



HISTORY HAPPENINGS

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Department of
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Editors: Suzanne Onstine and Caroline Peyton

Letter from the Chair

DR. SARAH POTTER



I am delighted to introduce the Fall 2024 edition of the University of Memphis History Department Newsletter. This has been a busy semester for the history department. We welcomed new and returning students into our general education and upper-division courses. We had an especially wonderful visit from Dr. Amrita Chakrabarti Myers for our annual Belle McWilliams lecture. Dr. Myers introduced us to the subject of her fascinating recent book, *The Vice President's Black Wife: The Untold Life of Julia Chinn*. Dr. Andrea Ringer, one of our own PhD alums, also visited this semester to meet with graduate students and give a lecture on the history of the circus. We had an expert panel of educators to talk about how a history degree can lead to a fulfilling career in education. Our faculty also shared their research on talks and panels all over the world in venues ranging from national and international conferences, to local institutions in Memphis, to our own campus.

Our newsletter team has also been busy and, as you can see, the newsletter has a brand-new look. Our editors, Dr. Caroline Peyton and Dr. Suzanne Onstine, have put together a fantastic set of articles as well. Dr. Peyton tells us about one of her passions—running—through her interview with History alumnus Bryan Roberson who runs Breakaway Running with his father. We also learn about the Egyptian statue that now graces the HERC and the amazing study abroad trip our students took last summer with Dr. Ben Graham and Dr. Chrystal Goudsouzian. Dr. Brad Dixon closes the issue with a brief introduction to his insightful new book, *Republic of Indians: Empires of Indigenous Law in the Early American South*. I hope you enjoy this issue!

Finally, I'd like to share my own thanks and reflections. This fall, I have had the privilege of serving as interim department chair while Dr. Dan Unowsky has been on a well-deserved research sabbatical. This experience has brought me a new appreciation of the many moving pieces in our large and dynamic department. I have lost sleep worrying, written more emails than I ever dreamed possible, and come to appreciate just how hard everyone around me is working as well. Our office staff in particular, Karen Bradley and Dr. Erika Feleg, have been critical to helping me thrive in this position. I want to thank them publicly for their support. I also want to thank my colleagues for their patience while I have muddled through trying to keep this place running smoothly. And, finally, I want to thank Dan Unowsky, who has generously fielded my questions and offered his help despite being on sabbatical. He can please take this job back now.

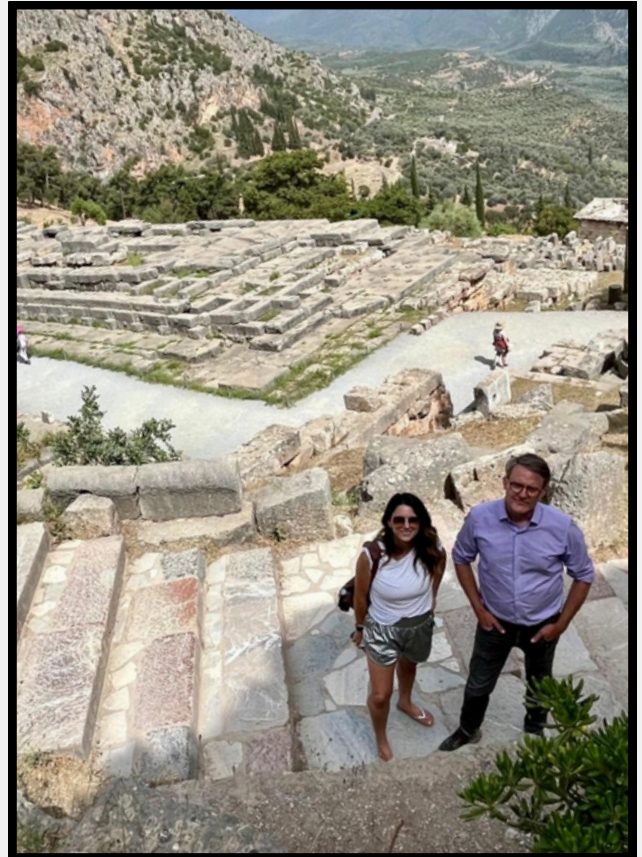
History Abroad

DR. BENJAMIN GRAHAM

I suppose there are lots of reasons to take a large group of adolescents to another country and set them loose. For Dr. Goudsouzian and I, the idea came to us during conversations about how the COVID-19 pandemic had changed our students and our department. We lamented that, after the experience of isolation and lockdown, our students seemed more hesitant to take chances and try new experiences. Further, we observed that the in-person experience for undergraduates at the U of M seemed to have diminished since the pandemic; there were fewer reasons to make the effort to be present and engage with the campus community.

