

T. Mills Kelly

Tenure Statement

When I arrived at George Mason in the summer of 2001, I was a non-traditional new assistant professor. Unlike most historians at the beginning of their climb up the tenure ladder, I had not one research agenda, but two. I am both a historian of radical nationalism in 19th and 20th century East Central Europe *and* a historian of the ways that digital technologies are transforming the teaching and learning of history, particularly at the post-secondary level. This dual research agenda has resulted in a wide variety of scholarly products—from a conventional monograph on Czech nationalism in late-Habsburg Austria, to a variety of articles on teaching and learning in history, to several popular websites funded by substantial grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In addition to my scholarship, I was hired to be the Coordinator of the new Western Civilization program at Mason. In this role, I administer the course, taught to between 1,200-1,500 students each semester spread across between 45-60 sections. I hire, supervise, and help our eight postdoctoral fellows find tenure track jobs, and hire and supervise adjunct faculty teaching the course. Finally, I teach both graduate and undergraduate courses in both of my scholarly areas.

My book, *Without Remorse: Czech Radical Nationalism in Late-Habsburg Austria*, is scheduled to be published by East European Monographs (a list distributed by Columbia University Press) in September 2006. Investigating the Czech National Socialist party (no relation to the later German party with a similar name) made it possible for me to examine several received notions about late-Habsburg political life. Histories of Czech politics in the last decades before 1914 have long emphasized the dual and later three-way contest for power between liberal and socialist, and then liberal, socialist, and agrarian parties. Radical nationalists like the National Socialists, have been almost universally dismissed by Czech historians as gadflies,

blowhards, and little better than fringe players in Czech political life. My work takes seriously the role of these masters of street politics, both because they had much more electoral success than is apparent in the conventional histories of this period, but more importantly because by 1914 these supposedly fringe politicians were setting the agenda for the nationalist wing of Czech politics. The failure of the Habsburg state to reach any sort of accommodation with the Czechs before the war is largely the result of the opposition of the National Socialists, who managed to torpedo several attempts at political compromise in the Bohemian lands (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia) after 1900. The failure of the Austrian state to reach such a compromise meant that the Monarchy's most industrialized region was in a state of significant turmoil when the international crisis arrived in 1914.

My work also makes what I think is a significant contribution to our understanding of how radical national movements take root and prosper. When I read the histories of late-Habsburg politics at the beginning of my project, I found many assumptions about who supported which of the many political parties active in the Monarchy. It was surprising to me, given the significant research that has been done on Wilhemine political life, that Habsburg historians were so readily accepting of these assumptions. Unwilling to accept these assumptions myself, I developed a large database of socioeconomic information that allowed me to connect voting patterns to patterns of social and economic development in the predominantly Czech provinces of the Monarchy. My analysis of these data—which is in line with similar analyses of voters in Imperial Germany and in post-1918 Poland—makes it possible to describe with much greater certainty who in the Czech electorate voted radical nationalist, socialist, liberal, catholic, or agrarian, and to draw several conclusions about why they may have done so.

The most important of the connections between social and economic factors and radical nationalist voting patterns that I highlight in the book is the fact that the

Czech radical nationalist parties prospered in those districts of Bohemia that modernized early (1870-1890), but which were slipping in relation to neighboring districts after 1900. Radical nationalist candidates capitalized on the discontent caused by this slippage in relation to neighboring cities and towns, pointing the finger at other Czech parties that, the radicals claimed, were to blame for the economic woes of the Czech people at the local level. It is important to note that the radicals pointed the finger at *other Czechs*, because almost every other history of Czech politics in this period stresses the centrality of the Czech-German divide in the Bohemian lands. My research uncovered much more evidence of *Czech-Czech* political conflict after 1900 and in the book I argue that historians have largely oversold the post-1900 Czech-German conflict. The maturing of Czech political culture evident in this shift is important because after 1900 Czech politicians argued with one another over substantive issues—local economic development, educational reform, the degree to which Czech leaders represented their people well at the imperial level—rather than inflammatory ones such as whether the Germans were the enemy of the Czechs. In addition to the book, I have presented aspects of this work at a variety of national conferences and in an article in the *Austrian History Yearbook*, one of the two major journals in my field.

During the summer of 2005, with the support of a fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, I began work on my next work of European history, tentatively titled “Foaming at the Mouth: Beer and Radical Politics in Twentieth Century East Central Europe.” This new project approaches the history of mass politics in the region by reaching across national and ideological boundaries to help us understand the relationship between the masses and their parties throughout the century—not just at a particular historical moment. In particular I intend to examine how political parties with mass constituencies formed and

maintained bonds with their constituents, and I will do so by examining what happened in a central venue for this activity—the beer hall and the pub.

