This podcast transcript was created for accessibility purposes using an automated transcription service. It has been reviewed for general accuracy but may contain minor discrepancies. It should not be considered a definitive record of the conversation. If you have any questions, please contact us at podcast@masshist.org.

The Interview of Thomas Lecaque

Thomas Lecaque 00:00

So, the book project is holy war rhetoric in colonial America. We are looking at the ways that across denominations, Christians are basically still doing crusading. And I don't mean crusading as an institution because crusading as an institution is alive and well over the entire period of the book, and no one is officially calling any of the wars of empire between England and France crusades. There are people who are playing really close to the edge, namely the bishops of Quebec, which is fantastic, and that's another discussion for another time, but they're all engaging in a rhetoric of holy war.

Samuel Hurwitz 00:32

[Intro music fades in] Historians and Their Histories is a podcast by the Massachusetts Historical Society. It introduces listeners to our community of researchers. We learn about the paths that they took to become a student of the past and the projects they're working on at the MHS. I'm Sam Hurwitz, Podcast Producer and Editor at the research department here at the MHS. Today, we are sitting down with Thomas Lecaque, an associate professor of history at Grand View University, and a recipient of the New England Regional Fellowship Consortium [NERFC] and the Kenneth and Carol Hills Fellowship in Colonial History.

Samuel Hurwitz 01:12

Can you first tell us a little bit about your background?

Thomas Lecaque 01:14

I'm an associate professor of history out in Iowa. I am in a small department. There are two of us at the moment, and it means that I teach, kind of all of the things which has been really important for my own journey in getting to actually here at the MHS. I trained as a medievalist. My dissertation was on religious culture in southern France and how it impacted the First Crusade, which does not instinctively map onto doing 18th century colonial history, but I am also the early Americanist for my department. And when I took the job, and it's been eight years now, I wanted to start teaching early America and kind of colonial early modern Europe, the kind of intersection across the Atlantic. And so, I want to teach from a lens that I felt comfortable with. I work on religious violence and apocalypticism in the First Crusade. That's kind of the theme that has impelled most of my academic journey from kind of like back half of undergrad on. So, I

want to see, you know, are there places where this appears in early America, and how can I talk about them? I was thinking, you know, Cotton Mather and witchcraft and, like the really most basic things. But as I was prepping to teach our colonial revolutionary America class for the first time, I kept running into the fact that sermon language, fundamentally, isn't any different from the 12th century to the 18th. If anything, 18th century sermon language is more extreme than the crusade sermons I was used to and that started a project of kind of delving deeper on this count over and over again. When I was in grad school, we had Amy Remensnyder come and speak at the Marco Institute at the University of Tennessee and her first book was an incredibly influential book in me, working on medieval Southern France. Her first book Remembering Kings Past looks at the language of monastic cartularies in southern France and the way they created kind of a fabricated past and imaginative memory of the past. It was hugely influential. And so, she came because she was getting ready to publish her second book, La Conquistadora, a book about the way that Milton Marian ideology transfers from late medieval Spain into early modern North America. And again, she is one of only two people I've ever been flustered meeting. It was kind of embarrassing, like I literally lost the ability to speak when being introduced to her, it was one of the more embarrassing moments of my life. But she had gone from writing about this topic that I was writing on to writing this incredibly cool book that I own and love and assign from time to time on the way that actually ideology crosses the Atlantic. And I thought, God, I'd love to do that someday. Well, okay, I graduated, finished my PhD, got a job, and that's what I'm doing now. I teach vast early America. I teach medieval world history. I teach in game studies. I have a class on video games and history I teach every fall. And right now I'm working on a book project on holy war rhetoric in colonial America, looking at the wars between England and France from 1680 to 1765 and I've been very, very blessed to have gotten support from the Congressional Library, Boston Athenaeum grant from NERFC [New England Regional Fellowship Consortium], and also from the Kenneth and Carroll Hills Fellowship in Colonial History and it's really exciting. It's really exciting being in the archives and doing this work.

Samuel Hurwitz 04:16
So how did you get interested in history?

