

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Jessica Johnson 785.806.2131
Suzanne Judson-Whitehouse
413.586.4900 x162

UMass Professors and K-12 Teachers Collaborate to Connect Past and Present,
Bringing Contemporary Events into Local Classrooms

Most people assume that history is over. After all, it's the past. Not so, says the UMass Amherst [History Department](#) and the Northampton-based non-profit, [Collaborative for Educational Services](#). Together, these organizations are hosting a year-long "History Institute" for local K-12 teachers organized around understanding and teaching about contemporary events in historical context. The events have covered topics including the conflict in Syria, climate change, U.S. foreign policy, and the conflict between human rights and energy policies.

On March 27, UMass History Professor Chris Appy will explore American exceptionalism, the idea that the U.S. is unrivaled not only in its resources, wealth, and military might, but in its values and institutions, its rights and opportunities. It is the idea that unlike other powerful nations, the U.S. is always a force for good in the world. Professor Appy's talk will explore how the Vietnam War posed fundamental challenges to the faith in American exceptionalism, a core tenant of American identity since the 17th century. He will also explore the post-Vietnam efforts to revive it. "Chris Appy brings a depth of insight and passion to the study of the American War in Vietnam and post-World War II America that fully engages teachers and the public alike. He brings a fresh and textured approach to a much-discussed topic," says Rich Cairn, Director of the Emerging America Program at the Collaborative.

On May 8, UMass History Professor David Glassberg will explore themes in American environmental history. Glassberg will show how studying environmental history offers middle and high school students insights into the ways that past generations of Americans imagined and shaped the land, as well as helps students to understand the roots of the current environmental crises that they are inheriting. Glassberg is a nationally prominent public historian with decades of experience with environmental issues, both as a historian and as a politically active member of the Pioneer Valley community. "Teachers appreciate Glassberg's grounding in global and local thought and issues. He applies a distinctive twist to history that helps his listeners to make sense of confusing and contradictory ideas," adds Cairn.

Following both talks, teachers, scholars and teacher-educators from the Collaborative will work together to develop strategies for applying the content to the classroom.

This series crosses the divide between K-12 teachers and university historians. "Teachers and faculty have each commented on the excitement generated by bringing both groups together. Teachers have said how inspiring it has been to have access to expert scholars and engaging primary sources, while faculty have expressed their pleasure at seeing the history that they work with every day being brought into K-12 classrooms for students in such meaningful ways," explains Suzanne Judson-Whitehouse, Assistant Director of the Emerging America Program.

The UMass History Department has hosted different forms of "The History Institute" for two decades. "This Institute is only the tip of the iceberg," says History Department Outreach Director Dr. Jessica Johnson. "Most, if not all, of our faculty conduct public scholarship, from museum exhibits to oral history projects to articles written for public audiences, and they have been doing so for decades. We are one of very few history departments in the nation with an office dedicated to outreach and community engagement, and our Public History Program is top notch."

The theme of this year's History Institute emerged from the Department's popular new blog, [Past@Present](#), in which faculty and graduate students explore contemporary events in historical perspective. These initiatives build on a growing movement within the historical profession and universities in general in general to conduct scholarship that is relevant to present-day social struggles, bringing humanities scholarship to bear on our nation's and world's most pressing problems.

Schedule of Events:

Professor Chris Appy, "Who We Are: The Vietnam War and the End of 'American Exceptionalism'"

Thursday, March 27, 2014

Public Lecture: 4:30-5:30PM; Teacher Workshop: 6-7:00PM

Collaborative for Educational Services, 97 Hawley St, Northampton, MA

David Glassberg, "Learning from American Environmental History"

Thursday, May 8, 2014

Public Lecture: 4:30-5:30PM; Teacher Workshop: 6-7:00PM

Collaborative for Educational Services, 97 Hawley St, Northampton, MA

Appy and Glassberg's lectures were preceded by events earlier in the year by History Department faculty Mary Wilson and Audrey Altstadt. The videos of these lectures are available online:

http://www.umass.edu/history/research/history_institute.html

More information:

http://www.umass.edu/history/research/history_institute.html

<http://www.collaborative.org/events-and-courses/history-institutes>