

Lindsay John Bell

Major: History

Interviewed by: Jacob Erickson

Lindsay is a Ph.D. student in the department of history and his dissertation explores how state expansion during the First World War influenced baseball's hero ethos. He views history as a “process of engaging in a moral philosophy and the way we understand humanity by looking at things in the past to hopefully shape a better future”. Throughout our conversation, I could tell Lindsay was not just passionate about history for history's sake, but for how history can better help us understand our present circumstances and how to make an informed decision on what to do next.

Lindsay, on his journey to graduate school here at ISU...

“I actually got my undergrad here too. I got my teaching license to teach secondary ed, and like most native lowans at 20 something I wanted to get as far away from the state as possible. So, I moved to Los Angeles, California and taught out there in the Southbay area for eight years, before moving back and coming back to grad school. I started here to get my M.A. Initially, that was gonna be my only goal, but through some convincing by some fellow colleagues and professors I decided to stick around for my Ph.D. I guess my reasoning was that I've always had a passion for history and some things within public education had been grinding on me for awhile. Ya know the students are great, just the administrative aspect of it just became too frustrating and so I decided I wanted to continue to think and pursue knowledge within history and getting and Ph.D. in history seemed to be the best route, and so here I am.”



On why studying and learning about history is important to him....

“It's seeing the presence of the past in today's conversations about everything, and becoming immensely frustrated when someone is representing something from the past out of context to create a partisan point. Or just people not having the knowledge. Or wanting to see how the past has shaped our present and wanting to continue to engage in those conversations and help people become more informed on why a particular point of view might not be as informed, because they happen to lack this huge gap in knowledge from the past that would provide for them a different perspective.”

On his experience struggling to adjust to the rigors of grad school and the moment he knew he belonged...

“For me, well most people I know, it’s in that first year. You just feel like your drowning almost. You come in with a little bit of, I don’t want to say arrogance, but you think ya know, ‘I got this, I’m a good writer, I think I’m pretty smart’, ya know, you think you were accepted after all so there must be something. Then all of those ideas are quickly vanquished when your sitting in seminar and your read the books and you’re starting to write the papers and you realize, ‘wow I’m really not that great of a writer, I really need to start thinking more critically and learning from other people who are a little farther along and the professors on how to actually become a historian’. Because there is engaging history and then there is being a historian that this process, grad school, helps you understand. So, I think it was my second semester when I was an MA student that I thought no way am I gonna be able to do this, but then in my second year I had learned from the first year. Then a professor nominated one of my papers from a class I took as one of the best research papers of that year for our awards ceremony interdepartmentally. So, I was like, ‘wow I’ve become a better writer’, and then from there, like I said, some colleagues and other professors kind of reinforced that. So that was probably when I knew I made the right choice when I got that affirmation of the growth I had made over the previous couple years, with the acknowledgement of the outstanding paper and stuff like that.”

Jacob Erickson is Ph.D. candidate in Sociology. His research interests are in deviant identity and decision making processes.