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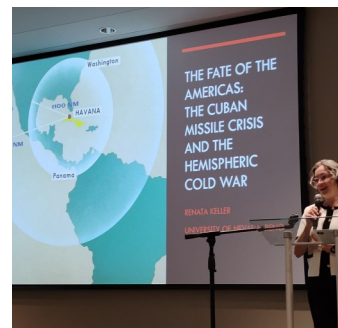
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## Mahan Lecture Reexamines Cuban Missile Crisis

Dr. Renata Keller, of the University of Nevada, Reno, delivered the twenty-third Howard F. Mahan Lecture on April 15. “The Fate of the Americas: The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Hemispheric Cold War,” based on Dr. Keller’s book of the same title, introduced a fresh, multipolar approach to a subject heretofore understood as a bipolar matter between the US and USSR.

As Dr. Keller recounted, a research trail beginning at the Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston and ultimately covering eight countries revealed considerable Latin American involvement in the crisis, leading to her conclusion: “The people of Latin America helped cause the Cuban missile crisis, participated in its resolution, and were affected by its results.” The key stimulus of the 1962 crisis was Fidel Castro’s Cuban revolution of 1959, which suggested to many the possibility of exporting, or the imperative of resisting the exportation of, the Cuban model to neighboring countries. Anti-Castro govern-

ments in the Caribbean basin and in Central and South America sought to isolate Cuba diplomatically and even supported the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. Alarmed, Castro agreed to Soviet



Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s proposal to deploy nuclear missiles to Cuba.

Dr. Keller next pointed out that the Organization of American States (OAS) met immediately after the missiles were detected and unanimously endorsed the US-led quarantine of Cuba. Such

regional participation prevented the crisis from assuming the shape of a US war with Cuba and instead ensured that its resolution conformed to the pattern of a “multilateral peace effort.” Pro- and anti-Castro demonstrations in many Latin American countries further attested to the crisis’s hemispheric character and occasioned a grim statistic: More Bolivians (five) died in the crisis than Cubans, when demonstrations turned violent. Finally, Dr. Keller highlighted the crisis’s regional fallout, which included coups and diplomatic realignments, such as Washington’s embrace of opposition forces in Brazil, following Brasilia’s ambiguous performance during the crisis.

Dr. Keller spoke without notes and enthralled the audience of seventy students, faculty, and community members, who did not want her talk to end and extended the evening with a broad range of questions. This year’s Mahan Lecture was a proud success.

## Faculty and Students Attend Conference in Fairhope

The History Department helped sponsor the Alabama Historical Association conference held in Fairhope from April 9 to April 11, 2026. The 78<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Association was a well-attended triumph.

The Department also contributed to the academic content. Undergraduate History major Nakeria Woods shared the results of her research project on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his memory in American

culture. Undergraduates Areshio Walker and Ayana Thompson reported on their research on Mobile’s Down the Bay neighborhood, which was part of a summer 2025 internship supervised by Dr. David Messenger and by Dr. Ryan Morini of the McCall Library and Archives. The internship was funded by the David Mathews Center for Civic Life.

Dr. Mara Hunter informed conference-goers of her work on the African-American history of

Fairhope, which is funded by a grant from the Alabama Humanities Alliance; and Dr. Clayton Vaughn-Roberson moderated a panel discussion on the subject, also supported by the Alliance. More news of this important project will appear in the next edition of this newsletter.

The USA History Department is making its mark on local history.

**Photos of the Conference appear on page four.**

## History Department Out and About

*"To study history means submitting yourself to chaos but nevertheless retaining your faith in order and meaning."*

— Herman Hesse

The History Department is very conscious of its role in bringing history to the broader community in Mobile and not just staying on campus.

In the spring of 2025, Dr. David Messenger's Public History in Africatown class learned about the history of African-American education in the South while helping to catalog items collected by the Mobile County Training School Alumni Association. Located in Africatown, the Mobile County Training School (MCTC) was the premier African-American high school in Mobile until it closed

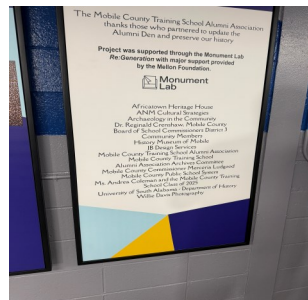
in 1970. The heritage space exhibit opened inside the current school, which is now a middle school, in September 2025.

In February and March of this year, working with partners at the Mobile Museum of Art and the Gulf Coast Holocaust and Human Rights Education Foundation, the Department co-sponsored an exhibit at the Mobile Museum of Art entitled "Pictures of Resistance: The Wartime Photographs of Jewish Partisan Faye Schulman." The exhibition opened with a talk by Dr. Daniel H. Magilow of the Univer-

sity of Tennessee, Knoxville on "What Can a Nazi Photo Magazine Tell Us about Disinformation Today?"

Finally, Dr. Deidra Dees, who teaches Native American history, helped judge the South Alabama Regional History Day contest February 24, 2026. She is pictured here with the winners of the category she judged: Student Websites, Junior Division.

