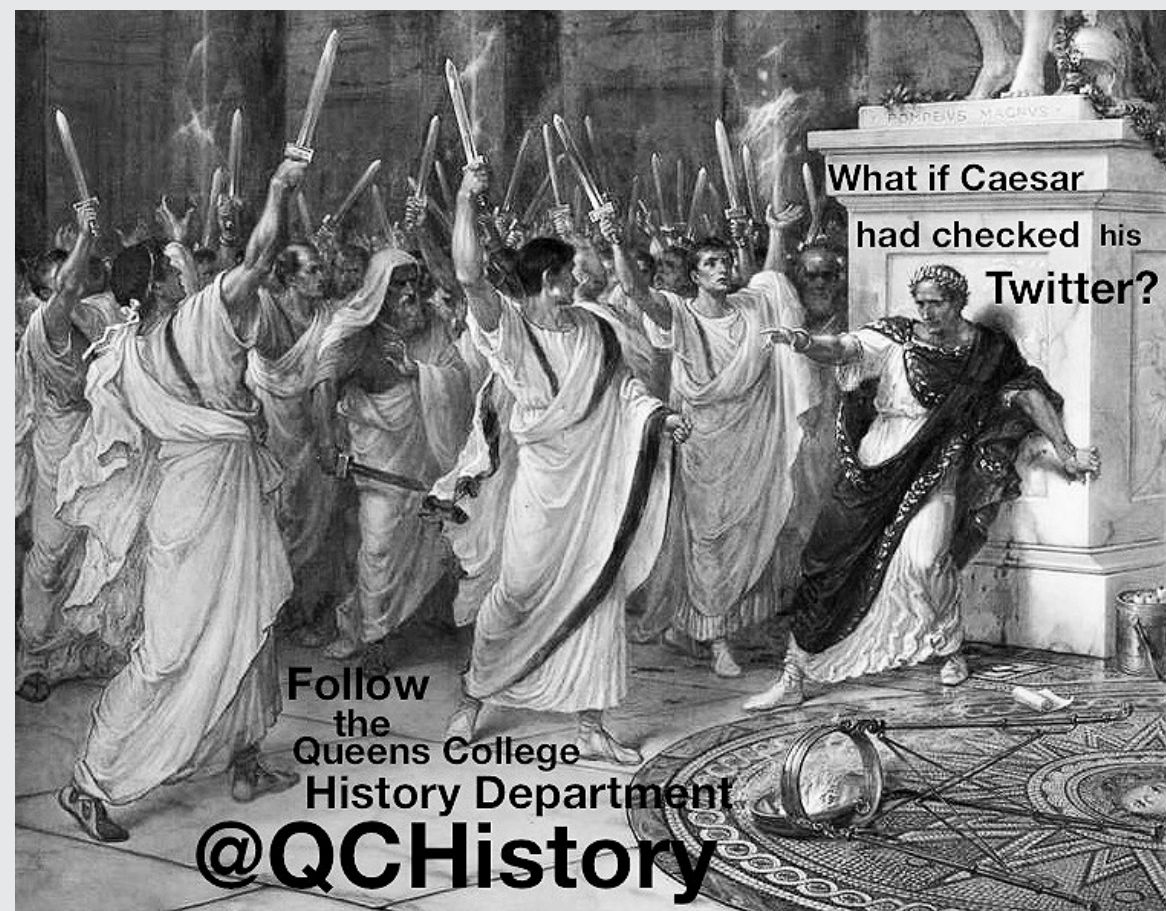


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The Year in History



Chair, Professor Joel Allen

Hello, QC historians (once a history major, always a historian)! I hope this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the early fall.

By the time this newsletter goes to press, I will be on a sabbatical leave, finishing up a book on the history of the Mediterranean in the Hellenistic era that is a long time in coming and about which I am very excited. Meanwhile, our Acting Chair is Professor **Elena Frangakis-Syrett**, whom you may remember as our expert Ottomanist. Expect to find correspondence from her in the coming academic year, including next year's newsletter. She has great plans for the department, and I cannot think of a better guide.

As usual, it's a pleasure to look back on the year that ended in May and fill you in on some of our marquee events and accomplishments. It seems that our freshly minted graduates are scattering across the country, even the globe. Two majors from the class of

2015 are going on to PhD programs with full fellowship funding: **Alyssa Lopez** will study African-American History at Michigan State University, one of the best institutions in the country for that subfield, and **Vasken Markarian** will be at the University of Texas–Austin for Latin American History—again, one of the best programs for such a focus. (Look elsewhere in this newsletter for Vasken's thoughts about his career at Queens College; he humbly refers to himself as a “mini-historian,” but we know better.) Another student, **Harry Hur**, who has been with us from undergraduate to graduate, will attend the University of Leiden in the Netherlands next year for further study. One of our current students, **Sara Dorfmann**, landed a competitive summer internship at the National Museum of American History (Smithsonian) in Washington, DC. We could go on about the many new teachers, law school students, civil servants, and entrepreneurs (including the Roman historian who had to decide between offers at J.P. Morgan-Chase or the NYPD), but these examples should be enough to indicate that our major is strong, and our students continue to inspire us.