Thomas Lecaque 04:18
It's my parents' fault. By fault. I mean, it's a wonderful thing that my parents gave me. My dad's a medieval art historian by training. He works on Bulgarian monastic art in the 14th and 15th century. And when I was a kid, I traveled a lot as a kid. I was incredibly fortunate. Didn't realize it until I grew up and had to pay for

my own plane tickets how fortunate I was. And so, every couple of years, I would drive out with my mom and my sister, and we do these big road trips out here to Massachusetts, because my mom's from Duxbury, and we would visit family, and we visit historical sites. And like, family history was a big thing on my mom's side the family. It's like that was part of it growing up with that. My dad, we'd go to France in summer because my dad is French. I'm a dual citizen, and we would mostly be at my grandparents' house, right? You go, you travel when you're a kid, you're traveling to see family. And then we would take these like couple day trips somewhere else. And my dad would take us by castles and churches and Roman sites. And so, my parents made sure that the past always felt alive and interesting to me as a kid. I am the right age that Sid Meier's Civilization II came out at a super formative time in my life. And I think there's something kind of magical about the way that video games can be super influential in the way that you actually get excited about the past. And my mom gave me a copy of The Hobbit when I was in second grade because I was a precocious little reader. And then I read Lord of the Rings in third grade. Like I know people love the Lord the Rings movies. I love the Lord of the Rings movies too. But the book, for me, it's the way that it's framed is like, this is a history chronicle stuffed into an archive somewhere in the Shire. I devoured that book, and I've read it far too many times, and I think it's like the bits and pieces of stuff like that, right? I love the idea that people became historians for only the most professional reasons, like, it was fantasy novels, right? It was video games, and then it was actual trips with my parents. I didn't start out as a history major. I started as a theater major. In high school, I became a theater and choir kid. I went to Tulane University in New Orleans in 2003 and was there until the semester after Hurricane Katrina. I started as a theater major. I was an anthropology major briefly, and then I took a class with Sam Ramer and Behrooz Moazami. Sam Ramer at Tulane. Behrooz Moazami is still at Loyola [University] New Orleans, I think now, and their classes were just so fantastic. And I switched majors and never looked back. I did think I wanted to work on the Russian Civil War, and if I'd stayed, maybe I would have. Hurricane Katrina had a lot of side effects, and I ended up leaving in political protest against the administration by the end of the next semester and finished as a history major at Truman State University, where my parents taught. How I ended up where I am now, then becomes a weird thing because I was still trying to go forward as a Russian historian, but people I'd want to work with were at a previous school, and it just became interesting thing. And as I was heading into my super senior year, my fifth year, I like, two weeks before the semester, I was just like, 'What am I doing with my life?' And I picked up Steven Runciman's History of the Crusades and just read through the entire three book trilogy over the course of a weekend. I was on summer vacation. I wasn't doing much at the time, obviously, but it was incredible. I thought, why, like, I used to love stuff like this, right? So much of my journey to becoming a medievalist is based around things like this. Why not, like, why not actually

study medieval history? And so, I switched focus my fifth my fifth year, took a bunch of language classes, took some independent studies, did a master's in English at Truman in medieval literature, and worked on languages the entire time, and then applied to schools. I was contemplating becoming a Byzantinist, and it came down to funding between the University of Kentucky and the University of Tennessee. And Tennessee offered me slightly more to be a crusade scholar than Kentucky did to be a Byzantinist, and I regret nothing about it. The Crusades part gets weird because I study, I studied the Crusades not out of a particular like Steven Runciman's book was important, but for me, it was the religious violence and apocalypticism part. I think a lot of the debate about presentism gets into this weird idea that, like, historians are like, oh, trying to push the present onto the past, and I think it's much more important like, the reason we study the things we do, has a lot to do with things about us, right? Historians are studying are asking the questions they're asking because of who we are now in this present moment.

