

Research the Resonates
Villanova CLAS Podcast
Episode 3 Transcription
Civic Engagement: The Albert Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest

HOST: Marissa Wasserleben

Guest 1 (PR): Paul C. Rosier, PhD

Guest 2 (KF): Kevin Fox '19 MA

Guest 3 (CG): Cait Graulau '25 MA

Guest 4 (LS): Lucy Simons '25 CLAS

Guest 5 (IS): Isaac Smith '25 MA

Intro Sound: Franklin D. Roosevelt inaugural address in 1933 in Washington, D.C.

HOST: We've all spent years studying history in school, yet for many, it fades into the background after graduation. Whether we realize it or not, it has a way of shaping the way we see the world, navigate challenges and influence the future. At the Albert Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest at Villanova University, students and faculty are bringing history to life in ways that matter. Through thought-provoking lectures and workshops, insightful blog posts, and meaningful community dialogue, the Center applies historical perspectives to today's current events.

You're listening to Research that Resonates, a podcast from Villanova University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences that takes you inside the labs and classrooms to learn from our distinguished faculty and students. I'm your host, Marissa Wasserleben. In this episode, I sat down with Dr. Paul Rosier, Kevin Fox, and student fellows Cait Graulau, Lucy Simmons and Isaac Smith.

PR: My name is Paul Rosier. I am a professor of History at Villanova University and serve as the director of the Albert Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest.

CG: I'm Caitlyn Graulau. I go by Cait. I'm a second year master's student at Villanova in the History program. My particular research interest relates to race and identity during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, and I'm a graduate fellow at the Lepage Center.

LS: I'm Lucy Simons. I'm a senior in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. I'm a History and Communications double major with a Rhetoric specialization, and I'm the undergraduate fellow at the Lepage Center.

IS: I'm Isaac Smith. I'm a second year MA student at Villanova, and I study intellectual history and black political thought.

KF: I'm Kevin Fox. I'm the assistant director of the Albert Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest. I got my master's here in 2019 in the History program that Cait and Isaac are now in.

HOST: Launched in 2017, the Lepage Center was established by Albert Lepage, who graduated from Villanova in 1969 with a bachelor's degree in History. He went on to have a successful business career and made a

transformational gift to establish an academic center dedicated to fostering a historically informed public.

PR: The Lepage Center is a natural extension of the innovative research and teaching of the Villanova History Department. Through professional programs, publications and events, the center engages the general public, policymakers, other scholars, teachers, and students from history and other fields, and provides them with a historical perspective on a range of political, cultural, economic and environmental issues. In doing so, the Center contributes to a more informed and engaged public, one that can advocate for greater historical consciousness among all citizens, elected officials, and business and civic leaders.

HOST: The Center organizes scholarly lectures, expert panels, research discussions and workshops, while also sponsoring grants, internships and fellowships—all designed to engage the community with history in meaningful ways.

KF: A lot of people don't know much about history generally speaking. The way that it's taught in the K through 12 level doesn't necessarily inspire everyone to find interest in it. The way that history comes to people through pop culture isn't always accurate or precise, but it's important for, if people want to engage in civic life, with politics with business, with anything, all of our challenges as a society have, a lineage or a continuity that they fit into.

HOST: One of the primary ways the Center engages with the public is through their annual event series. Throughout the 2024 – 2025 academic year, the Center is exploring diverse and interconnected historical perspectives on labor and democracy.

KF: Annually we have a topic that we work with and it's a broad topic that we can engage with from a lot of different perspectives. For labor and historical perspective, for instance, we're able to do events about immigration or about tech or about health care, sports and entertainment to give people an idea of how these sort of broad topics show up in their everyday lives.

HOST: The Center also organizes stand-alone events, such as their Lunch at Lepage gatherings. These informal discussions, often led by faculty, provide a space for engaging with historical topics in a conversational setting. The student fellows have a hand in shaping these events, considering what topics would be of interest to the community. Here's Lucy.

LS: We got to be involved last semester in identifying potential speakers for this semester, and that was really exciting and rewarding being able to dream up a potential event that you might want to explore more and then being involved from start to finish and kind of seeing that through.

CG: That process started with what topics should we talk about? What are some contemporary issues that the public would be interested in hearing more about?

AI has just exploded in the public eye recently, and we were like okay, an AI event, that sounds cool. Artificial Intelligence in the Historical

Perspective. And so, trying to find scholars that did AI in somewhat historical perspective was actually really challenging, but it was also rewarding because we got to read the scholarship and learn more about it.

HOST: Each student fellow also takes the lead in hosting at least one Lunch at Lepage event, sharing their unique area of research. Here is Lucy, followed by Cait, sharing a bit of their experiences.