We welcomed a few new people to the faculty last year, not least of

whom is the college's new president, Dr. **Félix Matos Rodríguez**, who is also a historian of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean when he isn't busy leading our institution. He graciously took time to share some of the conclusions of his research—and the archival adventures he undertook to reach them—with our student History Club last spring. Also new to the campus was Prof. **Deirdre Cooper Owens**, a specialist in the history of slavery in the U.S. Her thoughts on her first year at Queens are elsewhere in this newsletter. We also successfully concluded a nationwide search for a historian of Queens and New York City: Prof. **Kara Schlichting** is completing research for her book on the use of waterfronts in Queens, Bronx, and Westchester in the 19th to early-20th century, from recreation to industry.

Our department also hosted a range of events for the public last year. **Karen Avrigh** gave a lecture about her and her father's book, *Sasha and Emma*. As you probably know, our late colleague **Paul Avrigh** passed away before the manuscript was complete, and so Karen saw it through to publication; she spoke to an audience of faculty, alumni, and students about both the nature of their collaboration and some of their conclusions. Our current colleague,

Ambassador **Loucas Tsilas**, gave a talk about his career as the Greek envoy to South Africa in the 1980s and his professional relationship with Nelson Mandela. Many of our faculty gave talks on their research at informal, lunchtime “pizza parties” for majors: Prof. **Kate Antonova** spoke about the historical context of the conflict in Ukraine; I, myself, spoke about the use of fear in political rhetoric in Cicero's speeches in the Roman Republic; and Prof. **Sarah Covington** continued to build new programs for Irish Studies, including arranging oral history interviews.

(continued on page 2)



Professor Kate Antonova gives a “pizza party” talk to History students on the historical context of the conflict in the Ukraine.

Many of our faculty won prestigious grants and awards during the past year. **Morris Rossabi** was awarded a large grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation to study minority populations in China. **Elissa Bemporad** won a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities at the Center for Jewish History in New York, and **Warren Woodfin** received a fellowship from the Israel Institute for Advanced Study in Jerusalem. **Sarah Covington** received funding from Marsh’s Library in Dublin for her project on the memory of Oliver Cromwell.

We’ve initiated several new programs over the past several years in an effort to serve student interests and promote the study of History. These include a combined BA/MA degree; a joint graduate program in Library Science and History; a special graduate track for schoolteachers seeking improved credentials in History; and a new concentration in Legal History for those majors interested in careers in law. We’re currently developing a new dual degree program with the History Department at Queensborough Community College to facilitate students in their transfer credits and bring our two faculties together. We hope to start taking students in the program in 2016, and to initiate a combined faculty speaker series as well. We’re also preparing a standing internship with the Smithsonian Institution for a Queens College student every spring.

As ever, we thank you for your contributions to our Alumni Fund, which makes our various events and projects possible. There aren’t many institutions left in the country that can provide sterling opportunities in higher education at tuition rates that are affordable to broad populations: CUNY and Queens College are holding the line. With budget cuts from the state, our department relies on your support, and we are excited to share our mission with you. You are welcome to stop by whenever your schedule allows, and take a rest in our new Alumni Lounge and chat with our students. The department will be in excellent hands next year with Prof. **Elena Frangakis-Syrett** as Acting Chair. Please join me in welcoming her.

—Joel Allen, Chair,
History Department

My First Year at Queens College
by Deirdre Cooper Owens

I moved to New York from the Deep South, Mississippi, where I taught courses in 19th-century United States History, slavery, medicine, and gender for five years. As a native-born Southerner, I had yearned for the lilting language of other Southerners, the friendliness, and my roots, but also, having grown up in Washington, DC with a brief two-year stint in Queens Village as a toddler, I missed the ethnic and class diversity of larger communities. I wanted to be in a city where I could get my fix of culture, art, intellectualism, and cosmopolitanism. I had hoped for a number of years that I would have the opportunity to live and work in the New York metropolitan era, and fortunately Queens College hired me in 2014. My dream had finally materialized; I would live fabulously in the center of the universe (at least in my mind).

I arrived at Queens College ready to teach students about subjects I love—African American history, early American history, medicine, and slavery. The stories



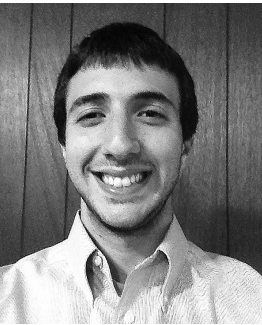
Deirdre Cooper Owens

my paternal grandfather and mother told me as a child about our Low Country Gullah/Geechee South Carolina ancestors riveted me. Their oral histories connected me to the study of history in a profoundly idiosyncratic way. As a professor I want to serve as the conduit to my students for understanding and appreciating early U.S. and African American history. Thankfully, the personal narratives of early Americans who helped shape the nation during a time when democracy was not yet born nor fully practiced affected many of my students.