Why beer halls and beer hall sociability? Across East Central Europe the local drinking establishment was (and is) central to political life. Where the coffee house or the club was the domain of the elite, the drinking establishment was the “working man’s club” and was the domain of the masses. After all, what coffee house could compete with the *Hofbrauhaus* in Munich that seats over 2,000 in its vast taproom alone, or the *Restaurácia Stára sladovna (Mamut)* in Bratislava that seats 1,200? As Madelon Powers has shown us in her study of American pub culture, if we are to understand the participation of the masses in political life—even the limited political life of the communist period—we have to go to the places where the masses engaged in so much of their political activity—the local watering hole. By taking this approach, my project locates the formation of mass political consciousness and popular political discourse within the masses, rather than making them the objects of elite manipulation. My project will also shed new light on the ways that drinking and civic action are entwined. As a result, those scholars grappling with issues of popular political engagement and the rise of populist/nationalist political parties in the region will have new ways of understanding these phenomena.

I intend to use my post-tenure research leave to do the first round of archival research in Prague and Vienna that will move the project forward. In November 2005 I presented the first results of my research at the national conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies to positive reviews.

My research in the scholarship of teaching and learning in history began in 1999 when The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching named me a Pew National Fellow. The research I conducted while a Carnegie Fellow resulted in several publications about how the use of digital media did and did not transform student learning in introductory history courses. Since arriving at Mason, I have

continued this work, with my more recent research focusing more on the ways that digital media facilitate (or do not facilitate) collaboration among students and how that collaboration results in different learning outcomes than can be achieved through other means. In my first years at Mason this work was supported by a fellowship from the Visible Knowledge Project at Georgetown University and has resulted in a number of additional publications, in peer reviewed disciplinary journals, in edited volumes, and in other publications such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Academe*.

Since arriving at Mason I have also engaged in what is best described as applied research on student learning and technology. In my work at the Center for History and New Media, where I am an Associate Director, I have been part of a team that has produced two major websites that make available to students, teachers, and scholars, the lessons I and others have learned through our work in this area. Supported by substantial grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and other sources, these two websites—*World History Sources* and *Women in World History*—are now averaging around 300,000 unique *visitors* (not hits) per year (combined) and brought in \$530,000 in external funding to the Department. In April 2006, I was awarded a third major NEH grant, this one for \$200,000, to create a website on the collapse of Communism in East Central Europe in 1989. Together, these three projects include essays on teaching, historical analysis, and research authored by more than three dozen scholars and teachers.

My variety of publications and the work that I have done at CHNM has resulted in a number of invitations to speak at national and international conferences on the scholarship of teaching and learning and to conduct a variety of faculty development workshops each year at institutions of higher education around the country. In the summer of 2007 I have been invited to be a scholar in residence at MacQuarrie University in Sydney, Australia, where I will work with the faculty there

on their use of digital media in their research and teaching. While there, I will be working on a book on the use of digital media in post-secondary history teaching. Cornell University Press has already requested sample chapters for this book and I hope to have a complete draft to them before the end of 2007.

My journey to becoming the teacher I am today began in the spring of 1997 in the campus coffee shop at Grinnell College where I was teaching on a one-year contract. Over coffee one day, my department chair complimented me for my extensive website and the heavy use I was making of digital media in my courses. Then he asked me whether I knew if the use of new media in my courses was transforming my students' learning in any measurable way? Somewhat abashed, I had to admit that I had no idea what the effect of all my use of technology in teaching was, except for a very high level of satisfaction among my students who regularly told me how much they appreciated all my use of technology.

His simple and obvious question sent me straight to the library to find out what scholars knew about how the use of technology influenced student learning in history courses. What I found, or more to the point, did not find, appalled me. With the exception of the work of Samuel Wineburg, whose research has focused entirely on K-12 education, we knew almost nothing about how students learning in history classes at all—never mind paying attention to how technology might influence that learning. So, I decided that if I was going to devote so much time and energy to creating and maintaining digital resources for my students, I would have to do some of the research myself. It was this decision that led me to the Carnegie Foundation the following year. While a fellow at Carnegie I was fortunate enough to be surrounded by other scholars from many different disciplines who were all interested in similar questions about student learning and how we might investigate it from within our own disciplinary styles. In addition to all that I have learned through my own research, I have also learned that by being a scholarly teacher—that is, one who

sees teaching as an intellectual activity, not merely as the transmission of knowledge—I have become a much better teacher and my students have learned so much more than they would have otherwise.

When I first began teaching, a number of my colleagues told me that the hardest course to teach was the introductory survey. They warned me that students taking this course generally didn't want to be there, the amount of material to cover was daunting, and they repeated some version of the complaint that "most of our students aren't really up to the challenge of really learning anything more than the basic facts." Since then, I've taught at four different institutions and everywhere I've gone, I've heard some version of this lament. But, even when I taught at an essentially open admission university drawing students from a largely rural population, I found that when students are challenged in the right ways, valued as individuals, and encouraged to think beyond the laundry list of historical facts, they can work well above the intellectual level so many of their professors are willing to relegate them to. Moreover, when history is presented to them as an epistemology (although I rarely use that word early on in the semester) and as a discipline filled with controversy, their enthusiasm for the material increases dramatically. My favorite comments on end-of-semester student evaluations are those that say something like, "I never realized history could be interesting."

