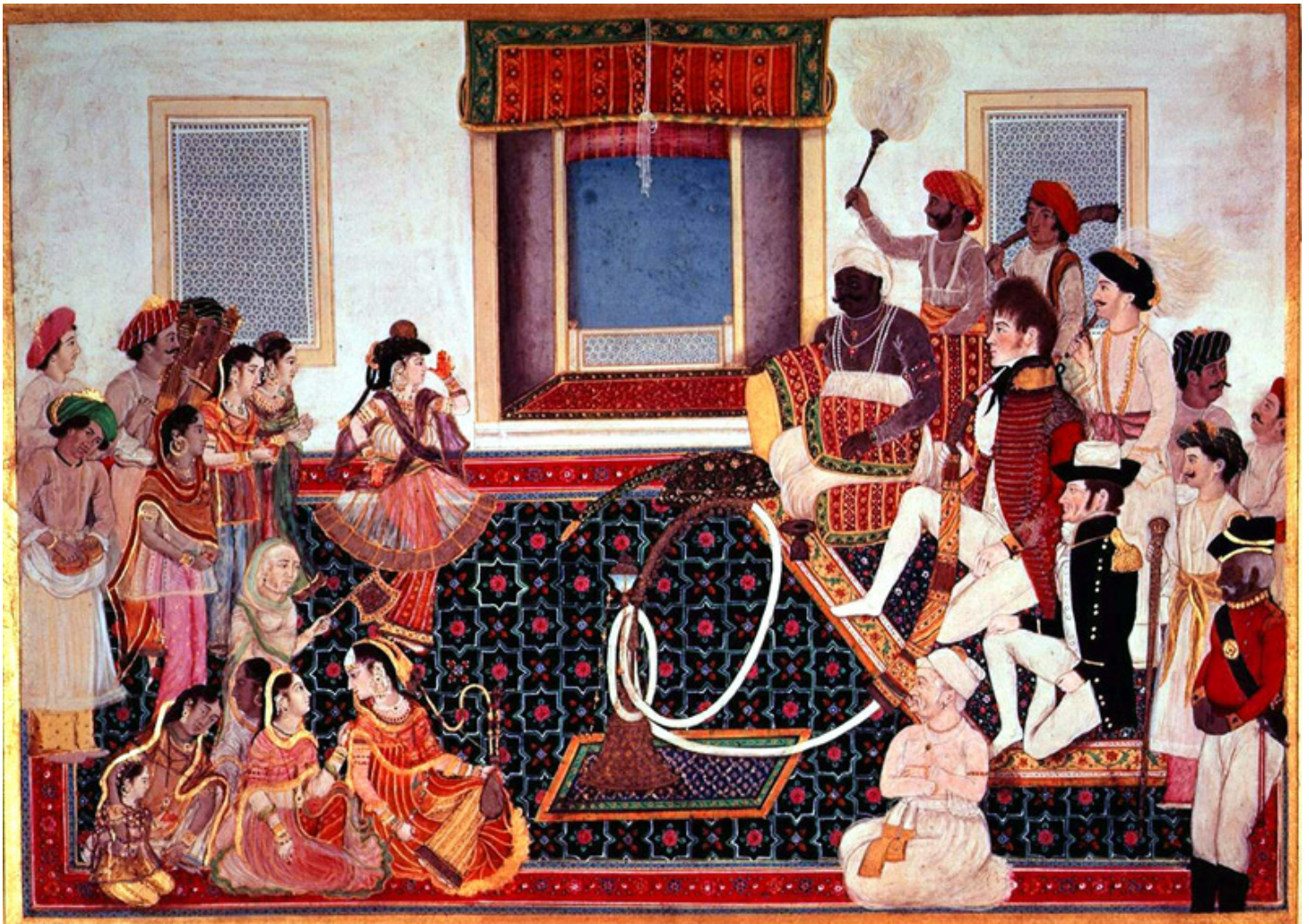


# History Happenings

*A newsletter published by the Department of History  
The University of Memphis*

