

ERNEST FREEBERG
Professor and Department Head

History by the Numbers

There are many indicators of achievement. Whether it is the number of books published, dollars raised, awards and fellowships won, or people served, the numbers of the Department of History add up to success.

Numbers never tell the whole story, but they can serve as a useful shorthand for the remarkable accomplishments of our faculty: **seven books** published last year and another five expected this year; **eighteen major fellowship awards** over the past six years, a record that would be the envy of any research university in the country; over **\$400,000 dollars** awarded this year by federal agencies in support of our presidential papers projects; and the college and university honored our faculty with **four research awards**. Our graduate students have contributed to this distinguished record, winning many external research fellowship awards this year, including **two Fulbright awards**.

Those numbers add up to one conclusion—that our department is home to a remarkably productive and engaged community of scholars that’s making major contributions to what historians can tell us about the past.

And our faculty speak to more than the national and international scholarly audience that reads our books and grants these research awards. We are proud to be a department of excellent and committed teachers who provide UT students the chance to learn about history from people who are writing it. Some of the most

exciting conversations going on in our halls these days involve new ways to engage our students, and the number that comes up in these conversations is **299**, as in “**History 299**.” That’s our new entry-level seminar for our history majors, designed to build a close mentoring relationship between faculty and students, and to show students what it means to “think like a historian.”

We are also actively engaged in taking our scholarship beyond the classroom. Each year we give **dozens of public talks** in the community, and host an annual workshop for history teachers that connects **over twenty-five area teachers** with our faculty. We join the East Tennessee Historical Society in hosting the region’s National History Day, where **several hundred area students** share their passion for history with faculty and student judges. And we continue our program that brings faculty into area classrooms, culminating this year in a campus visit from **forty advanced history students** from Fulton and Austin-East high schools.

In this newsletter we aim to put some flesh and blood on the bare bones of those numbers. Thanks for spending some time staying in touch with us. We’re pleased to **number** you among our valued supporters.



Robert "Jeff" Norrell is the Bernodotte Schmitt Chair of Excellence, and author of *Alex Haley and the Books that Changed A Nation*. (St. Martin's Press, 2015)

Surprising Observations: Alex Haley's Career as a Writer

Without apparent natural talent for writing, Haley worked diligently on his craft for decades and became enormously successful. *Roots* sold around six million copies and revised how the popular mind in America understood slavery.



In writing a biography of Alex Haley, I learned some surprising things about him and his career as a writer. Haley sold more books in one day in February 1977 than I have sold in my whole career of publishing. Both his two main works, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Roots*, sold in the neighborhood of six million books. Haley became a great celebrity, with all its pleasures and its pitfalls.

Haley had only a little college education before he went into the military in 1939, where he had a two-decade-long apprenticeship as a freelance writer. He was not a natural or even talented prose stylist, but he worked on his craft diligently for decades. He benefited from excellent editing from such magazines as *Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Playboy*. His agent and his editors at Doubleday guided his writing efforts for years. I was astonished at the sustained and detailed critiques they gave Haley over many long years.

Roots was published in September 1976 and the televised mini-series based on the book was viewed by 130 million people in January 1977. Fame of that magnitude sparked envy and criticism. A British journalist claimed that Haley had fabricated the African background

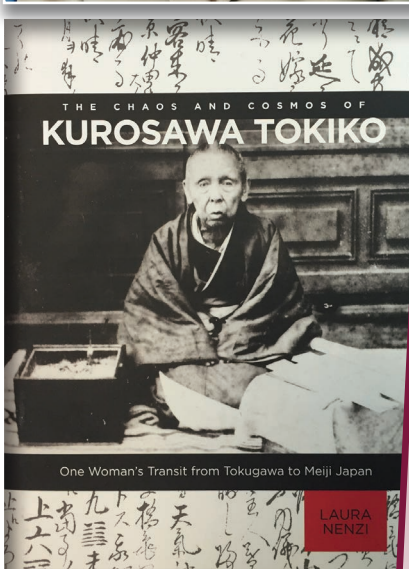
of his ancestor Kunta Kinte, and two American genealogists insisted that he had gotten the Haley family lineage in the United States all wrong. Haley and his publisher made the mistake of promoting the book as nonfiction, rather than calling it a historical novel that adhered as faithfully as possible to known facts. At the same time, two writers sued Haley claiming that he had plagiarized their books. One of the claims was specious, but the other proved that several passages of *Roots* were virtually identical to some in a novel called *The African*. Haley won the first suit and settled the second. Both brought negative publicity that undermined Haley's heroic status to many Americans who had admired his work.

