Battle over the nation’s future raged from coast to coast

Everyone knows the Civil War was a battle between the Yankees in the North and the Rebels in the South . . . except that this is not the whole story. A third region was deeply involved. And what were these other participants called?

“Well, umm . . . they were, umm—they didn’t have a nickname. That’s part of the problem I’m working on,” said Stacey Smith, a historian who is recasting the history of the war by re-centering it in the North American West.

“My work upends the standard regional narrative by arguing that the contest over African American freedom was a truly national conflict in which westerners, as well as northerners and southerners, battled over the meanings of freedom, race, and citizenship,” said Smith, a Research Fellow and history faculty member at OSU.

Smith’s previous book, Freedom’s Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction (supported by a previous Center Fellowship), won the David Montgomery Prize in U.S. Labor and Working-Class History, awarded by the Organization of American Historians. The book “aimed to write the Pacific Coast into the history of American slavery and emancipation.”

(Continued on page 5)
Come and see me as I don’t expect to last long. The dreariness here is more pleasant than that of the trenches but the frightfulness, although occurring less frequently, is quite as frightful and more certain.

Thomas Hughes, Officer British Royal Flying Corps, 1915

Flying a flimsy, unstable plane made of wood, linen, and wire, Officer Hughes died in aerial combat within months of writing the above lines to his lover, an infantryman on the Western Front.

“Although his gay identity and belief in the futility of the war would make Hughes relatively unique among his fellow airmen,” said Research Fellow Janet Lee, “he shared with them the precarious emotional terrain of not expecting to last long while still performing the role of the glamorous soldier hero.”

Airmen’s letters and diaries from WWI are extraordinary, said Lee, in their dual expressions of pleasure in sanctioned killing—“Oh joy, this is the life, bagged another Hun”—and fear of imminent death at a time when life expectancy in the air was just a matter of months. The men’s emotional lives were shaped by the inescapable knowledge of their own mortality while having to perform as heroes.

“Some faced death with an arrogant bravado. Others nervously scribbled about their demise in pocket diaries or wrote letters to be opened by family members at the time of their death. Many found pleasure in killing, most were at least satisfied by murderous acts performed in the course of duty, and a good number experienced guilt and remorse.”

In her new book, On Killing and Dying: Affective Histories of World War I Airmen, Lee will focus on the emotional struggles of British airmen by analyzing their flight logs, diaries, and letters. An OSU Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Lee is the author or co-author of five books, including another on WWI, War Girls: The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) in the First World War.

Founded in 1912, the Royal Flying Corps entered WWI as the aerial arm of the British Army to provide infantry support and photographic reconnaissance. Flying was in its infancy and as the planes were ill-equipped for fighting, incidents of combat were more by accident than design.

By 1915, however, aircraft had become an important combat element. “Capturing the imagination of the British public, airmen presented exciting new representations of military masculinities through daring acts of heroism. Theirs seemed a personalized and chivalrous fight combining flying skills, deftness with firearms, and sustained ferocity in a single act of combat.”

Though this conception was not necessarily accurate, said Lee, it was embraced by a willing public, which in turn helped to shape airmen’s emotional world. The young flier who described feeling joy at killing “another Hun” went on to say that his nerves “are starting to get the better of me,” and he hoped he could shut out the fear of “going down in a flaming ball” and “hold it together.”

“Such expressions of simultaneous fear and bravado, of joy and anxiety, capture the emotional struggles of men enculturated into the tropes of duty, service, courage and chivalry—all tropes associated with the nationalist soldier hero—when facing death on a daily basis.”

Lee’s focus on emotions in the context of men’s narratives of the period is a rare approach, but she views it as essential for a true understanding of the emotional worlds inhabited by historic figures such as the RAF fliers.

“How might we best understand the culturally embedded social meanings of key emotions like fear, for example, and is it possible to go beyond emotional expressions—usually conveyed in language—and have any assurance they are indicative of emotional states? And especially in terms of this project, how do these meanings affect gender performances, and how are they ultimately implicated in the mobilization of nationalist politics?”
Novel takes on family violence, family mythology

And then he jumps because what he sees next makes no sense: deep in the corner his father is sitting on the floor, his arms crossed over his knees, his head on his arms. And it’s coming from him—not crying or weeping—sniveling. The only time he’d seen his father with tears in his eyes was when he was picking up the porcelain shards of the broken lid to the Canton ginger jar.

What’s broken now is human rather than porcelain. It is his mother lying dead, strangled by his weeping father in a scene of domestic violence that forms the heart and theme of Keith Scribner’s new novel, The Keeping Room.

