

GULLIVER

SPRING 2024

HISTORY MAJORS'
COMMITTEE



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THE HISTORY MAJORS' COMMITTEE

Julianna Aguja

Katherine Bamberg

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Natalie Buzzell

Aidan Chisamore

Anjali Gahlaut

Benjamin Goth

Eli Hinerfeld

Willa Jewitt

Jaden Miller

Benjamin Savel

Sara Shepherd

Oliver Stewart

Jazmine Williams

CLASS OF 2024 SENIOR THESIS

“Saints at the Stake: Female Mysticism and the Medieval Heresy Inquisition”

By *Katherine Bamberg*

“Renouncing the ‘The Congregation of Sathan’: Expressions of John Knox’s Legacy in Catholic Persecutions, Disciplinary Systems, and Scottish Witch Hunting, 1540-1597”

By *Aidan Chisamore*

“‘The Good White Citizens’ of Isabella County: White Identity Formation through Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School (1891-1934)”

By *Heidi Compton*

“Stand up Straight: Euthenics, Posture and Nude Photography at Vassar College” By *Sarah*

Allison

“The Romance of a People: Rebranding Jewish-American Identity at the 1933 Chicago International Exposition”

By *Eli Hinerfeld*

“Rape, Rape Culture, and the Plight of Women in Early Virginia, 1608-1775”

By *Leah McLaren*

“‘A Thousand-Year Scandal’: Tracing the Legend of Yang Guifei, Late Tang to Present Day China”

By *Arlene Chen*

“Obscenity, Indecent, Immoral, and Impure: the 1923 ‘God of Vengeance Trials’” By *Yael Gelman*

“Legacy of Blood: A Vaginal Side Wound and its Blood as a Facilitator of Spiritual Marriage” By *Isabelle Foley*

“Standards of Kingship: Henry VI, The War of the Roses, and Shakespearean Drama” By *Liz Hertzell*

“Moral Geography: Single Family Zoning and Homeownership in the Early 20th Century” By *Celeste Brinkhuis*

“The War on the Black Family and Community Structure”
By *E’Nyjaih Fields*

“The Origins of the Modern Passport Regime: Legally Constructing Statelessness and the Lost Possibility of the Nansen Certificate”
By *Cating Greenes*

“Zelensky and Unity Against Russia’s Full Scale Invasion of Ukraine”
By *Igor Martiniouk*

Contemporary Black London: Vassar in London with Professor Ismail Rashid

By Sara Shepherd '26 & Oliver Stewart '25



Professor Ismail Rashid, Professor of History on the Marion Musser Lloyd '32 Chair, has been teaching at Vassar since 1998, with focuses on pre-colonial and modern African history, African diaspora and Pan-Africanism, and international relations. Professor Rashid spent the Fall 2023 semester directing and teaching in the Vassar London Program at Goldsmiths College. In a recent interview, we asked Rashid about his experiences in London and with the program, which specifically focuses on Media Studies.

Rashid found directing the program “very exciting, refreshing, and also challenging!” Part of his work involved helping students balance the academic and social challenges of study-abroad, as they explored the city

and the culture while keeping up with their studies. According to Rashid, Goldsmiths College offers a very different academic environment from Vassar: “It is an urban, public university with a very diverse population of undergraduate and graduate students as well as many international students.” Thus, classes are much larger and usually lecture-based, a departure from what Vassar students may have been used to. Rashid especially noticed this difference when guest lecturing for a 60-person course at Goldsmiths: “I did something in the lecture that was unexpected; I asked students in the class their opinions before I gave the lecture.” In this way, Rashid brought a more Vassar-style approach to Goldsmiths, exposing students to different styles of teaching and learning.

As director of the program, Rashid taught a seminar, “Contemporary Black London,” which was only open to Vassar students. The course “focused on the political and cultural contributions of *African and Caribbean* peoples in the remaking of London after the Second World War through their representations in *media, museums, and social movements*,” with a particular focus on the “Windrush Generation” of post-war migrants, mainly from the West Indies. The seminar incorporated many visits to museums and other cultural institutions, as well as several guest lectures from historians and other scholars – including the City University of New York James Cantres, a Vassar Alum ('08), former History major, and author of the book *Blackening Britain*.

