History Lecture Series

A Seattle Tradition

One of the UW's most popular lifelong learning programs, the History Lecture Series began in 1975. For 15 years, it featured History Professor Emeritus Giovanni Costigan, the first recipient of the UW's Distinguished Teaching Award. Today professors from the Department of History are proud to carry on his legacy, with the generous support of the UW Alumni Association. Scroll down to learn about upcoming lectures and to watch video recordings of past presentations.

Winter 2021 Lecture Series

Technology and Its Discontents

This History Lecture Series will return in January 2021 with four presentations by UW history faculty on “Technology and its Discontents.” Speakers will examine the role technologies have played in society since the medieval period and trace the connections around the world to contemporary issues of social, economic, and political justice.

The lecture series will be free this year. The lectures will be broadcast online for viewers all over the world and will be followed by a live Q&A. Tickets will be available from the UW Alumni Association in December.

January 20 | From Caravans of Gold to Atomic Bombs: African Mining in World History

Lynn Thomas, Professor of History

This talk will examine the role of technology in the mining industry in Africa, spanning from gold mining in medieval West Africa to uranium mining during the Cold War. Mining has generated enormous wealth in parts of Africa, but it has also generated enormous violence and inequalities.

January 27 | Photographic Power: Tales from the Philippines and the United States

Vicente Rafael, Professor of History

Professor Rafael will discuss the intertwined history of photography and trauma from the Philippine-American War to Black Lives Matter. The camera has been a tool of colonial conquest as much as it has been a means of resistance.

February 3 | Arming the Police and the ‘Social Source of Our Distresses’

Bruce Hevly, Associate Professor of History

This talk will investigate the use of handguns by American police officers beginning with Teddy Roosevelt’s tenure on the New York
City Police Commission in the 1870s.

February 10 | Digital Discontents, from the Age of the Mainframe to the Era of Big Tech
Margaret O’Mara, Howard and Frances Keller Endowed Professor of History

Professor O’Mara will tackle the unexpectedly long history of today’s worries about invasions of data privacy, untrammeled artificial intelligence, and the power of large tech platforms.

Winter 2020 Lecture Series
Life, Death, and the Gods

What happens after death? How should the living care for the dead? How do beliefs about the gods and the afterlife shape different approaches to death and burial? In this exciting set of lectures, four UW historians examine the relationship between the living and the dead in Ancient Rome and Iran and among the Aztecs and the Chinese.

January 22 | The Body as Offering: Making Meaning of Sacrifice in the Aztec Imperial Past
Adam Warren, Associate Professor, History

The Aztec Empire looms large in the popular imagination for its practice of human sacrifice. But how much of was exaggerated by Spanish invaders? Explore how those living under Aztec rule made sense of the relationship between the living, the dead, and the divine.
January 29 | Skeletons and Dining Couches: Eating and Dying in the Roman Empire

Mira Green, Lecturer, History

From stuffed dormice to recreational vomiting, modern ideas about ancient Roman eating practices fall back on images of decadent excess, set against a backdrop of violence and disease. But what does the evidence say about how the ancient Romans actually lived?

February 5 | Death and the Ancestors: The Religion of the Family in China

Patricia Ebrey, Professor, History

The powerful of ancient Chinese society went to great lengths to communicate with their dead ancestors, seeking their advice and keeping them informed of events. These practices spread throughout Chinese society to shape the everyday life of ordinary people, even in more recent centuries.

February 12 | Ancient Iran: Heaven, Hell, and the Good Life

Joel Walker, Associate Professor, History

Ancient Iran possessed a deep and complex culture that possibly influenced Jewish, Christian and Muslim views of the afterlife and the cosmos. Explore Zoroastrianism — the “Good Religion” in ancient Iran — from its founder’s homeland in prehistoric Central Asia to communities in contemporary India and beyond.
Winter 2019 Lecture Series: Challenging Gender

Winter 2018 Lecture Series: Speaking Truth To Power: Protest and Dissent in Modern History

Winter 2017 Lecture Series: Worlds Turned Upside Down: Five Revolutions that Shaped Our Times
Winter 2016 Lecture Series: *Excavating Seattle's Histories*

Fall 2014 Lecture Series: *The Great War and the Modern World*

Fall 2013 Lecture Series: *Slavery and Freedom in the Making of America*
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