Vol. 8, no. 3

February 2012

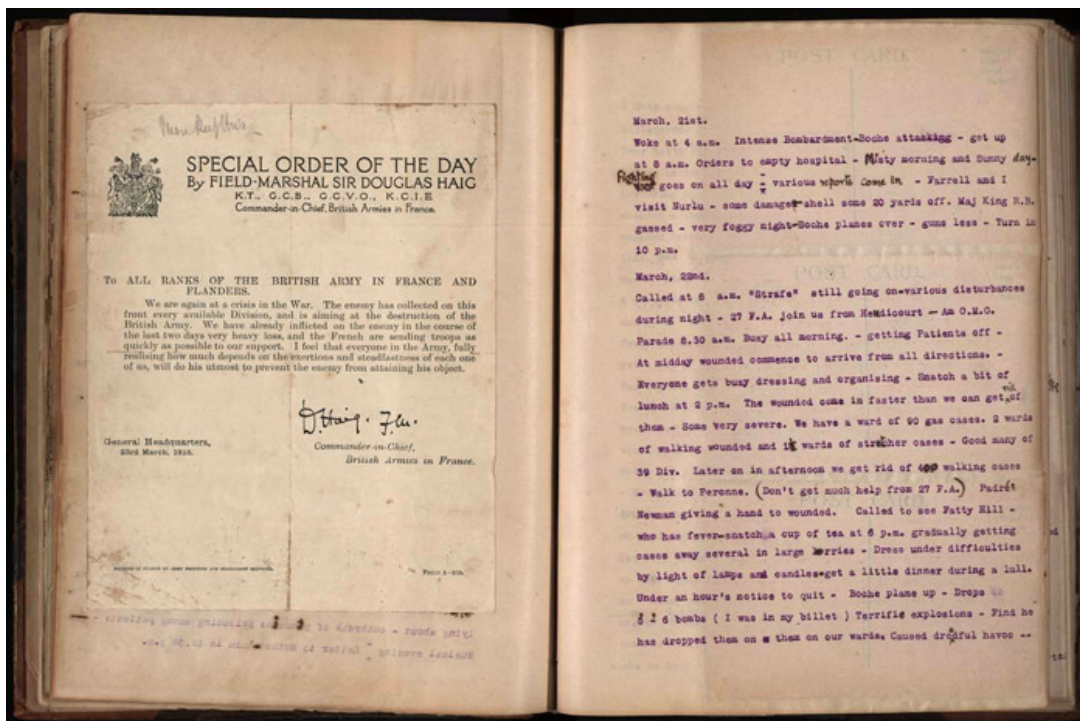




# Opening the Digital Door for History

*By Janann Sherman and Susan O'Donovan*

Quality historical scholarship is developed, we tell our students often, out of close study of archival and primary source materials. That is where we find understanding about the past. It is work that usually translates into time-consuming and costly trips to libraries near and far. In the case of those who study Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia, research trips can be prohibitively expensive. The problem is worse for graduate students, who almost by definition, teeter on the edge of poverty. The quality of historical scholarship can suffer as a consequence of research costs. Projects are trimmed, research questions are “dumbed down,” and topics narrowed to the point that they become meaningless. Archives matter in our line of work, and we simply cannot do our jobs well without access to them.



**Military document from the last year of the First World War**

demonstrably effective pedagogical model, like research, depends on easy access to archives, and to the letters, diaries, periodicals, images, reports, and so on that make up a library's manuscript holdings. In a department like ours at the University of Memphis, where our faculty offer courses that circle the globe, teaching well requires having access to historical materials—documents, archives—that are comparably inclusive.

Well, now we can. Using revenues generated by our very successful online degree programs the Department of History recently completed the purchase of more than a million pages of archival materials from Adam Matthew Digital. A British-based initiative that strives to make available in digital form primary sources held in libraries around the globe, AMD currently offers to academic customers more than thirty different thematic collections. Even better, their collections continue to multiply and existing ones continue to grow: including at least four of the six we just purchased.

