

NEH Application Cover Sheet (FZ-272140)

Public Scholar Program

PROJECT DIRECTOR

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Field of expertise: U.S. History

INSTITUTION

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APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: *American World Wars: Intimate Histories from the Crash of the Yankee Clipper*

Grant period: From 2021-09-01 to 2022-08-31

Project field(s): U.S. History; Diplomatic History; Cultural History

Description of project: Combat GIs dominate studies of Americans abroad during World War II.

But they constituted only a fraction of the millions of Americans stationed on six continents, in and out of uniform, during the global crisis. "American World Wars" tells a panoramic story of seven worldly noncombatants, their personal histories, their politics, and the paths that led them to all board the same Pan Am boat plane bound for Lisbon in February 1943. When the Yankee Clipper crashed in the Tagus River, it took five of their lives but left a paper trail that leads to a richer, deeper understanding of the cross-cutting political and ideological dimensions of Americans' war efforts.

REFERENCE LETTERS

Mark Bradley

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On February 21, 1943, Pan American Airways' celebrated flying boat, the *Yankee Clipper*, took off from La Guardia's Marine Air Terminal and island-hopped its way across the Atlantic Ocean. Arriving at Lisbon the following evening, it crashed in the Tagus River, killing twenty-four of the thirty-nine passengers and crew on board. This is a story about seven people on that plane, seven worldly Americans, their personal histories, their politics, and the paths that led them toward war. Two of them would survive the crash. Five of them did not.

There were more Americans abroad, engaging face-to-face with other people and cultures, during World War II than at any other time in history. Between spring 1939 and fall 1945, Pan Am's clippers alone shuttled more than 83,000 noncombatants back and forth across the Atlantic. Tens of thousands more travelled along the airline's Pacific, Latin American, and African routes. Filing down the gangplank went bankers, oil brokers, ordinance experts, wheat growers, magazine photographers, purchasing agents, plastic surgeons, Lend Lease statisticians, civil defense planners, fact-finding politicians, radio announcers, and more. These were the in-between people, going to in-between places, who shaped the course and outcome of the conflict in ways now largely forgotten. They channeled information and intelligence, coordinated humanitarian relief efforts, and threw lifelines to governments in exile. They galvanized audiences, hammered out trade deals, brokered arms sales, and bartered technological knowhow and scientific secrets. Looking closely at the work and worldviews of a handful of such travelers reveals the depth of American engagements abroad on the eve of and during World War II, delving below—and shedding light upon—the grand strategy and military actions that dominate histories of the twentieth century's signal conflict.

American World Wars begins with an account of the plane crash and then goes back in time, unfolding from the era of World War I to the accident in 1943 by braiding together important chapters in the lives of its seven subjects. They are: Tamara Drasin, a Russian nightclub singer who found fame debuting "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" on Broadway, but who also hid the fact that she was Jewish; Frank Cuhel, an Olympic track star who spent the 1930s selling American exports in Southeast Asia before fleeing the Japanese; Harry Seidel, Standard Oil's director of European operations, caught between country and company and facing growing public heat over his firm's German connections; Manuel Diaz, the founder of the most important Spanish transatlantic shipping agency, whose vessels engaged in pro-Axis activity; George Spiegelberg, a gifted Republican lawyer opposed to Roosevelt and the New Deal but who the press nevertheless credited with saving Lend Lease; Ben Robertson, journalist and proud South Carolina Democrat, who learned to love England while covering the Blitz in London but then grew to hate it in New Delhi; and Captain R. O. D. Sullivan, one of Pan Am's "master pilots" who commanded commercial flights to Lisbon as well as classified military missions, ferrying supplies between Brazil and West Africa, including beryllium for the Manhattan Project.

These individuals are not stand-ins for coherent groups. They are complex people, who sometimes fit common molds but often played against type. They lived lives of contradiction and complication. As their biographies accumulate, intersect, and sometimes work at cross purposes, they create a panoramic portrait of how Americans defined their relationships to others around the world during the first half of the twentieth century as well as how they ultimately understood and fought the war that solidified their nation's global power. The result, I hope, will accomplish the following objectives:

First, to remind readers of the awesome scope and complex nature of the American war effort. Few topics in U.S. history have captivated general readers as much as World War II. Yet popular narratives have whittled that history down to a set of stock scenarios, divided mostly between "home front" stories of civilians and overseas histories of high diplomacy or military campaigns. The everyday American abroad is almost always envisioned as the combat GI, storming beaches

and liberating towns. These celebrated soldiers, however, represented only a small fraction of the Americans who fulfilled wartime missions across six continents.

