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Jenna M. Gibbs, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of History

Florida International University

Born in 1961 in Nottingham, England

Studied History at the University of California, Los Angeles

FELLOWSHIP

Volkswagen/Mellon Postdoctoral-Fellow in the Humanities

PROJECT

Liberty of Conscience: Transatlantic Evangelicalism, Slavery, and Anti-Slavery, 1730s-1830s

My study will investigate evangelical revivalism's impact on the institution of slavery - working both to unsettle and to legitimate it - and the role of revivalists in antislavery opposition. In contradistinction to regional, national, and denominational studies of evangelicalism and slavery, this Atlantic study will offer a multi-denominational, transnational purview. The study will encompass German and German-American Pietists and Moravians, as well as British and American Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, and Congregationalists. Liberty of Conscience will explore the interchanges among these "awakeners" in Great Britain, mainland North America, German states, and the British Caribbean using mission reports, printed literature, and correspondence. In its emphases on pan-Atlantic clerical networks and slavery discourse, the project will bridge the fields of European, American, Caribbean, and Atlantic history.

Through an analysis of evangelical revivalism's impact on the institution of slavery and the role of revivalists in antislavery opposition, the project also seeks to assess their participation in fundamental redefinitions of the relationships between man and religion driven by the radical precept of spiritual equality. For Pietistic evangelicalism was not - as it is sometimes portrayed - in opposition to the Enlightenment. Indeed evangelicals, many of whom had read and were influenced by major 17th- and 18th-century Enlightenment natural philosophers and moral economists, significantly revised the relationship between man and religion by emphasizing human equality in Christ's eyes and thus helped redefine the colonized "other" by seeing the enslaved and Native Americans as spiritual equals. This fresh view of colonial (and later imperial) relations between European conquerors and subject peoples, embedded in evangelicals' conviction of the spiritual equality of all humankind and the shared right to religious liberty, or "liberty of conscience", profoundly contributed to Atlantic Enlightenment notions of human nature.

Recommended Reading

Gibbs, Jenna M. *Performing the Temple of Liberty: Slavery, Theater, and Popular Culture in the British Atlantic, 1760s-1850s*. Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming 2014.

- "Columbia the Goddess of Liberty and Slave-Trade Abolition." Special Issue "Staging the Enlightenment." *Sjuttonhundratel (Nordic Eighteenth-Century Studies)*, published by the Swedish, Finnish, and Norwegian Societies for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Uppsala, May 2011, 156-169.

- "Slavery, Liberty and Revolution in John Leacock's Pro-Patriot Tragicomedy, *The Fall of British Tyranny; or, American Liberty Triumphant* (1776)." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, 2 (2008): 241-258.

Evangelicalism, Slavery, and Empire: the global Latrobe family

Beginning in the early eighteenth century, evangelical Protestantism flourished in Europe, Great Britain, and North America in response not only to social and economic turmoil, but also to the colonizing and imperial projects of European and American powers, prompting evangelicals to establish missionary projects to spread the word. From the 1730s onward, British, American, and German evangelicals established missions that, for the first time, proselytized African slaves in the Caribbean and North America as well as indigenous peoples across the globe. Evangelical Protestants posed potent challenges to the racialized basis of African slavery but simultaneously legitimated the system: they converted the enslaved by proclaiming a radical new message of the spiritual equality of all humankind, yet did so only with the slave owners' approbation. I envisioned the original project I brought to Wiko as a study of transatlantic, multi-denominational evangelical networks in and between German-speaking states, North America, Great Britain, and the Caribbean over the issues of slavery, antislavery, and slave emancipation between the 1730s and 1830s.

As a result of my research while at Wiko, however, I have redirected the project's focus after following a footnote I stumbled across about Christian Latrobe, who headed the Moravians' Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel from the 1780s to the 1820s, and his involvement in the British antislavery movement in the late 18th century. I remain interested in the crucial interrelationships between evangelicalism, slavery, Enlightenment, and empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But I am now researching these larger questions through several generations of one particular Moravian family, the Latrobes, whose story is truly global. Originally a French Huguenot family, the Latrobes fled to Ireland in the late 17th century to escape religious persecution, and there converted to the German Protestant Moravian sect. The family then relocated to Great Britain, but successive generations were educated at Moravian schools in Saxony before migrating to the West Indies, North America, India, South Africa, and Australia. In each of these contexts, this cosmopolitan family brought not only their evangelical ethos but also their Enlightenment education in music, art, and ethnography to bear on Moravian missions, slavery, and imperial expansion and conquest.

This new approach thus links personal history with global history, transcending national and cultural boundary lines, and uses a micro-history of a familial web as a lens into the macro-history of evangelicalism, slavery, empire between 1750 and 1850, a crucial period in the transition to modernity. My talk will be a work-in-progress report on this recently re-conceptualized project. I will first offer an overview of the place of the Moravians and the Latrobe family in the larger story of evangelical revivalism in the 18th and 19th centuries. The latter part of my presentation will utilize several Latrobe family members as case studies to demonstrate how this family history illuminates a larger global history of dramatic political and economic transformations in an age of revolution and reaction: a story of family, Enlightenment, evangelicalism, slavery, and empire.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Gibbs, Jenna M. (2015)

Toussaint, Gabriel, and Three Finger'd Jack: "Courageous Chiefs" and the "Sacred Standard of Liberty" on the Atlantic Stage

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1041106890>

Gibbs, Jenna M. (Baltimore, 2014)

Performing the temple of liberty : slavery, theater, and popular culture in London and Philadelphia, 1760-1850

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=769242316>

Early America: history, context, culture

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=769242316>

Gibbs, Jenna M. (2011)

Columbia the goddess of liberty and slave-trade abolition (1807-1820s)

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=782712452>

Gibbs, Jenna M. (2008)

Slavery, liberty and revolution in John Leacock's pro-patriot tragicomedy, *The fall of British tyranny; or, American liberty*

triumphant (1776)

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=782708323>