Thomas Lecaque 08:37

So, I grew up non-religious in small town Missouri, which meant everyone around me was basically a member of Christian domination of some type. My closest friends were either Evangelical Baptist or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, two branches that certainly in the late '90s, early 2000s had a lot of discussion about kind of impending millennial expectations. I was a junior in high school when 9/11 happened. We invaded Iraq by last semester of high school. So, like, religious violence and apocalypticism is not a focus because of some intellectual reasons. Just like this is when I was heading off to college and exploring the world. This was a thing that was on everybody's minds. A number of my friends had the entire like Left Behind series at their houses. I would go to church with friends, and the sermons that I was hearing were different, different than my expectations of what Christianity were from, you know, having read parts of the Bible. So I think a lot of my journey has been trying to understand these people who I love dearly and who mattered a lot to me growing up, who I because I was not from the community and culture that they were growing up and I didn't really understand why this was, you know, we'd spend all week at school talking about significant others and classes and small drama. And then on the weekend, there would be a natural focus on, like, you know, the impending, the impending end of time. I think a lot of my study has been about wanting to understand this part of the world. So, I the thing I was hoping to study in the Russian Civil War was apocalyptic notions there. I became a medievalist like I guess this is what I'm going to do. So did my PhD at the University of Tennessee under Jay Rubenstein who was fantastic, who is fantastic. He's still alive, thank goodness. And he had just finished a book project, basically doing apocalyptic history of the First Crusade. And he focused on things similar to what I was doing and what I

ended up doing, and I got really excited doing the kind of regional history of southern France and how it impacted it more directly because my dad is from Toulon. My grandmother's [family is] from Corsica. And it was a way of going and doing both family history and also this topic that I was really passionate about. That's how I ended up kind of on the thematic element of it.

Samuel Hurwitz 10:40

So, can you tell us about some of the biggest misconceptions we have about medieval history and just Christianity during that time period?

Thomas Lecaque 10:48

I think the Enlightenment did a better job of winning the propaganda war than it did in actually changing things. And I think we have this weird notion that suddenly in the 18th century we became modern, so everything beforehand must have been bad and weird and superstitious. And I think this is a way that however many books academic historians try to write about how the Middle Ages were not actually a time of ignorance and darkness. Not everything is Monty Python. Things like Monty Python and Game of Thrones, actually, they don't teach us history, but they teach us a great way of how people view the past. And so, it's the scene where, like, the peasants are covered in dirt, right? It's these ideas that everyone in the Middle Ages must have been backwards and foolhardy. That's not true, and you don't have to take my word for it. I highly recommend everyone reads Matthew Gabriele and David Perry 's The Bright Ages, which I think is just a wonderfully written and fantastic look at the fact, like, actually, the Middle Ages are full of science and culture and light and interest, and are not the way that we have these preconceived notions about it must have been like short, brutish and dirty and things like that. I think the more interesting thing is actually very little has changed. And I try to talk to my students when we're talking about these ideas people have in the Middle Ages that we obviously don't believe now. People were so superstitious back then. They believed in the most nonsensical things. And I just always ask, have you been on Facebook? Have you seen the internet? There are more flat earthers now than there have ever been at any point in history because people proved mathematically that the world was around like 500 BC, and people have just been refining it since then, until now, when you have people literally all around the globe, and I realize how absurd that is who believe in a flat earth. So, part of it is that we want humans to be different. We like a teleological notion of progress, even when we say explicitly that we don't where somehow in the 18th century, everything changes. And I don't mean that among academic historians who know better and like just may not study a time period, but I think there's a popular notion that has a lot to do with our desire to believe that the

United States is founded on Enlightenment principles, and that we are consequently, this rational nation that does us a huge disservice in the way that we study the past. That combined with like Victorian era ideas about like reshaping the past in order to emphasize Victorian era morality, culture, etc, that then pollutes the rest of the Anglosphere. I think it does weird things to the way we think about the Middle Ages. My favorite part is the continuity, right? When it comes to the Crusades, crusading is still an active endeavor until 1798, and I don't mean this in just like it's a thing people do. Sometimes people do holy wars. I mean crusading as an actual institution, doesn't end until 1798 when Napoleon occupies Malta and the Knights Hospitaller in the aftermath eventually give up their military mission and return to just running hospitals. Crusades go on that long. The last individual episode Benjamin Franklin is 10 when you have the last formally officiated Holy League fight a battle against the Ottomans and like through the 1750s the Portuguese are busy proclaiming their prince who fights at the battle as a crusading hero. We really like to divide time up in weird ways to make us either feel better about ourselves if we're talking about pop history, because I think a lot of the way we talk about early America is about shaping a narrative of about the United States and less to do with real history. But also, we divide up time in bite sized chunks because we have to pass comprehensive exams and you cannot read all of history because there's no time. But it also unfortunately, like these are completely arbitrary divisions, like the geographical divisions we create. The chronological divisions we create and sometimes that means that we miss things. So, part of the fun of going from working on the Middle Ages to working on colonial America is that I come in with this background like what was, and I'm catching up to what is in the 18th century. And it does mean an awful lot of reading on my part, which is delightful, but also some of the things that that exist have always existed. History changes. It doesn't repeat itself. I you know the idea like history doesn't repeat, but it rhymes, is adorable, but that's also not really true. The fundamental thing, though, is that people don't evolve that quickly, and so given similar stimuli, people respond in similar ways, and situations change and location change and language change, but the people don't and it's really interesting studying that.