In a moment of despair, we convinced each other that an opportunity to experience Italy and Greece might excite students and nudge a few of them into interacting with the world around them. We sat down and designed a class centered on built space in the ancient Greek and Roman world, which we eventually called “Sites of Power, Sites of Death in the Ancient Mediterranean.” Starting with places that we both had some familiarity with through our research and travels (and places that we thought would be impactful to a group of 18-22-year olds), we reverse engineered an introduction to ancient ideologies of spectacle, religion, status, and death that would be accessible to students in any major. Listing in both the history department and Honors College, the course ran in the Spring 2024 semester.

The course planning, it turns out, was the easy part. The bureaucratic hurdles to co-teaching a spring course that culminated in summer travel with students from across the university and traveling across two countries were quite formidable.



Dr. Chrystal Goudsouzian and Dr. Graham at the precinct of the Delphic Oracle.

The financial barriers for interested students to commit to the trip were also significant. Fortunately for us, and our students, we had great logistical and financial support from Melinda Jones and Jonathan Holland from the Helen Hardin Honors College, Rebecca Laumann from the Center for International Services, and the Chair of History, Dan Unowsky.

Our efforts paid dividends. Students showed an enormous amount of interest in the trip—we had over 90 students who solicited more information about the class and trip.



Students and Acropolis in Athens; Palatine Hill in Rome; photo from the inadvertent hike up Mount Ellanio on the island of Aegina referred to in the article; cover photo: Acropolis in Athens.

HISTORY ABROAD CONT'D

And we ended up with 23 students who took the class and traveled with us to Italy and Greece. This was the largest study abroad group since COVID and one of the largest in the institution's history.

On May 10, we departed with the group to Rome and spent 6 nights there. The students were able to see first-hand many of the sites in Rome we had discussed in class: the Colosseum, the Pantheon, and the Palatine Hill. We also took two day-trips, one to the hill town of Orvieto to see an Etruscan necropolis and one to Pompeii to see the city buried in volcanic ash in 79 CE. The students ate pizza and gelato and learned how to use public transportation in a large metropolitan city.

Even after our Metro pep talks, we still had to assure them it was okay to brush against and generally share space with people they didn't know. At the start, we had to push and pull them in and out of the subway, but by the end of the trip, they were old pros, standing hip to hip with the denizens of Rome. The students generally kept their cool when mishaps occurred - like when they were given an hour to hike up and down Mount Vesuvius (on a hot day) or when we all learned that the sprawling ruins of Pompeii had two exits, not a single exit where we would assuredly locate everyone.

On May 17, we boarded the plane again and flew to Athens. Once again, we called back to important urban sites featured in class: the Agora, the city walls, and the Acropolis (where we met up with our newest faculty member, Dr. Gaggioli!).



Wall paintings from the House of the Vetti in Pompeii.

From Athens, we took a day trip to the Bronze Age ruins at Mycenae and one to visit the oracle at Delphi. For the final leg of the trip, we boarded a ferry and spent our remaining days in Greece on the island of Aegina where the students took in a few last ancient sites. Students braved difficult situations in Greece, too, like facing off against stealthy, hungry peacocks on Moni island or allowing a wrong turn to turn to turn into a 5-mile hike to the top of Aegina. Frankly, I learned the students were willing to do anything to get a good selfie.

I can happily report that all 23 students made it back to Memphis without any lasting bodily harm (despite a rogue bungee jumping expedition into the Corinth Canal). Dr. Goudsouzian arranged a reunion with the class earlier in November, where we exchanged photos and remembered funny stories. Some of the younger students left the reunion with the warning that "we will see you again in '27." They want, it seems, to go back to the Mediterranean, to continue their exploration of the world through study abroad. While Dr. Goudsouzian and I appreciated the sentiment and tallied it as a successful mission to draw students out, we hope, next time around, we can summon the energy to do it again.