Still, *Roots* revised how the popular mind in America understood slavery, changing it from being the romanticized institution depicted in *Gone with the Wind* to a realistic understanding of its violent, inhumane nature. To me, *Roots* remains the most important book on American slavery, and I think it should be recognized as that. For this reason, I wrote a biography of Alex Haley.

— Robert J. (Jeff) Norrell

REVEALING *Tokiko*

Tokiko is not a well-known figure in Japanese history. How did this rather obscure figure capture the attention and curiosity of Laura Nenzi? Nenzi responded to this question and others in a recent interview.



— Laura Nenzi is associate professor of history at UT, and author of *The Chaos and Cosmos of Kurosawa Tokiko: One Woman's Transit from Tokugawa to Meiji Japan* (University of Hawaii Press, 2015.)

Who was Kurosawa Tokiko, how did you find her story, and why were you drawn to it?

LN: Tokiko was a rural teacher, poet, and oracle, offering divination and healing, in nineteenth-century Japan. In her fifties she became a political activist and tried to change the course of Japanese history, but failed.

When I began my project Tokiko was completely unknown not only in the United States but also, surprisingly, in Japan. A few secondary sources mentioned her surprising life story: a 400-mile protest journey on foot to deliver a petition to the Japanese emperor, after which she was arrested, imprisoned, and then banished. Naturally, I had to investigate. How do you not tell such a story?

How does your subject's story illuminate the wider changes taking place in Japan in the 19th century?

LN: Tokiko lived through some of the most significant moments in early modern Japanese history: the end of the samurai period and the start of the Meiji Restoration. Her story shows how an ordinary individual understood, and reacted to, such political changes, revealing the personal preoccupations, joys, and sorrows underlying the geopolitical 'big picture'.

What are the challenges and value of studying what you have called an "incomplete and inconsequential" life?

LN: First, Tokiko is not a household name in Japanese history, and so I had to travel to Japan on several different occasions to consult local archives where the manuscripts of her diaries and poems are preserved. Second, once the project neared completion, I had to sell a microhistory in a self-declared "global" age. The rewards exceeded the challenges. Microhistory doesn't just require reduction, but also reconceptualization—some Japanese, like Tokiko, had other priorities and followed a road less traveled. Tokiko failed to change the course of history, but it is utterly amazing that a base-born woman thought she could.

What did you learn from the "many reincarnations" of Tokiko in her life and after?

LN: A lot! Her own writings reveal that Tokiko was a multidimensional person: a prognosticator, teacher, poet, and political activist all at the same time. But, as any historian knows: present preoccupations dictate the questions asked of the past. At the time of World War II, Tokiko was hailed as a patriot, overlooking her problematic involvement with divination. More recently, a failed film project was going to project Tokiko as a model of success through education, silencing her political voice. Local pride and boosterism also affect historical memories. In her hometown, sources have envisioned Tokiko as a model of rectitude. And so, a small group of local activists works to keep her memory alive, collecting documents and curating her home despite enormous costs and the lack of support. Without this local support, my project would have never come to fruition.



STUDENTS' RESEARCH

to Potentially Become Cherokee Biographies for Children

Julie Reed, assistant professor, holds a children's biography of Wilma Mankiller, the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation.

A group of history students spent last fall delving into the lives of Cherokees who called East Tennessee home in the 1800s, before they were forcibly removed and relocated west of the Mississippi River.

The students' research and recovery of the lost stories of Cherokee people could be translated into the Cherokee language and become children's books that would find their way to immersion schools, cultural centers, and local museums.

"It helps us understand that history is not just a jumble of dates but an explanation of how we all came to be the way we are now," said Katie Myers, a College Scholar and UT junior.

She added that the biographies will help children relate better to history, noting that "It's really important for people to know their own story and know the stories of people who are just like them." Myers was one of five students in the upper-level course, *Not Just Sequoyah and John Ross: Cherokee History through Biography*.

