

## Beyond Academe: Outside the Box

### Famous Historians Who Live Undetected Among Us

There are many ways of being an historian and many more people than you realize are historians. We've compiled a list of some of the more Famous Historians Who Live Undetected Among Us.

The people below are intended, as are our profiles (see Real Jobs, Real Historians), to provide you with inspiration and an understanding of the options which you have. We aren't suggesting that you rush out and write a best-selling novel or create a Grammy-winning musical group—but rather that you begin to look more closely at the people around you. You may be surprised to discover that the lawyer whom you met at the last PTA meeting has an MA in history, that the author whose work you admire has a doctorate in history or that your neighbor who is a civil servant has a doctorate in history.

We hope that you will use this list as a starting point for your own list of Historians Who Work Outside of Academia.

#### **Thomas Frank, (PhD, University of Chicago, 1994)**

Best known for his books *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, *The Wrecking Crew: How Conservatives Rule*, and *The Conquest of Cool*, Frank is a columnist and journalist. He currently writes the only left-leaning column in *The Wall Street Journal* and his work often appears in *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, *Harpers* and other well-known journals. In 2004, Frank received a Lannan Literary Fellowship and in 2009, a film based on his best-selling book, *What's the Matter With Kansas?* was made into a film.

#### **Vartan Gregorian, (PhD, Stanford University, 1964)**

Gregorian is the president of the Carnegie Corporation. Before heading the Carnegie Corporation, Gregorian taught European and Middle Eastern history at San Francisco State College, the University of California at Los Angeles, and the University of Texas at Austin. He became the Tarzian Professor of History and professor of South Asian history at the University of Pennsylvania in 1972. Two years, he was founding dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1978, he became the university's twenty-third provost, a position he held until 1981. Between 1981 and 1989, he was the president of the New York Library. In 1989, he became the president of Brown University and in 1997, he became the Director of the Carnegie Foundation.

In 1986, Gregorian, who immigrated to the United States, received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor. In 1998, President Clinton awarded him the National Humanities Medal and in 2004, he was awarded the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civil award.

#### **Bernice Johnson Reagon, (PhD, Howard University, 1975)**

An historian of African-American history, Johnson founded Sweet Honey in the Rock, a Grammy-winning African-American a capella group as a graduate student in 1973. She led this group until her retirement in 2004. Reagon's historical scholarship has been informed by her work as a political activist and her music has, in turn, been informed by her historical scholarship. Reagon's music provides audiences with a unique way to learn and think about history. Among her many achievements, she served as principal scholar, conceptual producer, and host for the Peabody Award-winning, *Wade in the Water: African American Sacred Music Traditions*, the 26 show series produced by National Public Radio and Smithsonian Institution. She was also a musical consultant, composer and performer for several films, including the PBS series, *Eyes on the Prize* and, the film based on Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*.

Reagon's scholarship and artistry have been recognized with the Heinz Award for the Arts and Humanities (2003), the Leeway National Award for Women in the Arts (2000), the Presidential Medal for contribution to public understanding of the Humanities (1995), and the MacArthur Fellowship (1989).

### **Scott Kleeb, (PhD, Yale University, 2006)**

In 2006, as Kleeb completed his dissertation in history at Yale, he began running as the Democratic candidate for Nebraska's 3rd Congressional District.

On his campaign website and in his ads, Kleeb pointed out that his in-depth knowledge of Nebraska's history (developed while writing a dissertation on the history of cattle ranching) gave him a unique and nuanced understanding of Nebraska and its needs. Although Kleeb lost in a hotly contested election, we suspect that his career has just begun.

### **Sharan Newman (PhD, University of California, Santa Barbara)**

A scholar of medieval history, Newman is the author of a series of murder mysteries set in medieval France. Newman's award-winning mysteries featuring Catherine LeVendeur explore the uneasy relations between Christians and Jews during the twelfth century. Newman's books are heavily researched and based on research conducted at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique France Méridionale et Espagne at the University of Toulouse and the Institute for Jewish History at the University of Trier, as well as many departmental archives. Newman has also used her considerable skills to write non-fiction works intended to educate readers on various topics related to the Middle Ages.