“I explore the cycle of domestic violence through generations of perpetrators, victims, and witnesses. I’m interested in what I see as a continuum from violent thoughts to violent speech to physical violence,” said Scribner.

The author of three previous novels, Scribner is a Research Fellow and English faculty member at OSU. The new book features protagonist Cole Callahan, a Connecticut native who puts plenty of distance between himself and the family tragedy by moving to Portland, Oregon, where he turns to renovating old houses.

The key years for the story are 1979 when the murder occurs and 2008 when Cole returns for the first time in decades to Connecticut, not for family reasons but to oversee the dismantling of an old tobacco drying shed made of American chestnut lumber that is prized by woodworkers such as Callahan.

“Many of the novel’s readers won’t know that for over a hundred years, some of the world’s finest and most expensive cigar wrappers have been grown under cheesecloth nets stretched over a structure of posts and heavy wire, tenting the vast fields up the valley north of Hartford,” said Scribner. Production has shrunk from a height of fifty thousand acres to just over two thousand.

“Tobacco farming lends sensuous and figurative texture to the novel—metaphors of covering up, smoke, and obsccurity, the class associations of cigars, the irony that the Connecticut River Valley, so steeped in New England pietism, relies for over a century on the evil weed as its biggest cash crop. And hidden inside many of these pious homes there’s ongoing domestic violence.”

Shocked to discover that his father, prison term long over, is not only living alone at the old family home but is suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, Cole feels compelled to move back in while arranging for long-term care.

“As his father drifts in and out of his symptoms, Cole begins to doubt his claim that he doesn’t really remember the murder. With his siblings maintaining their distance, Cole resists the possibility that he’s the only one bearing the memory.

“As with all my novels, I explore how memories change over time, how they can be fabricated or imagined, and how family members live their lives in response to each other and to the past. In a more general sense, this novel explores how American mythology can influence a family’s mythology. The novel considers how successfully we can return to our pasts and how we react upon discovering that the past is not as simple as we’ve thought. It asks, What’s recoverable, and what remains covered?”

Tobacco drying shed
Cameras on the Columbia Coast

Six pairs of eyes looking at the same scene will not see the same things.

Thirty photographs now on show at the Center prove this neatly. “Six Photographers on the Columbia Coast” includes both color and black-and-white images of familiar coastal sights like boats and old pilings on tidal flats along with less recognizable views of aging architectural details. The result is a rich, nostalgic and multifaceted tour of a maritime region with a colorful history that lives on.

The photographers traveled together to the area but then fanned out from Astoria to document the visual treats on both sides of the river. They explored the streets and waterfront of the Northwest’s oldest city, as well as the upriver sloughs around Brownsmead on the Oregon side, before crossing the river to Washington to photograph old Fort Columbia, the picturesque harbor at Ilwaco, and historic Oysterville on Willapa Bay.

The show includes work by Rich Bergeman, Allan Doerksen, Dave McIntire and John Ritchie, all of Corvallis, and Kurt Norlin and Dan Wise of Albany. Most have exhibited at the Center before, Bergeman in several one-man shows.

“Six Photographers on the Columbia Coast” will be on view through December 10. The exhibit is open most weekdays, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The John Muir, by Allan Doerksen

Astoria Bridge, by Rich Bergeman.
Historian ‘faces the music’

Mina Carson has long moved among varied academic and art worlds, including music and photography. Now she brings these together in “Facing the Music,” digital images of her fellow music makers.

The upcoming winter term exhibit will include photographs of The Flow, the Creighton Lindsay Band, Johanna Beekman, the New World Kirtan Band, Ed Dee, Lukas Borsten, Keltocalpyse, and others. Rather than a reception, the show will open in January with a concert (details in progress).

A songwriter and guitarist, Carson is a member of RiverRocks and Keltocalpyse. As a longtime professor at OSU, she teaches courses in the history of women, lesbians and gays, popular music, and psychotherapy.

Carson’s previous exhibit at the Center, “An American in Paris,” featured photographs taken in France on her cell phone. She is the author of Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the America Settlement Movement, 1885-1930; Girls Rock! (with Tisa Lewis and Susan Shaw); and Ava Helen Pauling: Partner, Activist, Visionary.

“Facing the Music: Performance Photos” will be on display weekdays January through March.

Civil War continued from page 1

They also pursued a vision of ‘colored citizenship’ that entailed full civil, legal and political equality, equal access to education and public accommodations, and a sense of belonging to the nation.”

A transnational element was added in 1858-59 when hundreds of African Americans migrated from California to British Columbia to escape oppressive laws in their home state.