"So many of the problems I face teaching students come from misinformation from a younger age," said Julie Reed, a Cherokee historian and UT assistant professor of history, who taught the class. She is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation. "They learn about the Trail of Tears, Wounded Knee, and other incredibly tragic moments in Native American history. But I want them to understand the richness of Native

American history then and now. Whatever images we have drawn for ourselves of what an Indian looks like are probably wrong."

Reed, who first taught the class in fall 2014, provided students with the names of Cherokee people who lived and worked in the area at the time of the Indian Removal and those who were held in stockades awaiting removal. Very little is known about them except perhaps a line listed in government records after they made claims for property losses. Students selected a name and then developed the person's biography, researching the period and the area in which the Cherokees lived by visiting public libraries, reading other biographies and investigating government documents.

Myers researched Polly Mocking Crow, a woman who lived in what is now Polk County, Tennessee. "For someone who grew up in the Internet age, finding things in books is embarrassingly difficult," she said. "Not every public record has been put on the Internet. I had to research her circumstances and area more than her name. I found that was a better way to tell her story—through all the things that existed around her."

Myers discovered that Polly Mocking Crow left Tennessee with a group called the Hildebrand detachment. Prior to that, she owned half an acre of onions, cabbage, and other plants and vegetables. Myers learned that Polly

Mocking Crow lived a typical Cherokee life for that period, since women were responsible for a lot of the agriculture.

She would eventually ask for repayment for her featherbed, among other goods, which indicated she may have been a woman of means.

"This has been important to me, to research someone who was not a chief or any important person but a really normal person and a woman—a housewife with children," Myers said. "This story is so seldom told and I wanted to tell that story."

Reed is collecting Myers's work and that of her peers, as well as that of the students in the fall 2014 class. She plans to partner with members of the Cherokee Nation to translate the students' work into the Cherokee language. She also will contact Cherokee artists who are interested in illustrating the books.

"They could be a resource that we can give back to the Cherokee Nation," Reed said. The biographies would also be beneficial to non-Cherokee people, Reed added, noting that "local museums and heritage centers are not geared toward children but nerdy adults who are into history."

"This is a good way for children to understand history because the materials are child-specific," Reed said.

— Lola Alapo, *Tennessee Today*

Internships Broaden and Diversify Graduate Training

Convinced of the broad cultural value of history, faculty are looking for opportunities to diversify graduate students' training. This year the department sponsored two new graduate student internships, one at UT's McClung Museum of Natural and Cultural History and another with the Knoxville College Oral History Project.

Robert Rennie, doctoral candidate, was the inaugural McClung Museum Fellow. Through his internship at McClung, Robert has had the opportunity to gain experience with exhibit planning and educational outreach. Lindsey Wainwright, McClung's coordinator of academic programs, and Robert have collaborated to help hundreds of UT students encounter historical objects from the time periods they were studying, giving them a chance to look at two-hundred-year-old artifacts up close, spread out on a table where they could be viewed from all angles, and in some cases, handled gently. Undergraduates studying the Atlantic slave trade tried to lift a ball and chain that had once been attached to someone's ankle. Another class followed up a lecture on the Napoleonic period with a visit to McClung to look at early 19th-century illustrations of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt.

Graduate student Lorraine Herbon is the inaugural intern working with the Knoxville College Oral History Project, an undertaking of UT's Emerita Professor of History Cynthia Fleming. As part of Lorraine's assignment, she is also assisting Brandon Winford, assistant professor, with one of his African-American history classes, a course where the students will be working on assignments that tie the Knoxville College project back to a broader study of black education in the US.

The department plans to expand the internship program next year, placing students with the East Tennessee Historical Society, the Knoxville History Project, and Knox Heritage.



Graduate Student *Kudos*

JOSH SANDER, working on the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, won a Fulbright grant to Germany this year, and **JEREMY PEARSON**, one of our medievalists, received a Fulbright as well as a fellowship at the Albright Institute in Jerusalem.

WILL RALL, JOSH HODGE, MATTHEW BLAYLOCK, J. TOMLIN, ROBERT GLAZE, AND LYDIA WALKER won externally funded grants to support their research and a number of other students were the recipients of internal UT grants and awards.