Replica of Amenirdis I Statue Comes to Memphis

BY BRANSON DALE ANDERSON

This semester, the Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology acquired a full-sized plaster replica of statue of Amenirdis I. The replica was a part of a collection that was originally owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They were intended to be used as models by art students and included replicas of many works from across the ancient world. The MET loaned the collection of replicas to Itawamba Community College in Fulton, Mississippi, where they had been kept for some time. Itawamba reached out to the IEAA about acquiring the statue, while the rest of the collection went to a college in Connecticut. The Amenirdis I statue has found a new home in the HERC (History Educational Resource Center) in Mitchell Hall on the campus of the University of Memphis.

Amenirdis I lived in Egypt during the 8th century BCE. She was the daughter of the Kushite King Kashta and Queen Pebatjma and the sister of King Piye, who conquered Egypt and established the 25th dynasty. The statue measures 170 cm (5 ft 6 in) tall. The original is made of Egyptian alabaster (indurated limestone). It was found within the grounds of Karnak temple in 1858 where Amenirdis served in the role of God's Wife of Amun. The God's Wives of Amun from the Late Period built small chapels within the grounds of Karnak temple. They were built to the northeast of the main temple of Amun-Re and are poorly preserved. These chapels were dedicated to the god Osiris, and the depictions on the walls of these chapels provide much of the information that is known about these women.



The Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology's full-sized plaster replica of statue of Amenirdis I.

REPLICA OF AMENIRDIS I STATUE COMES TO MEMPHIS

(continued) God's Wife (ḥm.t-nṯr) was the highest priestly role held by royal women in the cult of Amun at Thebes and was passed down hereditarily in this period from one royal woman to another. The woman serving in the role would symbolically adopt a younger woman, so that she could inherit the position upon her death. In the statue, she is wearing a tripartite wig with a vulture and two cobras at her brow. Atop her wig, she wears a modius ringed by cobras that served as a base for a crown consisting of two feathers, a solar disk, and horns associated with the goddess Hathor, daughter and wife of the sun-god Re. Hieroglyphic text inscribed along the base and back pillar of the statue provide us with her name and her titles.



Alumni Spotlight: Bryan Roberson

BREAKAWAY RUNNING & MEMPHIS HISTORY



Top: Barry and Bryan Roberson, owners of Breakaway Running at their Midtown store; Bottom: Vintage Nikes on display at the store.

In November 2024, Dr. Caroline Peyton sat down with Bryan Roberson, who graduated in 2011 from the University of Memphis with a degree in history. Today, Bryan, and his father, Barry Roberson, own and operate Breakaway Running. The store, now celebrating 43 years in business, has long been an anchor for the Memphis running community. A tight-knit group of Memphis runners, including Barry Roberson, opened the store in 1981, during the “jogging” boom in the United States. Since then, the store has evolved along with the sport itself, from mass participation in marathons to the ultra-running. In this conversation (edited for clarity and concision), Bryan and I discuss Memphis running history, the store—a virtual running history museum, and how the sport has evolved over forty-plus years.

CP (Caroline Peyton): Why did you become a history major?

BR (Bryan Roberson): That's a good question. I kind of found it in college. That is not what I intended to do when I went in, and then I realized didn't really know that much. So, I just kept taking more [classes], and I really enjoyed it. I planned to teach and then I just kind of fell in love with history, and I was like, oh, I want to teach this, and I want to teach it in the way that I'm learning it, because this is not how I learned it previous to college—in a way that was more fun.

CP: And when did you start running?

BR: I had run most of my life kind of because of my dad. I was always brought out to Shelby Farms, and my sisters and I would run the cross country course (continued).

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: BRYAN ROBERSON

BR (Bryan Roberson): I always say that one of them (BR's sister) was the best runner of the three of us, and she just never continued with it. But yeah, I started running through him. He would just take us to, like, find dirt roads and take us running, but I was mainly a soccer player. I didn't run my first race until the New York Marathon, when I was, like, 19 years old. My dad was going to run the New York marathon in 2009 for the thirtieth year anniversary of him running it in 1979. I quit playing soccer after I ran the marathon. I was like, this is all I want to do.

