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Four years ago, I was standing in front of my high school class preparing to give my speech as valedictorian and I thought I knew it all. Now, I stand before all of you feeling as though there is so much left for me to learn.

To begin studying history is a dangerous. I was at first intrigued by little, innocent historical questions. “What made him say those words? Why did she choose to take that action?” As I followed these questions’ leads, I found myself jumping head-first down a spiraling hole of deeper and deeper historical inquiry. One bit of information would immediately lead to yet another question. *History* is like a puzzle that is never complete and is missing that convenient picture on the front of the box that tells us what it’s supposed to look like in the end. The Historian puzzler-worker takes each small piece and situates it within the larger picture. Each time a piece is added, the shape of the puzzle morphs and the pictures comes in to clearer view. Yet what is so intriguing about history is that its puzzle-workers never run out of pieces to add. We have to search for them and they are often very cleverly hidden. As fragmentary pieces continue to be added to the puzzle, occasionally the picture we thought we were creating turns out to be completely different. Sometimes we find that a piece we had been trying to jam in place for years fits perfectly in another location, and again the picture changes.

While an undergraduate at UT, I experienced the excitement, joy, and occasional frustration of being a historical puzzle-worker early in my college career. As a junior a part of the Chancellor’s Honors Program, I completed an honors-by-contract course, where I registered

for Dr. Sacco's class in the History of Medicine, and then completed an independent project under her supervision. After digging through archives at Vanderbilt and UT, I discovered the story of Virginia P. Moore. Steeped in the early twentieth century Progressive era belief that orderliness and science were the keys to improved lives, Moore traveled through Appalachia as ambassador of the Southern Education Fund teaching rural women new sanitary and nutritious ways of preparing food. While visiting the towns, Moore helped establish Tomato Canning Clubs at local schools which she claimed would not only teach women healthier ways of canning food, but would also give young women the opportunity to take leadership roles and make an income all their own. You see, Virginia Moore holds a special place within the framework of southern progressivism, a unique place which located rural women at the center of the tale and the heart of the post-Civil War South's attempt to improve. Moore believed that by improving the lives of rural southern women, the entire South could be lifted out of poverty and raised to the place of prominence she strongly believed it deserved. Unlike other Progressives Era Reformers who viewed their work as improving the lives of a lesser, backwards class, Moore who was from rural Gallatin, Tennessee, saw herself as assisting kindred women from a rural region she believed produced-- as she was fond of saying-- "the finest stock in America."

While in Dr. Sacco's class, I never anticipated completing a project as involved as the one involving Virginia Moore, but in that same dangerous way I found that simple questions lead only to more complex questions. Writing about Virginia Moore was the first time the answers were not in the textbook. I had been a history student for two years before writing that paper, but I never *really* knew what it meant to be a historian before. Clearly, a meaningful connection to the past demands active engagement. Writing about Moore was also the first time I was introduced to history that puts ordinary women at the center of the story. This type of history

takes pieces that have fallen, and were occasionally pushed, between the floorboard cracks and adds them to the historical puzzle. Pieces that for centuries historians did not think would budge the grand historical picture that had already been completed in the minds of many. They contain information about the everyday lives of average women and men of diverse genders, races, classes, and sexualities. Added to the larger picture, the pieces add depth and life and reality to a picture that had formally been one-dimensional and restricted to the powerful. In a field that only began three decades ago, it's exciting to watch as the once-disregarded pieces swiftly morph and complicate the pictures historians see. Once you know where to look, you find these very small fragments strewn all over historical sources, but persistent detective work is needed to follow their trail. No path of historical inquiry is more winding and unknown than the one simple questions about ordinary people's lives lead you down. I was honored I could discover and add Virginia Moore's piece to the Historical Puzzles of Progressivism and Southern History. The pictures shifted a bit, even if only slightly.