Samuel Hurwitz 15:03

So, can you tell us a little bit about how you made that switch between jumping from a medievalist and then jumping to colonial American history and teaching that?

Thomas Lecaque 15:14

It is Bryan Banks fault and Age of Revolutions and by fault again, I love where what I'm doing now. I used to spend a lot of time on Twitter back when it was Twitter, and there was one year, probably like my third year in my current position, where I was talking about, kind of the destruction of medieval manuscripts during the French Revolution, and how it actually reshapes the way that we can study the medieval past in France, right? We love the idea that history is written by the victor, and that certainly helps, but history is written based on what survives, and that's about material culture, but that's also about all of the events after the fact that shape and winning usually helps you keep those sources, but not always. And during the French Revolution, a number of cathedral libraries are attacked and burned, and it's specifically because the church is a major landowner, and a lot of the cartularies are used specifically to insist on land ownership, right? These are, these are very modern concerns in the 18th century, when these activities are happening. That's on top of the wars of religion in France where the Huguenots are absolutely brutalized by the state and then also burn down monasteries, cities, cathedrals are also devastating southern France. And so the history of southern France is a fascinating thing to do because you can do it just from Paris, where you have copies of huge numbers of documents, but they're copies of documents procured by the monarchy in order to emphasize their power or you can do what I did, which is spend time in Paris because you have to, and then go to departmental archives and see what survives. And that was actually really formative in how I then moved into the early modern era because you cannot deal with the history of southern France without dealing with what happens afterwards. You cannot simply be like, I'm gonna look at medieval manuscripts. Well, you have those, and they're incredible. And you also have these early modern erudites who are writing down everything they can from surviving documents that become the bridge because so many things then get destroyed. So, I had been tweeting about the destruction of medieval manuscripts and Bryan invited me to write a piece for Age of Revolutions and it remains probably my favorite thing I've ever written. And so, I proposed some more pieces and I started actually writing in early modern and kind of age of revolutions history. And was teaching this colonial American class. And then my best friend J. Tomlin, who's at Fairmont State University now. He's an early Americanist by training. We've been friends since my second year of my PhD program, his first year. We have been talking about writing together since we've known each other. He worked on anti-Catholic conspiracy theories in kind of colonial America, while I'm working kind of religious violence Apocalypse around the First Crusade. And thematically, like the stuff we were doing had a lot in common, even though they were separated by huge amounts of time. And so, when I was teaching, I was always asking for advice, like, tell me things to read. What are things I can work on? And after a couple years, like, I'm already writing articles. I am teaching this class, and I just started accepting the

fact that by COVID, when we're all trapped at home and have too much time to think I'd become an Americanist indeed, if not name. And the last couple of years, I finally got confident of, like, this is what I do, this is what I studied. I've published a bunch of like, they're short articles. Like, I've published a bunch of short articles in the time period. Maybe I could be bold enough to actually think that, like, we could write a book on this. So, I'm writing this book with my best friend, which is great. We come at this from very different kind of approaches, but with shared interests. And I started applying for grants, and I lucked out, and I got them. And getting into the archives is the moment where all of a sudden you discover that actually you've made the right choice, right? I mean, I think that the beautiful thing about actually getting here, what historians do is about studying documents and actually getting here, and not just not just thinking that I'm doing this, but actually getting here just gonna be like, oh no, the things that I think that I'm finding, I am finding and I'm finding them here, and I'm finding them not just in, like, published catalogs, but I'm finding them the manuscripts, and I'm finding them outside of the handful of genres I've been looking at. Wait, I actually might know what I'm doing. And I mean, it's now, this is, this is my second year of three years where I've had fellowships to come out to Massachusetts and do work on various archives here. And it's, it's incredibly life affirming, right? I mean, like, we are trained to spend time in the archives and fall in love or hate or just fascination with the past. And so, like, it's very life affirming, but it's also very affirming that actually, all of these ideas I have about this project are real. They are grounded in real people's writing and thoughts, and you find them across genres. And it's, it's magical. And also, I finally, I mean, if I finally feel like by now that yet, no, I've made all the right choices. I love what I'm doing now. I am an early Americanist, and it's incredibly exciting, and it's been a weird path getting here, but I feel really good about it.

