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Professor Hits the Small Screen

History professor's lecture on Stamp Act to air on C-SPAN3

Story by Kelsey Allen

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In the 36 years that John and Laura Bullion have been married, Laura never sat in on one of her spouse's lectures until a film crew from C-SPAN showed up. Bullion, a history professor, was tapped to deliver his lecture on the Stamp Act for the network's *Lectures in History* TV series.



Photo by Rachel Coward.

When Laura settled into her seat during the taping in September 2012, realizing she was one of the few students not armed to take notes, she got out the only paper she had — an old grocery store receipt — and started writing.

Under the glare of the lights and pressure of the notable audience, Bullion stifled a nervous cough.

“But whenever I’d start feeling anxious, I’d say, ‘Fiddlesticks! You’ve given this lecture zillions of times!’ ” Bullion says.

Not quite zillions, but at least a few times each semester since 1974.

Bullion teaches American colonial history, and his research focuses on 18th-century British politics and policy during the American Revolution.

The Stamp Act, imposed by the British government on Americans in 1765, required all printed materials, from marriage licenses to

diplomas to land grants and currency, to have a stamp.

“The tax is instituted because of the concern of the British government about the weight of public debt that Britain had incurred during the Seven Years War,” Bullion says. “When you have a problem with debt, you have to either raise taxes or cut expenses, and generally, it’s a combination of the two.”

Although the lecture has remained substantially the same throughout the past three decades, Bullion does try to make it pertinent to his students’ lives.

“I don’t need to tell you the relevance of this to the present day,” Bullion adds, alluding to the current standoff over the fiscal cliff and the debt ceiling.

Bullion says the lecture also encourages students to think critically about the choices they make. “The British thought about the problem, and they chose this response to it,” he says. “It was disastrously wrong. My point to the students is

that there is a law of unforeseen consequences.
We're never so dumb as when we think we're
being smart.”

C-SPAN3 will air the lecture Dec. 8 at 7 p.m. and
11 p.m. and Dec. 9 at noon.

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