	3
<i>"Activism under Totalitarianism" hosted by Swarthmore Project for Eastern European and Eurasian Relations</i>	4
<i>Events, Fall 2019</i>	5
<i>Faculty Talks</i>	6

My colleagues and I had a busy fall reading some 400 applications for the position in US history that we hope to fill by the time of spring break in March. We were blessed with an embarrassment of riches in that so many of the applicants had impressive credentials in terms of their scholarly interests and teaching achievements. Just before winter break we selected three candidates to bring to campus at the start of the spring semester, and we are excited to learn more about each of them. Applicants will meet with students and faculty inside and outside the Department and give a lecture on their research. In the next newsletter I will provide details about our new colleague.

I also want to bring to your attention to the [Swarthmore Undergraduate History Journal](#), the brainchild of several majors who took the initiative to undertake such an endeavor. Like similar journals at many of our peer institutions, the Swarthmore Undergraduate History Journal is a peer-reviewed publication that solicits articles by undergraduates from around the country. The editors of the journal seek contributions on diverse subjects and are committed to publishing articles that are "specifically inclusive of historical narratives often overlooked in main-

stream scholarship." They also encourage "the submission of interdisciplinary articles so long as the focus remains historical." You can read more about the journal on the Department's website.

Given the attention the Department devoted to the job search during the fall semester, we were unable to continue our discussions on revisions of the curriculum, particularly our major requirements. We plan to finalize the changes during the spring semester, and I will let you know what we decide in the next newsletter.

One final remark concerns the appeal many of our courses have for a cross-section of students at the College. It is gratifying that students majoring in the Natural Sciences frequently take more than one History course, just as it is satisfying that students from a variety of disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities gravitate to those courses that complement what they learn in other disciplines. It is this intellectual curiosity and cross-fertilization that makes teaching here such a rewarding experience.

*"We were
blessed with an
embarrassment of
riches..."*

Robert Weinberg

Robert Weinberg
Isaac H. Clothier Professor of History & International Relations; Chair

ANTISEMITISM, THE LEFT, AND ANTI-RACISM: A LECTURE ON OPPOSITION TO ANTISEMITISM WITHIN ANTI-RACIST DISCOURSE

By: Daniel Pantini

On Monday, November 4th, Brendan McGeever, Lecturer in the Sociology of Racialization and Antisemitism at Birkbeck, University of London spoke on "Antisemitism, the Left, and Anti-Racism." The lecture was organized by the History Department in collaboration with the Departments of [Political Science](#), [Sociology](#)

"Antisemitism often found a home within European socialist movements..."

& [Anthropology](#), and the [Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility](#). Two years earlier, McGeever visited Swarthmore at the invitation of [Swarthmore's Isaac H. Clothier Professor of History and International Relations and History Department Chair Robert Weinberg](#) and talked about the relationship between racism and Brexit politics, describing it as "the hardest talk I've ever had to give." When contacted by Weinberg again to deliver a lecture on antisemitism in the British Labour party, McGeever remarked that this was the "only subject more difficult than Brexit" that he could have been asked to speak about. "We should treat with suspicion anybody that talks about anything in the current moment with certainty because these are profoundly uncertain and fluid times," said McGeever before beginning his lecture.

McGeever's newest book, [Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution](#) was published by Cambridge University Press in March 2019 and received an endorsement from Weinberg. Although his most recent publication focused on antisemitism in the development of the former Soviet Union,

McGeever's research extends more broadly into the field of antisemitism and its relationship to race and racism. November's lecture explored this relationship in contemporary British politics, along with providing historical background on the roots of antisemitism in the European left.

The lecture began with a critique of a common metaphor employed by Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn of antisemitism as a virus or sickness that infects the margins of political actors. To McGeever, this metaphor places too much of the blame on a select few extremists and neglects the ways in which everyone across the political spectrum has the capacity to employ antisemitic tropes. Rather than a virus, McGeever proposed a metaphor of antisemitism as a reservoir, or "a pool of ideas that exist within the political culture that are just there to be drawn upon whenever Jews become the subject of political debate, as is happening right now," explained McGeever. This framing rejects the notion that antisemitism is a problem of individuals and instead frames it as an issue that exists within political culture.

