

## **USA History Club/Phi Alpha Theta Fall 2014-Spring 2015**

This year, the History Club and USA chapter of the History Honor Society, Phi Alpha Theta, made history. They produced a new series of public discussions, founded an undergraduate research and writing award, and turned the “History Club” into an administrative reality. These accomplishments were due in large measure to the vision and energy of outgoing president, Gabriel Gold-Vukson, assisted by vice president, Blakeney McKnight; treasurer, Eric Williams; and, secretary, Alexandria Odell. A new faculty committee charged with assisting the History Club/Phi Alpha Theta, also helped facilitate these innovations. The faculty advisors were Leanne Good, Michele Strong (Chair), and Rebecca Williams (on sabbatical spring, 2015).

### ***SGA Registration of the History Club***

In 2015, the History Club became an official student organization. Prior to this year, Phi Alpha Theta held the title as the only history oriented student group at USA. The SGA registration of the History Club aims to make student life within the History Department more inclusive and democratic.

### ***The Macaluso Prize for Undergraduate Research and Writing***

The History Club/Phi Alpha Theta founded a prize competition for undergraduate history papers. Titled “The Macaluso Prize,” in honor of the late Lenny Macaluso, a beloved teacher and faculty member, the competition seeks to generate excitement about undergraduate writing and research and to reward excellence. In this inaugural year Curtis Johnson and Timothy Kaiser shared the Macaluso Prize. The Macaluso Prize is only the first step in a long-term plan by the History Club/Phi Alpha Theta to encourage academic excellence. The next phase will be the creation of a student conference on campus to share historical research and the publication of vetted student research papers and essays in an annual journal.

### ***Civil Rights in Historical Perspective Panel Discussions:***

- ***Spotlight on Ferguson***
- ***Spotlight on Free Speech***

Believing that students find history more accessible when they engage with its implications in contemporary contexts, President Gold-Vukson led the History Club/Phi Alpha Theta in hosting two public and well-attended panel discussions on civil rights. The events took place at 6:00 pm, Marx Library auditorium, on 9/29/2014 and 3/12/2015. Catered receptions followed both events. Preparation for the panel discussions also included “student only” “teach ins” conducted by President Gold-Vukson at the Sartori Coffee shop.

In response to the protests following the death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014, the first panel discussion put the “spotlight on Ferguson” and questions surrounding race and social justice. Dr. Don Devore (Department of History) and author of *Defying Jim Crow: African American Community Development and the Struggle for Racial Equality in New Orleans, 1900-1960*; Frye Gaillard, Writer in Residence and the author of the 2015-2016 “common read” selection, *Cradle of Freedom*; and Scotty Kirkland, adjunct professor (Department of History), local civil rights historian, and former curator at the Museum of Mobile, comprised the panel of guest speakers. Dr. Leanne Good (Faculty Advisor, Department of History) moderated the panel

and fielded questions from the audience. Drs. Robert Faust, Clarence Mohr, and Strong also attended.

In response to the terrorist attack at the offices of the satirical news magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, on January 17, 2015, the second panel discussion put the spotlight on free speech historically, globally, and on campus. Dr. Dan Rogers (Department of History), author of "Testimony as Rehabilitation: Hans Globke at Nuremberg, 1948-49"; Dr. Nader Entessar (Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice), author of *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*; J.D. Crowe, nationally syndicated political cartoonist and author of *Half-thunk Thoughts*, comprised the panel. President Gold-Vukson moderated. Drs. Devore, Faust, Mohr, Steven Trout (English) and Strong also attended. At the conclusion of the panel discussion, the student bookstore held a book-signing for Crowe in the lobby of the library auditorium.

Incoming History Club president, Alexandria Odell, will take the lead in setting the agenda for the 2015-16 panel discussions.

### ***Field Trips***

On November 18, 2014, the History Club/Phi Alpha Theta sponsored a tour of the "Ark of India" exhibit at the History Museum of Mobile. Scotty Kirkland, curator, conducted the tour. Over thirty students attended, accompanied by Drs. Faust and Strong. Drs. Miller and Mohr also attended.

### ***History Professor of the Year***

History Club officers conducted an annual online poll of history majors and minors for the Favorite History Professor of the Year Award. President Gold-Vukson presented the award to Dr. Mara Kozelsky at the department's annual award ceremony.

### ***Phi Alpha Theta Induction Ceremony***

At the History Department Awards ceremony held in the spring, Dr. Strong inducted two new Phi Alpha Theta members: Brian McGhee and Eric Williams.

### ***Meetings, Elections, and Faculty Advisors***

Two elections and recruitment meetings took place during the academic year, as well as multiple organizational meetings, which were attended variously by Drs. Faust, Good, Rogers, Strong, and Williams.

Gabriel Gold-Vukson stepped down as president after graduating in spring 2015. We are grateful to president Gold-Vukson for acting upon the potential of the club to empower history students with a collective identity in pursuit of academic excellence, outreach, and conviviality.

Members elected secretary, Alexandria Odell, to succeed Gold-Vukson as History Club president. Odell's term begins in fall, 2015. Elections for officers will also take place in the fall.

Faculty advisors for the 2015-2016 year are Drs. Timothy Lombardo, Michele Strong (Chair), and Rebecca Williams.