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The e-Newsletter of the University of Missouri
Department of History
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In This Issue

Late Winter Greetings

We are now about midway through the Spring Semester 2008—renamed by the university registrar, to dispel any depressing associations with winter. Of course, the climate has not been cooperating with this positive thinking, since February 2008 has been an unusually cold and icy month here in Columbia.

While the weather has been less than ideal, developments in the history department have generally run in a positive direction. After a record fall semester, total enrollments in history courses reached 6,738 students this year, a slight improvement over the previous year, and the second-highest total ever.

When it comes to undergraduates, the history department certainly has quantity, but it has quality as well. February 13, the date of the department's third annual undergraduate recognition ceremony was eloquent testimony to the quality of history students. At the ceremony, the department offered tributes to its very best undergraduates, those who are writing honors theses and are recipients of scholarships from the history department and the College of Arts and Science. About 50 students and their parents attended. Click [here](#), for a copy of the program and photos of the department's top majors.

As another last piece of good news, the department is proud to announce the creation of a new endowment, the William A. Percy, PhD, and William C. Nash MD History Endowment Fund. This fund was donated, in the form of a charitable gift annuity by Dr. William Nash, in honor of his mentor and one-time history professor William Percy. The Percy-Nash endowment will, in the future, support undergraduate scholarships and guest lectures in the Department of History. We would like to acknowledge Nash's generous donation of and to remind all our friends and alumni that there are

many opportunities to make donations in support of the activities of the department.

Our feature news section contains tributes to two former faculty members. One is Professor Emerita Susan Flader, now even more active and vigorous in her retirement than when she was teaching. The news section has a report on the Conference on Missouri's Environmental and Cultural History held in her honor on Saturday, February 23. The other item is for a colleague sadly no longer with us, Professor Julius Thompson, professor of History and director of the Black Studies Program, who passed away last November. As promised in the November issue of the Newsletter, we have an extended obituary of Thompson, written by his and our colleague Robert Weems Jr., professor of African-American History. Our colleague, Wilma King, Arvarh Strickland Professor of African-American History and Life will be providing another form of tribute to Thompson's life and activities by taking over as interim director of the MU's Black Studies Program.

Veteran alumni may remember Claudia Kren, who was professor of medieval history and the history of science here at MU in the 1970s and 1980s. We just received the news that she passed away, quite unexpectedly, this January. Our May issue will have a full obituary.

This issue introduces a new section in the newsletter, "News from Alumni," which we hope will be a regular feature. The first of these comes from Patrick Brennan, who was in the history graduate program here from 1998 until 2003, when he received his doctorate. Since then, he has been teaching at Gulf Coast Community College, in Panama City, Florida. If any history department alumnus or alumna—a recent graduate, or from a while back, whether enrolled in the undergraduate or graduate history program—would

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like to share his or her experiences and interests since leaving MU, we would be delighted to put it in this section of the newsletter.

We'll be back with the annual book and faculty awards issue in May. In the meantime, I hope that you are all experiencing nice weather, or at least feel as good as you might if you were.

Jonathan Sperber

Chair, Department of History

The Susan L. Flader Conference on Missouri's Environmental and Cultural History

This conference, held to honor Susan Flader and her long record of accomplishment as a scholar, teacher and citizen activist, attracted 80 attendees, an impressive number, in spite of the bad weather, which hampered several participants from reaching Columbia.

A highlight of the conference was the appearance of Flader's former and current doctoral students, emphasizing her three decades of mentoring graduate students and directing their dissertations.



Susan Flader and her students. Standing: Phil Scarpino, Alison Dubbert, Mary Barile, Dave Benac, Jeff Gall, Jeremy Neely, Bob Faust, Jon Taylor, Diana Ahmad and Walter Schroeder. Seated: Amahia Mallea, Professor Flader, and Sarah Haskins.

Considering making a donation to the history department? For information on doing so, click on this [link](#). The department chair and the development office of the College of Arts and Sciences will be pleased to discuss with you any plans you may have to help the Department of History.

The conference had four sessions: one featured reminiscences of Flader as a teacher, a second dealt with her scholarship in environmental history, a third was on her work as a historian of Missouri, and the last one considered her role as a citizen activist. Panel speakers included Professor [Richard Victor](#), associate dean of the Harvard Business School; [Gary Kremer](#), director of the Missouri State Historical Society; and the Honorable [Darwin Hindman](#), mayor of Columbia. A pdf copy of the conference program is on the history department's [home page](#) at the lower right.



Columbia's mayor, Darwin Hindman, speaks on Flader's work with the Missouri Parks Association. On the right, is Richard Victor of the Harvard School of Business, whose presentation on the economics of wind power attracted considerable attention.

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The luncheon speaker was [David Thelen](#), professor emeritus at Indiana University. (Our older readers may remember Thelen from the years 1967-85, when he taught at MU, and his role in sponsoring Columbia's first recycling ordinance.) His address on the relationship between historical truth and political action was a fascinating one.



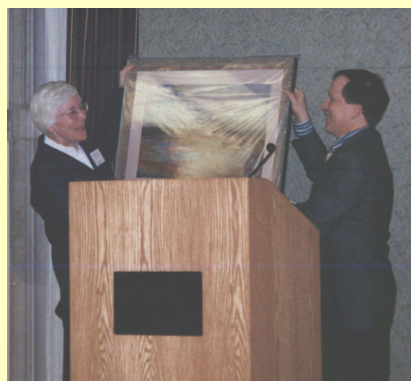
Professor Thelen giving the luncheon address.

Banquet and keynote speaker was Professor [Donald Worster](#), of the University of Kansas, one of America's most distinguished environmental historians. Worster's speech on Flader and her role in the creation of the discipline of environmental history was both a heartfelt tribute and an intellectually acute analysis.