Focusing so tightly on the combat GI obscures the war's vast geography as well as the range of activities in which Americans abroad were engaged. It also underplays Americans' political motivations. Frontline fighters, understandably, may have been swayed by deeply personal reasons to fight and the simple urge to keep themselves and their comrades alive. But those who traversed the war's middle grounds, which stretched between the continental United States and the killing fields—men and women who had long been enmeshed in global affairs like the passengers on the *Yankee Clipper*—these individuals turned to other ideas to sustain their convictions and put meaning to a conflict of such incomprehensible magnitude.

Second, to give readers a fuller sense of the war's chronology. It is hard not to think backward about World War II as a beginning—to imagine it as an event that shocked Americans out of an “isolationist” slumber and led them to unprecedented prosperity and power. The conflict before December 1941 plays little part in Americans' retellings unless they are exploring how a small number of interventionist activists and the FDR administration inched a reluctant public toward involvement. But as this book's subjects reveal, Americans saw their lives as intimately bound up with other people and places long before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and they headed toward conflict not with victory in view, but with the fallout from World War I and the passions and sorrows of the twenties and thirties in mind.

Thinking forward in time through the eyes of these individuals not only reconnects the war to the decades before it; it also reinvigorates our understanding of the period between 1941 and 1945. Too much of the war's first half has been forgotten in triumphant American narratives written from the vantage point of ultimate victory. Focused on the question of how and why the Allies won, popular histories typically jump from the bombing of Pearl Harbor to a sequence of liberation stories, confined to the war's final two years. Narrating the first half of the war instead recalls how perilous the state of the world was before early 1943, how uncertain was the future before the allies gained the upper hand.

Finally, to explore new possibilities for microhistory and biography. International histories often unfold as bird's-eye synthetic accounts that lack detailed engagement with human scale experience or compelling threads to guide readers through vast spaces and literatures. To write convincingly about big and small at the same time *American World Wars* employs a form of microhistory with global sweep, embedding fine-grained portraits of individuals in broader contexts and shifting terrains. Early modernist scholars pioneered microhistory in order to illuminate ordinary lives normally obscured by a lack of sources. Historians of the twentieth century might embrace microanalytic techniques for the opposite reason—to forge empirically grounded paths through otherwise overwhelming amounts of source material. “Micro-strategy,” as Linda Colley puts it, “becomes paradoxically more, and not less, valuable when dealing with historical developments that extend over vast territorial and oceanic spaces.”²

Biography, too, has untapped potential as a form of twenty-first century historical inquiry. In recent decades, historians have become suspicious of master narratives and instead seek in their work to respect a multiplicity of perspectives, forces, and causes. A single life story trudging from cradle to grave seems out of step with contemporary preferences for fractured viewpoints, mutable meanings, and narrative complexity. Yet stories about people have an enduring appeal and often help readers grasp otherwise amorphous historical developments. To bridge the need for both

¹ Spies are one exception, and recently they have led historians to fascinating histories about missionaries and librarians: Matthew Avery Sutton, *Double Crossed: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War* (Basic, 2019) and Kathy Peiss, *Information Hunters: When Librarians, Soldiers, and Spies Banded Together in World War II Europe* (Oxford, 2020).

² Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (Anchor, 2008), 300.

narrative force and sophistication, creative writers have pioneered multiple protagonist, parallel plot techniques, storytelling strategies which can also invigorate the writing of historical nonfiction.³

Human lives spill out over scholarly categories, national borders, and other schemes for order. This makes them especially useful for revisiting well-known events with fresh eyes. The time is ripe for attempting this kind of work as electronic databases make it possible to track everyday people like never before. Decades ago, this project would have ended with an unsuccessful flip through the phonebook. But online search engines yielded up census records and passport applications. Word-searchable newspapers unearthed other enticing clues, which in turn led to alumni records, uncatalogued love letters, and classified FBI files. The ability to find some of the *Yankee Clipper* passengers' living relatives at the stroke of a keyboard produced yet more material that had been gathering dust in basements and family closets: century-old correspondence on parchment paper, scrapbooks encrusted with ration coupons and yellowing photographs, steamer trunks stuffed with journals and business records. In addition to writing biographies about people because they embody something we deem important in retrospect (and because they deemed themselves important enough to leave an archive), we might now also write about people simply to see where they can take us, places we might otherwise never think to go.

