Religious Sectarianism in the Middle East
in the Age of Western Power, 1860-2003

The 2016 Harrison Distinguished Lecture

On April 6 the WKU History Department welcomed Professor Ussama Makdisi as he delivered this year's Harrison Distinguished Lecture. This lecture has over the years become a highlight of the academic year both for faculty and students.

Makdisi is Chair of Arab Studies at Rice University. He has been a Resident Fellow of the Berlin Institute for Advanced Study, and in 2009 he was made a Carnegie Scholar for his work among Muslim communities both in the U.S. and abroad.

Makdisi addressed the timely topic of how religious sectarianism in the Middle East has responded and reacted to Western Power in the region during the past 150 years. This will be the theme of his upcoming book to be published by the University of California Press.
Future Historians
Vie for Contest Honors

On March 18 the History Department once again invited high and middle school students to participate in the annual history contest. This year 650 students, representing 20 schools in Kentucky and Tennessee, competed for honors as future preservers of our cultural heritage. Above students are shown hard at work on their essays and contest coordinator Tammy Van Dyken presents award to Austin Ball of Ohio Co. Middle School as first prize winner in American History.

Phi Alpha Theta
Enjoy “Food for Thought” at Awards Banquet

On April 27, the students shown above were given awards at the annual Phi Alpha Theta banquet. The speaker, shown here with faculty adviser Selena Sanderfer (center right), was Crystal deGregory (center left), founder and president of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Inc. She discussed how academic advocacy of the past century will be changed by conditions in the new one. In this photo Dr. deGregory and Phi Alpha Theta sponsor Selena Sanderfer stand with this year’s student award winners.
On November 18, 2015 the History Department and a host of former students mourned the passing of Professor Jack Thacker. Jack taught at WKU for 51 years and touched the lives of well over 10,000 students and all of our faculty, past and present. His historical emphasis was Military History, and for many years he taught classes for WKU’s ROTC students. He won the university award for teaching, and he was once a visiting professor at West Point. He also taught televised extension classes and did interviews on the local public affairs radio station. For several years, being the longest-serving active professor on campus, he carried the mace to open commencement ceremonies.

Tributes from former students poured in upon word of his death. A few examples:

“When I completed my degree in 2006 he walked off the stage and shook my hand. I will never forget that moment. Thanks, Dr. Thacker, you will be missed.” Daniel Trujillo

“Many hearts hurt tonight because of this loss. How lucky we are to have been able to know Jack Thacker and to have learned from him things that we will never forget.” Andrew Whobrey

“He was very hard on me in class, and one day I asked him why he threw such tough stuff at me. He said, ‘You are a five foot woman, asking to join the military, and I want to make sure you can take the tough stuff.’ Soldier on, Jack.” Danielle Davis Pousette

“He molded and trained many of the Kentucky high school history teachers. Thanks, Dr. Thacker.” Andy Broome
In May 2016 WKU received a letter from Army Major General Peggy Combs announcing that at Fort Knox in June the U.S. Army Cadet Command would induct [posthumously] Dr. Jack W. Thacker into the inaugural class of the U.S. Army ROTC’s National Hall of Fame. His character and distinguished service, she said, demonstrated the kind of “Leadership Excellence” that placed him on the roll of servants to the nation’s defense.
History Recognized Again—and Again

History continues to pile up academic awards. This year Patricia Minter (left) received the University Award for Public Service. This comes as a result of her highly-regarded work as faculty regent and her contributions to the endeavors of ACLU of Kentucky, Bowling Green Fairness, Campus Pride, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Student Coalition for Renters' Rights, and the American Society for Legal History.

David Serafini, one of our most popular instructors, won high marks in a student poll for his skills in the classroom. His classes are first to fill up each semester.

Testing Your I.Q.: An Identification Quiz

Many of your former teachers gathered for a “historic” photo following the Phi Alpha Theta banquet this year. You get 10 points for each you can still name, 130 if you get them all, a good I.Q. test for you.
Greetings from the Boss

The death of Dr. Jack Thacker last November was a major shock to the History Department and to its many alumni. We received many comments from former students about his lasting impact on their education and careers during his fifty years at WKU. With the passing of long-time faculty members such as Jack Thacker, Carlton Jackson, George Dillingham, Hugh Philips, and Lowell Harrison, the History Department has lost important connections to its own past. I invite you, the departmental alumni and alumnae, to send us your memories of Dr. Thacker and other history faculty members to history@wk.edu so that we can archive them for the departmental collective memory. I also want to thank each one of you who has donated to the History Department in the past. These contributions continue to fund needed improvements to classroom technology and provide research grants for our current students. Your support is vital to the department’s future.

Robert Dietle