
ZACHARY DEGREEFF

HISTORIAN & EDUCATOR

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PROFILE

I am a skilled researcher and writer with a lifelong love of learning. While I often focus on the 20th Century, I approach history as a proud generalist fascinated by the full arc of the human story and how it shapes the world today. My field experience spans across archives, museums, and classrooms where I have worked to make the past meaningful and accessible. My ultimate mission is to challenge xenophobic ideas through education and to share my passion for historical inquiry with others.

EDUCATION

BAKER UNIVERSITY

August 2017 – May 2021

B.A. in History and Secondary Education



RECOGNITIONS

- Graduated *summa cum laude*
- 4.0 cumulative GPA
- Dean's list (2017-2021)
- Department of History Outstanding Senior (2021)
- School of Education Teacher of Promise (2021)

HONOR SOCIETIES

- Alpha Mu Gamma (Foreign language studies)
 - Phi Eta Sigma (First-year achievement)
 - Pi Gamma Mu (Social Studies)
 - Pi Lambda Theta (Education)
 - Alpha Delta Sigma (Top 10% of graduating class)
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CAREER EXPERIENCE

VISITOR SERVICES ASSOCIATE | LACMA

January 2025 – Present

As a voice for art, I engage museum guests in conversations about individual works and special exhibitions. This role requires effective communication with guests and colleagues as well as solid research skills to quickly answer guest inquiries. I oversaw the unveiling of a major new museum building from Summer 2025 to Spring 2026.

ARCHIVES ASSISTANT | BAKER UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

May 2021 – August 2021

I helped the lead archivist create finding aids, process new acquisitions, satisfy client research requests, digitize documents, and complete other tasks as needed. I also researched, wrote, and performed a walking tour of the city for a historic preservation conference.

CONSULTANT | BAKER UNIVERSITY SPEECH CENTER

February 2019 – May 2021

The speech center is a program at Baker University that allows students to visit with a consultant. As one of these consultants, I carefully listened to each student's presentation and provided constructive feedback to help improve their public speaking skills.

SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER | USD 437

August 2021 – May 2024

I taught World History, Post-Secondary Success, and International Relations to students from 9th Grade to 12th Grade. To be an effective educator, I needed to develop strong research, communication, organization, and management skills. I frequently contributed to the professional development of my colleagues by introducing them to new technologies, resources, and lesson plans to improve our learning outcomes.

RESIDENT ASSISTANT | BAKER UNIVERSITY RESLIFE

August 2019 – May 2021

I lived in the dorm hall as an on-call resource for residents, served office hours seven nights a month, organized dormitory events, and interacted with residents to ensure a safe and positive college experience. This role required a significant level of responsibility, community-building, and leadership skills.

TOUR GUIDE | OZ MUSEUM & COLUMBIAN THEATRE

May 2019 – April 2020

I developed and performed an introductory monologue for each group of guests entering the museum and provided informative and entertaining guided tours of the collection. In addition to this, I operated the ticket office and kept the museum space organized.

CONFERENCES

PI GAMMA MU TRIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION | NOVEMBER 2021

Presented: "Kansas City or Bust: The Methodist Plan to Relocate Baker University, 1927-1939." Virtual Conference.

KANSAS ASSOCIATION OF HISTORIANS CONFERENCE | MARCH 2021

Presented: "Kansas City or Bust: The Methodist Plan to Relocate Baker University, 1927-1939." Virtual Conference.

RED BRICKS AND STORIED STRUCTURES: A HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONFERENCE | JULY 2021

Researched and hosted a historic walking tour of Baldwin City, Kansas for the conference by the Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council.

PI GAMMA MU TRIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION | NOVEMBER 2020

"Kansas City or Bust: The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Campaign to Relocate Baker University, 1927-1939"

Accepted but not presented, the conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Voted among the top ten papers and accepted for publication in the International Social Science Review.

BAKER UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS SYMPOSIUM: DIALOGOS | APRIL 2020

"Kansas City or Bust: The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Campaign to Relocate Baker University, 1927-1939"

Accepted but not presented, the conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

KANSAS ASSOCIATION OF HISTORIANS CONFERENCE | MARCH 2020

"Kansas City or Bust: The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Campaign to Relocate Baker University, 1927-1939"

Accepted but not presented, the conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

RESEARCH PAPERS

Kansas City or Bust: The Methodist Plan to Relocate Baker University, 1927–1939.