But wow, what a choice! Yet as difficult as it was to set aside a number of attractive collections until a later time (including the deliciously titled “London Low Life”), we opted to invest initially in collections that directly relate to existing departmental strengths in global, women's, African/African American, and twentieth-century US/European history. Already “live” and

Our scholarship is not the only thing that suffers when we don't spent time in the archives. The quality and effectiveness of our teaching suffers too. It has become widely accepted among the profession that students learn far better by doing than by simply sitting and listening. We learn to drive, after all, by getting behind the wheel of our daddy's car. The same principle holds true in the history classroom. As is the case with biology, chemistry, art, literature, and mathematics, history students learn by doing the work of a historian: interrogating primary sources, weighing evidence, drawing their own conclusions. This

accessible to the entire campus community through the University Libraries, the collections we purchased include: Empire Online; Everyday Life & Women in America; The First World War: Personal Experiences; Medieval Family Life; Rock and Roll, Counterculture, Peace and Protest; and Slavery, Abolition, and Social Justice. Each one is a treasure trove in and of itself. Packed full of digitized images of original documents, these materials can be downloaded to users' computers as pdf files or read in full on line. Because they come to us in their original form there is no concern about errors in transcription and there is no risk that our thinking and our interpretation might be distorted by someone else's. We encounter these materials in exactly the same way we would in a conventional library: fresh, curious, and thoughtful. But best of all, these six collections pry open a world of interpretive, scholarly, and pedagogical possibilities. As unmediated primary sources, they lend themselves to as many questions as we can possibly imagine asking. Thus the hundreds of antebellum Supreme Court cases included in the "Slavery, Abolition, and Social Justice" collection are as relevant and useful to faculty and students in the law school as they are to those of us in the Department of History who specialize in the history of slaves and slavery. Likewise, a century's worth of periodicals that make up a part of "Everyday Life & Women in America" invite scholarly inquiries from across the campus community about women, family, the history of journalism, and the evolution of literary and cultural styles. And heaven alone knows what kind of questions our creative students will ask, or the answers they will arrive at, for having engaged with an early twentieth-century pamphlet titled "Your Daughter's Corset"!

Already these collections are making an impact on our students. Those enrolled this semester in Dr. Dan Unowsky's European history research seminar will use these materials as they learn what it is historians do, and how they do it. The students in



Document from Everyday Life & Women in America



Document from Medieval Family Life

Dr. Susan O'Donovan's Civil War & Reconstruction will dive into the AMD collections in their effort to understand one of the most foundational eras in our nation's history. In coming months, those of us who teach online will begin incorporating them into our syllabi too. A specialist in medieval Europe, Dr. Courtney Luckhardt has her sights set on the "Medieval Family Life" collection, and Drs. Janann Sherman and Steve Stein are eager to develop lessons around and out of the powerful and poignant contents of "The First World War: Personal Experiences." And which of us isn't plotting a way to work "Rock and Roll, Counter Culture, Peace and Protest" into our classrooms and onto our research agendas! Indeed, we all anticipate that these collections and future investments in similar material will change in positive and profound ways what it means to do history at the University of Memphis. Already strong, we can only become stronger for having such ready access to the past that these materials provide.



# Bottles, Old Women and Crumbling Walls

By James Blythe

In the last newsletter, Dr. Susan O'Donovan wrote about the close connection between her passion for rural life and her work as a historian. My experience has been quite different. I see my activities as a photographer and as a historian as almost completely distinct. If I took a camera back to the period I write about, the European Middle Ages, I would probably return mostly with close-ups of peeling walls. As for the farm, although I grew up in a small town, I always dreamed of getting away to the city, and I feel much closer to historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto, who wrote in *Civilization*, his masterly overview of the influence of the natural environment on human society, "The countryside to me is something to admire, if at all, at a distance, through a study window or in a frame on the wall." I'd rather not even think about wet opossums. So, in this article I will talk mostly about my photography and write about my scholarship in a coming newsletter.