Samuel Hurwitz 19:57

Can you tell us about the project you're currently working on and the sources you're using here at the MHS?

Thomas Lecaque 20:03

So, the book project is holy war rhetoric in colonial America. We are looking at the ways that across denominations Christians are basically still doing crusading. And I don't mean crusading as an institution because crusading as an institution is alive and well over the entire period of the book, and no one is officially calling any of the wars of empire between England and France crusades. There are people who are playing really close to the edge, namely the bishops of Quebec, which is fantastic, and that's another discussion for another time, but they're all engaging in a rhetoric of holy war. And this is not just the groups

that we all feel comfortable with, right? So, if the Catholic Church is still officially endorsing crusading, you're going to get language of holy war and liturgies of holy war that are coming out of Catholic churches when you're talking about fighting Protestants. Fine. No one gets worried about that. People have weird ideas about the Puritans, but we are also very comfortable with the idea that Puritans may, in fact, be doing some holy war sermons from time to time. You poke at it, even on the most surface level, it's right there. It's very visible. Presbyterians also know some holy war. Whole lot of holy war sermons. Okay, fine. Presbyterians not that far off. Dutch Reformed Church, a group that we don't usually think of as doing holy war. And there's an article I read a couple years back saying the Dutch don't have a holy war tradition in early modern Europe. It's like I have some sermons that would beg to disagree. Dutch Reformed Church, you're getting some holy war sermons out of them. Anglicans doing some holy war sermon work. Every denomination that we poke at is engaging in a rhetoric of sacred violence against the other. And so, for the Catholics, they talk about the British as heretics. For the British, and there's a British Huguenots. All the other groups that make up the British colonies, Sons of Antichrist is a big one. The sermons that come out of the kind of the fall of Canada. Like, really, you're kind of 1759, 1760, 1761 sermons about the end of the war are some of the most apocalyptic things I've ever read. I like the one where they call France the Queen Mother of all Harlots. That's a good one. They refer to Quebec as the American Babylon. We get some really, like, very strong traditional apocalyptic language about defeating your unholy enemy to the north. So, at MHS, I have been lucky to find some real gems. I'm looking at a lot of stuff. I am looking at sermons. I'm trying to broaden it out because sermons are a great place for finding kind of bedrock. But you want to show that this is not just a rhetoric being used among preachers. So not randomly but one of the coolest individual sources is Joseph Dwight's journal from the kind of Lake George campaign at the beginning of the Seven Years War and I got it manuscript form. This was in November, and I was just reading through the daily entries, right? Your not everything is for every single project. And so, some of these are, like, really fantastic sources for the military history of the war. But I'm not writing military history, we're writing religious history. And so, I'm flipping through and every Sunday he's recording who is preaching and what, like sermon verses, they're doing. It's always better if you have manuscript sermons, but you don't, you don't always get that these things don't survive. And so just tracking what Bible verses people are using gives you a sense of some of the content. My favorite preacher from the Seven Years War, my favorite studies of apocalyptic sermon and what became the starting point of, really, this project for me is Theodore Frelinghuysen who was the pastor of the First Reformed Church in Albany. His dad, Theodore Frelinghuysen Sr, is a big like proto-Great Awakening, Dutch reform New Jersey. Huge deal. The son is less well known. He has two sermons published in english in New York City, one around the Albany Congress,