All of the primary source research for this book—from more than a dozen archives in four countries—has been completed. Sources in English, French, Spanish, and Dutch I have been able to read myself. Research assistants helped to translate other documents in Russian, Ukrainian, and Japanese. Of the book's 22 short chapters (typically 15-25 double-spaced pages), 13 have been drafted. During the next three academic semesters I expect to complete five more chapters, which have been prepped for writing (designated * below). A fellowship year, September 2021-August 2022, would enable me time off from my university duties to finish the remaining five chapters (designated ** below) and finalize the manuscript for publication by the trade wing of Oxford University Press. My hope is to reach a cross-section of readers: students, scholars, as well as general readers of historical nonfiction, military and airplane buffs as well as those who never imagined they could be so interested in World War II.

By charting the personal and political choices that brought a collection of worldly Americans to board the same plane, and fleshing out the foreign contexts through which they moved, *American World Wars* takes the reader beyond now famous battlegrounds. The point of the book, however, is not simply to tell an exciting story with the help of a character-driven multi-protagonist plot. Its goal is to use the power of narrative to rewrite American understandings of World War II, which have narrowed too much over time. Nuancing the public memory of World War II matters, because the conflict continues to hold such a special place in the stories Americans tell themselves about who they are and who they want to be. Especially in the post-Vietnam era, it has become a touchstone for policymakers and the public alike, a standard against which they have judged subsequent wars and foreign interventions. Americans therefore need to see clearly how World War II, like other wars, was built out of incompatible impulses—economic, humanitarian, and political—and how victory was far from certain. They need to remember how quickly the world can fall apart.

³ Nonfiction models might include J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (Random House, 1985); Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Vintage, 2010); and Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (Penguin, 2015).

Preface	<i>(An explanation of what the book is about and why it's important)</i>
Prologue	<i>(An account of the flight, the state of the world and the war in February 1943, and an introduction to the characters)</i>
PART I: BEFORE WARS	
1. Balloon Work	<i>(George spends WWI in a stateside training camp while his brother becomes a hero in France)</i>
2. Autumn Flies	<i>(Tamara survives pogroms during the Ukrainian Civil War and flees to New York)</i>
3. Blood of the Earth	<i>(Harry learns the oil business in Bucharest and is arrested for espionage by the Germans)</i>
4. Tramp Trade	<i>(Manuel establishes a shipping agency and watches as the Great War tears his homeland Spain apart)</i>
5. Strenuous Endeavor	<i>(Frank discovers the world through sports and wins a medal at the Amsterdam Olympics)</i>
6. Wandering between Worlds	<i>(Tamara struggles in the Bronx, finds fame on Broadway, and begins to hide her Jewish past)</i>
7. The Blind Spot**	<i>(Ben reminisces about the Confederate South and falls in love with Roosevelt's Washington)</i>
8. The Able Young Man*	<i>(George succeeds as a trial lawyer, runs for Congress as an anti-New Deal Republican, and loses)</i>
9. Stolen on the High Seas	<i>(Manuel uses his ships and contacts to assist Franco in winning the Spanish Civil War)</i>
10. Gibraltars of the Pacific	<i>(Frank enjoys colonial privileges in Southeast Asia and bats away warnings about the Japanese)</i>
PART II: THESE WARS	
11. Put Up or Shut Up	<i>(Ben becomes a convert to the British cause while living in London during the blitz)</i>
12. Swallow the Ashes*	<i>(Tamara, Russian songstress, confronts the Hitler-Stalin pact and early signs of the Holocaust)</i>
13. Untold Damage	<i>(Manuel does a booming business as a neutral shipper and narrowly evades conviction for smuggling for the Axis)</i>
14. Day Eleven	<i>(Frank broadcasts emergency radio reports from Java and escapes as the Japanese invade)</i>
15. Hold Your Hats*	<i>(George joins the army and establishes an elaborate bartering system in London known as reverse lend lease)</i>
16. Patent Denials**	<i>(Harry and his firm Standard Oil face growing scrutiny for continued collaboration with Germany's I. G. Farben)</i>
17. Russia's Mississippi	<i>(Ben reports from Moscow, demands an immediate second front in Europe while ignoring signs of local trouble)</i>
18. Small Potatoes	<i>(Frank worries about interned friends and rails against the Allies' Europe first policy on Australian radio)</i>
19. Get Out of Town*	<i>(Tamara volunteers to entertain troops in the war zones of Europe and North Africa)</i>
20. The Acid Test**	<i>(Ben's pro-British sentiments fall apart when he witnesses repression of the independence movement in India)</i>
21. The Stand Out Witness*	<i>(George makes an emergency trip to Washington to defend lend lease before a suddenly skeptical congress)</i>
22. A Fancy Swerve**	<i>(Sully pilots Pan Am's overseas routes and takes control of the Yankee Clipper as passengers board)</i>
Epilogue**	<i>(Aftermath of the crash and the fate of the survivors)</i>

