Introduction

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A man calls his wife from a cell phone, his voice quivering with emotion as he describes his love for her and for his children. He works on the top floors of the World Trade Center. The date is September 11, 2001.

The President steps to a podium in the mid-afternoon and sheds tears of sadness on national television. He makes brief comment on events that unfolded in Newtown, Connecticut earlier that day. The date is December 14, 2012.

Jackie Kennedy stands at the side of her husband's casket and though her face is hidden behind a mourning veil, tears can be seen rolling off her cheeks. The date is November 25, 1963. Human life is emotional. It is defined by subjective internal emotional states and those states are, in turn, realized within social contexts. The internal worlds of human beings are shaped by the ebb and flow of emotion. Anger, love, disdain, fear, elation: each of these emotions, and this list is by no means inclusive, has a role in propelling or inhibiting the human being along life's path. But is emotion fair game for the historian? This loaded question has only very recently been settled. An even cursory review of the current state of the historians' field turns up a fast-proliferating literature concerned with the history of emotion, though, as Dr. Marcy May points out, the subject is not devoid of conceptual disagreements. It is no small indication that the innovative and pioneering Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin now includes among its eighty associations the new Research Center for the History of Emotion. Ute Frevert, former Professor of German History at Yale University, is the first and current head of the Center, having taken up the mantel in 2008. She has offered a compelling justification for the role of emotion in historical inquiry: "Our research rests on the assumption that emotions –

feelings and their expressions – are shaped by culture and learnt/acquired in social contexts. What somebody can and may feel (and show) in a given situation, towards certain people or things, depends on social norms and rules. It is thus historically variable and open to change."[1]

Emotions are complicated and temporally capricious. They vary over time and space, and they exist both within the individual and in the society at large. Yet the variability of emotion is one very good reason, according to historians Carol Z. and Peter N. Stearns, why their incorporation into social history is no less than revelatory. Nearly thirty years ago the Stearns noted that "the study of emotion may become one of the hot new topics in social history" because of its ability to shed new light on social, political, and economic changes through an interdisciplinary understanding of emotion as a driver of those shifts.[2] Just as the burgeoning of women's history si new avenues of research, so the history of emotion has and will continue to present the historian with untrammeled realms of inquiry.

Historians are not a detached set, for all their bookish and ascetic qualities. They are social participants, members of human communities, emotionally tied-in to the collective. And historians bear great responsibility in that they must attempt to record and interpret the emotions of others, of persons separated by time and space and all else that alters unknowably in the continuum.

Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 813-836.

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[1] Max Planck Institute for Human Development, "History of Emotions." Accessed March 13, 2013, http://www.mpib-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/history-of-emotions.

[2] Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 813-836.