CP: Tell me a little bit about the history of the store.

BR: Breakaway started in 1981. The original idea came from Mike Cody and Jack Rockett. I actually have Mike Cody's 1981 running log somewhere. And in there, it says, "went on a run today with Rockett, came up with the idea for Cody and Rockett's Running Emporium." And so that's where the inception came from. They were a doctor and lawyer, and from what I know, they were like, we need someone to run the business. My dad was only 22 years old and a senior at Memphis State at the time, had managed other running stores. They were like we'll bring Barry on. There were, I think, five or six partners at the beginning; it was an old house on Union. Barry, my dad, lived upstairs in the house, and the store was downstairs.

CP: What was the state of running merchandise like in the early 1980s?

BR: Obviously, before the internet, there was mail order, but it wasn't always reliable. And in those days, things were made differently, and there's a lot more quality control now.



Bryan R. - New York City Marathon

BR: (cont'd) You never knew exactly what you were going to get depending on where it was made - size wise. Having a place to actually try something on and know what it was actually going to feel like, it's still a little bit like that today, but things were just not as reliable.

When Breakaway first started, many of the guys that started have said they wanted to start like a clubhouse for runners. This is coming out of the jogging boom of the 70s, and all these guys were great runners. Mike Cody ran at Southwestern and was a one man track team, and Bill Craddock, and all these guys were 2:40 marathoners or so (e.g. 6:06 mile pace for 26.2 miles).

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: BRYAN ROBERSON



CP: What was the running culture like in the 1980s in Memphis?

BR: There were 5Ks, but from what I've heard, the 10k was the big distance. I don't think my dad has a half marathon time. The 10k and the marathon were the two big distances that most people did for road racing. I think a lot of people in Memphis know the Memphis Runners Track Club (which started in the 1970s); Mike Cody, Jack Rockett, and Bill Butler were involved in that. I mean, things did not exist as they do today. Pre-internet, my dad had a catalog of *Runners World* magazines and had them categorized. You could look in this filing cabinet and, give it to people when they came in.

Memphis has a long history of really good runners. I mean, there are people that these days no one would ever know, but Terron Wright (right), who worked at the store, lived upstairs at the the old house, was a world record holder in the 300 yards, and he ran at Memphis State. He just retired from the Fire Department after 27 years. He was a world class runner. Barry always says he's the fastest American that never ran on an Olympic team.

BR: He traveled to Europe and did big track meets, and would talk about how nobody knew who he was here when he worked at the store. He would go to Europe and kids would go up to him, and they would know his times. That's crazy.

And it was a very different, different world of running, but quality running. And there were a lot of guys that went to Memphis, and there were a lot of English and Irish runners in those days, and they would stick around and do road races. Guys that ran for Mississippi State, Ole Miss, Rhodes would all run local races. So, a lot of the times were very fast.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: BRYAN ROBERSON



Photo: The Original Breakaway Crew

CP: How do you think running culture has changed since the store started?

BR: There are a lot of good things that have changed. As far as who is doing it, as far as the amount of people, from all walks of life, that people feel like they're invited to it, where for a long time, you know, everyone kind of looked the same. Everyone came from a similar background. And now there are just so many more people who are getting out there and doing it. And I think that's a great thing that's happened, especially in the past 10 years.

CP: What has stayed the same? How are the runners of 2024 similar to the runners in 1981?

Some of the guys that started Breakaway and some of the things they were doing, like the quest to get better and to figure out tricks...

BR: (cont'd) It's funny because we all know the one thing you've got to do to get better at running is you actually have to run.

But yeah, it's always that trying to find, what can I do outside of running to run a little bit quicker, a little bit faster than last time. That rings true through the past 40 something years.

CP: Why run? Why do we run?

BR: I think people do it for different reasons. I know for me, in the way that I run and do more distance stuff, I love the idea that I can see something. I can run 50 miles across something, and I can see a place in that way, while I'm also working very hard to do it. The most beautiful places I've seen were some of the hardest places to get to. That effort and the endorphins from it, "the runner's high," can come in different forms.

