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Harvard University Historian Examines Challenges of the 1850s

Walter Johnson to deliver lecture Sept. 18

SEPTEMBER 4, 2013 BY REBECCA LAUCK CLEARY



Walter Johnson

OXFORD, Miss. – Slavery, capitalism and imperialism are the focus of this year’s Gilder-Jordan Lecture in Southern History at the University of Mississippi.

Walter Johnson, the Winthrop Professor of History and professor of African-American studies at Harvard University, speaks at 7 p.m. Sept. 18 in Nutt Auditorium. The event is free and open to the public.

Johnson’s lecture, “The ‘Negro Fever,’ the South, and the Ignominious Effort to Re-Open the Atlantic Slave Trade,” focuses on the challenges facing Mississippi Valley slaveholders in the late 1850s and the way many hoped to solve them through a global projection of slaveholding power, which was through pro-slavery imperialism.

Ted Ownby, director of the **UM Center for the Study of Southern Culture**, said Johnson is one of the most influential scholars writing on the history of American slavery.

“In his new book, ‘River of Dark Dreams,’ and his first book, ‘Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market,’ he shows the ability to ask big, ambitious questions and answer them on a human scale with individual people making, or trying to make, individual choices,” Ownby said.

Johnson has been to Oxford before, for a conference organized by Winthrop Jordan, former UM professor of history and African-American studies for more than 20 years.

“I am looking forward to seeing some of the people I met then, and to seeing Oxford, which I very much like,” Johnson said. “I like being in Mississippi generally; I find the presence of the specific history about which I have been thinking for so long challenging, provocative and inspiring.”

He received his B.A. from Amherst College and his doctorate from Princeton University. Before teaching at Harvard, he taught history and American studies at New York University.

“I’m excited that Walter Johnson is this year’s Gilder-Jordan lecturer,” said Deirdre Cooper Owens, assistant professor of history. “His work on agency and the seven sites of racial reification have influenced my scholarship in profound ways, especially his discussion of medical journals as one of those sites.”

One of the important elements of the Gilder-Jordan lecture series is the opportunity for Southern studies and history graduate students to meet with leading scholars.

Johnson said he always learns things from talking to students, so he is looking forward to seeing what they are thinking about and what they care about.

“The thing I guess that I hope students take away from anything I do is a sense of history as palpable – what people in the past worried about, felt, and why they cared about what they cared about,” Johnson said. “Failing that, I’m usually good for a few citations of useful but obscure historical monographs.”

Organized through the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, **African-American Studies Program**, **Center for Civil War Research** and **Department of History**, the Gilder-Jordan Speaker Series is made possible through the generosity of the Gilder Foundation Inc. The series honors Richard Gilder of New York and his family, as well as his friends, Dan and Lou Jordan of Virginia.

Previous Gilder-Jordan Lecturers have been Barbara J. Fields of Columbia University, David Blight of Yale University and Grace Elizabeth Hale of the University of Virginia.

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OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children’s play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school’s first African-American student.

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“James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier,” a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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