James Blythe

Photography and history fulfill different needs, artistic and intellectual, that have been with me since childhood, although I have expressed them in different ways over the years. In both areas it took me decades to find my place, lurching in my academic interests from the sciences, to medicine, to mathematics (NOT a science, as most historians seem to think), in which I began work on a Ph.D. Literature and history were always in the background. I was good at all these things and I abandoned them not because I didn't think I could do well (I was going to say "succeed," but this now seems to mean "make a lot of money"), but because I always felt that they were keeping me from doing other things. It was only after a hiatus from formal study, after a few years devoted to radical leftist politics and a few more hanging around New York City—at exactly the time Will Hermes described in *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire: Five*

*Years in New York That Changed Music Forever*—following Patti Smith and The New York Dolls, reading widely, and making money however I could—as a math teacher, blackjack player, junk man, mover, computer programmer, and actuary—that I decided that what most fascinated me was medieval history. For the first time I found myself able to study something without regrets, and have done so now for thirty years.

With art it was different. I always loved it, but never thought I had any talent. I tried the saxophone in junior high, but could hardly blow it, let alone make music. I found no inspiration for drawing or painting and no aptitude even for its technical aspects. I wrote the usual terrible poetry in college. Maybe I gave up too soon without enough effort, but that certainly wasn't true for the six years of guitar lessons I took while at Cornell studying medieval history. At the end I wasn't as good as some who pick up a guitar for a weekend, not to speak of my model guitarist, Mississippi John Hurt.

And then I discovered photography, which could have happened much earlier had I been paying attention. I now remember a black and white photo I took in high school, now sadly lost to Hurricane Agnes, which deposited six feet of water in my parents' house, of a solitary figure with an umbrella in a rainy Battery Park and a fog-shrouded Statue of Liberty in the background. It was a really good picture, as Ellen Feiss might say. But I forgot all about it until 1990, when, by chance, I took a point-and-shoot camera on a trip to Mexico.



San Miguel Woman with Tortillas



**Not Yet Titled 115**

I had never taken photos on earlier trips because I thought that tourists with cameras were obnoxious, which is true enough, but I also had the stupid idea that I would see more without a camera. True, most people I saw with cameras seemed primarily concerned with accumulating pictures of themselves blocking the view of famous landmarks, but I discovered that I saw much more with the camera than I ever had before. I found myself constantly looking everywhere: up and down, left and right, into doorways and windows, across the street, under tables, searching for a good photo. I came back from that trip with a number of good photos, some of people, but mostly of close-ups of peeling walls and distorted reflections. Instinctively, without ever having heard it, I agreed with the photographer Robert Capa's

principle, "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough." On subsequent trips I took a much better camera with a big telephoto lens, which also enabled me to get many candid pictures of people.



**Machinery of Night**

While I still take a wide variety of photos, I have worked most in recent years on my "Floating World Series," which consists of macro (close-up) photographs of various organic and inorganic materials in bottles of oil. In addition to the literal meaning of floating objects, the series title alludes to the Japanese woodblock prints known as *ukiyo-e*, "pictures of the floating world," which depicted the urban demimonde of the Edo period (1603–1868). In this series, as in most of my pictures, I tend to be interested in the abstractions that arise from an uncommon view of a common subject.