Brooke L. Blower, Bibliography for American World Wars

Selected Archives

Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid, Spain
Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin (ExxonMobil Historical Collection)
British Library (Colonial Office files)
Clemson University Libraries Special Collections, South Carolina (Ben Robertson Papers)
FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York
Foynes Flying Boat Museum Archives, County Limerick, Ireland
National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland
National Archives, Kew, Great Britain
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (Tamara Drasin and USO collections)
Rutgers University Library Special Collections (Drasin Family Papers)
University of Miami Library, Special Collections, (Pan American World Airways Records)

Other Primary Sources

Major newspapers and magazines (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Time*, *Life*, etc.)
Government records and public debates (*Congressional Record*, court records, political pamphlets, etc.)
Genealogical resources (census, passenger lists, draft registrations, city directories, etc.)
Memoirs (Ben Robertson, *I Saw England*, William Dunn, *Pacific Microphone*, etc.)
Private collections (courtesy of the families of Frank Cuhel, George Spiegelberg, and Harry Seidel)

Sample Secondary Sources

Bayly, C. A. and Tim Harper. *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945*. Cambridge, 2006.
Bodnar, John. *The "Good War" in American Memory*. Baltimore, 2010.
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Gerwarth, Robert and Erez Manela, eds. *Empires at War: 1911-1923*. New York, 2014.
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Hönicke Moore, Michaela. *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazism*. Cambridge, 2010.
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Tooze, Adam. *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of the Global Order*. NY, 2014.
Van Vleck, Jenifer. *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy*. Cambridge, 2013.

Essays on Methodology

Bell, David. "The Global Turn," *New Republic*, October 7, 2013.
Ginzburg, Carlo, John Tedeschi, and Anne Tedeschi. "Microhistory," *Critical Inquiry* 20.1 1993, 10-35.
Hunt, Lynn. *Writing History in the Global Era*. New York, 2014.
Jelavich, Peter. "Cultural History," in Budde et. al, eds. *Transnationale Geschichte*. Göttingen, 2006.
Peltonen, Matti. "The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research," *History & Theory* 40.3 (2001), 347-59.
Roundtable. "Historians and Biography," *American Historical Review*, 114.3 (June 2009): 576-661.
Struck, Bernhard, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel. "Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History," *International History Review* 33.4 (Dec. 2011), 573-84.

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CURRENT POSITIONS

Associate Professor, Department of History, Boston University	2013- present
Founding Co-Editor, with Sarah T. Phillips, <i>Modern American History</i> , Cambridge University Press Journals	2016- present

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Department of History, Princeton University	2005
B.A. <i>summa cum laude</i> , University of California at Berkeley	1998

PUBLICATIONS

Books

Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture between the World Wars. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Paperback, September 2013. Chinese translation, forthcoming.

- Winner, Gilbert Chinard Book Prize, Society for French Historical Studies
- Winner, James P. Hanlan Best Book Award, New England Historical Association
- *Highly Recommended* Book Prize, Boston Authors Club Annual Awards

The Familiar Made Strange: American Icons and Artifacts after the Transnational Turn. Co-editor with Mark P. Bradley. Cornell University Press, 2015.

In Progress

American World Wars: Intimate Histories from the Crash of the Yankee Clipper.
Under contract with Oxford University Press.

Cambridge History of America in the World, Volume 3: 1900-1945, co-edited with Andrew Preston. Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2021.

Chapter on the 1930s-1960s for *The Oxford Illustrated History of the United States*, ed. Nicholas Guyatt.

Articles and Book Chapters

"Nation of Outposts: Forts, Factories, Bases, and the Making of American Power,"
Diplomatic History 41.3 (June 2017): 439-459.

"V-J Day, 1945, Times Square." Chapter for *The Familiar Made Strange: American Icons and Artifacts after the Transnational Turn.* Brooke L. Blower and Mark P. Bradley, eds. Cornell University Press, 2015.

“New York City’s Spanish Shipping Agents and the Practice of State Power in the Atlantic Borderlands of World War II.” *American Historical Review*, 119.1 (February 2014): 111-141.

“From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919-1941.” *Diplomatic History*, 38.2 (April 2014): 345-376.

— Winner, Stuart L. Bernath Scholarly Article Prize, Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR)

“The Life of Mary Anderson: An Intimate Response to the Turn-of-the-Century World of Transatlantic Migration.” *Prospects*, 29 (2005): 185-217.

Op Eds

[“WWII’s Most Iconic Kiss Wasn’t Romantic—It Was Terrifying,”](#) *Washington Post*, February 22, 2019.