As the Vassar London Program focuses on media studies, it offered Rashid the opportunity to explore the overlap between that discipline and his own field of history. According to him, the two fields share “a deep interest in different kinds of mass media and what they tell us about people in the past and in the present.” However, what they do with those materials differs: “History is good at digging up the evidence and providing context, and media studies is superb at theorizing and discerning meaning!” Together, these approaches offer powerful analytical tools for primary source scholarship. Rashid sees museums and galleries as important sites to explore the “codependency and dialogue between the two disciplines” and their different approaches to analyzing mass media sources. To Rashid, this dialogue allows both disciplines to learn from one another and expand their focuses: “Together history and mass media enrich each other and facilitate a dynamic, interdisciplinary academic and research lens.”

One thing that Rashid was particularly struck by during his time in London was “the ways in which Black people were woven into the fabric of London. Visible, invisible, prominent, ordinary, celebrated, vilified...” Seeing the prominence and ever-presence of Black people in Britain helped refine his sense of “both the recency and concreteness

of ‘Black British’ as a social and political identity in the United Kingdom...embedded within unstable, contested, and continuously evolving Britishness and Blackness.” Rashid and the students in the program explored how this theme ran throughout the cultural institutions that they visited, including James Graham’s play “Dear London,” which Rashid said “hilariously but aptly captures this dynamic of being Black and British.” Overall, the experience enriched Rashid’s understanding of “the history, lives, and contributions of Black people in London,” which has helped him reshape parts of his seminar, “African Diaspora and Pan-Africanism.”

Rashid, who had previously lived in London for a year doing archival research, cherished the opportunity to reconnect with family, friends, and colleagues during his time directing the Vassar London Program. He also took great pleasure in exploring the city’s museums and galleries, both as part of his teaching and independently. Perhaps his favorite pastime in London, though, were his “regular, almost daily walks around the city,” taking in his surroundings and the sights of the city: “It was easy to walk for two hours, without noticing how long you were walking, because there was so much to see and experience around you. One of the things I really missed about London are these almost daily walks.”

Swift Creativity: Rethinking Approaches to Studying History at Vassar

By *Jazmine Williams '26* and *Benjamin Savel '26*

When students are asked to imagine a typical history class, their minds often fill with images of writing papers and taking tests. At Swift Hall, in addition to these traditional methods of study, our faculty also uses more creative approaches to class design and final projects. We spoke with four history faculty members who have incorporated pottery, comics, art, and design into their classes. Professors Lydia Murdoch, Michaela Pohl, Allison Puglisi, and Ashanti Shih shared with us how these creative methods deepen students' understanding of history. In their classes, the professors push history students to think beyond lectures and research papers as valuable methods of interpreting the past.

HIST 340 - Dave the Potter

Professor Puglisi's creative intensive centers on the life of 19th-century Black poet and potter David Drake. Drake learned to read and write under enslavement, and despite being forced to make large ceramic jugs, he created art, inscribing those pieces with poetry. During this intensive, students explore his pottery and poetry and engage in the academic debate around his work. How does this factor into deepening a student's understanding of history? According to Puglisi, history has its limits, and historical silences mean we can come to an impasse in our ability to "know." As students, we may never come to understand the full complexity of David Drake's life; however, engaging in the creative process of poetry as Drake did could allow students to work through and meaningfully engage this silence. Puglisi states that working through these historical

silences with creative work might help us confront questions that the discipline of history can't answer. Allowing students to create their own ceramic work during this intensive allows Vassar history students the unique opportunity to reckon with the legacy of historical silences in a way beyond traditional means.

HIST 227 - Chinatowns

Professor Shih's class covers the history of Chinatowns in the United States from the mid-1800s to the early 2000s. In the class, history students get to design their own Chinatown memorial as the final project. For the project, her students will design a mock-up of a memorial for any city and time period of their choice. This allows for a more comprehensive study of Chinatowns beyond the time and geographical limits of the course, as well as focusing on smaller, less-studied Chinatowns outside of New York City and San Francisco. Along with an argumentative essay, students' projects engage with the public's memory, determining which histories are told and which are left out. The project prompts each member of the class to face challenging, often less-considered historical questions through its creative component, such as: What parts of a community's collective past should be highlighted? How can you use the "politics of the visual" to depict this community's history?

HIST 354 - History and Politics of Grief In

Professor Murdoch's class, "students examine the mourning rituals—funerals,

cemeteries, dress, postmortem photographs, relics and jewelry—that proliferated and took on new meanings in nineteenth-century Britain, marking new ways of embodying and visualizing grief.” During this course, students explore literary and public expressions for the commemoration of death. Additionally, students study how the dead gained political value in social movements like those surrounding factories and child welfare. Unique to this course is how Vassar’s campus is used as an exploratory tool, with visits to the Loeb and local cemeteries built into the syllabus. Past final projects from students include the use of 19th-century guidebooks to make mourning cloth from pre-aniline black dye. Another student rewrote the American folk song “John Henry” to document the experiences of Chinese-American railroad workers, who until recently had been erased from historical memory. As Murdoch states, this course and its inclusion of a creative final project allowed students to reflect on the spatial aspects of mourning—how representations of grief can both disrupt and remain unrecognized within our daily spaces. This course allows Vassar history students to critically engage with representations of grief and produce artistic work to consider its legacy.