and one right before they go north for the Battle of Lake George. And they are the most crusading sermons I've ever read. And I started as a crusade historian. They're incredible. They seem to come out of nowhere, like there is a Dutch tradition of holy war that exists in a bunch of places. And Danny Norlander has done a really good job on talking about that in other fronts. But these two English language sermons that get published are wild. So, I'm reading through this Joseph Dwight journal, and there's the line on Sunday, 'Heard Mr. Frelinghuysen talk in English, very good talk.' And they give the lines one of the war verses from Deuteronomy, which means it's not just we've published these two English language sermons specifically for the English language audience. And this is just like some weird sop that these are the only two, no, he's also preaching these on other days with completely other verses. This is, this is what we're doing on our way north. I may have done a dance in the reading room. I may have gone to bother librarians to show them this thing. It was like, it's the moment where, unbeknownst to you, you're about to find an actual gem in the archives. There have been a couple of moments like that. So, I'm looking through journals. I'm looking through letters. If you're a medievalist, you spend a lot of time trying to deal with everything that survives from a time period in place, because we do not have the kind of rich source bases that you do in early America. And so, I got used to I'm going to look at every manuscript from 100-year period centered around these places of production. And that means it's looking at Bibles, it's looking at liturgies, it's looking at business texts, looking at whatever exists. So, I'm still taking a really broad approach, but of course, having to focus in on a couple of different endeavors. So, I've been reading a lot of journals that involve these kind of campaigns in New York, heading north from Albany. I have been looking at letter collections, and I've been looking at not as much business documents, because there's so much I have. I've already discovered, like, oh, actually, you guys have a wealth of resources that I cannot in one lifetime possibly get through. Journals are incredible. And like, not everyone has these mentions. This time that I think my favorite thing I found is a journal by Charlotte Brown. It's one of the copies of it. There's another copy in the library of the Library of Congress. The original one's in New York Historical Society. But it is a woman who comes over as a nurse matron for General [Edward] Braddock's hospital train with her brother. And so, she's there like at the fort when Braddock's exhibition goes off and everyone dies. And then she makes her way north through, makes her way back to the coast, and then up to Philadelphia, and then up to New York, and then she's there on the Albany front and writing about, kind of the genuine level of like fear and despair and the kind of emotional journey that's actually exists behind the front. She never writes about her business in the hospital itself, but she writes about, you know, how terrified they are about being attacked by Native Americans, how terrified they are every time there's a report that the French are near, right? And you get these moments that bring these topics that we're talking about in kind of intellectual, religious lines, really,

to life. Like, actually, this is not just a thing that is happening on Sunday mornings. This thing's like, actually, people are terrified all the time, and the fear and the anger and the excitement percolates out everywhere. On the one hand, it's horrifying, right? I study bad things, religious violence and apocalypticism are not exciting topics unless you unless you love studying them. They're scary topics, and they're topics that actually influence the way people approach the world around them, and they lend themselves towards an incredible amount of violence and hatred and the othering, in the worst sense, of groups of people, in order to convince yourself that the atrocities you want to commit are justified in the name of God, and at the same time, it's a really important thing to think about that this has always been bedrock in, unfortunately, the human condition, but also has been built into the American experience. And I think part of the joy of getting into the archives and discovering that it permeates out entirely outside of just you're serving your political tracks into the day to lived experience of people that no this is, this is a real phenomenon. We can talk about what, however we want about the founding of the United States and the principles that go into the actual documents. But the people are doing the founding are people who fought in these wars, who came out of this time with apocalyptic fervor and terror and hatred. And it doesn't just dissipate. You don't wake up when we're like I guess I'm good now. I guess we don't need to do a holy war against everyone we view as being different than us. And it exists in a lot more of the journals than I expected it to in bits and pieces. And that's great for the project and bad for America I suppose.

Samuel Hurwitz 27:42
So, to what extent would these sermons or this kind of general religious fervor that you're kind of picking up on, how much is that bleeding over to the founders or that class of Americans?

Thomas Lecaque 27:56
So, I think it bleeds over quite heavily. And I we're deliberately stopping the project before that because once you get in the Revolution, it's a whole new historiography you have to tackle, and that might be the next book project. J and I are still talking about that. I think part of it is that you have a number of people who are preaching both the Seven Years War and, in the Revolution, and some of it crosses over quite clearly. And I think that's actually a really important thing. And the two that immediately come to mind, because, again, we deliberately cut off this project out of sort of like to not have to make this jump. But Abraham Keteltas, who is preaches in a number of places down in New Jersey and New York, has at least one surviving printed Seven Years War sermon that is absolutely Milton holy war sermon. It's not an apocalyptic one, but it is the kind of, you know we are going to go on a Davidic, Davidic model of, like,