Newman's books have won numerous awards, among them the Macavity Best First Novel award for *Death comes as Epiphany* in 1994 and the first Herodotus Award for *Cursed in Blood* in 1999. Check out her website and enjoy her many fictional and non-fictional books.

**Sara Paretsky (PhD, University of Chicago, 1975)**

After receiving her doctorate in history, Paretsky recognized the "complete lack of academic jobs for historians [and she]...bowed to the inevitable...and got an MBA from the University of Chicago." She worked as a marketing manager for an insurance company for ten years before turning to writing. Today, she is an award-winning novelist whose popular murder mysteries featuring V.I. Warshawski have been made into a film starring Kathleen Turner. In 1986 Paretsky created Sisters in Crime, a worldwide organization to support women crime writers, which earned her Ms. Magazine's 1987 Woman of the Year award. She has also been the recipient of the British Crime Writers' Cartier Diamond Dagger for lifetime achievement and her novel, *Blacklist* won the Gold Dagger from the British Crime Writers for best novel of 2004, and she has received the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from several different universities.

Like Thomas Frank who famously turned his knowledge of Kansas' complex history into a best-selling work, Paretsky also used her understanding of her native Kansas' bloody history in her recent novel, *Bleeding Kansas*.

Check out her website and enjoy her many books.

**Josh Marshall, (PhD, Brown University, 2003)**

Josh Marshall is a journalist and the founder of *Talking Points Memo*, which the New York Times characterized as "one of the most popular and respected sites" in the blogosphere.

Marshall, who has written for *The American Prospect*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*, founded *Talking Points Memo* during the 2000 Florida recount. He is widely credited with being the first to publicize and draw attention to the politically motivated dismissal of U.S. attorneys by the Bush Administration.

**Gordon Brown, (PhD, Edinburgh University, 1982)**

In 2007, Gordon Brown became the Prime Minister of Britain. Brown's dissertation on the history of the early Labour Party in Scotland undoubtedly provided him with a strong understanding of various political issues in Britain. He was first elected to Parliament in 1983.

**Lucy Killea, (PhD, University of California, San Diego 1975)**

Lucy Killea earned her PhD in Latin American history from the University of California, San Diego. She currently is a Senior Fellow with the International Community Foundation. Between 1996 and 2001, Dr. Killea served as the foundation's President & CEO.

The recipient of numerous awards and honors, Killea has had an extraordinarily varied career. In California, Killea is well-known for her eighteen years of service as an elected official, serving on the San Diego City Council (1978-82); in the California State Assembly (1982-89); and in the State Senate (1989-96).

### **Barbara Mertz a.k.a Elizabeth Peters and Barbara Michaels (PhD, University of Chicago, 1952)**

An Egyptologist, Mertz is an award-winning murder mystery writer whose works have dominated the New York Times best-seller list for decades. In 1998, she was named a Grandmaster by the Mystery Writers of America. Mertz published her first fiction book under the pseudonym, Barbara Michaels, because her publisher was concerned that readers might confuse her fictional work with her non-fictional scholarship. Mertz also publishes under the name Elizabeth Peters.

Through her award-winning series featuring Amelia Peabody, a Victorian Egyptologist, Mertz has shared her passion for Egypt with thousands of readers. Check out her website and enjoy her many books.

### **Defining History**

What does it mean to be an historian? Are historians only professors?

Historians, in our book, are those who use a knowledge of history in their work. Historians inside and outside the academy promote the study of history in diverse ways. And, of course, historians are often active scholars, researching, analyzing and publishing their work in different forums.