The semester after I finished my project about Moore, I left Knoxville and boarded a plane for Amsterdam. Encouraged by my history advisers and the Chancellor's Honors Program, I spend a semester studying abroad. History has not only taken me to new depths of critical thinking, but it also took me 4000 miles away from home. And let me assure you that for a person who had lived in Tennessee for 21 years at that point, there could be no place farther away from home than Amsterdam. While abroad, I was part of the University of Amsterdam's International School for the Humanities. I focused my studies on social theories of gender and ethnicity. In Amsterdam, The work and training I received at UT entered into an international context. Professors and my fellow students challenge and stretched my thinking as they introduced *new* pieces to historical puzzles. Often--they looked at the *same* puzzles I did and saw

a completely different picture. More than ever in Amsterdam, the academic setting encouraged active engagement with ideas and theory. Luckily, UT helped prepare me for that experience. My professors in Amsterdam taught us how to use historical and social theory as a way to analyze the jagged edges of the historical pieces we find and, by doing so, see more clearly where the piece fits in the larger picture. Though no picture is on the front of a historical puzzle box, theory helps think through the possible shapes the puzzle might take. And, at the same time, as the historical puzzle is built, the theory itself is nuanced and critiqued. Seven months later, a different historian, armed with new tools of analysis, stepped off the plane that arrived back in America.

Starting my senior year, I was excited to put my new skills to the test in completing my senior thesis for the department's honors program. Originally, I began looking at white women's participation in the civil rights movement and its ties to 2nd wave feminism, but as I read books and searched archives in Nashville, young black college women's bravery and enthusiasm was impossible to ignore. In fact, the enthusiastic participation of young black women alongside black men in Nashville's sit-in movement represents a reconceptualization of respectable "racial uplift" work in the early 1960s. Advocating respectable middle-class values was an important tactic of race workers since the days of slavery, yet the discourse shifted as black women stepped into the public spotlight *alongside* black men in ways that their foremothers would never had deemed proper. But these women's unprecedented actions exposed a generational divide.

Most of the students' parents had agreed with and supported race leaders in the early 1950s who counseled "respectable Christian women" to "sacrifice for their men" by allowing them to assume the manly position of leader which Jim Crow laws denied them. Black college women did not reject traditional views about the importance of respectability, religious faith, and

racial uplift, but now they felt they needed to sacrifice for their community by braving racial violence by men's side. Though continuing to utilize familiar rhetoric, the implied actions stemming from the words changed. No longer did "respectable black Christian women" step aside and let men take charge. Instead "respectable Christian women" took aggressive, public action alongside men in the fight for equality. By situating the students' in a familiar, though broader context of respectability, Nashville's race leaders not only won the backing of a large portion of the black community, but they successfully shifted the discourse of respectable racial uplift work in a manner that allowed women to emerge as leaders, organizers and more equal participants in the civil rights movement.

The more I researched, the more excited I became to tell these young women's story and to add their piece to the historical puzzle. Writing my thesis this past year has been both rewarding and frustrating. I emphasize the frustrating now, but on the 16th of April when I present my research and turn in my final draft I'm sure I will feel rewarded. Writing my thesis has given me a new appreciation for historical authors. I read history books through a new set of eyes. Each sentence we read in a matter of seconds is comprised of hours of research and conceptualization. Even while not writing, I carry my thesis in the back of my mind, always evaluating my theories against the backdrop of, not only every historical book I read, but life's everyday interactions.

So here I stand now preparing to graduate exactly one month from today. The history department has helped me to dramatically grow in the way I analyze and construct the historical puzzle. I've done my own historical research, and traveled to Europe where my ideas were critiqued and fine-tuned by those with a different outlook. I've moved from a student who memorized names and dates in high school history classes to a college student who actively

engages with the historical past. But the knowledge I have gained these past four years transcends the academic setting and has genuinely transformed the way I look at my everyday life.

In her book “Why History Matters,” Gerda Learner, a founder of women’s history, writes: History, a mental construct which extends human life beyond its span, can give meaning to each life and serve as a necessary anchor for us. It gives us a sense of perspective about our own lives and encourages us to transcend the finite span of our life-time by identifying with the generations that came before us and measuring our own actions against the generations that will follow. By perceiving ourselves to be part of history, we can expand our reach and with it our aspirations.