[“A Paris Invented for the American Imagination.”](#) *Boston Globe*, June 16, 2011.

SELECTED RECENT KEYNOTES

Upcoming keynote for the Ohio Valley History Conference, Western Kentucky University, Oct. 15, 2020.

“Moonlight and Magnesium Bombs: White Southern Reckonings with Race, Democracy, and Empire during World War II,” plenary speaker for the Historians of the Twentieth Century United States (HOTCUS) annual conference, University of Cambridge, UK, June 13, 2018.

“Race, Democracy, and Empire: Americans in Europe and Its Colonies during World War II,” conference keynote, Perceptions of the Transatlantic Other, 1900-2000, Utrecht University, the Netherlands, November 8, 2017.

“Nation of Outposts: Forts, Factories, and the Making of American Power in the *Longue Durée*,” Stuart L. Bernath Lecture, American Historical Association annual convention, Denver, Colorado, January 6, 2017.

“American Overseas Outposts in the *Longue Durée*.” Conference keynote, “Americans Overseas: The United States in the World Since 1865,” Rothermere American Institute, Oxford University, Apr 15, 2016.

SELECTED RECENT HONORS AND AWARDS

Organization of American Historians Distinguished Lectureship	2019
Metcalf Cup and Prize (BU’s highest, university-wide teaching award)	2018
Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Bernath Lecture Prize	2016
ACLS Frederick Burkhardt Fellowship	2015
Gitner Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, BU History Department	2015
Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar Grant	2014
Frank and Lynne Wisneski Award for Excellence in Teaching, Boston University	2014
American Philosophical Society Franklin Research Grant	2013

January 25, 2020

To whom it may concern:

I am writing on behalf of Brooke Blower, who is applying for the Public Scholars Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am extremely pleased that the NEH has recognized the importance of humanistic work in the form of books for a broad public, as that is my deepest goal for the history list at Oxford University Press.

I worked with Dr. Blower on her first book, *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture between the World Wars*, which was a revision of her Princeton University dissertation. This was recognized in reviews as an important work of transatlantic history and the history of the United States in the world. For her second book, Dr. Blower has crafted a more ambitious narrative that would make an equally important contribution to these areas of the historical discipline, while writing a work that general readers interested in World War II would appreciate on its own terms. This project is under contract and an NEH Public Scholars Program would be critical to its completion.

In her work tentatively entitled *AMERICAN WORLD WARS: INTIMATE HISTORIES FROM THE CRASH OF THE YANKEE CLIPPER* Blower tells the story of the thirty-nine Americans who took a Pan American boat plane that crashed upon landing in Lisbon and claimed twenty-four of their lives. Blower's deep research, which has already included learning new languages in order to do primary research, has allowed for her to flesh out the lives of Americans going abroad during the early 1940s: crewmen, Army NCOs, a Foreign service officer, journalists, an armed government courier, private businessmen, and USO volunteers. They were each in their own way key participants in the administration of the war, but their overseas efforts, and those of others like them, have since been eclipsed by accounts centered on combat soldiers. This book aims to use microhistory to produce a fully-rounded history of American engagements in a world at war. It also offers a broader rethinking of one of the most written-about moments in United States history and offer new insight into the ascendance of what Henry Luce famously dubbed the "American Century." In short, it will tell the real life stories behind the men and women immortalized in the classic film "Casablanca."

Readers of the proposal for OUP said, "The book promises entertaining details and characters and a compelling narrative structure. Given the American public's enduring fascination with the war, and given the immense number of books already written on the war, Blower's ability to find a fresh angle is especially impressive....It seems likely that Blower's manuscript will generate positive reviews and a fairly wide readership." And another commented, "A most promising book project that is poised to make an important intervention at the intersection of cultural and social history and political economy, in the process

helping to re-periodize World War II and dramatically broadening the conceptualization of that conflict to include the vast expanse of non-military maneuvering in the realm of trans-national circulations, particularly as they involved ideas and trade. It is an originally conceived and rigorously researched project that would buoy Oxford's already rising profile in U.S. political history and place its stamp even more firmly within the juggernaut that is the America in the world literature.... This is not the kind of project that should be rushed, even if the microhistorical frame and Blower's literary gifts facilitate quick and fluid writing."