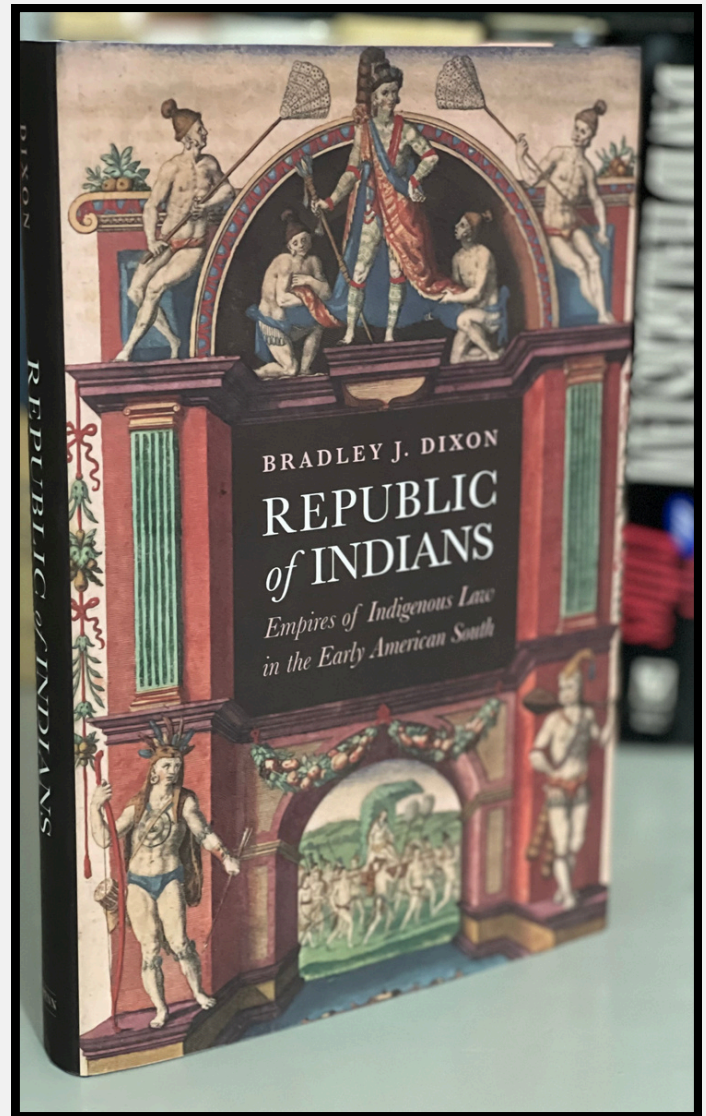
The Book Report: *Republic of Indians*

BY DR. BRAD DIXON

For the fall semester's *Book Report*, Dr. Brad Dixon provides a snapshot into his recently published *Republic of Indians: Empires of Indigenous Law in the Early American South* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024). Historian Robbie Ethridge offered high praise for the book; it "inverts the conventional story line of early America."

While in the Spanish Empire, Natives were a recognized part of "la república de indios" (the "republic of Indians"), a kind of separate commonwealth, Indigenous peoples established similar systems in other places. Across the early American South, Native joined with European colonists in larger polities, and jealously guarded their own bodies of liberties under royal sanction. Rather than simply rejecting European pretensions to rule them as subjects and vassals, Native Southerners as diverse as the Apalachees, Pamunkeys, Powhatans, and Timucuas redefined their status to become political players in legislative assemblies and the courts of distant monarchs. They pushed for incorporation in larger political systems in which they had a say and were themselves instrumental in creating.

Adapting pre-invasion practices to the technology of writing and the challenges of colonialism, Native petitioners sought exemptions from labor, protection for "the lands that God gave to them," to install preferred leaders, avoid enslavement, ally with the Crown against colonists, ease harsh colonial laws, and even to amend the terms of treaties and compacts.



Their petitions also stand as enduring contributions to American political thought. In fact, it was these "vassals" and "subjects" who gave the sharpest meaning to the modern idea of tribal sovereignty. In the South, the Spanish and English empires came to resemble one another precisely because they were both dependent to a remarkable degree on maintaining Indigenous political consent and were founded in large part on Indigenous conceptions of law.