

Resolution on the Retirement of Jeanne Marie Penvenne
Professor of History
May 16, 2018

On behalf of the History Department and the University as a whole, I am honored to enter a resolution on the retirement of Professor Jeanne Marie Penvenne. In the twenty-five years she has been at Tufts, Jeanne has become a beloved figure both at the university and internationally – through her brilliant research in the history of labor conditions in Mozambique, and especially through her dedication to teaching, advising, and service. Jeanne has put her heart and soul into making Tufts the best place it could be, and generations of students, staff, and faculty have benefitted from her warmth and generosity.

Jeanne did not follow a privileged trajectory on her way to becoming a professor. She was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts in 1947 to a French-Breton immigrant father and an American mother. Her father died when she was very young, and her mother was left to try to make ends meet with four children under the age of 8. Jeanne ended up at Berkshire Community College on a full scholarship. She took out a loan to buy a motorcycle and helmet so that she could commute from Lenox to Pittsfield. After receiving her Associate's degree, she went on to earn a BA in History and Philosophy from Northeastern. She wrote her senior thesis on Kenyan labor organizer and politician Tom Mboya, a first glimpse at her life-long interest in African labor history. Jeanne then moved on to the Peace Corps. She initially wanted to go to Africa, but the only option there was to teach English as a second language, which she did not want to do – so she ended up vaccinating cows in Brazil, where she learned Portuguese. Her familiarity with cattle helped her in her next stage in life, when she briefly became an organic farmer in Maine, keeping cows and pigs. Her knowledge of Portuguese would prove to be an asset for her throughout her academic career.

Eventually, Jeanne entered into the Ph.D. program at Boston University's African Studies Center, through the Department of History. She originally planned to write her dissertation on labor history in Tanzania – but just as she was preparing her dissertation proposal in 1974, Portugal's authoritarian government in Mozambique was overthrown. Because she spoke Portuguese, her mentors convinced her to shift her focus to colonial Mozambique, in the hopes of getting access to previously inaccessible sources. She received three different research grants supporting two years of research in Portugal, England, and Mozambique. The Social Science Research Council would only pay airfare for her sweetheart, Norman Robert Bennett, if they got married, so they did – a marriage that has now lasted over forty years and has been blessed with two children, John and Louis Bennett, and (to date) four grandchildren.

At the time of Jeanne's dissertation research, Mozambique had no diplomatic relations with the U.S., so it was unclear whether she could obtain clearance to travel there. She started her research at archives in Lisbon, and one day in early 1977 she received a one-line telex from Mozambique that simply said: "arrive 16 February." The American Ambassador in Portugal insisted that she sign a statement stating that she had been warned not to go to Mozambique, but Jeanne was undeterred. A representative of the national university collected her at the airport in Maputo, and she was asked to teach part time at the university while conducting her research. She has continued that practice throughout her career and developed a graduate curriculum in gender and oral history for Mozambique faculty to use throughout the national educational system. But she also gained access both to archives and to people. She poured over stacks of uncatalogued papers in the dusty attic of the former labor relations office and conducted oral interviews with indigenous workers. This

combination of archival research and oral histories would become the hallmark of her historical methodology.

Jeanne received her Ph.D in 1982 and came to Tufts in 1993 as our historian of Africa. In 1995, she published her first book, a study of labor relationships between indigenous Mozambican workers, their employers, and the Portuguese colonial administration, titled *African Workers and Colonial Racism; Mozambican Strategies for Survival in Lourenço Marques, Mozambique 1877-1962*. After this study of men and labor relations, Jeanne then embarked on a decades-long project on women in the cashew industry in colonial Mozambique. She collected careful oral histories of cashew factory workers, which required her to learn to speak two new languages, Changana and Ronga, and to gain the trust of the communities she studied. In 2015, she published *Women, Migration and the Cashew Economy of Southern Mozambique, 1945 to 1975*, a detailed and poignant study of the cashew women's economic, social, and urban histories. Aside from her two books, Jeanne has published widely on Mozambican labor history in both English and Portuguese and has been a regular at the universities in Lisbon and in Maputo. She has also hosted and mentored Mozambican scholars who came to this country.

At Tufts, we know Jeanne especially for her outstanding teaching, advising, and service. She has received just about every teaching award it is possible to receive at Tufts, including the Lerman-Neubauer Prize for Outstanding Teaching and Advising (1999), the Lillian and Joseph Leibner Award for Excellence in Teaching and Advising (2001), and the Seymour Simches Award for Distinguished Teaching and Advising (2018). She does not depend on showmanship for her popularity, but on her ability to create a learning community in the classroom. She gives exceptional individual attention to students as well, devoting generous amounts of time to office hours and commenting on numerous drafts of student papers. She helps students to navigate challenges while abroad, offers personal and career advice, and guides applications for awards and grants. Jeanne has advised students beyond Tufts as well, serving on Ph.D. committees at Boston University, the University of Michigan, SUNY-Albany, and the Universidad Nova de Lisbon.

Jeanne has been particularly involved with International Relations and devoted to history's place within the IR curriculum. Noting that thesis-writers often felt at sea, she instituted the "Thesis Exchange," an opportunity for thesis-writers in History, International Relations and Political Science to share research problems and ideas in a relaxed setting, over wine and cheese. In recent years, Thesis Exchange has added a day of student presentations in organized panels, providing an opportunity for thesis-writers to share their research.

Members of the Tufts faculty have also benefitted from Jeanne's tireless efforts and collegiality. She has served on the Executive Committee, the Work-Life Task Force, and the International Relations Executive Committee, as well as many smaller committees. Every History Department chair since her arrival at Tufts has been grateful for her willingness to volunteer for thankless tasks. She has been a supportive mentor for junior faculty both within the History Department and beyond and has acted as the History Department's moral compass in many decisions. She has hosted many students and faculty members at her beautiful house on a cranberry bog in Duxbury, and her kindness and human decency have helped create an atmosphere of collegiality among colleagues.

Jeanne was also instrumental in bringing to Tufts the papers of the late Gerald Gill, the beloved professor of African-American history and Jeanne's close friend, who died unexpectedly in 2007. After years of discussion with the Gill family, the papers were donated to the Tufts archive in 2017. They will remain one of Jeanne's lasting legacies at Tufts.

In her retirement, Jeanne plans to continue her research. She has two new book projects planned and is already working on two articles. She also looks forward to spending more time with her husband, children, and grandchildren.

On behalf of the Department of History, I ask that this resolution be spread upon the minutes of the faculty and that a copy be given to Professor Jeanne Penvenne.

Respectfully submitted,

Alisha Rankin
Associate Professor and Chair *ad interim*
History Department