The actual job titles which our Famous Historians Who Live Among Us profiles hold are wide-ranging and rarely ever include the word “historian” but if you look closely at the tasks and accomplishments of these profiles, it is clear that these individuals are ground-breaking historians, that is scholars who have used their knowledge of history in unique and different ways both to educate others and to analyze problems which are historical in nature.

### **Fictional Characters Who Think Outside the Box**

Even fictional characters sometimes decide to leave academia. Some characters, such as Michael Malone's Cuddy Mangum, pursue and earn a PhD in history but decide never to become academics, while others, such as Elizabeth Peter's Vicky Bliss, walk away from positions as professors to pursue other careers. Many of these authors have made decisions similar to those of their characters. Malone walked away from a teaching position at the University of Pennsylvania. Peters (real name: Barbara Mertz) has a PhD from the University of Chicago but chose not to be a professor.

You may want to check these five books out.

Robert Hellenga, *The Fall of a Sparrow* (Scribner, 1999).

Michael Malone, *Time's Witness*. Other Cuddy Mangum books include *Uncivil Seasons* and *First Lady*.

Elizabeth Peters, *The Borrower of the Night* (Avon, 2000). Other Vicky Bliss books include: *Street of the Five Moons*, *The Silhouette in Scarlet*, *Trojan Gold*, and *Night Train to Memphis*.

Francine Prose, *Blue Angel* (Perennial, 2001).

Erik Tarloff, *The Man Who Wrote the Book* (Crown, 2000).

Connie Willis, *Bellwether* (Bantam, 1996). You may also enjoy Willis' view of historians in the future. Check out *The Doomsday Book* and *To Say Nothing of the Dog*.

## Four Transformed Academics, or Here's Where We Prove That Nothing is Too Obscure

**Gregor Samsa** is a specialist in the history of science (his dissertation: A Great Metamorphosis: Physics in Eighteenth-Century France). Greg spent a year in France researching his dissertation. Since then, he has worked as a tenure-track assistant professor for two years. Greg majored in physics as an undergraduate and, while writing his dissertation, he expanded his understanding of this field. He is able to read and understand fairly complex scientific documents. Greg has published two articles in *Isis* and is negotiating with a university press for his book. While serving as a faculty member, he helped redesign his department's major; he also worked across the university to help create ties between the sciences and the humanities.

Things Greg should emphasize on his resume/in interviews and in job letters:

- \* In-depth knowledge of and understanding of French culture
- \* Ability to work with and create ties between scientists and non-scientists
- \* Published with University of Chicago Press
- \* In-depth understanding of scientific culture and foundations
- \* Comfortable with giving public presentations in French

Some suggestions as to where he can look for satisfying work

- \* Scientific foundations (National Academy of Sciences, National Science Foundation, American Association for the Advancement of Science etc.)
- \* Scientific journals with general audiences (*Scientific American*, *National Geographic* etc.)
- \* Organizations and businesses which seek to promote French culture
- \* French businesses

- \* International societies which emphasize the sciences
- \* Educational foundations which seek to integrate the sciences and humanities for students (these are very trendy)
- \* Museums of Science (these exist in many cities-from Baltimore to Boston)

**Leopold Bloom** is a specialist in early modern German religious history (his dissertation: *Reluctant Revolutionaries: Reform Ministers and the Peasants War in Germany*). Leo speaks fluent German and is comfortable working with documents in sixteenth-century German dialects. He chose his topic of study because he is interested in the conflict between secular and religious authorities. While working on his dissertation, Leo studied abroad and lived in Berlin. Leo completed his doctorate in seven years and he has worked as a visiting professor at a small southern college for two years.

