Dr. Thomas Neil Ingersoll

Thomas Neil Ingersoll was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on September 8, 1948 and died on December 19, 2021 in Lima, Ohio at the age of 73. From a young age he was an avid reader and writer and taught one of his two younger brothers to read. He was active with the Boy Scouts until he moved with his family to California at the age of sixteen. He graduated from Los Altos High School and lived San Francisco for many years. He is survived by his brothers Robert (Rima) and Ted Ingersoll, nieces Carly and Shannon Ingersoll, nephew Tyler Ingersoll, and a great nephew, Rylan.

Tom earned his B.A. in anthropology at University of California, Berkeley in 1981, his M.A. in history at San Francisco State University in 1982, and his Ph.D. in history at University of California, Los Angeles in 1990, his dissertation directed by Gary B. Nash. He taught at UCLA, Occidental College, l’Université de Montréal, and Ohio State Lima where he joined the faculty as Associate Professor in 2002.

Tom’s research was on colonial America and nineteenth-century United States, and focused on slavery, American Indians, and the revolutionary war. Describing his own work, he wrote that “His guiding interest is how people in early America defined legitimate membership in society, who had rights and who did not.” Outspoken in person and his writing, Tom pulled no punches when it came to challenging established scholarship. He was a tireless researcher, spending time in archives in the United States, Canada, and Britain, and his scholarship reflected a comprehensive familiarity with the archival sources on which his work was based.

In his first book, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (1999), based on his dissertation, he argued that New Orleans was “more like than unlike other North American slave societies.” Rejecting Frank Tannenbaum’s idea that Catholic slaveholding societies allowed slaves greater leeway than Protestant slaveholding societies, he argued that New Orleans slave society changed little under successive French, Spanish, French, and U.S. administrations.

Tom’s second book, *To Intermix With Our White Brothers: Indian Mixed Bloods in the United States from Earliest Times to the Indian Removals* (2005), examined the importance of “mixed-blood” Indians in North America from the colonial period through the Indian Removal Act of 1830, arguing that perceptions of mixed-race Indians shaped early republican understandings of race, were essential to the development of Jackson’s Indian removal policy, and informed ideas of American expansionism through the Mexican-American war. He concluded that mixed-race Indians were essential in “leading the way not toward assimilation” but rather toward acculturation, ultimately “undermining prevailing racial stereotypes” and representing an ideal of cultural mixing that would come to define the U.S.

Tom’s third book, *The Loyalist Problem in Revolutionary New England* (2016), examined the importance of loyalists in the revolutionary period, arguing that New England’s “radical ideology of liberty, democracy, and equality” was defined by rebel attempts to “define and control loyalists.” Tom pithily wrote that although rebels could agree on little, “the only thing they could agree on for sure was that the loyalists were wrong.” He concluded that rebels’ largely lenient treatment of British loyalists and the fact that the majority of loyalists remained in New England and retained their property, reflected both emerging democratic ideals and the necessity of political peace after the war. In both this book and *To Intermix With Our White Brothers*, he focused on groups that contemporaries understood to be politically and culturally
problematic, arguing that this tension reflected larger debates about how the nation and its citizens were defined.

At the time of his death, Tom also had two additional book manuscripts in the final stages of completion. The first, *Massachusetts and China in 1773: The Boston Tea Party, A Contribution to the Divergence Debate*, is an innovative re-assessment of the Boston Tea Party in a global context, while the second, *A 'Tempestuous Sea of Liberty': The Rage for Equality in the Election of 1800-01*, is an ambitious and comprehensive study of the complex politics of the early republic.

At the Ohio State Lima campus, Tom taught a survey of American history to 1877 every semester, and he believed this course was an essential foundation for undergraduates and especially for the history major. The course was often students’ first college level history course and Tom’s deep knowledge and passion for the subject drew many students to the major. His impressive range of courses also included African-American history, Women’s history, Native American history, the history of slavery, U.S. political history, Tudor-Stuart Britain, the Civil War, and twentieth-century world history, in addition to methods and seminar courses for history majors. Often he could be found in his office meeting with students to talk about their writing and research, and he was extraordinarily dedicated to advancing student understanding and knowledge of the past. Over the years he took countless groups of students to museums in Ohio and the Midwest, driving an OSU Lima van to Dayton, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Detroit. Tom was a loyal advocate for his students, oversaw numerous independent studies and senior research projects, and had several students go on to law school and graduate study in History.

Tom enjoyed hiking and swimming. In California he went out of his way to find new lakes to swim in. In Lima he often could be spotted at YMCA swimming laps for exercise. He enjoyed concerts and the opera and discussing all manner of music ranging from hip hop to classical with friends, colleagues, and students. He enjoyed eating at restaurants and always shared his opinion about menus and new restaurants, especially those with good bread. He would show up at a colleague’s annual party, two bottles of wine in hand, ready to celebrate the end of the school year. Tom will be remembered fondly and missed dearly by his family, students, and colleagues.

Stanley “Chip” Blake