Following this introduction, McGeever traced the roots of antisemitism within 20th-century European labor movements and European socialist thought. According to McGeever, because labor movements "developed in capitalist countries already stained through with racism, colonialism, and nationalism, the socialist projects that emerged during that period absorbed elements of the European mainstream cultures out of which they emerged," including antisemitism. Antisemitism often found a home within European socialist movements through a false equation of an-

tisemitism and anti-capitalism. McGeever presented numerous historical British socialist publications that portrayed Jews as "capitalist financiers, in opposition to the working class." Although McGeever noted that antisemitism was not a driving factor behind European labor movements, he did argue that the anti-capitalist left was—and is—particularly vulnerable to antisemitism if it portrays Jews as the face of the capitalists it fights against.

After diving into the history of antisemitism in European labor movements, McGeever then turned to the topic of antisemitism within the modern-day British Labour party. "The issue is not hardened antisemites on the left, but the fact that some on the left find antisemitism difficult to recognize, including when it's staring them in the face." He argued that the Labour party no longer sees the fights against antisemitism and racism as compatible with one another and shared his belief that "the need for anti-racist unity is greater than ever in our lifetimes, and yet anti-racist unity is in short supply. In Britain mainstream Jewish concerns are often seen as incompatible with the project of anti-racism." He noted that this tension arose in British politics last year when "over 100 Black, minority, and ethnic anti-racist organizations signed an open letter protesting against Labour's adoption of the IHRA [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance] definition of antisemitism, and they said the definition would prevent us from coming to terms with the realities of colonialism, past and present," said McGeever. He did not elaborate further on the specific con-

continued on page 3...

FACULTY NEWS

In October **Megan Brown** hosted a workshop funded by the [Alliance to Advance Liberal Arts Colleges](#), “Empire on the Move: Teaching and Researching Colonization and Mobility” at Swarthmore College. Faculty and staff from Amherst, Bryn Mawr, Carleton, Denison, Grinnell, Haverford, Macalester, Middlebury, Vassar, and, of course, Swarthmore, attended and presented.

With **BuYun Chen’s** [book release](#) last summer, Professor Chen has been traveling quite a bit to give talks. Professor Chen was up at Harvard, Bard, NYU, over in Milan, and down at Johns Hopkins this fall. Peruse the [Faculty Talks](#) section of the newsletter to find Professor Chen in a neighborhood near you this spring!

Allison Dorsey presented “[A Case for Reparations](#)” at the Lovett Memorial Library in Philadelphia. She also spoke at the NAACP’s Media Area Unit Freedom Fund Event: “2019 Foot Soldier for Justice Award Luncheon.” Dr. Dorsey’s talk was entitled “The Black Student Movement at Swarthmore College: Education, Activism and Community.”

Ahmad Shokr spoke at this year’s [Annual Meeting](#) of the [Middle East Studies Association](#). He was a discussant at the “Economy-Making at Empire’s End: Law and Capital in the Ottoman Gilded Age?” panel, and he presented his paper, “Capitalism after Empire? Nationalism and Economic Thought in Egypt circa 1919,” on the same day in New Orleans. •

STUDENT & ALUMNI NEWS

Dr. Ariane Liazos '98 has just published a new book, [Reforming the City: The Contested Origins of Urban Government, 1890-1930](#) with Columbia University Press.

Hansi Lo Wang '09 continues to report on the 2020 census for NPR. He recently visited Swarthmore to provide insight, “Reporting on the People, Power, and Money behind the 2020 Census.”

The Women’s Cross Country team placed 3rd at the Conference Meet—its best finish since 2005—this year. Honors Major **Emma Novak '21** led the team with an All-Conference time, besting her own time by two minutes. Major **Sierra Sweeney '21** also finished in Swarthmore’s top seven at the meet.

Novak and **Sweeney** went on to compete at the Regional Meet at Lehigh University, and **Novak** placed on the All-Region Team for the first time with her race. **Sweeney** was the sixth Garnet to cross the line.

Sophia Stills '21 traveled over to Pittsburgh to join the Women’s Soccer team on their quest in the NCAA tournament. They fell to eventual semifinalist Carnegie Mellon.

