**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The following statement of purpose was written for University of Wisconsin-Madison’s PhD in American History. The instructions in the application materials regarding the statement are: 'Attach a statement describing your reasons for graduate study. Include a brief overview of your current degree goals, your professional aspirations, and your reasons for selecting a field of study.'

I was born and raised in a city that can trace its roots back to the Roman legionary fort of Deva, in a house that dates back to the Reformation, and studied at a university that predated Columbus by three centuries. So, what could America have that I didn't already have in abundance where I was?

The first inkling of an answer to this question came when I started work on my first course of American history as an undergraduate at Oxford. It was then that I finally discovered what it was I wanted to do in life. When I returned to education after five years of working, I was no clearer in my own mind as to what career I wanted to aim at. I selected a history degree because I was aware of a nagging absence of an understanding of how the world got to be the place it is today, and that I wanted to rectify. I set out with the intention of covering as wide a sweep of history as possible, with an emphasis on my own country, and also the country that had held a fascination for me since I was a child - America.

My first year on Britain and Europe was enjoyable, and told me I was more of a 19th century buff than a medievalist, but the variety helped give perspective. It was only when I started my first paper on American history that things became clearer. The sheer vigour, freedom and effervescence of what I was studying took my breath away. Britain does have a rich and glorious past, but in many ways, it is now held back by its history, so set in its ways that change is extra difficult. America did not have that problem; it simply cherry picked the best bits from other systems, adapted it to its own needs, and never stopped moving forward. Such freedom was alien to me and to the system that introduced it to me, but it was refreshing and invigorating too. That same year I made several good friends amongst the visiting JYAs and visited them on their home turf, a trip that helped cement my fascination with America.

From then on it became clear what I really wanted to do - US history. My other courses, already chosen, were interesting and gave different perspectives, but I only really came alive when studying America. My plan to move into journalism once graduated was dropped and I went straight into a Master's course in American history. I wanted to broaden my understanding, and also see if I really was committed to further study. Certain aspects of my time at Sussex were dissatisfying, but one that wasn't was the enjoyment I got from the work, especially the independent research for my thesis.

That is I why I write to you now. I am asking you to give me the opportunity to fulfil a wish, long cherished, of being able to study nothing but American history, taking the courses I want to take, with professors of my own choosing. That this decision has not been lightly taken is illustrated by the fact that if my application is successful, I will be leaving friends, family and my own country behind for upwards of five years.

My major interests lie in the 19th century, and focus on slavery and Native Americans. My MA thesis was an investigation of racist beliefs amongst the Five Civilised Tribes (FCTs) towards their black slaves, and the reasons for these beliefs. My conclusion was that these racist beliefs were a self-defence mechanism designed to differentiate themselves from blacks and thus move back up the racial hierarchy and avoid the worst excesses of white racism.

While I would envisage taking my MA thesis further to form the basis of my doctoral dissertation - I uncovered many interesting side-issues that I did not have the time to pursue in the course of my MA - my interests centre on slavery and its culture. One of the issues, for example, that I wanted to look at but never even had time to start was a comparison of slave culture under Native American masters as opposed to white owners. For this reason, I would like to track certain elements of slave culture back to their African roots and see how many were adaptations and survivals of tribal culture in Africa.

Equally I would also like to do more research into Native American culture in order to see if there was any transfer of cultural traits from them to their slaves. Such transfer of cultural practices between groups would seem to offer a useful insight into the racial attitudes of the three groups as whole, with the adoption of African practices by Native Americans offering particular insight into their true attitudes toward Africans. If the FCTs did adopt African practices at an earlier stage in their joint history then it could be claimed that later racism by the FCTs towards their slaves was a result of the pressure of white attitudes upon them.

Submission to such pressure would therefore indicate a willingness to assimilate and become more acceptable to the wider white society. The Seminole, for their amicable role towards runaways and blacks generally and animosity to assimilation, would be an integral part of such a study. A comparison of slavery as practised by Native peoples in other parts of the US - the Pacific Northwest for example - and also in Latin America would also be useful for my research.

My goal is to teach history - preferably at university level - and hopefully be able to convey to my students my own passion for the subject. The best teachers I have had in my academic career thus far have been those who's fascination and love of their own subject has shone through and animated them. There is no other feeling quite like the sudden rush of realisation and understanding when another piece of the jigsaw drops into place and the larger picture of which it is a part is drawn more closely into focus. If I could convey even a fraction of the buzz it gives me to make that connection and complete the picture then I could look forward to as fulfilling and satisfying a working life as anyone could lay claim to.

When I first started looking into possible destinations for doctoral work one of the first institutions recommended to me was Madison. Once I actively started researching the University, I found the faculty helpful, interested, and swift to reply to any queries I sent.

The Department also houses a multitude of specialists in all the fields I am looking to study. Professors Blackhawk for Native America; Professor Cronon for Native Americans, the West, and the Frontier; Professor Kantrowitz for southern culture, racism and white supremacy; Professor Lee on slavery; Professors Stern and Scarano for slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean respectively; Professors Spear and Thomas on Africa, its pre-colonial culture, and the Diaspora; Professor Cohen for Colonial and early America, Religion and Native Americans; Professor Boydston for westward expansion and Removal, as well as others in the broad categories of African-Americans, the South, and Africa.

From the website listings I also identified nearly 30 courses that I would be interested in taking, and the program would also enable me to further my knowledge of French, allow me the opportunity to sample anthropology or archaeology for use as an extra research tool. I also believe from my correspondence with faculty that there are already a couple of students at Madison working in similar areas to the one I propose.