As a result, each course I teach, regardless of its place in the curriculum is grounded in historiography, historical methodologies and the interplay of conflicting sources. History becomes a set of problems to be solved by my students rather than a compendium of facts to be memorized. To be sure, they acquire many important facts along the way, but when the semester is over, there are surely other important facts that we left out. Does this make me nervous? Sometimes I still feel a bit of anxiety about the content we did not cover, but in the end, it seems much more important to me to uncover the past than cover it. It is through this "uncoverage"

that my students acquire sophisticated understandings of essential historical moments—and a set of skills they can bring to bear on other intellectual problems they confront in other courses and in life.

Just as I teach my students to uncover the past, I have spent the past five years attempting to uncover what works and does not work when we use technology in our courses. For me, technology is no end in itself. I do not ask the technology to teach my students for me. After all, I changed careers to become an educator and an historian in part because I wanted to spend time with students, teaching them and learning with them. Instead, all of my work with technology is designed to provide my students and students with the tools they need to make sense of the past.

If you could visit my classrooms at mid-semester you would find students energetically debating the answers to questions I (or they) pose, using evidence from sources and the work of other scholars, rather than just offering their opinions for the sake of having something to say. You will also find a professor who disagrees with them incessantly, sometimes driving them to distraction, as I goad them to think ever more carefully about their answers, about the evidence they are deploying to support their arguments, and to find connections between the events we are discussing and other matters that have come up or might come up during the semester.

Several years ago, one of my students blurted out, “Dr. Kelly, why can’t you just agree for once!” Laughing, I promised her that before the semester was over, I would agree with someone about something, but only if and when that someone presented an argument worthy of agreeing with on the first pass. From that moment on, the students in that general education class became some of the most energetic young scholars I have ever met. They made it their mission to obtain my agreement and by the end of the semester, I had actually agreed at least three times—surely a record in my classroom. That my students understand that I’m goading them in this

way out of a love of learning, a desire to teach them as much as possible, and a genuine respect for their intellectual abilities is reflected in their end-of-semester evaluations of my teaching.

The successes I've had in the classroom are also reflected in various awards I have received. In addition to the fellowships from Carnegie and the Visible Knowledge Project, in 2005 I received the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) Outstanding Faculty Award, the highest recognition the Commonwealth of Virginia bestows for faculty excellence. I was the inaugural recipient in the category "Teaching With Technology." I also received George Mason University's Teaching Excellence Award in 2005.

My service to the University, my department, my profession and my community has been just as varied as my scholarship and my teaching. In addition to directing the Western Civilization course and being one of the Associate Directors of the Center for History and New Media, I have been very active in hiring at both the departmental and university level. In addition to the hiring of between two and five new postdoctoral fellows each year, I have participated in two departmental and two university search committees. I am a regular member of a number of departmental committees (research, undergraduate studies, etc.) and during the 2005-06 academic year was the only untenured professor who sat on a Provost's committee charged with deciding whether to divide our College of Arts and Sciences into two smaller colleges. My service to my discipline includes such things as acting as the Vice President and webmaster of the Czechoslovak History Conference, serving as teaching editor for the H-Net list HABSBURG for four years, serving on various dissertation and article prize committees, and sitting on the editorial boards of three journals.

Beyond the University, my service has taken several forms. From 2002-2004 I served as a disciplinary consultant to the Quality in Undergraduate Education

project, a multi-state, multi-campus and multi-disciplinary effort to bring together community colleges and universities around issues of teaching effectiveness and assessment standards. For the past four summers I have been a mentor at a multi-institution scholarship of teaching and learning conference based at Rockhurst University in Missouri and Columbia College in Chicago, and during the summer of 2005 I was a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center's Junior Scholars Training seminar—the premier mentoring forum for new faculty in East European studies. Since 1996 I have been a member of the Board of Directors of the Civic Education Project (CEP), an international non-governmental organization dedicated to the promoting the reform of higher education in societies emerging from dictatorship. From 1998-2002 I was the Chair of the Board of this organization and oversaw an expansion of our budget from \$3 million to \$4.5 million and the expansion of our programs from 16 to 22 countries. At its height last year, CEP provided fellowships to more than 300 local faculty fellows from the Czech Republic to Mongolia. CEP is now opening its first program in the Middle East, with new fellows being placed in Jordan in 2007. Finally, I believe that each of us has a responsibility to engage in service to our communities. In my own life, this has taken several forms, including being a Little League baseball umpire (since 1984), a Cub Scout leader (since 2003), and a chair of the advisory council at Bennett Elementary School in Manassas, Virginia (since 2005).

I hope it is apparent how each of the facets of my career as an educator fits together in a (mostly) seamless web of activities that benefit my chosen profession, my university, and my community. That I see myself as an educator as well as a scholar makes it possible for me to integrate all of the many things I do into my daily life and into my work and gives me tremendous professional and personal satisfaction.