Sophia also ended up on the Centennial Conference’s Academic Honor Roll this year. **Sophia** is an Honors Major in the department. **Sophia** also earned a spot on the All-Conference Second Team.

Jason Meuth '21 scored on a penalty kick to lead Men’s Soccer to the Sweet 16, which Swarthmore hosted. •

...continued from McGeever on page 2

cerns these protesters had with the IHRA definition.

To explain this dissolving of anti-racist unity, McGeever pointed to the development of anti-Zionism and its “vexed relationship” to antisemitism. McGeever argued that the split between those fighting against antisemitism and those fighting racism after the 10-15 year period of Israeli history beginning with the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. It was during this period in which Israel began its occupation of the internationally-recognized Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza, saw the rise of the right-wing Likud party in Israeli politics, and began the expansion of illegal settlements into the West Bank and Gaza. “That 10 to 15 year period produced a re-formation within the anti-racist project and the symbolic place of Jewishness and Palestine within it,” said McGeever. He recalled how in 1975, the United Nations General Assembly passed the “infamous” Resolution 3379 that declared Zionism to be a form of racism and racial discrimination and how this event brought the tension between opposition to antisemitism and opposition to racism into view. This resolution referred to Israel as a “racist regime,” sharing a “common imperialist origin” to those regimes operating in South Africa and Zimbabwe. McGeever explained how this resolution shows the shifting international stances towards Zionism, “once thought of as a response to [anti-Jewish] racism, and now understood as a vehicle of racism in and of its own right.” According to McGeever, this

continued on page 5...

*Want updates more often?
Join the conversation by “[Liking](#)” us on Facebook!
Want to send us updates?
Post to the community on our [Facebook page](#), reach out to us on [Twitter @swathistory](#), or [email us!](#)*

LECTURE SERIES "ACTIVISM UNDER TOTALITARIANISM"

HOSTED BY SWARTHMORE PROJECT FOR EASTERN EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN RELATIONS

*By: September Porras
Payea*

The crowded auditorium hushed as the lecture was cued to begin. Roman Shemakov '20 stepped up to the podium to begin his introduction. A major in History with a double minor in Economics and Russian, he had worked hard on the [Eurasia Project](#) to bring prominent voices in both academia and culture to Swarthmore's campus. He began by recounting his summer spent filming a documentary in his home of Ukraine, centered on the current war and oppression by Russia. He went on to say how activists like Nadya Tolokonnikova and her feminist project Pussy Riot teach us "how to act in times of crisis." She began doing "guerrilla performances" in 2011, including one in a church for which she was arrested and sent to a prison and labor camp for two years. After her release, she continued her art and formed an organization that provides legal defense for Russian activists. Shemakov was both impacted and inspired by her, and as he ended his talk the crowd erupted into applause to welcome Tolokonnikova.

The lecture was an interview hosted by [Russian Language and Literature Professor José Vergara](#). He began by asking her a probing question: in the face of corruption, climate crisis, and catastrophe, how do you find joy? She spoke about how depression has affected her after prison and ruminated on how prison was a model for life itself. In this, she was referencing the dehumanization and oppressive authority that we deal with both in jails and in our daily lives. She said the goal for her was to make everyday in prison mean-

ingful, because she knew that was exactly what they were trying to take from her.

He asked next about the importance of the prison tradition in Russia, especially given that historically so many artists and activists have been jailed for their beliefs. She explained how prison is an everyday theme in Russia, and the threat of prison always looms. She conceded that she had always



been fascinated and inspired by those protesters jailed for their beliefs and told a story of when she was learning philosophy with a man who had been in prison for a year and spoke to her often about it. Professor Vergara then asked her about the experience of traveling to other prisons around the world after her release and the opinions she had on what might constitute a proper penal system. She critiqued the existence of prisons in their current structure, saying: "We should never give absolute power to anybody. Absolute power corrupts absolutely—that's what you see in prison." She then told a story about how

"...the goal for her was to make everyday in prison meaningful, because she knew that was exactly what they were trying to take from her."

every day a prison official would taunt her by bringing her into his office to demean her and saying how she may have supporters outside, but inside he was in charge. For her, a proper correctional system looks like social workers in charge of rehabilitation. She visited a place like this in Germany and saw first hand how effective this type of system can be while also allowing for the humanity and dignity of its prisoners.