divine vengeance against our enemies. And it's all about, you know, girding yourself with the shield of the Lord, but also, very much like, we don't mean this in metaphorical I mean, we're going to go out, we're going to slay the Canaanites, and then we're going to butcher all of them. And then, at the early stages of the war, he gives an incredibly apocalyptic sermon about how the war between the colonies and the British government is like the war between heaven and hell, right? You have people like Samuel Sherwood who are noted for their kind of fiery apocalyptic sermons. And then I haven't delved into the rest of that but if you have two that are published, I found that there's a ton of stuff in the manuscript sermons that don't get published that also do all of this, right? It's really fun looking just at the published sermons because that one that's a material culture component, like you were putting money into it. You were publishing them. You were distributing them. If you find printed apocalyptic sermons, that means that there is enough of a popular interest in this that people will pay to get copies of this. And I think that's a really fun part about the actual publication thing that like when you have printed sources, especially print sources that are coming out of, you know, the British colonies themselves. That is an actual investment like this is a message we want to get out. And you have various things, artillery sermons out of Boston that really emphasize this. And of course, that's part of where they're coming out of. This is not a rare thing. There are a lot of these printed ones that then circulate that are then still circulating and people are like writing in ownership marks that are like in the back half of the 18th century. These are then preserved. People are keeping these and not throwing them out. You have manuscript sermons from earlier on that are also doing this. So, it's not just like we have a publication venue that's trying to push this for propaganda purposes. There are also lots of handwritten ones that don't make it into publication that focus this. I bet if you scratch a Revolutionary archive, you're going to find more of these too. I haven't yet, but I would be willing to put a pretty heavy monetary bet that they are also percolating everywhere.

Samuel Hurwitz 30:29

How do you think your research will help audiences better understand the past?

Thomas Lecaque 30:33

It's about understanding the past and about understanding the present. It's not because we need to shape the past around our concerns, but I think that the beauty of asking new questions of a source base that we've all seen before is that it actually should inform how we view everything that follows. For me, a big part of it is that people keep being confused about how the language of religious violence and apocalypse of some permeates American politics now in 2025 and I think I'm hopeful that by this point we've gotten over

the kind of shock and horror that these are living ideas and ideologies that people are motivated by. But I don't know that we've gotten past the shock and horror. The project is designed to point out that this is a very real strain of thought that is not just European, and it is not just medieval. It crosses the Atlantic. It is also American. That the Atlantic is not a boundary that separates out ideologies, that colonial thought is not a thing that can be divorced from European thought and from European history and cultural identity, while also having to emphasize that it is much broader than that. So, the hope is point out that one, crusades don't end in the Middle Ages and crusades don't end when the Catholic Church says that they stop as an institution, yes, but as an ideology, no. And it doesn't stop in the Protestant Revolution. Protestants don't magically give up a rhetoric and ideology and actual doing of holy war, and that's not a thing that gets left behind in Europe. That's one. I really think that, you know, if you're going to do Atlantic history, you have to do a lot of Atlantic history. We're doing a microcosm for this project. I mean, really looking at kind of the Northeast and, like, New England and New France, and that's that's about languages more than anything else. It's not because, like, that is still an artificial boundary, but it's about, I bring in French, J brings in German and can read Dutch. And so like, we're going to do a multilingual project, but you have to focus it in on an area where the languages we have available to us work. You could do this in the southern United States. You could do this in the Caribbean. You could do this all over the place. We're doing a case study in the place we're doing. Two: these ideologies don't magically dissipate, like it doesn't hit 1760, well, I guess, I guess we defeated the Antichrist. Everything's fine now, and I'm hoping that either for a follow up project by us, or someone else really, then going back into what does it mean, if you have all of this fervor that has been building for a solid 80 years, that's the arc, right? We're talking about from '58 to 1760/61. We're debating on where the end point is, because if you do Pontiac Rebellion, you really need to go and broaden the regional ideas. And so, end point to be determined. But if you have all this fervor that over 80 years has been building and growing ever more violent, Seven Years War sermons are more apocalyptic than King William's War. It changes quite dramatically. I mean, you start the Seven Years War with apocalyptic sermons, and you end them with things that would have gotten people accused of heresy during the actual crusades. It is fun to me that the most apocalyptic sermons I've ever read are not 11th or 12th century ones. They're 1760 ones. When you open the floodgates of religious hatred, you don't magically close them the next day. And I think part of this should be a reconsideration, then, of like, how important the Quebec Act is to starting the Revolution.

