Cal Poly History Department to Host Cold War Speakers May 15, 16

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Two experts on the Cold War will be at Cal Poly in mid-May to discuss different aspects of that period of history.

Amy Offner, assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania, will present “Remaking Housing Policy in the Americas, 1950-1980” from 4:10 to 5 p.m. Wednesday, May 15, in Room E-27 in the Science Building (No. 52).

On May 16, Bradley Simpson, assistant professor at Princeton University, will discuss “The Cold War, Human Rights and Self Determination.” His talk, from 11 a.m. to noon in Room 123 in the Agricultural Engineering Building (No. 8), will focus on the end of European empire in the 1970s.

According to Offner, during the Cold War, poverty in capitalist countries became a discrediting embarrassment for government officials, a prestigious topic of expertise for social scientists, and a cause for protest by social movements.

“From Bogotá, Colombia, to California’s San Joaquin Valley, some of the most visible manifestations of poverty were housing crises,” Offner said.

In her talk, she will explore the rise of “aided self-help housing,” a distinctively privatized form of public housing policy, and trace its circulation within the Americas. “Self-help programs illuminate lines of mutual influence between U.S. and Latin American social policy, the mid-century origins of neoliberal practices, and an avenue by which economists rose as policymakers and public intellectuals,” she said.

On May 16, Simpson will talk about how during the Cold War, countless peoples and movements mobilized under the banner of self-determination and sought to institutionalize its status as a human right in international law. He will explore why self-determination came to have such expansive and potentially disruptive meaning in the post-World War II era, serving as a short-hand for a wide range of claims to sovereignty.

Offner holds a doctorate from Columbia University. She is writing a book on anti-poverty programs, social conflict, and economic thought in the U.S. and Colombia, 1948-1980.

Simpson earned a doctorate in history from Northwestern University. He is an assistant professor of history and international affairs and the author of “Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations,” which was published by Stanford University Press in 2008.

Both presentations are free and open to the public. They are sponsored by Cal Poly’s History, Political Science, and City and Regional Planning departments and the College of Liberal Arts Lottery Speaker Fund. For more information, visit the History Department website at http://cla.calpoly.edu/hist_events.html.

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