Professor Vergara circled back to the ongoing theme of optimism in the face of repression, asking her if she felt prison had impacted her life in important ways. She spoke on how it is a part of Russian culture to understand enlightenment as being achieved through suffering. Even when she was first arrested, there was a moment when she was filled with both terror and excitement; though she was in shock, she felt she was able to see her capabilities as a human and learned from her experience. She made a specific point, however, to say that growth in prison may be possible, but labor camp "was hell." For her, it meant abandonment of all morals and solidarity, and it turned people "into wolves."

He then asked her, when looking back at the last decade of Russian activism, how things have changed in terms of protests and the new attention being paid to the climate crisis. She replied that she went to prison thinking the country

continued on page 5...

EVENTS, FALL 2019

The History Department had its hands full with three reviews and one job search this fall, so we found ourselves mostly co-sponsoring events. Given our busy-ness and the fact that we are short-staffed with the retirement of Professors Bensch and Murphy and two of our other faculty on leave, we postponed our biennial lecture series. The Field Lecture will resume next year.

However, there were no shortage of events.

You can read about the Q&A with Nadya Tolokonnikova of Pussy Riot in the article on [page 4](#). The concert took place after as part of the Cooper Series and was fire, of course.

Peter Kornbluh, Senior Analyst at the National Security Archive, delivered a talk entitled, "Declassification Diplomacy in Latin America: The Use of Secret Archives as Diplomatic Tools to Advance US Foreign Policy in the Region" on October 3rd. [Peace & Conflict Studies](#) organized the event, co-sponsored by [Latin American and Latino Studies](#), [Political Science](#), and [Spanish](#).

[Peace & Conflict Studies](#) also organized "The 1.5 Insurgent Generation: Stories of El Salvador's Postwar" on October 22nd with Irina Carlota (Lotti) Silber, Associate Professor of Anthropology, City University of New York. This talk was co-sponsored by [Latin American and Latino Studies](#), [Political Science](#), [Sociology & Anthropology](#), [Spanish](#), [The Intercultural Center](#), the [Office of Inclusive Excellence](#), and the [Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility](#).

Dr. Brendan McGeever visited us again on November 4th, and we have an article about it on [page 2](#).

Paula Palmer of [Toward Right Re-](#)

[lationships with Native Peoples, Friends Peace Teams](#) spoke on November 6th thanks to [Peace & Conflict Studies](#). "The Quaker Indian Boarding Schools: Facing Our History and Ourselves" was co-sponsored by [Political Science](#), Religion, [Sociology & Anthropology](#), [The Intercultural Center](#), the [Office of Inclusive Excellence](#), and the [Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility](#).

On November 24th and 25th, [Dr. Emma Otheguy '09](#) returned to campus for a book reading, signing, and campus talk. She signed books and did a reading for the local community on November 24th at the [Campus + Community Store](#). She then spoke on the 25th about her experience as an author of picture books and novels. The events were organized by Linguistics and cosponsored by the [Campus + Community Store](#), [Educational Studies](#), [ENLACE](#), [Spanish](#), and [the Writing Associates Program](#). Emma also managed to head down to the South Philadelphia branch of the Free Public Library and do a reading there on the 26th before heading home. ●

...continued from McGeever on page 3

association between Zionism and racism makes it "increasingly difficult to recognize antisemitism as a form of racism within anti-racist politics."

McGeever went on to describe what he sees as a tension within academic studies of racism that "takes a vision of racism derived from the US context and applies it to other parts of the world, such as Britain and Europe." McGeever argued that, "the United States is not the world and racism in the United States does not represent the full extent of racialization across time and space in different parts of the world." He cited W.E.B. Du Bois' understanding of the color line as central to racism in the United States, but noted that the color line is not the only way to understand racism in an international context.

The conclusion of the lecture featured a brief analysis of the belated cultivation of Holocaust memory in British politics of the last few decades. McGeever described how at the same time that Holocaust memory is being written into history, the legacy of British colonialism is consistently written out of Britain's collective memory. "This relatively newfound

state of attentiveness to Nazi genocide has not been accompanied by a corresponding attentiveness to British complicity in colonial violence. As Brexit has shown, it is imperial amnesia that defines British politics rather than any coming to terms with that history." This selective "forgetting" and remembering and "hierarchy of memorialization" gives life to what McGeever calls "competitive victimhood" that he argues "further pulls apart oppositions to racism."