January 2021

After selection as one of the top ten student papers submitted at the 2020 Pi Gamma Mu Triennial International Convention, I was awarded the opportunity to have my work published in the International Social Science Review (Volume 97, Issue 3). After consulting with Candice Quinn, the editor-in-chief of ISSR, I made adjustments to the paper and published it in September 2021.

Read: https://drive.google.com/file/d/14b9hjh23kZJcSldeB5_LV2ML7yR0ze2i/view?usp=sharing

American Persian: The Biography of Paul Boodagh in Early U.S.–Iran Relations, 1889–1951.

November 2021

This paper provides a detailed biography of Paul Mirza Boodagh, an Iranian man who immigrated to the United States in 1903, attended several midwestern universities, performed entertaining informational lectures on Iran, served in World War I, became a lawyer then a Methodist minister, and died of a heart attack during his sermon in 1951. I compare Boodagh's story to the wider context of early U.S.-Iran relations because he lived squarely within the period preceding the 1953 coup and 1979 revolution which are most responsible for current tensions between the two nations. By studying the life of an Iranian who was embraced by American society, we can envision a future of decreased animosity and increased understanding between the United States and Iran.

Ersatz Empire: Inherent Fallacies in Cartographic Depictions of Alexander's Campaign.

May 2020

In this paper, I argue that the 'empire' of Alexander the Great allegedly built during his famous West Asian campaign and commonly depicted in maps as a contiguous, stable imperial state is a fantasy of authors wishing to aggrandize Alexander's legacy. I systematically critique the assumption that Alexander gained de facto control of the swath from Egypt to India with full comprehension, continuity, and custody of these lands. After breaking down the flaws in this understanding of the so-called Macedonian Empire which rapidly dissolved into warring successor states, I explain how both Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic propagandists perpetuated this myth to serve their own imperial ambitions in the Near East.

'They are Invading Us': The 1949 War of the Worlds Riot in Quito, Ecuador.

April 2020

In this paper, I investigate how a panic caused by a War of the Worlds radio broadcast mistaken for factual news in Ecuador turned into a lethal mob when a similar earlier event in the United States had not produced such violence. After assessing the common scapegoats, I conclude that Ecuador likely saw a stronger reaction due to the lasting legacy of colonial oppression which had raised tension with a revolving door of dictatorial leaders and a recent war with Peru over ambiguous colonial borders. This primed Ecuador to have a much harsher response to a fake invasion story than a country which had not experienced such trauma in their recent history.

'We Advocate No Violence': The Forgotten Moral Drama of Astor Place.

March 2020

In this paper, I ask why the xenophobic Astor Place Riot and subsequent act of deadly police violence does not occupy the American public memory as strongly as other 'moral dramas' such as the Boston Massacre. Through my analysis, I demonstrate how the event exposed major rifts in American society along lines of nativism versus pluralism and lower class versus upper class – this duality prevented the establishment of a mutual agreement on who to blame for the violence.

'The Birth of a New Art': Considering the Influence of a Historically Inaccurate Film on History.

December 2019

In this paper, I assess the impact of the historically inaccurate film, 'The Birth of a Nation'. From production, to distribution, to audience reaction, I show how the film was intentionally used as propaganda to reshape the public memory surrounding slavery, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction Era to devastating effect.

The Dissoi Logoi of Depictions: Examining the Impact of the Ancient Sophists Through Texts in Conversation.

December 2019

Utilizing the Sophist technique of Dissoi Logoi – or opposing texts in conversation – this paper sought to parse the evidence surrounding the nature of the ancient Sophists who were sometimes described as wise, visionary educators and other times described as foolish, greedy charlatans. Ultimately, by weighing these competing images, a fuller picture of their role in Greek society emerged.

Kansas City or Bust: The Commission on Survey of Educational Institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Campaign to Relocate Baker University, 1927–1939.

May 2019

Part of a Historical Methods course assignment in which the professor required undergraduate students to research a topic from the university archives with no previous scholarship dedicated to it. In this paper, I investigate a 1931 report by the Methodist Episcopal Church which argues, among other things, that Baker University should relocate from its current home in the small town of Baldwin City to the nearby Kansas City. First, I break down why the church would recommend this move for political, economic, and social considerations of the time. Next, I argue Baker University opted to ignore this advice due to an inextricable loyalty to their small town.