**Earlobe on the Deep**

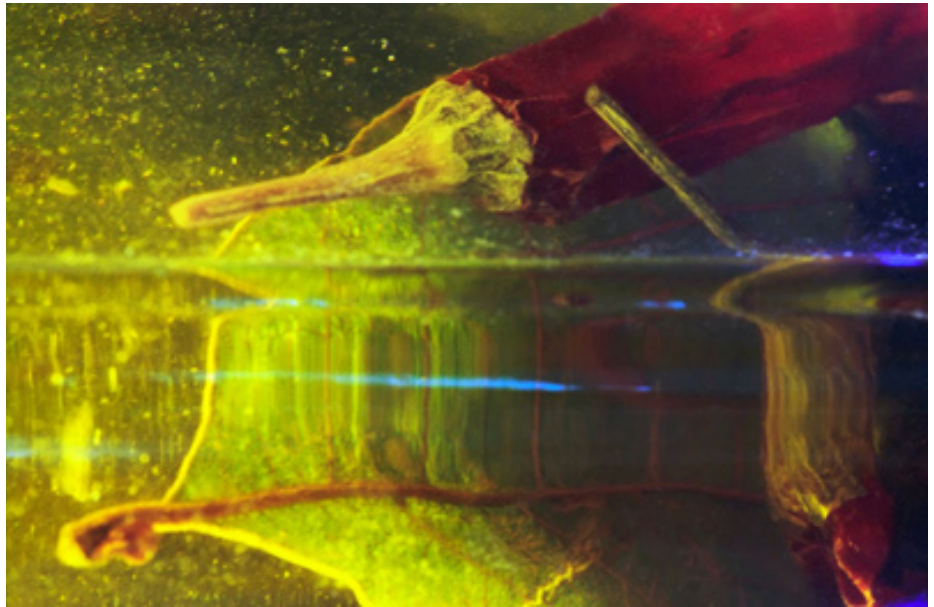
The idea for this series came from a Christmas present from my brother: a bottle of chiles and spices in olive oil. I placed this on my kitchen windowsill and almost immediately noticed how beautiful it looked in the strong backlight of the winter morning sun. In the next three years, what began as a few pictures of this bottle turned into over three hundred photographs that I felt were worth saving and many hundreds more that I discarded. I am still amazed at how many different pictures could come from one bottle, many of them looking nothing like each other, or even like anything normally visible in the bottle. Eventually I got tired of that one bottle and began to create my own, with different kinds of oil (mostly mineral oil), bits of plants, cloth, slices of fruit, and whatever else seems like a good idea. Insects have been especially fruitful, which I had been collecting anyway from pool-kill.

In addition to close-ups, I am also interested in reflections, particularly in distorted surfaces and the distorting effect of refractions in water or transmission of light through a translucent medium. My titling of the photos tends to be obscure and



idiosyncratic. I don't like things called "Untitled," yet I cringe at obvious or literal titles, mainly because they seem jejune, but also because I think of my work as having a largely abstract appeal and I don't want to limit the viewer's response to it. As a result I often pick a title from mythology (usually Hindu or Greek), poetry (often Ginsberg or Eliot), literature (most often Joyce or Pynchon), music (often Patti Smith or Captain Beefheart), or art that refers to something I see in the picture, although I don't expect anyone else to understand.

You may see several collections of my photos—five of the Floating World Series, two of people, and one each of graffiti, walls and windows, animals, and miscellaneous—at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jimblythe/collections/72157626938177806/>, and you may see an article about me in *Nashville Arts Magazine* at <http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/952fadee#/952fadee/68>.

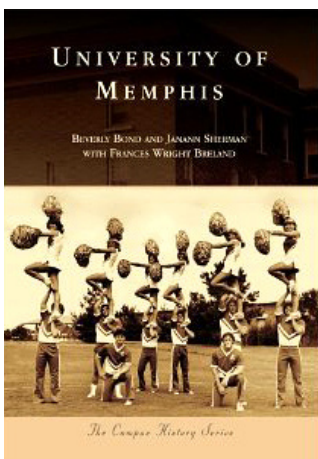


Narcissus

# The University Captured in Pictures

*By Beverly Bond*

Jan Sherman and I began working on *University of Memphis* in 2008 after our editor at Arcadia Publishing contacted us about doing a book on the University of Memphis for their Campus History Series. We had already completed two books, *Memphis in Black and White* and *Images of America: Beale Street*, for other Arcadia series. We agreed to do



the book, but we wanted to push the publication date ahead three years to coincide with the centennial celebration. Of course, when you know that you have a contract for a book that won't be published for three years there's a great temptation to procrastinate, and maybe we did a little bit of that. But we worked fairly consistently for three years on different levels of this project and we are very pleased with the finished product.