HIST 257 - Comics and History

Professor Pohl’s intensive, Comics and History, centers around the creation of a 5-6 page comic. Pohl chose this method because it puts the history in students’ hands, allowing them to create their own art about a topic instead of just reading existing literature by other scholars. Explaining her

methodological approach, Pohl stated, “I’ve been working on comics about my childhood in West Germany for a while now, and I decided to introduce students to comics and history in a practical way, by focusing on making, because it is a particularly active way of reflecting on history.” Students begin drawing from the first day of the class, using a series of guiding prompts and exercises that help fit their historical narrative within the narrative construction of a comic. They also read several comics and a cartooning manual to become familiar with the visual storytelling tools of established comic authors. The comic develops as students progress throughout the course, with students submitting an outline of “thumbnails” halfway through the course, then rough sketches, and finally the “inks,” the cleaned-up, completed drawings. “It’s an invigorating, active/activist way to do history and memory work,” Pohl noted. Pohl hopes to compile this year’s comics into a short zine collection to highlight the work of her students.

Vassar’s history faculty, through non-traditional course structures and assignments, push students to creatively understand the discipline with historical memory and activism in mind. We encourage students to explore these courses to continue synthesizing traditional academic work with artistic expression. Special thanks to professors Puglisi, Shih, Murdoch, and Pohl for speaking with us!

Tales from the Road: Student Travel with the Clark

By *Aidan Chisamore '24*

Travel has always been an important part of the study of history. It allows us as historians to gain a personal and scholarly connection to the subjects of our research. It is important to reflect on all of the wonderful opportunities to travel here in the department, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. I have collected a small sample of this year's travel stories from the recipients of the Evalyn Clark Memorial Travel Fellowship. Named after the distinguished professor Evalyn Clark, who taught history in the department from the 1930s to the 1960s, the fellowship has helped dozens of students over the years to travel domestically and around the world. I would like to thank all of our participants who sent in details about their Clark fellowships – I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I have!

Arlene Chen '24 - Major in History

“I traveled to China in late December of 2023, and stayed for about two weeks. While some of the trip was spent in different cities during transit, my primary destination was the city of Xi'an, where much of the history surrounding the legend of Yang Guifei, my thesis topic, was situated. During the course of my stay at Xi'an, I visited public museums, where I recorded relevant artifacts and took copious amounts of pictures regarding images, descriptions, paintings, etc. about the Tang Dynasty. I also took several trips to Huaqing Pools, which is a historic site on the outskirts of Xi'an about one and a half hours away by subway. The

pools, which were a favorite vacation spot of Emperor Xuanzong and his consort Yang Guifei, have been well preserved as a representation of the late Tang dynasty and of the iconic Xuanzong-Guifei love tale that persists in the collective Chinese cultural consciousness. During my visits to the pools, I recorded everything I could about them, from the words of passing tour guides to the physical layout of the historic site. Lastly, I visited local public libraries in hopes of searching through historical Xi'an archives that could provide more local historical context for my thesis (a relatively unsuccessful endeavor). My trip to China was integral in helping me secure valuable historical context and gain an understanding of an important historic site (Huaqing Pools) that made up a primary part of my third thesis chapter. I'm super grateful to the Clark Award for making this all possible!”



Statue of Yang Guifei

*Isabelle Foley '24 - Major in History and
Correlate in Medieval and Renaissance
Studies*

“With the generous support of the Clark Fellowship, I had the opportunity to travel to Siena, Italy in January 2024 during winter break! I went here to look at sites associated with the 14th-century figure St. Catherine of Siena and to see what her local legacy is like in the present. She was a very influential medieval saint who is known for her many writings and for her strong devotion to Christ's wound and blood. I used her as a central figure throughout my thesis, *A Legacy of Blood: A Vaginal Side Wound and Its Blood as a Facilitator of Spiritual Marriage*, which examines vaginal representations of Christ's side wound in late medieval Christianity and how that is a key part of spiritual marriages. While in Siena, I had the opportunity to see sites such as the house where Catherine grew up, the church associated with her (Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico), and a fresco depicting her canonization in the Piccolomini Library as well as various other sites throughout Siena. I noticed that there were so many fascinating artistic depictions of her, even in places that I looked at that I did not originally realize

would have portrayals of Catherine, which really helped me to realize just how influential she was on the Sieneese religious and visual landscape after her death and how she continues to be such a central figure in Siena even in the present. This helped motivate me to have a large section of my third chapter discuss visual representations of Catherine and her famous ideas about Christ's blood and how that tied into the widespread nature of her ideas. I had a wonderful time on the trip, and a fun highlight in addition to the sites was trying all of the incredible Italian food!”