OUP is planning to publish AMERICAN WORLD WARS on its trade list, with full marketing and publicity to commercial and academic audiences. It will be published in print and electronic form and be disseminated globally by OUP. In addition, translation, audiobook rights, and other subsidiary rights will be pitched. The Press has a standing arrangement with Recorded Books for consideration of new books, and it has an active rights department that licenses hundreds of translations a year. Given the rapidly changing publishing market, it is too soon to have a definitive print run, but the crossover list at OUP consists of a limited number of top titles that are pitched to booksellers (bricks and mortar chain and independent stores,etailers, and wholesalers), the media (print, social media, blogs, podcasts), and others in the broader community as the top tier of titles for the season. OUP's list in the history of World War II receives significant trade coverage and sales; recent titles have included Craig Symonds's *World War II at Sea: A Global History*, Matthew Dallek's *Defenseless Under the Night: The Roosevelt Years and the Origins of Homeland Security*, and David Kennedy's *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*.

I hope this information is of use as you consider Brooke Blower's application for the NEH Public Scholars Program.

Sincerely,



Susan Ferber

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16 February 2020

Letter of Recommendation for Brooke Blower

I write in the strongest support of Brooke Blower's application for an NEH Public Scholars Fellowship. I have come to know Blower's work well, as an appreciative reader of her first book and as her co-editor for a Cornell University Press volume that puts a set of familiar American icons and artifacts in a transnational frame. Most recently as the general editor of the *Cambridge History of America and the World* I invited her to serve as one of the volume editors for what will ultimately be a foundational four-volume work that stretches from 1500 to the present. Blower is clearly at the very top of a younger cohort of scholars whose work is recasting how we understand the place of the United States in the twentieth century world and will without doubt continue to be a leading figure in the field. She is also one of those rare scholars whose work crosses to a more general audience. Her current project, *American World Wars*, is richly deserving of support from the NEH Public Scholars Program.

Blower's project emerges in the wake of almost two decades of sustained reflection by American historians about the relationship between the United States and the wider world. This effort has been deeply concerned with moving away from exceptionalist readings of the American past by broadening the contextual parameters of the field and looking beyond the geographical confines of the United States to understand how people, capital, commodities, ideas and events that transcend physical borders shaped U.S. history as well histories both larger and smaller than the nation. But for all the hortatory injunctions, and caveats, about placing the United States in a wider interpretative framework, substantial historical monographs that take such concerns seriously only began to appear about ten years ago. In general they have moved in two directions. One centers on expanding the frame through which to view more canonical forms of American foreign relations, manifested in the work of diplomatic historians eager to move beyond a focus on official U.S. actors and archives by utilizing multiple national and non-national archives and the perspectives of non-state actors to place American diplomacy in a

larger global context. A second approach focuses on realizing the potentialities of a politically inflected transnational social and cultural history to craft a wider vision of American engagement in the world, seeking to explore the overlapping and intertwined nature of the construction of American state and society and the larger transnational forces that contributed to contestations over identity at home and abroad. While both streams of scholarship are producing important work, the second approach may offer the most promise for fundamentally re-thinking and enlarging how we write and teach about U.S. history.

I find Blower's work to be among the supplest of those recent interventions that go in this second direction. *American World Wars* is an ambitious book with an engaging biographical approach that will transform public and scholarly understanding of the Second World War. Using as her central actors a selection of American passengers aboard a 1943 Pan-American flight that crashed in Lisbon is an inspired move that allows her to explore the often surprising global and domestic entanglements of a wide swath of American "archetypes" as they encountered the mid twentieth century world at war. The seven lives she lifts up help take us beyond the combat soldier and the home front, where so much World War II history has been located, to see the depth, range and quotidian impacts of the war on a far wider set of Americans.

Keeping seven stories in play over the course of the narrative would be a challenge for many historians but as the writing sample that accompanies her application here makes very clear Blower can more than meet it. In particular I like the structure of short staccato chapters that will move between the prewar and wartimes era. Her 2014 article in the *American Historical Review* that focuses on one of the central figures in *American World Wars* illustrates how she will tell a gripping story that simultaneously raises a set of central issues for rethinking the meanings Americans made of this pivotal era in U.S. history. Blower's nuanced interpretative approach the prewar era also emerge very nicely in the essay "From Isolationism to Neutrality" that appeared in *Diplomatic History* in 2014. Blower is quite right to suggest that isolationism, which has been the primary optic to view American diplomacy between the world wars of the twentieth century, fails to fully capture how contemporaries responded to the problematics of total war. Her argument in favor of tracing the multi-faceted and shifting idea of neutrality to better characterize American thought in this period is a compelling one and I look forward to seeing how she pulls these ideas forward in the book project.