Our first task—convincing the administration that the university needed a solid history as a part of its centennial celebration—was probably the easiest. Contracts were signed and we went to work on the project in the spring of 2009. The format for *University of Memphis* is the same as that for *Beale Street*. The story is told through 200 captioned photographs covering the school's one-hundred-year history.

We combed the photograph collections in Special Collections, went through yearbooks and bulletins, and looked through photograph collections in the Memphis Room and the archives of the *Commercial Appeal*. We also read two earlier histories of the school, one an unpublished manuscript by Otis Jones and the other, the 1960's work, *The Enduring Years*, which focused



Beverly Bond



**W. Wayne Johnson, the original "Pouncer" mascot, making a telephone call, 1962**

on the administration of President Cecil C. Humphreys.

About a year after we started on *University of Memphis*, we contracted with the university to co-author a second centennial book. This one, *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers: A Centennial History of the University of Memphis*, was released at the beginning of the centennial celebration in August 2011. *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers* is a limited edition coffee-table book that includes a 20,000-word narrative of the school's history. There are many photographs and illustrations but the narrative, not the photographs, drives this book. *Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers* is only available in the university bookstore or through the Alumni Association, while *University of Memphis* will be on

sale in local bookstores, drugstores like Walgreens, online through Amazon and Barnes and Noble, and by direct order from Arcadia Publishing.

In the course of researching and readying this book for publication, Dr. Sherman and I had assistance from a variety of sources. Ed Frank and the staff in Special Collections and the Heritage Room (Brister Hall) always seemed to find one more box of photographs or clippings for us to go through. The staff at the *Commercial Appeal's* photo archive located the classic images of TOM I and TOM II. We also had the assistance of some wonderful graduate students who researched the university's history during a seminar on public history in the spring 2009 semester. Their work helped us develop



**Class of 1915 seniors Earnest Ball and Julian Jones. Ball later became Superintendent of Memphis City Schools. E.C. Ball Hall on the U of M campus is named after him.**



**Students celebrating the transition from Memphis State College to Memphis State University, 1957**

the framework for the book's narrative and verify the timeline. The seminar also brought us the third member of our team, Frances Wright Breland, who, as our graduate assistant the following semester, did additional research, scanned photographs, helped with the layout, and wrote several short articles for the university's alumni magazine and homepage. The final copyediting was done by my daughter, Julia Bond Ellingboe, whose close (and speedy) editing helped us get the proof pages back to the publisher in a timely fashion.

Working on these two university histories was, to some extent, a labor of love. As a three-time alumnus, I thought I knew everything about MSU/ U of M, but those "incarnations" are only two-fifths of the story of this institution. The mission has changed over the last century from one of training teachers for west Tennessee schools to being a major research institution for the state as a whole. This is a proud story that our books will carry into the second century.



# Killing Fields

*By Daniel Unowsky*



**Timothy Snyder**

Each year, the Department of History invites a scholar specializing in a non-US field of history to deliver the Memphis Sesquicentennial Lecture. This year we were very pleased that the Marcus W. Orr Center for the Humanities joined us to bring in Timothy Snyder, the Bird White Housum Professor of History at Yale University. Professor Snyder is one of the leading scholars of eastern European history and is known beyond the academy for his many articles in *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Review of Books*, and other publications. On January 26, Professor Snyder spoke about his 2010 award-winning and best-selling book, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and*



**Daniel Unowsky**

*Stalin*. He captivated an audience composed of students, professors, and many from the broader Memphis community drawn to campus for the event. Every seat in the University Center Theater was filled.



