

Beyond Academe: Contact

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns about this site, please direct them to Lexi Lord at beyondacademe@yahoo.com.

In case you are curious, the image of two young adults headed over a cliff is a poster from 1918. The image was originally created by the U.S. Public Health Service as a comment on American parents' failure to provide sex education to their children.

It's an apt comment on how graduate programs are preparing students for careers today. And, yes, discussions of leaving academia are as taboo in academia today as frank discussions of sex were in the early 20th century.

How You Can Change History

If our profession is to adopt a broader and deeper understanding of not only what it means to be an historian but also how historians use their skills and knowledge in a range of careers, we must participate in ongoing discussions about the future of the historical profession.

Please ensure that your voice is heard by attending historical conferences and participating on committees associated with the leading historical organizations whenever possible. Volunteer to speak at your alma mater.

The National Council on Public History is one of the most welcoming organizations for historians who have followed a non-traditional path. Historians who are active in NCPH include experts in both American and non-American history. Their annual conference brings together people in an incredible range of professions. Conference organizers have also worked hard to ensure that historians in different professions communicate with one another through a range of innovative networking programs. This year, the NCPH conference will be held in Portland, Oregon on March 10-14, 2009. Check out the program online.

A Mission to Change History

Today, the overwhelming number of graduate programs in history train historians to be professors. Period.

As graduate programs have pushed students toward careers in the academy, the academic job market has become tighter and tighter. More and more PhDs have found themselves adjuncting for years, all in the hopes of obtaining that coveted tenure-track job.

The tightening of the job market has led many to call for drastic cuts in graduate school admissions and the termination of some graduate programs.

Yet, even as we call for cuts in graduate programs, few historians have discussed the ways in which academically trained historians have turned away from the public arena---often to the detriment of the historical profession.

This failure to step outside the classroom has meant that those who practice history and hold jobs as historians in the public arena have often not been trained historians. Museum educators and even many curators often hold degrees in museum studies, not history. Similarly, preservationists often have degrees in preservation, not history. And journalists who often write history for the general public only rarely have advanced degrees in history. Obviously, many of these people are fantastic and very skilled historians but it is also not uncommon to discover inaccurate or even bad history being done in the public arena by people who lack a nuanced and in-depth understanding of history.

As an historian, I strongly feel that academically trained historians, should be involved in the public arena, whether they hold tenure-track positions or not and whether they are Americanists or not.

Equally importantly, historians who decide to leave academe should have the knowledge, skills, and experiences which will enable them to work as historians in the public arena.

Beyond Academe was created to assist historians in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and experiences which will help them to have choices in their careers and to encourage historians to think of our profession in broad terms.

History does have value outside the classroom.

Acknowledgements

In creating and updating this site, I spoke to and learned from an extraordinary number of people both in and outside of academia. Several people were especially helpful: Laura Ettinger, Anne Whisnant, Jeffrey Reznick, John Swann, Victoria Harden, Paula Foster Chambers, Darryl Stevens, Themie Pantazis, Hadass Sheffer, Michelle McClellan, John Dichtl, and Marla Miller.

My husband, Benjamin L. Apt, also deserves a special thanks. A lawyer with two master's degrees, he has been tremendously supportive of Beyond Academe. He has also often steered me toward PhDs who have left the academy, including three members of his own immediate family, (his father, Charles Apt, his uncle, Victor Wouk, and his brother, Adam Apt).

Finally, my mother, Athena Lord, has done an amazing job finding PhDs outside the academy. If I were to judge by her experiences, every third person in America is a non-academic PhD.

Beyond Academe was created as a free service for the historical profession. If you would to excerpt material from this site, please contact Alexandra Lord at beyondacademe@yahoo.com for permission. Thank you.