American World Wars rests on an exceptionally strong multiple archival base drawing on her sustained research in the United States, Great Britain, Spain and Ireland. I anticipate the book will make a big splash and cement Blower's emerging profile as one of the most important historians of the intersection between the domestic and the transnational in the making of twentieth century American history. The volume on rethinking American icons we co-edited together for Cornell University Press captures her creative and accessible approaches to history. The conceit of this project was to use transnational methods to make strange familiar


American iconic images such as John Singleton Copley's painting *Watson and the Shark* and Alfred Eisenstaedt's photograph *V-J Day, 1945, Times Square* (the subject of Blower's essay in the volume and her recent *Washington Post* op-ed) to new shed light on American politics, empire, gender, and the operation of power in everyday life. Her innovative work as editor of the new journal *Modern American History* and her impressive track record of external fellowship support, including the highly competitive ACLS Burkhardt fellowship, further testify to Blower's creativity and considerable stature in the field.

Blower's prize winning first book, *Becoming Americans in Paris*, is a marvelous exploration of how cultural politics in the United States and France during the 1920s and 1930s were mutually constituted through encounters between Americans and French in the French capital. Her point of entry troubles the now familiar if often romanticized narrative of Americans like Ernest Hemingway, Langston Hughes and Gertrude Stein who came to Paris in the wake of World War I. These figures are not absent from her narrative (and indeed she recasts our understanding of them), but her primary intervention is to offer a probing and richly textured analysis of the global politics of the Parisian street and how it shaped both American and French sensibilities about themselves and their places in the world. The American dimension of her project offered a fundamentally new and persuasive lens for the capturing the ways in which American sojourns in Paris transformed contestations at home over the construction of domestic political space. *Becoming Americans in Paris* is also exceptionally well written. Blower wears her considerable theoretical sophistication very lightly in her narrative, a smart choice that along with her limpid prose allows the work to engage both specialists and more general readers.

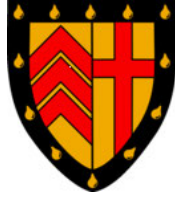
American World Wars builds upon all of these strengths. Blower is an astute and original analytical thinker, a beautiful writer and a historian intent upon pushing the boundaries of American historical thought and practice in ways that speak to multiple audiences. It is good to see Oxford University Press Executive Editor Susan Ferber's publisher letter on the presence OUP will accord to *American World Wars* on their trade list and the marketing muscle they plan to put behind it. This project strikes me as just what the NEH's Public Scholars Program is looking to fund. Blower is a disciplined and highly organized writer (something I know well from my editorial collaborations with her) and I have no doubt that she will complete her book manuscript by the end of your fellowship period.

I urge you to give Blower's application very careful consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me at mbradley@uchicago.edu if I can provide you with any additional information for your deliberations.

Sincerely yours,



Mark Bradley



CLARE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

February 24, 2020

Reference for Brooke L. Blower

I am delighted to write in support of Brooke Blower's application to the NEH Public Scholars Program. Blower is an exceptionally talented scholar as well as a leading light of her generation of diplomatic/transnational historians and would be ideally suited to this particular fellowship. She would use this fellowship to complete a book that will significantly revise our conventional wisdom on America's involvement in World War II, everything from intervention to participation to collective memory. Her research is impeccable (and her track record on this unblemished), but she is also a gifted stylist, and this book has the potential to reach a wide audience—crucial given that she will be challenging some of the most sacred shibboleths surrounding WWII in American political culture. I therefore recommend her unreservedly and with the utmost enthusiasm.

In the history of American foreign relations, Blower is one of the leading figures of her generation. U.S. diplomatic history has in recent decades been rebranded as either "U.S. international history" or, more commonly, "U.S. and the world," and Blower has been one of the key innovator's of this important change. I have seen this for myself at conferences, such as the annual meeting of the learned society of record in the field, the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) as well as smaller venues, in addition to reading her published work. In particular, her scholarship is on the cutting edge of two major waves of historiographical innovation: the internationalization of American history; and the cultural turn within American foreign relations history.

Blower's principal scholarly contribution is her groundbreaking 2011 monograph, *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture between the World Wars*. It is a remarkable book, not only gracefully and engagingly written but substantively and historiographically important. Her signature achievement is to have made an important contribution to several fields of historical inquiry. It won a prize from French historians, no mean feat for an Americanist. Most importantly, *Becoming Americans in Paris* is a superb example of both the internationalization of the field of U.S. history and the cultural turn in U.S. diplomatic history. The book takes a familiar period and familiar themes in U.S. history and turns them on their heads. By integrating French