Things Leo should emphasize on his resume/in interviews and in job letters:

- \* Fluent German
- \* French (he passed a graduate language exam)
- \* The rapid completion of his doctorate (he finished in less than the average time)
- \* The ability to create and change websites (Leo always created his own websites when teaching)
- \* The ability to meet deadlines
- \* Flexibility and ability to master new subjects quickly (because the college at which he taught was so small, Leo also taught a German-language class and classes on Asian history)
- \* Public speaking skills (Leo has given papers at European and American conferences)
- \* Ability to give public presentations in German

Some suggestions as to where he can look for satisfying work:

- \* Art auction houses such as Southeby's and Christie's (we recommend that he look at the smaller firms first)
- \* Organizations which focus on the separation of church and state in American society (ACLU, People for the American Way, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State The Center for Inquiry, etc.)
- \* Organizations which seek to promote German culture
- \* Law firms focusing on either German businesses or reparations claims
- \* The US Government (specifically the Library of Congress which always needs fluent speakers and the Department of State but also the CIA and the Congressional Research Service)
- \* Businesses which have German-American ties
- \* Web design companies, especially those with a focus on German-American or educational issues

**Alice Liddle** is a specialist in American labor history (her dissertation: *A Sense of Wonder: Strikes During the McCarthy Years*). As a graduate student, Alice became involved in the movement to unionize teaching assistants (she has been to national

meetings to discuss this and organize her fellow teaching assistants). In writing her dissertation, Alice used oral history (she should look over her contacts and re-assess whether these can be useful to her now; a former union head may, for example, know the current union leader).

Things Alice should emphasize on her resume/in interviews and in job letters:

- \* In-depth knowledge and understanding of labor issues in the US
- \* Organizing skills
- \* Her oral history skills (especially if she is interested in doing reporting or writing)
- \* Ability to give oral presentations (Alice has given two papers at graduate student conferences)
- \* 75% success in writing grants over a nine year period (Alice received 3 out of the 4 grants she applied for during her nine year graduate career)

Some suggestions as to where she can look for satisfying work:

- \* Federal or various state departments of labor
- \* Union organizations
- \* Lobbying groups which focus on workers' rights
- \* Museums and historical sites, especially those which focus on social history and workers' rights (The Tenement Museum, Smithsonian etc.)
- \* Human resources departments of businesses, especially those known for worker-friendly policies (Ben and Jerry's, etc.)
- \* Groups which seek to promote first-amendment rights (ACLU, Media Watch etc.)
- \* Newspapers and newsletters which strongly identify with workers' rights (*The Nation*, *The Socialist Worker* etc.)
- \* Staff of a state or federal legislator who specializes in labor issues or serves on labor-related committees

*Elizabeth Bennett* is a specialist in nineteenth-century Arab women (her dissertation: *Lifting the Veil: The World of Middle-Class Egyptian Women, 1823-1918*). She has spent a fair amount of time in Egypt doing research (6 months) and has good Arabic. She became interested in her subject while working for the Peace Corps in Jordan.

Things Liz should emphasize on her resume/in interviews and in job letters:

- \* Arabic
- \* Extensive experience working and living in the Mid-East
- \* Knowledge and understanding of women's issues
- \* In-depth understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices, especially as they relate to Egypt and Jordan

Some suggestions as to where she can look for satisfying work:

- \* Feminist organizations which fight for women's issues in the third world (Equality Now etc.)
- \* The United Nations
- \* The US Government (Department of State, the CIA, the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, the FBI, the Congressional Research Service)
- \* Medical organizations which provide support to the third world (Doctors without Borders, Worldwide Fund for Mothers Injured in Childbirth etc.)
- \* Business companies with ties to the Middle East
- \* Educational organizations which focus on third-world women
- \* Lobbying organizations for Arab interests and Arab-Americans
- \* Organizations which seek to promote democracy worldwide (Amnesty International, The Carr Foundation, Freedom House etc.)

Obviously, Liz has a really wide range of options but we included her because, just a few years ago, Liz's work would have been considered extremely obscure. Political situations change constantly---always watch out for shifts which can work to your benefit.

Beyond Academe was created as a free service for the historical profession. Please contact Alexandra Lord at [beyondacademe@yahoo.com](mailto:beyondacademe@yahoo.com) if you would like to excerpt material from this site and post it elsewhere. Thank you.