

History Department News

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Professor Robert Darnton praises the life and work of Oscar Handlin, 1915-2011

With the death of Oscar Handlin, Harvard University, its library in particular and the world of learning in general, has lost one of the greatest citizens in the Republic of Letters. As Director of the University Library from 1979 to 1984, Oscar Handlin oversaw the building of the Pusey Library, which now houses some of its most important collections, the adoption of the Library of Congress cataloguing system, and the preparation of what is now the HOLLIS catalogue. As a historian, he spoke to an enormous public and explained the central importance of immigration as a theme in American history. I took his course in American social history when I was a student. His lectures ended precisely at noon. He had a flat, undramatic style of lecturing, but we walked out of the lecture hall excitedly debating the points he raised. We continued to debate them throughout lunch—in fact, in some cases, for the rest of our lives. The history of America is the history of immigration, he told us. It is a lesson we shall never forget. Nor will we forget Oscar Handlin's great contributions to Harvard and the Harvard Library. He left a permanent mark on the university he loved.

Robert Darnton

Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor and University Librarian

22 September 2011

Update: 23 September, 2011

Emily Langer of the Washington Post has also written a [story](#) on Professor Handlin.

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Posted on September 22nd, 2011

QS World University Ranking of history departments released: see where Harvard falls

[Top 100 QS World University Rankings for History, 2011](#)

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Posted on September 9th, 2011

Michael McCormick on NPR's "Science Friday"

Francis Goelet Professor of Medieval History and Chair of the Science of the Human Past program, Michael McCormick, discussed the history of the Black Death with Ira Flatow on the September 2nd edition of NPR's "Science Friday". McCormick was joined by Hendrik Poinar, an evolutionary geneticist and a member of the Department of Anthropology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada.

Listen to the entire discussion [here](#).

Tags: [Black Death](#), [Hendrik Poinar](#), [Michael McCormick](#), [NPR](#), [Science of the Human](#)

Posted on September 7th, 2011

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Caroline Elkins' research becomes key in Kenyan reparations case

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The work of a Harvard history professor has bolstered the case of a group of elderly Kenyans who are seeking reparations from the British government for rape, castration, beatings, and other abuses that they say were part of systematic colonial-era efforts to suppress Kenya's Mau Mau uprising.

The case passed a critical milestone in July when a British judge allowed it to move forward despite government arguments that, if the abuses happened, the current government isn't liable for colonial transgressions.

The Kenyans are former detainees in British prison camps set up during the 1950s Mau Mau rebellion, which set the stage for Kenyan independence in 1963. The plaintiffs allege that their abuse came at the hands of British jailers in what was a systematic and government-sanctioned campaign to break the rebellion.

Read the full article on the [Harvard Gazette](#)

**photo credit: Stephanie Mitchell/Harvard Staff Photographer*

Tags: [Caroline Elkins](#), [Harvard History Department](#), [Imperial Reckoning](#), [Mau Mau Uprising](#)

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