



# Faculty Spotlight

Graham Cox

## EIGHT QUESTIONS FOR DR. COX:

### 1. How did you get interested in Military History?

I became interested in military history at a very young age. My father grew up with and remained lifelong friends with Tom Keiser who earned his Ph.D. at the University of Reading in the UK. His area of expertise was the American Civil War and, thus, it became my interest. I was even lucky enough to visit a number of battlefields with Tom from Gettysburg in Pennsylvania to Vicksburg in Mississippi. I have been fascinated with military history ever since. Study of the American Civil War, consequently, became my original focus at grad school.

### 2. What interests you most about being a professional military historian?

For me, by studying military history I am able to gain insights into such a wide variety of aspects of the human condition. Even a purely operational military history has so much to offer to our study of politics, diplomacy, and culture.

### 3. What place does Military History have in academia?

Military History and its associated fields should have a central place in higher education – that it does not at many universities is a shame. War – and all that comes with it – has remained an ever-present feature of the human experience. If we are to hope that we might someday escape from it – well, that aim surely begins with maintaining a rigorous examination of its causes and consequences.

### 4. How do you integrate Military History in your curriculum?

There is not a single course I have taught that has not included military history as part of its curriculum (why? see my answer above). One cannot understand American history, even at the survey level for example, without understanding military history. I cannot teach my Holocaust class without a focus on military history. When I teach War Crimes, Genocide, and Justice, military history is front and center. Even when I teach U.S. History through Film, military history is a part of the curriculum.

### 5. What are your current and future projects?

At present, I have just wrapped up my manuscript on the development of the trial protocol for the Nuremberg IMT. It focuses on the debate among the Allies over the creation of an international legal protocol to

prosecute Nazi officials following the close of World War II. The manuscript demonstrates that American policymakers circumscribed the scope of new international law to avoid creating precedents that – so they thought – might boomerang on the United States itself because of its own praxis of racial segregation. It details how policymakers linked “crimes against humanity” with “aggressive war” and “conspiracy” to protect American sovereignty against accusations about its own unequal social order and simultaneously proclaimed – hypocritically – the United States as the moral leader of the postwar new world order. Very simply, for the Nuremberg IMT US policymakers created international law to prosecute Nazis for crimes based on racial, religious, and political persecution and simultaneously made sure that new precedent did not apply to the United States.

Among other future projects, I am currently working on a manuscript examining the tenuous relationship between African-American civic leaders and the Roosevelt administration (particularly the Morale Branch of the Army, the Office of War Information and the NAACP) during WWII.

**6. What was the hardest aspect of writing your most recent book?**

Well, when writing about the past – even the relatively recent past in my case – there are always roadblocks as to evidence. For example, the Legal Advisor for the U.S. State Department during WWII chose to deposit his papers at the Library of Congress; unfortunately, he noted that he burned almost all of his records. For my work, this was, to say the least, singularly frustration. I suppose, the hardest part for me has been to release the work to the publisher wondering if just one more trip to one more archive might have revealed something more.

**7. Any advice to students aspiring to be military historians?**

I doubt what I say here will be of any consolation to aspiring students, and I am quite sure it has been said by others – and said better. But this knowledge has served me well. Ask yourself if you can do anything else besides studying military history. If you readily come up with other options, I’d suggest you strongly consider those other options. If becoming a military historian is your only option, then dive in and don’t look back. All the roadblocks – and there are way too many – that face those of us who want to study and write and teach about military history (or any other field) can be quite disheartening. Every setback I have faced in my pursuit of history has been bearable by the knowledge that I am following the right path for me.

**8. If you could have any career in the world, what would it be and why?**

I have been lucky enough to test-drive several careers – busboy, stage hand, theater producer, general manager of a golf course, among others – I’ve enjoyed them all, but they all led me back to where I started, the study of history. As a colleague of mine says, “this is a great gig if you can get it.”