To me, Dr. Learner is saying that history teaches us to recognize that we too are a piece of the puzzle and our actions and words will someday be analyzed and fit into the larger picture. History puts our lives in context with rest of society and makes us evaluate our social positions, not only as we consider our own biases as we write our historical work, but as we move through our daily lives. It makes us understand that people and their actions are contingent on where their piece fits into the larger puzzle. If history has taught me anything, it’s to think before I assume a person or group of people brought hardships on themselves. It also has made me stop and think before I assume people are powerless to fix their problems or change their circumstances. The judgments we make now will be judged by the historians of the future

More importantly Dr. Learner is implying that if you don’t like the picture you see, let your actions and words be the piece that shifts the historical puzzle. Studying history gives us clues on how to do that very thing. Our piece is always bound to the puzzle, but the puzzle never remains still. Though history is certainly not an upwards slope to increasing freedom and rights

for all, by identifying with and studying the generations that came before us we can recognize the temporality and malleability of society's numerous discourses. Taking action and voicing opinions *do* make a difference in this world. We are the pieces of which history is comprised. Studying history has taught me to say what I think--perhaps to a fault in the mind of some--And to take action when I feel like injustices are being done. By studying history, we learn that power changes hands, meanings alter, ideology shifts, but the picture on the puzzle cannot change without the pieces moving first.

By seeing ourselves as part of history and spending years attempting to understand why change occurs over time, we are in an advantageous position. Not because we become increasingly exempt from the "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it" rule the more we study. For how could history really be repeated when historical contexts are always shifting? Similar actions have drastically different meanings among diverse groups of people and in different historical eras. Yet it *is* a lesson from history that gives us the advantage - the only real lesson history teaches us according to Gerda Lerner. The lesson is simple: *All* actions have consequences. Every piece of the puzzle counts. That knowledge, though seemingly simple, is *powerful*. Being constantly reminded of this fact allows us to more consciously consider what we want the consequences of our actions to be. While writing, speaking, and volunteering my time, I think: "how do I want this to shape the way people look at the world today?" Though we can never really know *how* history will judge us, we do know that history *will* judge us. With that knowledge, I hope my fragmentary individual piece of history is, at worst, added to the puzzle on the side of "those with good intentions."

When I first walked onto campus at UT, my world was very small. My ideas were very small. Now, my world has expanded in all directions. Backwards to the past, forward in thinking

about the future, across oceans, and all over the country as I engage with the historical past. History has expanded my horizons and affected the way I see the world. History gives us the tools to not only critically think about our own work but all of life's situation. Even while studying southern women's history, I find connection can be made to texts read in classes on modern Europe-- the everyday interaction of men and women-- and the way we think about present day politics.. My world would still be narrow without the help of my professors at UT who encouraged, and sometimes pushed, me further in my historical inquiries. I would still be thinking small if it weren't for Dr. Phillips who encouraged me as a sophomore while sitting in her office asking endless questions about grad school and rambled about my favorite historical topic of the week. Without Dr. Salzer who has given me endless support through my years here. Dr. Freeburg whose class first gave me the tools to really *do* history. Dr. Glover who has helped me through the long, arduous thesis writing process and is always there to help in any way, even if its last minute. Dr. Morrissey who, though I have only known him for a short-time, has encouraged me tremendously in my historical pursuits. Dr. Fleming who, as one of my thesis advisors, has helped me to think critically about my work and gave me the once-in-a-life time opportunity to meet the most prominent women in my thesis. And finally, Dr. Sacco, who has been more than an advisor to me for the past two years, but a tireless cheerleader, an attentive listener (even about ridiculous things), and, most importantly, a role-model. I hope I can someday do for a student of my own all the things she has done for me.

Thank you *all* for expanding my horizons. Being a part of the history department at the university of Tennessee, has not only taught me the skills of an historical puzzle-worker and ignited my historical imagination in a way that makes me want to pursue a future career as a historian, but it has helped me to understand myself as an active agent in the shaping of the

world. As I learn to fit my own piece into the larger puzzle that is added to every day, the historical Puzzle of the past becomes part of my present and changes the way I see the future.

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