The Bible, ‘God’s Women’, and the Denial of Progress.

April 2019

In this paper, I analyze the speech ‘God’s Women’ by the feminist Anna Howard Shaw. I argue that by comparing empowered female figures of the Bible to the limited sphere of modern womanhood, Shaw refuted the progressive theory of history which was commonly accepted in her time.

The Power of the People: The Social Consequences of Fuel Sources in Kansas.

April 2018

In this paper, I describe how successive waves of new energy technologies (coal, oil, nuclear, and wind) received both popular resistance and popular support by competing factions in Kansas political, economic, and social life.

Langston Hughes.

October 2017

In this paper, I investigate why Langston Hughes came to be such a prominently remembered figure in American literary and intellectual life compared to other Harlem Renaissance contemporaries, arguing that Hughes occupied a unique position within the movement which celebrated blackness while also building bridges with the white community.

OTHER PROJECTS & EXPERIENCES

KNEE DEEP: A HUMAN HISTORY OF THE WAKARUSA WETLANDS | 2020 - PRESENT

After half a decade of research, the final goal of this project is to publish a book chronicling the human and environmental history of the Wakarusa Wetlands, a riparian wetland habitat located near present-day Lawrence, Kansas. The book begins with the first human arrivals to the site approximately 12,000 years ago, following shifts in the lifeways of indigenous inhabitants until the disruptive introduction of European and United States settler colonialism; the next chapters describe the mixed use of the wetlands by indigenous and settler communities during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, including the devastating environmental impacts; the next chapters detail how the wetlands were used by a local American Indian boarding school to force assimilation on their indigenous students through agricultural labor before the U.S. government sold the wetlands property

to another nearby university for conservation, research, and education; the final chapters of the book cover the four-decade battle against a highway construction project which threatened the wetlands. The protests mobilized the local American Indian community, students and faculty from three universities, and other concerned citizens. The final chapter culminates with the completion of the highway and subsequent aftermath – but ends on a hopeful note that the remaining wetlands will be preserved and expanded for future generations to experience.

BRENDA DAY AWARD DOCUMENTARY PROJECT | 2020 - 2021

The Great Plains Chapter of the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History interviewed me for a documentary film project about my research paper, *Kansas City or Bust*, for which I earned the Brenda Day Award. At Baker University, this award is made available to students who produce outstanding scholarship at the undergraduate level. In the documentary, my professor and the lead archivist describe the award and praise my academic achievements and potential.

Watch the documentary here: <https://youtu.be/RnildhpRUQY>

BAKER UNIVERSITY SPEECH CHOIR ARCHIVAL PROJECT | 2020 - 2021

In 2020, it was announced that the Baker University Speech Choir would end, and I took it upon myself to collect documentation of the organization to be stored in the university archive. This also involved conducting an oral history interview with Dr. Susan Emel, the founder and director of Speech Choir. For context, the Baker University Speech Choir was an elective course and student organization from c. 2004-2020 which developed students' public-speaking skills. A typical Speech Choir performance involved a small group where each member took turns reading sentences with dramatic interpretation while the others on stage responded with choreographed actions and expressions. This style of presentation brought the script to life for the audience more than a flat reading of the words. By collaborating with Dr. Emel and the lead archivist, I successfully archived the history of this impactful group for future generations.

AMERICAN LEGION BOYS' STATE OF KANSAS | 2016

This summer program allows students to participate in a simulated state government to learn more about how institutions function. After being nominated by my history teacher, I had the opportunity to serve as a state legislator who composed, debated, and voted on bills in the mock House of Representatives. This experience allowed me to learn about the critical balance between the ideals and realities in policymaking and better understand the role of government in public life.

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE STUDENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM | 2014

This organization, originally established under President Eisenhower, empowers students to learn more about the world and build connections with other people through travel. As a student ambassador, I traveled to France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Italy. Through this experience, I confronted my own romanticized stereotypes about Europe and came to a deeper appreciation of the transformative power that travel can have on our understanding of the world. As Mark Twain wrote, "travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness."
