

Personal Statement
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For as long as I have loved history, I have been fascinated by the late nineteenth century. Two reasons for this stand out in my mind: my father's entrepreneurial spirit and my own confusion about the time period as a young person. I grew up admiring Morgans, Rockefellers, and Carnegies for their financial genius without grasping the economics that made their financial gains possible. In high school I absorbed a cursory understanding of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era while feeling overwhelmed by the many dramatic changes that took place during that time. Despite my confusion about the period I could never shake the idea that somehow it was the key to understanding the world we live in today. I became determined to master this era of history and convinced that doing so would help me to better understand current events. Over the years I have filled in the gaps in my knowledge, which has prompted me to reach conclusions about both the past and the present that I never would have expected. Over the course of my career I hope to write about many subjects and do various things, but underpinning all of it is a passion for this period of American history.

Sven Beckert has written that history is about connections, and my studies at TCU have enabled me to find ways of connecting people and events that are chronologically, thematically, or geographically different. I began graduate school unable and unwilling to venture outside my antitrust and regulatory history box but, buoyed by the sense of accomplishment derived from completing my thesis, I made it a point to explore new subjects. I consistently sought out new research projects that challenged me to acquaint myself with many different fields of history rather than tailor each research assignment to fit a pre-determined dissertation topic. I can now claim high-quality work on a number of subjects ranging from Native American history to

English radicalism and even Civil War historiography. This route may have cost me an extra semester in the program but it has been invaluable for my development as a scholar.

My minor fields have empowered me to broaden my thinking about the late-nineteenth century and make connections that will be useful for my dissertation and in my career beyond TCU. A firm knowledge of American history from the colonial period through the mid-nineteenth century is crucial to my work. Though it is out of fashion to write narrative history centered upon the great question of a particular era, there is no doubt that American history, indeed all of human history, has witnessed the recurrence of certain themes from one age to another. In American history one of these themes is the maintenance of a bi-racial society, accomplished differently through slavery, segregation, and integration. Another is the persistent acquisitiveness and commercialism of even the most traditional or allegedly backward-looking section of the great choir of Americans throughout history. My dissertation must tap into themes like these and make itself relevant to the broader scope of American history, or else be relegated to the dustbin of historical triviality.

All of my research up to this time has fallen under the heading of political history, either the old and dry kind or the “new” and culturally-informed variety. Many political historians make the mistake of forgetting about the female half of the population that was unable to participate directly in the political process prior to women’s enfranchisement. Studying women’s history as well as feminist theory has given me the tools necessary to avoid this common pitfall. Not only am I familiar with the “contribution history” of the few female political activists of the nineteenth century, but with historians’ masculinization of politics as well. Rebecca Edwards has admirably tried to insert women and feminine discourses into traditional political history, and scholars like Drew Gilpin Faust and LeAnn Whites have gone a step further by re-

conceptualizing political events (like war) in gendered terms. The people of the past, like us, lived in a gendered world with some spaces and activities reserved strictly for men and others for women. Understanding this reality and knowing how to approach it has led me to include gender analysis as an important part of my work.

Gender analysis will occupy a prominent place in my dissertation. Dozens of scholarly works have addressed the uses, rights, and regulations pertaining to guns, but few of them have made any concerted effort to do so with gender in mind. “Bearing arms” has historically been a manly duty, and the recent conflict over women serving in combat in the United States military clearly demonstrates that it remains so in the eyes of many Americans even today. Though scholarship on the Second Amendment (and similar guarantees in state constitutions) is rife with detailed explanations of legal theory, the field suffers a shortage of analysis willing to confront the reality that this dearly-held constitutional right clearly belonged to men, not women. My experience working in the history of women and gender has enabled me to see this gap in the current scholarship and make an effort to fill it. The current state of the field might tempt us to believe otherwise, but meticulous recapitulations of legal theory pertaining to weapons can peacefully coexist alongside equally insightful explorations of the differences between the “manly” and “womanly” uses of guns in American history.

Chronological and thematic barriers are, in some respects, easier to overcome than geographic ones. The “new” fields of history that have come to the fore over the past several decades have largely consisted of dismantling walls of time and methodology, but geographic divisions still penetrate to the very heart of the historical profession. Graduate students gain a perfunctory education about a region outside the borders of their specialty, but learning transnational history (much less how to write it) remains a rarity among historians. I have made an

effort to acquire some experience in this cutting-edge approach by familiarizing myself with nineteenth-century Europe. My minor in European history has especially prepared me to make trans-Atlantic connections about politics and reform in the Anglophone world throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

There are significant parallels between the American farmer-labor reform efforts of the 1880s-1890s and the re-emergence of English radicalism and socialism at that same time. Charles Postel hinted at these connections in *The Populist Vision* when he included a host of other reformers within his big-tent populism. Bellamy Clubs and Georgite Single-Taxers, modernizers alongside Populists, were not just popular throughout the United States but in Britain as well. A dramatic rethinking of government's role in society and a willingness to embrace radical solutions were present on both sides of the Atlantic during the late-nineteenth century. Whether calling for land nationalization, the sub-treasury plan, or activist crime-prevention laws, reformers believed government regulation was the answer to the great problems posed by their modern world. The European minor also promises to be a crucial part of research into antimonopoly rhetoric which I intend to pursue in the future. American anti-monopolism often pointed to Britain as a cautionary example of the dangers of aristocracy while also mimicking a rhetorical strategy used by British dissidents throughout the modern era. For this reason, I intend to make my future antimonopoly research trans-Atlantic in scope. Familiarity with British history may prove to be the decisive factor in making my research stand out against the work of other Americanists who have addressed this topic.

These minor fields promise to make my dissertation an engaging and informative work of history. I plan to begin my dissertation with some historical context about gun rights and weapons regulations in the early nineteenth century. This will include some discussion of the

historiography pertaining to the Second Amendment, the Southern *code duello* that glorified interpersonal violence, and the specific laws affecting Texas from the Spanish period through American statehood. The historiography of American gun laws is disproportionately preoccupied with early American history, so I will be required to address this body of scholarship in an informed way within my dissertation; a firm grasp of American history prior to the 1870s is necessary for that task. As stated above, I plan to integrate cultural history and gender analysis into a subject that has historically been dominated by legal argumentation. This approach has borne fruit in a publishable-quality research paper about Texas gun laws during Reconstruction. Finally, familiarity with European history will keep me mindful to look for trans-national continuities instead of simply assuming that American history is inherently unique or distinct from other Anglo-dominated societies. Armed with a good education from TCU, I am ready to continue learning new subjects and reevaluating my suppositions.