Current graduate students are also publishing in prestigious journals. **BRAD NICHOLS** published an article in *German History*, and **ANNIE EVERETT** had a piece in the *International Social Science Review*.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Assistant Professor Matthew Gillis pioneered instruction of the department's first History 299 class, a new undergraduate course that teaches students to "think like a historian."

The goal of the new course (History 299) is to not only introduce history students to key terms and concepts, and ways of working and thinking characteristic of the discipline of history, but also to give students a sense of the fascination, passion, and joy of discovery that history faculty associate with historical scholarship. This course is about process, ideas, and engagement. Rather than focusing on a narrative "History of X," the seminars of History 299 focus on discrete themes closely linked to faculty research specialties.

In alignment with the new course's design, goals, and objectives, Gillis selected a broad-based theme for the course: "Vengeance and Violence in Dark Age Worlds." The theme reflects Gillis's expertise and special interest in Early Medieval Europe, Early Middle Ages, and the Vikings.

History 299 is the centerpiece for a number of changes the faculty are making to the undergraduate curriculum in history. The intent is to offer majors aspects of a liberal-arts style education within a large, research-focused department. This means offering smaller class sizes in the upper division courses, more intensive and more hands-on research throughout the major, and the introduction of new courses that span geographic regions to explore themes of great historical and contemporary significance.



“This course is about **process**, **ideas**, and **engagement**.”

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Childers Named Outstanding Alumnus

Thomas N. Childers was named the department's outstanding alumnus for 2016 at the annual honors ceremony on April 20.

Childers earned the bachelor's and master's degrees in history at UT, before going to Harvard to complete a doctorate in history in 1976. Currently, Childers is Sheldon and Lucy Hackney Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania (PENN), where he has taught since 1976.



Robert Norrell (left) presents award to Tom Childers.

Childers is the author and editor of several books on modern German history and the Second World War, including *The Nazi Voter* (Chapel Hill, 1983), *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency*, (London, 1987), and *Reevaluating the Third Reich: New Controversies, New Interpretations* (New York, 1993). He has completed the third of a quartet of books on the Second World War—*Soldier from the War Returning: The Greatest Generation's Troubled Homecoming from World War II* (Houghton Mifflin, 2009). His latest book offering a new interpretation of the rise and fall of the Third Reich will be published in 2017.



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I LOVE A PARADE

As Frank Luther crooned in 1931, “I love a parade... the rat-a-tat-tat.” Ancient Romans also loved parades—as well as chariot races, gladiatorial combat, and theater shows.

This Roman funerary relief from Pompeii shows just such a procession. From right to left: 1) two political standard-bearers lead the way with three trumpeters, 2) followed by four porters carrying a litter, 3) the president of the games led by someone carrying a sign naming the festive occasion and another the victor's wreath, 4) a long line of gladiators carrying their armor, and 5) more musicians and grooms leading the finely styled contestants' horses.

To learn more about Roman parades, see the new book by **Assistant Professor Jacob Latham**, *Performance, Memory, and Processions in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 2016)



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Your donation to the Department of History will be used to help a dynamic and accomplished faculty in its mission to produce ground-breaking research, to train a new generation of professional historians, and to extend the benefits of an excellent liberal arts education to more citizens of the state.

Contributions may support one or more of these worthy causes:

- Time in the archives for our award-winning scholars, who are producing fascinating research in a wide range of fields
- Support for our graduate students, who need financial help in pursuing their dissertation research
- Faculty outreach to history teachers and the wider Tennessee community to share their expertise and passion for history
- Scholarship awards to support a number of undergraduate history majors, some for financial need, others to reward excellence in undergraduate research
- Funding to bring major scholars to our campus for public lectures and for seminars with faculty and graduate students

At a time of declining financial support for the humanities at the state and national level, private donations are crucial. Your dollars will be gratefully received and carefully stewarded, supporting a dynamic department that is leading the way in UT's drive to be a Top 25 public research university.



Your gift counts more than ever! We sincerely thank the many alumni and friends who so generously support the Department of History. Gifts can be designated to the program you prefer and will be most gratefully received.

For more information, visit history.utk.edu/alumni-support