



## FOLLOWING IN TOM SHARK'S FOOTSTEPS JENNA M. GIBBS

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Jenna Gibbs had a 20+ year career in theater and theater education before returning to higher education to complete her Ph.D. in History at the University of California, Los Angeles and becoming an Assistant Professor of History at Florida International University in 2009. Her research interests are situated in the Atlantic world in the long revolutionary era (1750s–1850s) and she is broadly interested in the interrelationship of culture and politics. Her first book, *Performing the Temple of Liberty: Slavery, Theater and Popular Culture in London and Philadelphia (1760s–1850s)*, was published in 2014, and she has also published a number of articles on transatlantic theater, print, and popular culture. She is now working on a second book, tentatively titled *Evangelicalism, Slavery, and Empire: The Global Latrobe Family (1750s–1850s)*. The book will examine the crucial tensions between Protestant evangelicalism, slavery, and empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through several generations of one particular family, the Latrobes. – Address: Department of History, College of Arts & Sciences, Florida International University, University Park, Miami, FL 33199, USA. E-mail: [jgibbs@fiu.edu](mailto:jgibbs@fiu.edu)

In September 2013, Thorsten Wilhelmy, in his capacity as Secretary of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, gave an imaginative, humorous, but also highly instructive welcome to all the newly arrived Fellows when he introduced us to Tom Shark. Shark was the fictional protagonist in a pulp fiction detective series, *Tom Shark, der König der Detektive* (Tom Shark, King of Detectives), which ran for over 500 installments between 1928 and 1939 before resuming after World War II. A successful sleuth based in Grunewald, Shark interrogated with open ears all possible witnesses and chased down even the smallest

clues in order to solve cases, practices that sometimes led him in wholly unexpected directions. Shark, Thorsten informed us, was an exemplary model for Wiko Fellows: listen carefully and absorb the rich interdisciplinary exchanges at the Kolleg, pursue unexpected leads, explore the idyllic Grunewald setting, and fully utilize the wonderful library and staff services at the Wissenschaftskolleg. But, above all, we should feel free to perhaps even abandon the original “case” we came in with in favor of a “secret project” if that was the direction our Shark-like “sleuthing” and “interrogating” took us. Play detective: follow the trail of research clues and be open to new ideas.

This advice proved prophetic for me, because during my time at the Wissenschaftskolleg I transformed the project I originally proposed into a new “case” as a result of following a footnote: not a radically different “secret” project, but nonetheless a dramatically new approach, based on the “clues”. But before I explain how following in Tom Shark’s footsteps led me to reinvent the project, allow me to briefly introduce myself.

I began my Wiko fellowship by completing the final copy edits for my first book, *Performing the Temple of Liberty: Slavery, Theater, and Popular Culture in London and Philadelphia, 1760–1850*. The book, which was published in June 2014 by Johns Hopkins University Press, examines the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about slavery, race, and rights in Britain and the United States as they were performed in transatlantic theater, print, and popular culture. While at Wiko I also wrote an article, titled “Toussaint, Gabriel, and Three Finger’d Jack”. The article concerns a pantomime performed in the London and Philadelphia theaters that staged a real-life 1760s Jamaican slave revolt that had been instigated by an escaped slave, Jack Mansong. The piece took the Atlantic stages just as the Haitian Revolution, led by Toussaint L’Ouvverture, was erupting, and also as a massive slave revolt was underway in Virginia, US, under the leadership of Gabriel, a slave of Thomas Prosser. The article will appear in *Early American Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Summer 2015). While at Wiko, I also had considerable help from the library staff in finding primary source material related to an article I am co-writing with Gary B. Nash on the late eighteenth-century German reception of a play by August von Kotzebue, titled *The Quaker*, which concerns the pacifist commitment of the Philadelphia Quaker and abolitionist, Walter Mifflin. During my Wiko residence, I also wrote the introduction for a volume I am co-editing with Keith Baker (Stanford University), *Life Forms in the Thinking of the Long Eighteenth Century*. This compilation investigates the place of historicist, vitalist, and esotericist thought in the Enlightenment. Thanks to my Volkswagen-Mellon Fellowship and to the excellent translation services of Wiko, we were able to have

three of the essays translated from German into English and to submit the volume to University of Toronto Press, where it is currently under peer review.