Thomas Lecaque 33:41

Makes perfect sense from the point of view of London and continental sermons get militant, and there's some holy war stuff, but they are less wholly warped centered than colonial ones. Seventeen-sixty you're busy talking about the proclamation of the defeating of the Antichrist and the fall of Babylon in the most revelation center terms you can possibly do, and a decade later, you're saying that Catholics are equal and they should be allowed to maintain their current rights. There's something happening there. This is hopefully grounding an argument about then, actually, the ways that language of religious violence and apocalypticism actually do push the Revolution and, if nothing else, thwarted apocalypticism, right? Because apocalyptic ideas never die, right? Within Christianity, apocalypticism is bedrock in Christianity as a religion. It is prominent in the gospel message. The Little Apocalypse is an important part of the imminent eschatological movement that Jesus of Nazareth is pushing. Revelation is right there, right there is a teleological endpoint. Most of Christian history has been trying to figure out where they are on the kind of roadmap from the death of Jesus of Nazareth to actual Revelation, always with the emphasis we must be somewhere in Revelation right now, right? Thwart apocalypticism is almost worse because you didn't get it right this time. So, what did we do wrong? And that means reform and new targets. And this is true after the First Crusade, where in southern France, I think the Reform Movement really pushes into what we call the kind of heresies, the Albigensian Heresies because you have a huge apocalyptic movement in southern France in the 11th century heading to the First Crusade that the world doesn't end. Jesus does not descend in Jerusalem after they take it, and so we must have done something wrong. Let's try again. I wonder how much of the fall of Quebec and then the changes pushes it into a notion of we did something wrong, or maybe somebody else did something wrong. So, I'm hoping that this will become a part of the story of American history, that it is also good to look at the ways that our founding fathers are using interesting legal theory and classical texts and Lockean ideas and kind of the rhetoric of the Enlightenment to build the foundational documents that become the American government. I think that's very important. I don't want to deny that at any point. And also, there is a whole strain of militant religious violence that is bedrock in the colonies, that also comes into play. And I think you have to have both. I think you also have to deal with with the kind of weird, violent, uncomfortable parts of American history that come into the foundation of the nation because otherwise, every time those parts rear their heads, we have this weird moment where the public's like, where did this come from? I thought we were past this. No, this is us. This has always been us. Manifest Destiny is not a new thing that pops up one day when it's like, where did this come from? And it went away? No, it's a notion of religious violence and entitlement, about taking land from people you view as a religious and racial other. Those impulses don't die, and they're alive and well in the contemporary

political sphere. I think the past should be useful to inform the present. And I think this is the hope. And again, who knows how big any spread can possibly but the hope is to set a bedrock like this is a thing that has always been here among us, and we should maybe stop being surprised when we see it now.

Samuel Hurwitz 36:56

Any concluding remarks about your time here at the MHS?

Thomas Lecaque 36:59

This is a wonderful place. Everyone who works here is genuinely lovely human beings. There is an excitement of being in the reading room. There is an excitement getting to meet the other people working here. There is a richness of documents that you can't find anywhere else. People should figure out ways to come if they can. People should apply for the fellowships. They really should. There is no reason why I should have gotten this, other than the fact that I had a project that people found interesting. I am from a small, non-elite school from the Midwest. I parcel out my time in little chunks because I have work and kids and like family obligations. And I think there are people who think these kinds of fellowships are not for people like me, and they're wrong, and they should apply for them because if you have an interesting project, MHS is such a welcoming and warm and supportive environment that wants you to be able to do interesting work, whoever you are, wherever you're from, on whatever topic. And I'd like to encourage everyone to apply and have the chance to really spend a couple weeks in a temple of learning.

Samuel Hurwitz 38:02

[Outro music fades in] Historians and Their Histories is a podcast produced by the research department at the Massachusetts Historical Society. We would like to thank Thomas Lecaque of Grand View University, and I've been Sam Hurwitz Podcast Producer and Editor here at the MHS. Music in this episode is by Podington Bear. See our show notes for details. Thank you for listening, and please rate, review and subscribe to both the MHS produced shows wherever you listen to podcasts.