The Department is raising its profile in the community by taking the Mobile area as its classroom and learning and teaching in it.



## History Students Share Internship Experiences

USA History students are taking advantage of internships in the Mobile area. The internships earn credit for graduation, and they also provide rich management, research, and interpersonal experience.

Megan Linley, Chris Beam, and Josiah Todd (pictured left to right) shared their stories as part of an Internship Expo that took place

on April 2. With many hours of diverse experiences at the USS Alabama battleship, the History Museum of Mobile, the Mobile Medical Museum, the Bragg-Mitchell Mansion, and the Gulf Coast Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education between them, the three young historians described their daily engagement with such tasks as cataloguing, curating, and investigating,

and highlighting the unexpected pleasures that come with working alone and with others. All three reported thrilling discoveries of artifacts or documents, which made them feel more connected with the past and more competent as professional historians.

A roomful of intrigued classmates absorbed every detail. The Internship Expo may soon become an annual event.



# New Book Links Abolitionism and Religion

Dr. Nicholas P. Wood, of Spring Hill College, introduced his new book, *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Abolitionism in Colonial and Revolutionary America*, at a March 24 meeting of the Alabama Archeological Society, Southwest Chapter. The event was co-sponsored by the History Department.

To an engaged audience of more than thirty students, faculty, and community members, Dr. Wood explained that his project sought to account for the coincidence of the Revolutionary War and the abolition of slavery in northern states. After considering theories such as the “contagion of liberty” – that the natural rights-espousing patriots turned their principles toward slavery – as well as the argument, made by the scholars of the 1619 project, that the War was waged for the sake of slavery, Dr. Wood discovered that the movement against slavery in the revolutionary generation was actuated by religion. Wars such as the French and Indian War and the Revolution, “invite religious interpretation to explain suffering,” Dr. Wood said. Military setbacks including the British capture of Philadelphia in 1777 signified God’s displeasure

at the sin of slavery. As Philadelphians prayed for forgiveness for their sins the next year, the French alliance was secured and the British left Philadelphia. The subsequent abolition of slavery in Pennsylvania was conceived by its



Dr. Wood (right) with friends

sponsors as an expression of gratitude at their deliverance.

Dr. Wood delved into both the pro- and anti-slavery Biblicism of the age and found

that it was mostly the Quakers who claimed that, since Jesus had destroyed the “wall of partition” separating Jews from Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14), the latter, encompassing Africans, were now included in the injunction against long-term slavery heretofore applicable only to Jews. Other Biblical controversies, such as the “curse of Ham,” also occasioned numerous pro- and anti-slavery interpretations.

One interesting corollary of the preponderance of the religious aspect of abolitionism is the reduction of abolitionist credit on the part of the Founding Fathers, for most of the anti-slavery impetus came from Quakers and other obscure people. John Adams fared especially poorly in Dr. Wood’s account, owing to his tendency to defend slaveowners in lawsuits mounted by slaves seeking emancipation.

Penetrating questions and learned answers followed the main talk. Dr. Wood’s research, and the keen interest with which it was received, made for an especially enlightening and enjoyable event.

## Recent Faculty Publications

History Department faculty have recently published work in diverse areas. Dr. Mel McKiven’s *The Consequences of Confederate Citizenship: The Civil War Correspondence of Alabama’s Pickens Family* was released by LSU Press. The book is part of the “Conflicting Worlds: New Dimensions of the American Civil War” series and examines letters between home front and war front, bringing the domestic aspect of the War to vivid light.

Dr. David Messenger brought out *Civilian Bombing and Civil Defense in the Spanish Civil War: Bombs Along the Mediterranean*, which highlights the shift in focus from military to civilian targets, a harbinger of subsequent trends. The book was published by Palgrave Macmillan.



Dr. Rebecca Williams published two essays in edited volumes: “The Miracles of Jesus,” contained in *Jesus, Son of Mary, in Muslim Thought* (Society of Biblical Literature Press); and “‘The Light That Was With You Yesterday Has Left You’: The Conception of Muḥammad as Late Antique Tale in the Qur’an and Sīra,” included in *Muḥammad’s Ḥiḡāz in Focus: Philological Contributions* (EB Verlag).

These publications showcase the great breadth of our faculty’s research interests and count as major contributions to their fields. Congratulations to our three authors!

# Photos from Fairhope Conference

Clockwise from top left: Nakeria Woods with conference-goers; Areshio Walker and Ayana Thompson with an attendee; Dr. Clayton Vaughn-Roberson moderating his panel; Dr. Mara Hunter introducing a speaker.



*Clio, Muse of History*



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***"Historians can process information in a systematic way. They recognize patterns that other people cannot."***

The USA History Department offers a wide variety of exciting courses, covering the histories of Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, as well as the history of the United States and the South. Faculty are committed to teaching research and writing skills and the critical thinking that is becoming ever more necessary for survival in the information age. Now, more than ever, a history education is a prerequisite for an informed global citizenry.

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**The History Department welcomes donations! Please contact the Department office.**