Having utilized the marvelous library facilities, office space, and stimulating environment at Wiko to realize these projects, I then turned my full attention to my new book project, which is a transnational story of evangelicalism, slavery, and empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. My original proposal was to revise the narrative of eighteenth-century evangelical revivalism through a study of German, British, and American evangelicals and their inter-denominational, transnational communication networks over the issue of slavery. 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 activities of European and American powers, prompting evangelicals to establish missionary projects to spread the word. British, American, and German evangelicals sought to proselytize African slaves in the Caribbean and North America as well as indigenous peoples across the globe by establishing the first Protestant missions. These missions 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 spiritual equality, yet did so only with the slave owners' approbation. Evangelicals of all stripes grappled with this fundamental tension between slaves' spiritual and worldly liberty. Too often, the study of evangelicalism has been confined to a nationally based focus: hence, it is known in US history textbooks as "*the* Great Awakening", in British history as "*the* eighteenth-century English evangelical revival", and in German scholarship as "*the* Pietist movement". This national approach overlooks evangelicalism's transnational character: German, American, and British evangelicals were all in communication with each other and influenced each others' theology. A significant aim of my original project was, therefore, to eschew these nationally based constructions and instead take an Atlantic-wide purview in order to explore evangelicals' encounters with slaves and indigenous peoples and the transnational communications they had with each other about these issues.

But ... Tom Shark's influence beckoned when I became intrigued by a stray "clue" that altered the direction of my sleuthing: a footnote about the involvement of Christian Latrobe, a Moravian minister, in the British antislavery activities of the 1780s and 1790s. I followed in Shark's footsteps and pursued this small clue, which drove me to the Moravian archives in London and in Herrnhut, Saxony to do research and prompted me to completely reconceptualize my project. I remain passionately interested in the tension

between – on the one hand – evangelicals’ commitment to evangelizing slaves of African descent and indigenous peoples on the fundamental premise of spiritual liberty of conscience and – on the other hand – their complicity with slavery and imperial expansion and governance.

As a result of Tom Shark’s sway, however, I am now investigating these issues through the lens of several generations of one family: the Latrobes. Of French Huguenot descent, the Latrobes converted to the German evangelical Moravian sect after fleeing to Ireland after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Latrobe family members thereafter travelled and migrated to global locales that included Great Britain, the West Indies, mainland North America, South Africa, and Australia. Some travelled as Moravian missionaries, some as British or American government officials, and some as independent immigrants. In this latter vein, Americanists will no doubt be familiar with Benjamin Henry Latrobe, architect of the United States’ capital, who was involved in the American Colonization Society that “repatriated” former African American slaves to Liberia, as was his son, John Henry Latrobe, who also founded the Maryland Colonization Society. Numerous other Latrobe family members of several generations were involved in Atlantic slavery and global missions and empire. For example, Christian Latrobe (Benjamin Henry’s brother) was the head of the Moravian Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel from 1788–1834, and his son, Peter, took over that role after his death. They oversaw the worldwide missions and were in constant communication with the mother church in Herrnhut, Saxony, as well as the Moravian and other Protestant missions in North America, the West Indies, South Africa, Greenland, Lapland, Egypt, and elsewhere. Another of Christian’s sons, Charles Latrobe, was the first Lieutenant Governor of Melbourne, Australia and oversaw there the introduction of Moravian missions and British governmental aboriginal policy. Through this family biography-in-motion, I will trace the contours of early evangelical missions to the slaves and to indigenous peoples and examine the connections and tensions between evangelicals in the German-speaking states, Great Britain, America, Australia, and South Africa. I will also illustrate the relationships between both British and American imperial expansion and the vexed issue of slavery, and connect the histories of Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the Pacific through the spread of empires and evangelicalism.

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In my fellowship year at Wiko, I made great strides in this project through research and intellectual networks and through organizing a (Wiko) conference. My progress on the Latrobe project was facilitated not only via archival trips to London and Herrnhut, but also through the rich array of digitized primary sources I utilized with the help of the library staff. They helped me obtain sources from far-flung locales, including Pennsylvania, London, Sydney, and various repositories in Germany. Moreover, using Volkswagen-Mellon funds and with considerable help from the unfailingly helpful and efficient Wiko staff, I organized (and presented at) a two-day conference in Berlin in May 2014 that was focused on eighteenth-century evangelicalism, slavery, and global networks. This conference allowed me to bring senior and up-and-coming scholars together into a very stimulating and focused conversation. The work I did at Wiko on the Shark-influenced reconceived project also bore fruition in a number of invited talks and conference panel presentations on this new project, in Germany, the USA, and Canada.

But my year at Wiko was not only about “sleuthing” a new “case” and finding, through the research, new approaches. For the year was also marked, above all, by the irreplaceable camaraderie with my fellow Fellows, and how very much I learned from them in our interdisciplinary exchanges both informally – at dinners and lunches – and formally at our weekly Fellows’ Colloquium. This robust interdisciplinary collegiality was, in turn, facilitated by Luca Giuliani as Rector, Thorsten Wilhelmy as Secretary, the fantastic staff at the institute ... and, of course, the persuasive influence of Tom Shark’s sleuthing and interrogation techniques in the heart of beautiful Grunewald.