Keynote speaker, Professor Donald Worster

The conference concluded with the presentation to Flader of a gift from the Department of History, a watercolor of a Missouri River landscape, by Columbia's distinguished artist Frank Stack. The gift was an ideal tribute to a colleague whose decades of teaching, scholarship and activism have been so closely tied to Missouri and its natural and cultural environment.



Department of History chair Jonathan Sperber presents Susan Flader with a Frank Stack Missouri River landscape.

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Julius Thompson, 1946–2007

Julius E. Thompson, professor of history and director of the Black Studies Program at MU, died of complications after a serious head trauma on Oct. 26, 2007. Born in Vicksburg, Miss., on July 15, 1946, Thompson attended elementary and high school in Natchez Miss., and received his bachelor's degree in History from Alcorn State University in 1969. He subsequently earned his master's (1971) and doctorate (1973) in American history at Princeton University where his advisor was James M. McPherson.

During the course of his career, Julius worked at a variety of institutions including: Jackson State University (1973–1980); Florida Memorial College (1981–1983); State University of New York-Albany (1983–1988); University of Rochester (1988–1989); Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (1989–1996); and the University of Missouri (1996–2007). In addition, he served as a program officer for the Lilly Foundation, coordinating their grants program for historically black institutions (1980–1981) and he received a Fulbright Program Award to conduct research and lecture at the University of Zimbabwe (Fall 1987).

Beginning with his doctoral dissertation on Hiram R. Revels, one of two African-Americans who represented Mississippi in the U.S. Senate during the early days of Reconstruction, Julius' research agenda included several works related to his home state. Besides his work on Revels, published in 1982, Thompson's other early books focused on the African American press in Mississippi. In fact, *The Black Press in Mississippi, 1865-1985 A Directory* (1988); *The Black Press in Mississippi, 1865-1985* (1993); and *Percy Greene and the Jackson Advocate: The Life and Times of a Radical Conservative Black Newspaperman, 1897-1977* (1994) contributed to Thompson's reputation as one of the country's leading experts on the African American press. Besides his works related to the black press in Mississippi, Thompson's other books related to the African American experience in the Magnolia State were *Black Life In Mississippi: Essays on Political, Social, and Cultural Studies in a Deep South State* (2001) and

Lynching in Mississippi: A History, 1865-1965 (2006).

Along with being a respected historian, Julius E. Thompson was also a respected poet. His published poetry included three books: *Hopes Tied Up In Promises* (1970); *Blues Said: Walk On* (1977); and *Mississippi Witness: Poems* (2001). Moreover, he edited *The Anthology of Black Mississippi Poets* (1988).

Seemingly based upon his proficiency as both an historian and a poet, Julius Thompson's research agenda also included works that melded these two areas. His 1999 book, *Dudley Randall, Broadside Press, and the Black Arts Movement in Detroit, 1960-1995* represents a pioneering study of arguably the leading independent black publisher associated with the black arts movement of the 1960s. Along a similar vein, the manuscript he completed shortly before his death, *Hoyt W. Fuller (1927-1981): A Life in Black Literature and Journalism* will make a significant contribution to African-American historiography and literary studies. Fuller was the influential editor of *Negro Digest*, later renamed *Black World*, during the 1960s and 70s.

While Julius E. Thompson was a productive scholar (whose output was even more impressive considering his definition of a word processor was a typewriter and legal pads), he was an equally proficient teacher and mentor. My enduring memory of Julius in this regard involves a conference entitled "African-Americans in the Land of Lincoln" we both attended at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville in early 1997. Several of his former students at SIU-Carbondale took the time to drive to this conference just to see him. As I joked at the Nov. 9, 2007 memorial service held for Julius on the MU campus, most professors' former students would not walk across the street to say "Hello" or "Thank You," let alone drive some distance to do so. Consequently, I doubt he will be forgotten by the students with whom he worked.

Besides being a productive scholar and a caring teacher and mentor, Julius E. Thompson was a good colleague

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who used his pronounced sense of humor to uplift those around him. The king of “one-liners,” and possessor of a truly unforgettable laugh, his presence will be truly missed.

Robert E. Weems Jr.
University of Missouri

News from Alumni

Since coming to Panama City, Fla. I have enjoyed many diverse and stimulating challenges. After three years and being nominated twice for a newcomer award, I am relieved to say I enjoy some job security with continuing contract status and promotion to professor. I teach five courses a semester to fulfill my contractual obligations and an additional course each semester as an overload. In addition to which, I have had the opportunity to teach two one-credit hour seminars for the Honor’s Program here at Gulf Coast Community College.

I have been privileged to invite and host scholars to this campus. Notable guests include Lecia Brooks, Director of Educational Outreach at the Southern Poverty Law Center and Professor Ken Jolly, of Saginaw State Valley University. [Editor’s note: Ken is also a graduate of the MU history doctoral program.] I have also been fortunate to leave the campus and take students to Ireland for a 10-day educational tour. I hope to be going soon (June 2008) to London to teach English history to American students for six weeks. (Just need a couple more students to register—knock on wood!). Next year in December and January I will lead students to the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico for a brief visit to our sister city, Merida. Then, in the early summer of 2009 we will go to China for a course I am co-teaching with a business professor.

I also teach courses every semester at Florida State University’s extension campus here in Panama City. Courses such as the *French Revolution* and *Colonialism* are dual listed and I enjoy working with graduate students a great deal. I am revising an article about the yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans in 1853 for *Louisiana History*.

Finally, I am proud to say I have completed three marathons; the most memorable was in Rome, Italy in 2006.

Pat Brennan

