

## **British-American historian opens MSU lecture series**

**By Jan Swoope**

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On Tuesday, British-American historian Amanda Foreman will explore U.S.-British relations during the Civil War, as she opens the Mississippi State University Institute for Humanities Distinguished Lecture Series.

At 4 p.m. Sept. 20, Foreman of New York and London leads the public program at Lee Hall's Betterworth Auditorium on the MSU campus. "A World on Fire: Great Britain and the American Civil War" will be her topic.

Foreman's address will be based around "A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided," her 1,040-page work released last year by Random House USA and Allen Lane UK. The daughter of the well-known screenwriter and producer Carl Foreman, she is an Oxford University doctoral graduate.

"Amanda Foreman looks at a familiar story to find something new and important that highlights the Civil War's wider context," said lecture series director Will Hay. "The United States -- North and South -- were part of a wider English-speaking world that included Britain as the leading power of the day. American events had an impact on Britain, just as reactions there shaped the Civil War. 'A World on Fire' makes an important contribution that Mississippians will want to hear."

### ***Book to movie***

Foreman's 1998 inaugural publication was "Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire" (HarperCollins UK and Random House USA). An expansion on her doctoral thesis, the best-selling book won the Whitbread Prize for Best Biography and inspired a successful movie, "The Duchess," that starred Dame Judith "Judi" Dench, Ralph Fiennes and Keira Knightley.

"The idea for 'A World on Fire' originated while I was writing 'Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire,'" explained Foreman. "I came across letters to Georgiana's great-nephew, the Eighth Duke of Devonshire, in which he described spending Christmas day in 1862 making eggnog for the Confederate cavalry officers of Gen. Robert E. Lee's army."

The duke wrote to his father: "I hope Freddy [his younger brother, Lord Frederick Cavendish] won't groan much over my rebel sympathies, but I can't help them. The people here are so much more earnest about the [war] than the North seems to be." Understanding the war's polarizing effect on public opinion in Britain became a driving obsession that led Foreman to undertake "A World on Fire."

"Mississippi State's Institute for Humanities has presented the Distinguished Lecture Series since 2005, and from the start we've featured nationally and internationally known

speakers," Hay remarked. "Amanda Foreman's visit highlights our efforts to provide students and the wider community opportunities they would not otherwise find."

### ***Additional programs***

Other Distinguished Lecture Series programs this fall are:

- Oct. 5 -- David Bell, historian of early modern France, speaks at 4 p.m. in the McCool Atrium on "The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It."
- Nov. 9 -- Charles Hill, a career diplomat with the U.S. Foreign Service who served as senior advisor to George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, speaks at 4 p.m. in the McCool Atrium on "Grand Strategies: How Literature Explains Statescraft and World Order."

To learn more, visit [msstate.edu/dept/IH/Humanities.html](http://msstate.edu/dept/IH/Humanities.html), or contact Hay at 662-325-3604.

*Jan Swoope is the Lifestyles Editor for The Commercial Dispatch.*

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