I taught survey courses on early U.S. history and early African American history and was blown away by my students’ interests, intellect, and natural curiosity toward these subjects. I taught a number of students who were either immigrants or the children of immigrants, and they often kept me on my toes. Aware that this might have been the first U.S. history class that many of my students had taken, I learned to teach more expansively and stayed attuned to the nuances that could get lost in lecturing to a less diverse class. I was moved when my students shared stories during our discussions about how they felt connected to many of the historical figures we studied because of the personal tragedies those men and women triumphed over. Although I have taught college students for over a decade, my first year at Queens College allowed me to become a better teacher. I am much more intuitive about the process of listening to what my students need from me in the classroom (and sometimes out of the classroom).

Personally, I have enjoyed the camaraderie of my colleagues who are smart, supportive, and nice people, and the opportunities the department has afforded me to be of real service to our students and the larger Queens College community. Did I mention that Flushing has some of the best Chinese food I have ever eaten? My husband, Bryan Cooper Owens, who is an adjunct in the department, and I are “foodies,” and we appreciate being located near so many culinary treasures. I look forward to having many more years of service at Queens College.

Becoming a
Mini-Historian at
Queens College



Vasken Markarian

As is often true with many undergraduate students, I entered college unsure of my academic path and had to learn by trial and error exactly what I was passionate about. This meant that once I even found myself pursuing forestry in Flagstaff, AZ, or, more recently, training to become a NYC firefighter. As things turned out, when I entered Queens College I gravitated toward History and Spanish, so I enrolled in both majors. This was an excellent choice with a positive outcome. The history classes allowed me to grow intellectually and opened up the possibility of a career in history. The variety of my coursework ranged from surveys in United States and European history to courses on African history, Truth Commissions, Genocide, Colonialism and Culture, Modern Europe, and, last but not least, Latin America. This diversity of themes and approaches to history nourished my curiosity and interest further. The most compelling thing about being a historian for me was the idea of being a detective and challenging social constructs.

I entered Queens College as a transfer student with an AA degree from Queensborough Community College. I already had a notion of the topics that interested me the most: race and genocide. Although that interest remained strong at Queens, I gained valuable knowledge and experience working in a variety of areas, themes, and approaches. One highlight was my first course on Latin America in the Colonial period, taught by Dr. Mary Gallagher. We studied primary documents from a variety of sources, but the historical context, although rich, seemed incredibly scarce to me. I mustered up my energy to analyze, rethink, and form arguments about the texts and found that, sadly, sometimes I was wrong, but sometimes I was insightful. This was an arduous task, given my lack of experience in the topic. But to go through such a gruelling task and find that I was doing what a good historian does was an important turning point in the way I viewed myself as a mini-historian. I gained confidence

IDEAS FOR PUBLIC LECTURES



Karen Avrigh speaks about her collaboration with her late father, Paul Avrigh, on their book *Sasha and Emma*.

On the evening of November 13, 2014 in Lefrak Concert Hall, an audience of faculty, students, and especially Queens College History alumni heard Karen Avrigh, daughter of our late colleague Professor Paul Avrigh, give a talk on *Sasha and Emma*, the book she completed for her father. The lives of anarchists Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman had been particularly important to Paul, and in the book and her talk Karen was able to show the historical importance of their lives, and why the vibrancy of their lives and the passion of their cause made them memorable and meaningful. The talk elicited a series of excellent comments and questions from the audience. I think those of you who were there will agree it was an

intellectually stimulating evening. But it was also a social evening. In the reception following the talk, I was able to speak to former students whom I had not seen in years; other faculty had the same experience. We reminisced about Paul, Queens College, and the History Department. In short, it was the kind of evening the History Department would like to repeat in the future. Whom would you like to hear speak among the retirees, former department members who have gone elsewhere, or the present department members? On what topics? Please send me your suggestions: frank.warren@qc.cuny.edu.

—Frank Warren

in myself, and I evolved as an academic.

Perhaps I did not frequent the History Department as much as I should have (and perhaps that is why the faculty says they are lonely), but I did come in to get what I needed, and the department staff and faculty received me enthusiastically and warmly every time. I thank them for being such good role models. Sometimes the growth in their students bubbles up without them knowing it. I am excited to embark on a PhD program this fall to study Latin American History at the University of Texas–Austin. My focus will be modern Central America, with an emphasis on Guatemala, state violence and genocide, and the relations between indigenous peoples and the state. I also plan to travel to Central America and incorporate fieldwork and testimony into my studies.

—Vasken Markarian



Playing the Part

Recent Honors graduate Antonio Vitale (Class of 2015) inhabits an historic role in Bodrum, Turkey.