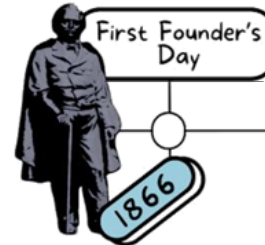
Isabelle outside of the Duomo di Siena

Founder's Day

An incomplete timeline of themes from 1928 to 2024

BACKGROUND

Throughout the years, Founder's Day at Vassar has taken many forms. Beginning in 1866 as a celebration of Matthew Vassar's birthday, the event included lectures and poetry readings, and, after Matthew Vassar's death, trips to the founder's grave. Dancing and singing contests, faculty-student baseball games, parades, and performances joined the queue of activities, and, in the 1920s, Vassar President MacCracken introduced themes to the event. These themes give insight into the lives and interests of Vassar students throughout the college's history as the celebration evolved, reflecting both popular culture as well as racial stereotypes present on campus.



MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

1945

THE GAY NINETIES

1944

CIRCUS

1942

UTOPIA

1939

2015 AD

1930

COUNTY FAIR

1928

FEDORA DAY

1948

CAPERS IN THE PAPERS

1950

AT VASSAR EVERYBODY READS

1951

1969 - 1975

During these years, Vassar students lost interest in Founder's Day festivities and the event was rarely held.

The Miscellany reported that the theme was the 150th anniversary of the college. Students were told the following: "costumes for the day can be either what you think you'll be or what you'd like to be by then . . . The metaphysics involved in this idea makes it difficult to explain—but what we mean to say is—plan your spring wardrobe around your appearance on Founder's Day as Lindbergh Jr., Red Grange III, or a skeleton if you must be practical."



MATTHEW VASSAR'S 200TH BIRTHDAY

1992

GO GREEKS!

1990

MATT TO THE FUTURE

1988

Although the Founder's Day Committee claimed that the theme was intended to "mock" Greek Life at other colleges, there was a lot of protest on campus as students complained these systems perpetuated sexual violence and celebrated male hegemony. Alongside vandalism, The Miscellany reported that a merchandise order was even sabotaged by an anonymous student. In response, the committee chose to change the theme to Ancient Greece, although they kept the original slogan.

COMPLICATING FOUNDER'S DAY

In 2023, Vassar Libraries invited the campus to dig into the history of Founder's Day through the college's archives. They found that throughout the years, Founder's Day costumes and performances often included "racist and stereotypical representation of marginalized groups, including blackface, redface, and yellow face." Their exhibit asked students to reflect on who we honor as "founders" and who, historically and currently, has been excluded from the Vassar community.

MARDI GRAS

1994

CANDYLAND

1997

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

1998

TRENDS

Founder's Day themes have often focused on popular culture. However, some have repeated themselves throughout the years.

Alice in Wonderland has been chosen three times.

Dr. Seuss has been chosen two times.

Candyland has been chosen two times.

MEDIEVAL FAIRYTALE

2024

LOST AT SEA

2023

MYTHS & LEGENDS

2022

PLANTS & FUNGI

2021

FLORA & FAUNA

2017

GLITTER

2018

GALACTIC RODEO

2019

CELESTIAL BODIES

2020

In 2020, the majority of Vassar students did not return to campus after Spring Break due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, Founder's Day did not take place.

UNDER THE SEA

2016

INFINITE SPACE

2015

DINOSAURS

2014

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

2013

DR. SEUSS

2012

"What was the world like when Vassar was founded?" This question described this year's theme, as students were asked to dress as if they had stepped out of the 1800s.

FANTASIA

2007

CANDYLAND

2008

NINTENDO

2009

NINETIES NICKELODEON

2010

VINTAGE VASSAR

2011



THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS BY HIERONYMUS BOSCH, 1490 - 1500

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

2006

THE WIZARD OF OZ

2005

WILLY WONKA

2004

DR. SEUSS

2003

A DAY IN THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

1999

NEVER NEVER LAND

2000

THE BEATLES

2001

DO WHAT YOU WISH

2002



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