



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

## **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/public-scholar-program> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: The Invisible Emperor: Napoleon Bonaparte on Elba

Institution: Stanford University

Project Director: Mark Braude

Grant Program: Public Scholar Program

## The Invisible Emperor: Napoleon on Elba

Mark Braude, NEH Public Scholar Proposal

In the spring of 1814, a coalition of Allied armies forced Napoleon Bonaparte to abdicate, ending his fourteen-year reign and a quarter-century of war. Aiming to secure a quick peace, the Allied sovereigns banished Napoleon to the Tuscan island of Elba. He had once overseen an empire spanning half the European continent and beyond, controlling the lives of some seventy million people. As the newly titled Emperor of Elba, he would rule a territory about the size of Staten Island, with a population of roughly twelve thousand. Napoleon escaped Elba after ten months in exile, sailing to the southern coast of France with a few hundred supporters in tow. He retook the Tuileries palace without a single shot fired. Promising to return France to its purportedly glorious past, he insisted that only he, the so-called Man of Destiny, could bring order to Europe. The result was Waterloo and tens of thousands of needless deaths.

How and why could so many people be convinced to support this disgraced leader, when it should have been so clear that doing so could only bring destruction?

To wrestle with that question and its broader historical implications, I am writing a narrative history of Napoleon's exile on Elba. *The Invisible Emperor* offers the Elban exile as a case study through which to investigate the intertwined histories of politics, celebrity, and mass media in the modern era. The book is under contract with Penguin Press in North America, with foreign rights sold to Profile Books in the UK and Balans in the Netherlands.

Admittedly, we are not suffering from a lack of books about Napoleon. One of the leading Napoleonic scholars in France, Patrice Gueniffey, told me that by his estimate the only life to have garnered more ink is that of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, the American historian David Bell has cited a list, now several decades old, that puts the number at over 220,000.<sup>1</sup> Yet over the past two centuries the Napoleonic Industrial Complex has produced very little material devoted exclusively to Elba. I count under a dozen such studies, with the most recent work in English published in 1982.<sup>2</sup> Historians and biographers have treated this moment chiefly as a comic interlude to be paid a quick courtesy between recounting the two more obviously dramatic acts of abdication and Waterloo.<sup>3</sup>

I said as much in the forty-page book proposal submitted to trade publishers in early 2016. Yet the acquiring editors at Penguin Press, Ann Godoff and William Heyward, told me they wished to publish the book less because of the novelty of its focus and more because of the timeliness of its central argument: that Napoleon gained the necessary popular support for his unlikely return to power precisely because of the mystique he fostered while seemingly out-of-sight and silenced on Elba, as Europeans delighted in this latest twist in his already storied career. Drawing on Max Weber's concept of 'charismatic authority,' I use the Elban exile as a way to present Napoleon as the first modern political figure to fully harness the power of emerging mass media technologies, a ruler who offered himself as the charismatic protagonist in a heroic narrative to be consumed through widely circulated texts and images, as though it were a novel or a work of art.<sup>4</sup>

On Elba, stripped of much of his wealth and abandoned by all but a few last members of his

coterie, Napoleon could be observed at unprecedented proximity. He often interacted with islanders of different social stations, for instance while working alongside laborers to add a floor to his new villa, pausing to share lunches of hard-boiled eggs and crusty bread. He meanwhile presented himself as a sort of tourist attraction for visitors from the mainland who sought an audience. If any ship docked at Elba's capital of Portoferraio, Napoleon would board without invitation and regale crew members with battle stories and impromptu speeches, regardless of under which flag the vessel sailed. I suggest that seemingly trivial moments such as these were in fact fundamental to Napoleon's success in gaining widespread support for his return in 1815, especially as Bonapartists spun exactly these types of anecdotes into pamphlets and engravings, turning the exile into a redemption narrative, featuring a tragic hero who as at once god-like and all-too-human.

Historians are trained to be hyperconscious of the power imbalances that have fostered and been reinforced by the writing of 'Great Man' history. We teach our students that wide-ranging, complex, and impersonal forces shape our world. Yet our broader culture repeatedly venerates those few charismatic sociopaths who, by striking a careful balance between remoteness and accessibility, deftly transform their relatively mundane and disordered daily lives into gripping life-stories, and who tend to give us only violence and waste in return for our devotion to their carefully crafted narratives.

So if I am writing yet another book about a narcissistic, destructive, and long-dead white man it is only because, while adding one more Napoleon book to the stack, I hope to prompt readers to think about why that stack has grown as tall as it has. That stack says as much about the study of history as it does about the human condition. By engaging with a moment that took place two centuries ago but feels eerily familiar, I hope readers might ponder our own relentless need to celebrate people purporting to embody ultimate freedom, power, and wealth. Readers might be inspired to think about how, as we are bombarded by words and images showing us the supposedly glamorous lives of those fortunate few who control a disproportionate amount of capital and power, we are conditioned toward our own maddening quests to live up to an unattainable idea of greatness.

This project builds on the research questions I posed with my dissertation and first book: How does power operate in relation to geography? How, over the last two centuries, have political and financial elites capitalized on innovations in media technologies to wield power in new ways? With my first book, *Making Monte Carlo: A History of Speculation and Spectacle* (Simon & Schuster, 2016), I traced a history of Monaco to explore how the nation-building projects of the nineteenth century allowed for tiny territories to prosper by allowing people to escape the laws of larger nations. With *The Invisible Emperor*, I trace a history of another small and seemingly remote place, in this case to consider how a ruler and his supporters experimented with new ways of crafting and presenting a public persona for maximum popular appeal.