LS: It's kind of scary, but also exciting to be able to have my own Lunch at Lepage. I'm doing it based on my senior project from last semester, which was mental health and the origins of the mental health movement in America. So I'm really looking forward to that.

CG: I did my Lunch at Lepage last fall and I talked about how historians use spatial analysis. And so that was a lot of fun to get to, I mean, it was also very anxiety inducing, but to stand up there with a presentation up and speak for 30 to 45 minutes, answer questions. That gave me speaking experience, it gave me experience making a presentation. That was a lot of fun cause it was something I was really passionate about.

HOST: The Center's blog, Hindsight, is another key platform for engaging the public with history. For student fellows, writing for the blog offers a unique challenge—translating complex historical ideas into accessible, compelling narratives. Here's Issac.

IS: So the real thing that attracted me to the Center was the opportunity to write for the blog. I'm a pretty theoretical guy. And so the way I approach historical writing is always theoretically informed. And that's much easier to do in academic writing, but when you write for the Lepage Center, you have to strip all of that back, and you have to kind of think, how can this resonate with a public audience?

LS: I think learning how to write blog posts for the Lepage Center was a bit of a challenge at first. Kevin really encouraged me to infuse it with some of my own thoughts in the lecture. I was more so writing it as a recap, but this year we've been more focused on kind of imbuing it with our own opinions and you know, making it a little more authentic and personal.

CG: I always want my work to be accessible, and that's also a mission of the Lepage Center. So I need to make sure that my writing and the concepts and everything that's explained in the blog post is something that anybody can read regardless of their exposure to historical concepts or methods or theories.

HOST: The Lepage Center's work extends beyond Villanova's campus, fostering civic engagement by creating opportunities for the broader community to connect with history and providing a space for learning and reflection.

LS: There are certain initiatives on Villanova's campus that are exclusive to students here, but the Lepage Center's not one of them. It really encourages community involvement. I think that especially nowadays,

ignorance is kind of an epidemic in the country. So, I think that even offering these teach-ins or lectures in which to learn about a topic and become more informed on it is step one in learning how to engage with activism and advocacy for that topic.

CG: Yeah. They're almost like a call to action.

IS: The scholars who are involved, they typically speak about organizations essential to the history, and so just learning about those organizations can at least encourage somebody who wasn't aware of an activist group or network, to reach out or to look them up, you know, to go to maybe an event or a protest.

HOST: The Lepage Center fosters both public engagement and personal growth for those involved. For student fellows, it sharpens writing skills, expands career possibilities, and deepens their connection to history. For faculty and staff, it's an opportunity to collaborate with passionate young scholars and bridge the gap between academic research and public engagement.

CG: Seeing the result of all of our hard work is definitely the most rewarding part. I think just working with the community. that is in the Lepage Center has been really rewarding. Just getting to hear everyone's different perspectives and see how people approach different things. So it's honestly just like expanded the possibilities of working within public history for me.

IS: The stuff that I write certainly informs me academically because every time you write is, like, exercise and practice. So, that's also a reward in and of itself, because it definitely makes you a much better writer.

LS: In the next several years, I plan on applying to law school. Lepage has definitely helped me hone in kind of my writing skills, and obviously, being a lawyer you need to have good writing skills, but for the time being, I'm looking for work in the policy or social impact world. It's been cool getting to gain experience in that and hopefully apply it to my professional life outside of Villanova.

KF: I get opportunities every year to work with students that inspire me a lot and motivate me just to think differently and to engage with different kinds of history and different ideas. And it's really exciting for me because, you know, professors get to work with students all the time. So they can see their impact. I have this short window with students. So it's really great to hear that there's anything positive coming out of it for them.

HOST: As the Lepage Center continues to grow, its mission remains the same—bringing historical perspectives to the public and fostering meaningful civic dialogue.

PR: To further the Lepage Center's mission in 2025 and beyond, the Center is strengthening its connections with the larger community of historians.

We're also expanding our internship program by funding two graduate student interns to work in the American Historical Association's Washington, D.C. office to support their public advocacy program.

And we are launching a new program called the Lepage Center Public Interest Writing Initiative, through which we provide honoraria to historians and journalists who support the Lepage Center's mission of advancing historical literacy locally and nationally. Albert Lepage's continued support of the Center enables us to expand our public engagement and outreach and raise our visibility in order to strengthen that mission.

HOST: Thanks for listening to Research that Resonates. If you haven't already, be sure to check out our other miniseries, including our most recent one on language and literature. Research that Resonates is available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.