The Western black freedom movement was complicated by factors peculiar to the region, said Smith. While most East Coast abolitionists criticized U.S. seizure of Mexican territory in the 1840s as an immoral land grab, West Coast black activists—as beneficiaries of American western empire—saw the conquest more positively.

“Echoing the mainstream rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, they portrayed their own westward migration as a ‘civilizing’ project that spread freedom, democracy, and Protestant Christianity to benighted Mexicans and Indians. Moreover, the West’s racial diversity forced West Coast activists to confront dilemmas about race, freedom, and citizenship unfamiliar to their East Coast colleagues.”

The presence of Latinos, American Indians, and Asian immigrants who also endured exclusion and inequality raised difficult questions for African American activists.

“Would they link their cause with those of other oppressed groups or press only for their own rights? Would they advocate the brotherhood of all men, or would they make a case for the superiority of black men’s claim to citizenship?”

Ultimately, said Smith, they chose to support federal Reconstruction laws such as the Naturalization Act of 1870 that opened citizenship to those of African descent but excluded Asians.

“A West-focused history of black freedom struggle can help scholars better understand the diversity and complexity of this movement and how the Pacific Coast was integral—rather than peripheral—to national debates over race, democracy, and American destiny in this era.”
Dropping in on Wordsworth

*I traveled among unknown men, In lands beyond the sea . . . ah, but could Wordsworth possibly have imagined an unknown man from beyond the sea “traveling” to his cherished Dove Cottage without having had to leave Oregon?

Humanities scholar Evan Gottlieb made such a trip last May, dropping in at the Lake District poet’s home by Skyping from the Center to speak in the “Wordsworth Online” series sponsored by the Wordsworth Trust.

“There happened to be a group of American students visiting the trust at the time, so they were part of the audience too, which was neat,” said Gottlieb.


Wordsworth lived at Dove Cottage, a former pub that is now headquarters for the Wordsworth Trust, with his sister Dorothy from 1799 to 1808. It’s possible that journeying by Skype while remaining snugly in his own study might have suited the poet very well indeed, for the “Travel” poem continues . . . Nor will I quit thy shore A second time; for still I seem To love thee more and more.

Peter J. Copek Fund

During Peter J. Copek’s sixteen years as the founding director of the Center, he regularly made Center money available to support cultural events on campus. In addition to conferences, music festivals, and film series, the Center supported many special and unusual lectures and programs, including visits to OSU by Gore Vidal, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and venerable South African township jazz singer and film star Dolly Rathebe. After Peter died suddenly in June, 2001, there was much discussion of how best to keep his name alive so that his impact on OSU intellectual life would not be forgotten. What resulted is the Peter J. Copek Fund, intended to provide more regular and stable support for the same kinds of cultural events that he sponsored through the Center.

PLEASE JOIN US IN SUPPORTING THE PETER J. COPEK FUND

For information on how to contribute, please see the Center’s website and click on “Make a gift” http://oregonstate.edu/dept/humanities/
You may also send a check, made out to the OSU Foundation, Peter J. Copek Fund, to:

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FALL & WINTER CALENDAR

Lectures are at 4 p.m. at Autzen House

October 12

The Last Love Song: Harmonies and Disharmonies in the Art of Biography.

Tracy Daugherty, Center Guest, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English, OSU.

November 9

Emerson, the Indian Brahmo Samaj, and the American Reception of Gandhi.

David Robinson, Director, Center for the Humanities, Distinguished Professor of American Literature, OSU.

November 16

Vignettes of Oregon State University History.

William Robbins, Center Guest, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History, OSU.

February 22

The Keeping Room.

Keith Scribner, Center Research Fellow, Writing Faculty, School of Writing, Literature, and Film, OSU.

February 29

An Empire for Freedom: Transcontinental Abolitionism and the Black Civil Rights Struggle in the Pacific West.

Stacey Smith, Center Research Fellow, History Faculty, School of History, Philosophy, and Religion, OSU.

March 7

They Might Be Giants: Fossils, Mythology, and National Identity in Early Modern Europe.

Anita Guerrini, Center Guest, Horning Professor in the Humanities, School of History, Philosophy, and Religion, OSU.

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Astoria View, by Dave McIntire, on exhibit at the Center.
The Center for the Humanities

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The Center was established in 1984 as an outgrowth of the Humanities Development Program, which had been creating innovative interdisciplinary courses since 1977. The Center’s focus has broadened to a concern for improving the quality of humanities research as well as teaching at OSU. This is accomplished through the awarding of resident research fellowships to OSU scholars as well as by supporting faculty initiatives, and sponsoring conferences, seminars, lecture series, art exhibits and other events. The Center occupies Autzen House, 811 S.W. Jefferson Avenue, Corvallis, OR, 97333.