I ask the NEH for twelve months of funding so that I can be away from teaching in the upcoming academic year. I will deliver the completed manuscript by September 2018, with publication scheduled for autumn 2019. This is an admittedly ambitious schedule, but feasible. I have

completed all archival research as well as 40,000 words of the anticipated 80,000-word manuscript. I recently received editorial feedback on the first half of the manuscript from my editor. His comments were encouraging and editorial suggestions minimal. Please note that I submitted the final manuscript for my first book well ahead of that contract's deadline and was asked to make only a few subsequent line edits. The accompanying letter from editor William Heyward at Penguin Press offers more insight into specific marketing and publication plans for the book.

*The Invisible Emperor* relies chiefly on archival work completed at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, where I located a great deal of material pertaining to the Elban exile, including private correspondence, memoirs, visual representations, accounting ledgers, and diplomatic files. I also explored the extensive Napoleon papers at the French National Archives, as well as those of Henri Bertrand, who served as Grand Marshal on Elba, and of Antoine Drouot, the island's de facto governor. Two of my most valuable sources are relatively obscure memoirs: the first by Napoleon's British guardian on Elba, Colonel Neil Campbell, and the second by Elba's mining administrator, Pons de l'Hérault, Napoleon's chief rival for influence on the island, but who eventually helped in his escape. I also spent two months on Elba working in their modest municipal archives, interviewing locals claiming family ties to this history, and immersing myself in the island's culture and geography. I secured private tours of Napoleon's three residences on the island, one of which is now a maximum-security prison and to my knowledge unseen by any biographer or historian (my Elban host was related to the head of the local *carabinieri*). From this research and reading in secondary sources, I have acquired a strong sense of daily life during the exile, learned how a network of supporters orchestrated Napoleon's return and why Allied officials failed to anticipate this outcome, and can write with authority about how Elbans now remember, commemorate, and occasionally seek to profit from this history. I was helped in my research by my near-native fluency in French and reading-fluency in Italian.

Thanks to several months working on the book proposal I have outlined a firm structure for this narrative. Each chapter concerns one month of time, beginning with the abdication in April 1814 and ending with the landing in March of 1815 at Golfe-Juan. We follow Napoleon and his entourage setting up an ersatz court in exile, training a small army, building infrastructure, and trying (and often failing) to control the locals. I alternate between this action on Elba and pertinent events on the mainland, focusing especially on how Napoleon's supporters turned the exile into an easily digestible narrative meant to advance the cause of his return, while supporters of the restored Louis XVIII struggled to craft an equally alluring story about their preferred ruler, who embodied the country's dynastic Bourbon past, but failed to offer a clear vision for its future. A short epilogue concerns present-day Elba and the broader legacy of the exile on the island and beyond.

Throughout the book I juxtapose large-scale diplomatic developments – such as the restoration of Louis XVIII and the Congress of Vienna – with personal stories and anecdotes that offer insight into the era's social, economic, and political relations. Readers will, for instance, be introduced to the plight of Napoleon's strong-willed second wife, Marie Louise, who rather than joining her husband in Elba saw this moment as an opportunity to claim greater independence, even

while her father, Emperor Francis of Austria, and Napoleon waged a proxy war by trying to control her movements. I used a similar method in my first book, chronicling the founding and early years of Monte Carlo while weaving in historical arguments and providing necessary context without (hopefully) losing general readers seeking narrative and rich character studies, above all.

Writing *Making Monte Carlo* for a trade press required transforming my dissertation into a narrative history. In the process I learned quite a bit about how to attract broader interest in humanities research, by which I mean not only in the writing and editing, but also in book design, marketing, and publicity, as I worked with professionals in these departments at Simon & Schuster. To promote the book I gave interviews, museum talks, and bookstore readings, and wrote op-eds and longer journalism pieces on all things Monaco. The book was widely and favorably reviewed in several national publications, such as the *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Financial Times*. I was pleased that reviewers tended to praise the quality of the research as much as that of the narrative. I will soon go on a west coast book tour in anticipation of the April 2017 publication of the paperback edition. While my experience with Simon & Schuster was positive, my literary agent and I felt that Penguin Press was a better fit going forward, especially given their record of producing excellent works of narrative history. Penguin Press functions as a kind of boutique house within the larger Penguin universe, publishing about forty books a year, exclusively in the fields of quality nonfiction and literary fiction. I was especially keen to work with Ann Godoff, founder of the press, known for shepherding Ron Chernow's Alexander Hamilton biography, as well as Liaquat Ahamed's Pulitzer Prize-winning history, *Lords of Finance*.

In my research, writing, and teaching, I have long looked to build connections between the academic community and the broader public. I have written for *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New Republic*, *The Daily Beast*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and other publications. For a brief period while completing my PhD I wrote a weekly Arts column for *The Globe and Mail*. In 2014, while a postdoctoral fellow, working on Stanford's NEH-funded 'Networks in History' digital humanities project, I teamed with the Office of the Historian at the Department of State to create interactive data-visualizations pertaining to the archives of Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), and was invited to DC to present to the Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation at the Department of State. More recently at Stanford, despite having no research budget or tenure-track status, I have developed and secured cross-departmental funding for events meant to build bridges between the campus and the broader community, including curating a public exhibition, 'Speed and Power', featuring works by Andy Warhol, Walker Evans, and Alexander Calder, at the Cantor Museum, which due to its popularity was moved to a bigger space and had its run extended, as well as a visiting-writer series, with guests such as Luc Sante and Pico Iyer.

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<sup>1</sup> David A. Bell, *The First Total War* (Mariner, 2008), 13

<sup>2</sup> Norman MacKenzie, *The Escape from Elba* (Oxford University Press, 1982)

<sup>3</sup> See, out of many possible examples, Steven Englund's *Napoleon: A Political Life* (Scribner, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Talcott Parsons, trans. (1947)

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