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and other European perspectives into her study of the American past, Blower is able to shed new and original light on well-worn subjects. And by searching for historical voices and agency beyond the diplomats, politicians, and famous expatriates, she is able to construct a richer, more holistic account of how Americans constructed an ideology for their role in a modernizing and globalizing world. Through six chapters exploring elite as well as non-elite Americans who traveled to Paris at some point in the interwar era, she demonstrates that the Parisian milieu offered a laboratory for a variety of Americans to forge and refine their worldviews, be they conservative, “isolationist” (for lack of a better word, as Blower’s later work shows), liberal internationalist, or radical. She rightly and convincingly challenges the prevailing view of the interwar years as carefree, apolitical, and isolationist. She shows that many Americans became politicized in Paris—and, beyond Paris, in many other parts of Europe, such as Spain even before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War—and returned to the United States with a new political consciousness. Rather than a United States that was sealed off from the world by the failure of Wilsonianism, the retreat into isolationism, and the insular protectionism of the Depression, *Becoming Americans in Paris* reveals a nation that was deeply enmeshed in constantly flowing international networks of people and ideas. By focusing on the impact ordinary people made on a global scale, here is where she provides a huge wealth of empirical support for Ian Tyrrell’s “transnational nation” conception of America. And by demolishing American expats’ self-serving retrospective construction of themselves as innocents abroad, Blower unearths a new source of American internationalism, both liberal and radical, that was critical in the development of a general internationalist consciousness in the first half of the twentieth century. Historians of internationalism have spent a good deal of time on the formal mechanics of institution-building (the UN, IMF, NATO, etc.), and rightly so, but Blower highlights other key sources of internationalist ideas and cultures that were equally important. Overall, *Becoming Americans in Paris* is a triumph in both the internationalization and transnationalization of U.S. history.

Blower’s next book project, provisionally entitled *American World Wars*, plans to extend further the theoretical and historiographical innovations featured in *Becoming Americans in Paris*. The parts I have read suggest the book will be an absorbing story of how America became a truly global power, but told from the bottom-up. With it, she is especially challenging the dominant narrative about globalization, told primarily by economic historians, that the era of the two world wars and the early Cold War was one of de-globalization. In purely economic terms, this is almost certainly true: in nearly every major economy in the 1930s, tariffs went up, customs and duties went up, trade flows were checked, and the flow of overseas imports and exports declined; and then, of course, the outbreak of war in Asia in 1937 and Europe in 1939 brought international trade close to a standstill, with the obvious exception of wartime supplies and weapons. By focusing on the growth of ideological, political, and transnational connections between Americans and people the world over, and by linking these connections to the security concerns that came to predominate the period between 1935 and 1945, Blower’s work will show that the economic-history perspective offers only a limited view of globalization. Even more, *American World Wars* will also be the best kind of narrative in that it will recover the lost voices and forgotten figures who did much to shape history. *American World Wars* essentially builds on *Becoming Americans in Paris*, but on a much

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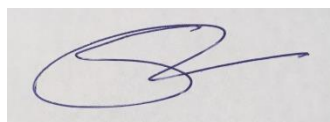
bigger scale and with archives from more countries and in more languages. And in the process, she will situate the United States very much in and of the world, not as an exception that somehow stands apart from the general stream of world history. It is a clear sign of both her ambition and her talent and points encouragingly towards a steeply upward career trajectory.

On top of those two ambitious books, Blower has added a series of smaller but important scholarly projects, among them articles in the *American Historical Review* and *Diplomatic History* and the wonderful collection of essays she co-edited with Mark Bradley and published with Cornell, *The Familiar Made Strange: American Icons and Artifacts after the Transnational Turn*.

Even more impressive, she is the inaugural editor (with Sarah Phillips) of the new CUP-published journal *Modern American History*. *MAH* is the first general-field scholarly journal dedicated to the history of the modern United States. Cambridge UP has thrown a lot of resources behind it, and the fact they have entrusted this project—one of CUP's largest journal launches in decades—speaks volumes about Blower's competence as well as her stature in the field. The first two years of publication have been a roaring success, as anyone who has seen issues of the journal will attest; but for those who have seen circulation and download figures (I'm on the editorial board and so have seen them), *MAH* is shaping up to be a real game-changer in the field of American history—not just diplomatic history, but American history writ large. And yet, launching *MAH* has starved Blower of significant amounts of time to write—not necessarily to research, as she's been able to do that along the way over several years, but she does not have an unbroken block of time to sit and write. A grant from the NEH would provide her with this priceless asset I can think of nobody more deserving of it, but the result will benefit many historians of several subfields once the book is published.

In short, I have no reservations whatsoever in recommending Brooke Blower to the NEH. I would of course be happy to expand upon these comments further if you have any questions or require additional information. Please do not hesitate to write me at the address below; e-mail me at amp33@cam.ac.uk; or telephone me directly at +44 (0)1223 766491.

Yours truly,



Andrew Preston
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