●

...continued from Tolokonnikova on page 4

would change, but even during this time there were political murders and arrests. When she got out of prison she was overcome with depression over the obstacles that still existed and were yet to be faced. However, now she sees Russia as having made a lot of headway through "alternative institutions" like self-organizing and the creation of new media outlets. As for the climate crisis, it was actually the catalyst for her activism. Having grown up in one of the most polluted cities on earth, where the factories literally coat the snow black, she was first drawn to activism through her frustration with pollution and climate change. She noted, however, that the climate crisis is still a very peripheral subject for most Russians, even progressives. She mentioned how, even today, she has friends who do not believe in climate change. However, with young people continually showing up to demand action across the globe, she is confident many Russians will soon change their minds.

Concluding the discussion was an open Q&A section where many of the questions were seeking advice on activism and resistance in the world today. She expressed disappointment in Russia's inability to learn from its history, but also had a hope for the new generation of activists. She also expressed a dislike of the term "activist," as "every citizen should be an activist." She finished by explaining that once we reach the point where all citizens feel themselves responsible to fight repression and create solutions, then we can have more electronic democracies that allow more representation and citizen voices. ●

FACULTY TALKS

WINTER AND SPRING 2020

JANUARY, 2020

1/10	BuYun Chen	“Between Court and Workshop: Craft, Knowledge, and Production in the Ryukyus” at the University of Washington	Seattle, WA, USA
1/11	BuYun Chen	“Silk and the Logics of Cosmopolitan Empire in Tang China” at the Gardner Center for Asian Art and Ideas, Seattle Art Museum	Seattle, WA, USA

FEBRUARY, 2020

2/21	Megan Brown	“France, Algeria, and the Europe of Nation States (1965-1975)” at the Lees Seminar, Rutgers University-Camden	Camden, NJ, USA
2/26	BuYun Chen	“The Tactile and Playful World of Tang Fashion” at McMaster University	Hamilton, Ontario, CAN-ADA

MARCH, 2020

3/9	Diego Armus	“National Anti-smoking Policies between the Local and the Global in the Late 20th and Early 21st centuries in Latin America” at the Urban Health in Latin America Workshop organized by the Brazilian Academy of Sciences and UK Academy of Sciences	Rio de Janeiro, BRAZIL
3/26	Diego Armus	“Cities of (Im)migrants. Buenos Aires, Lima, and New York” at the Universidad de Salamanca	Salamanca, SPAIN
3/27	BuYun Chen	“Figured in Silk: Cosmopolitanism and the Tang Empire” at the Symposium on the Silk Roads at the University of Kansas	Lawrence, KS, USA

APRIL, 2020

4/2	Diego Armus	“City of Smokers. Buenos Aires in the 20th century” at University College London	London, UK
4/10	BuYun Chen	“Crafting in the Ryukyus” at the China Project Workshop, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University	New York, NY, USA

MAY, 2020

5/1-2	BuYun Chen	“Silk and Power in Tang China” at “Portability in the Early Global Middle Ages: Production and Networks” workshop at the University of St. Andrews	St. Andrews, Scotland, UNITED KINGDOM
5/10-13	BuYun Chen	“None whatever, unless it be velvet’: Narrating Trade and Innovation in the Early Modern Fashion System” at “ Fashion as an Economic Engine: Process and Product Innovation, Commercial Strategies, Consumer Behavior, ” LII Study Week, Fondazione Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica “F. Datini”	Prato, ITALY
5/14	BuYun Chen	“The Material and Visual Circulation of Fashion” at “A Discussion on Fashion: Material and Visual Approaches,” at the European University Institute	Florence, ITALY

JUNE, 2020

6/4	Diego Armus	“Hybrid Healers in the Latin American History of Health and Disease” at Pontificia Universidad Católica	Lima, PERU
6/28-7/2	Bob Weinberg	“Ethnic Violence, Politics, and Revolution: The Odessa Pogrom in October 1905” at the Research Workshop on “Odessa: Cosmopolitanism and Modernism” at Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem	Jerusalem, ISRAEL