**This map of the “bloodlands” remained on the projection screen throughout Dr. Snyder’s lecture**



*Bloodlands* has been widely reviewed as one of the most important recent works on the mass murders conducted in the lands between Berlin and Moscow (the regions Snyder defines as the “bloodlands” largely correspond to central/eastern Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic countries, and a strip of western Russia). As Dr. Snyder noted in the prelude to his main remarks, scholars writing on this period and this region have long focused on one or another of the many national/ethnic tragedies at the center of his book. Historians of the great starvation of millions of Ukrainian peasants in 1932–33 have confined their studies to the events themselves and set them within Ukrainian history as part of a longer story of Ukrainian tragedies in the 20th century. Scholars who have written about the Great Terror of the later 1930s have often overlooked the links between the earlier events in Ukraine or the concurrent events in late interwar



**Dr. Snyder delivering the Memphis Sesquicentennial Lecture**

Europe. Scholars of the Holocaust tend to make little reference to the multiple occupations of the lands where Jews were murdered—the Soviet occupation of most of the bloodlands from 1939 to 1941; followed by the German occupation that came with the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941; the Soviet reoccupation as Soviet forces pushed back the German armies from

1943 until the final Soviet capture of Berlin in April 1945. Those who have written on the deliberate starvation and murder of more than three million Soviet POWs in German captivity have also done so largely in isolation from these other tragic events. By putting his emphasis on the lands in between, by focusing on the deliberate targeting and murder of 14 million non-combatants, and by looking at the period from 1933 to 1945, Dr. Snyder has achieved a rich and nuanced interpretation that transcends the confines of state boundaries and ethnic/national histories.

Much of the material of the book is well known to scholars, but will likely be new to many readers: the Soviet armies, not the US, defeated the bulk of German forces; the German treatment of Soviet POWs was far more brutal than the treatment meted out to US, British, and French POWs; most of the approximately six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust never saw the inside of a concentration camp, but were instead killed by bullets fired at close range over ravines and open pits in eastern Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic

states, and western Russia or were murdered within hours after they arrived at one of a handful of specially designed extermination sites; Soviet forces, not US armies, liberated all of the major killing fields and extermination centers of the Holocaust. Many readers will find the sections on the starvation of Ukrainian peasantry haunting and overwhelming.

Snyder’s approach, by bringing in the entire region over this specific period of time, provides some insights that seem obvious but have not received much scholarly attention. Both regimes murdered as part of very different ideological projects designed to create utopian futures. These were, Snyder argues, colonial projects. For the Soviets, Ukraine was to become the industrial and agricultural heartland of the new Soviet power. For the Germans, the same territory was to be recreated as a pastoral paradise of German farming communities that would be served by the few among the many peoples of the region who would not be starved to death by the Nazi plans for transformation. As Snyder shows, in the years of peace (1933–39), the Soviets murdered on a far more massive scale than the Germans did. In these years, Stalin committed the majority of his deliberate murder campaigns—against kulaks (supposed rich peasants who opposed the collectivization program); against Polish and other ethnic minorities in the Great Terror—while Hitler confined tens of thousands in concentration camps like Dachau and murdered a few thousand opponents. From 1939 to 1941, both regimes murdered the elites of Polish society in almost equal numbers. Between 1941 and 1945, during the German attack on the Soviet Union, most of the mass murder of non-combatants, at the center of which was the Holocaust, was the work of the German forces with local assistants, many of whom had already experienced Soviet occupation and, at least at first, viewed the Germans as the lesser of two evils.

Throughout this mesmerizing and disturbing book, Snyder keeps us focused on human lives. He has culled through archives in Berlin, Moscow, and in the bloodlands themselves. He mastered the available published primary sources in many languages (Czech, German, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Belarussian, French, Italian), and surveyed the scholarly literature on all the ethnic/national histories that intersect with his history of the bloodlands. Whenever possible, he lets voices from the region speak to us. As he noted in his Sesquicentennial Lecture, it is easy to become lost in the numbers of the murdered; yet, as humanists we need to remember this: 14 million dead is 14 million times one. Each was a person, each had a history. Each of the 14 million was a human being targeted for death from 1933 to 1945 in the bloodlands.