

History in Focus

S2 E6 Picnicking at the End of Empire + Around AHA 2024

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Daniel Story

Welcome to *History in Focus*, a podcast by the *American Historical Review*. I'm Daniel Story, and in this episode, number six for season two, we have something a little different. In part two, we take you with us along the bustling corridors and exhibition spaces of this year's American Historical Association annual meeting in San Francisco, where you'll hear from a smattering of attendees, brave enough not to run away when we approach with our microphones. But seriously, we think you'll really enjoy hearing from these conferencegoers on their experience at this year's meeting. So stay tuned for that. But to start off, historian Sarah Stein takes us into her History Unclassified piece "Eating on the Ground: Picnicking at the End of Empire" from the December 2023 issue. "Eating on the Ground" explores the ever-evolving practice of picnicking by Sephardic Jewish communities in the late Ottoman Empire. Stein approaches the subject "from the ground up," as she puts it, steering clear largely of wider themes like Empire in favor of the picnic experience itself. Even injecting here and there, imagined conversations between picnickers held in the mix of languages they likely spoke. And for this segment, we're trying something new here on the podcast. In what follows Sarah reads her piece in its entirety in our team provides a soundscape to back Sarah up. So, now, we invite you to find your spot on the blanket. Settle in and enjoy.

Crickets and birds chirp, leaves rustle, and muffled voices converse in the background.

Sarah Stein

The de Toledo entourage, finely dressed, have a simple picnic. They've arranged their fare on a rough wooden table that lists with the hillside, makeshift tablecloth barely covering its surface. There are loaves of bread, hunks of cheese, a bag of nuts or dried fruit, water, a thermos—tea, perhaps? It is May, just after the Jewish holiday of Shavuot; the trees are full, the weather cool enough to warrant a three-piece tweed suit, the ground too cold or damp to sit on. The young woman I am chatting with has muddy shoes; the group has hiked to their destination.

Across the late Ottoman Empire and its successor states, modern Jews like the de Toledos picnicked alongside, and sometimes with, their Christian and Muslim peers. In this they were no different than other modern, urban, middle-class women, men, and children, who were eagerly embracing new forms of leisure, including relaxing in the countryside. But Sephardic

picnics were inflected with Mediterranean Jewish hue and history. They were neither generically Jewish nor generically Mediterranean, but both and more. Alas, scholarship has been so focused upon Mediterranean Jews' urban lives—and especially their commercial, communitarian, religious, and intellectual practices—that we forget they enjoyed a down home picnic, too.

Every Sephardic community had its favored picnic location: in Istanbul, near Göksu creek on the Bosphorus or in the woods of Sultan Suyu; outside the Mevlevi Monastery in Salonica; the grounds of Izmir's Ottoman Water Company and the city's many orchards; the "lake" (that is, a dammed bit of the Miljacka River) of Sarajevo; the dunes of Agami in Alexandria; adjacent the ruins of the Villanova Castle on Rhodes; the slopes of Uludağ, outside of Bursa; the beaches of Agia Triada, to the south of Salonica; at Bi'r Ayyub, outside the walls of Jerusalem at the springs of Lower Silwan. Janet Sages (born Camila Agruete) remembers that in early 20th century Bursa, "picnics were part of life...that you couldn't do without." In time, the beloved ritual of picnicking was exported to Ottoman Jewish émigré centers.

The modern picnic and the photograph came of age together in the Ottoman realm, and each illuminates the other. Studio and family portraits are the most common photographs taken by Sephardic Jews from the Ottoman era: this accords with the development of photography in the empire in the mid to late-nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, as portable cameras became more affordable, "vernacular" photographers were turning up everywhere. Especially at picnics.

I have encountered picnic photos in privately owned, Sephardic photograph collections across the émigrés hubs of the global Sephardic diaspora (Manchester, London, Paris, Brussels, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, New York, Seattle, Los Angeles), and in less predictable locations (Rio de Janeiro, Kolkata, Johannesburg, State College, PA, on Ebay). These albums survived countless calamities: wars, genocide, fires, displacement. They, like the families that preserved them, are "hypermobile," surviving migrations in multiple directions, more than once. Aron Amateau expanded his album journeying from his native island of Rhodes—Ottoman and Italian in his lifetime—to the Colony of Southern Rhodesia, Republican Turkey, and the United States. Now it resides far from Amateau's chosen home, Queens, in Pennsylvania.

"I was getting ready to leave: that's why I bought my Leica. I was going to follow my older sister Rebecca to Gatooma, in southern Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe]. At first, I thought it would be great to take pictures of everything new and interesting I encountered along my way—but Rhodos, it's also changing, non ci piove [Italian: there's no doubt about it], and I don't know

when I'll be back. I was just fifteen when I left, still a kid." "Kaminos de leche i miel [Ladino: may you walk paths of milk and honey.]"

An array of picnics show up in turn-of-the-century Sephardic family albums like Amateau's. They were elaborate and rustic, prim and messy, stiffly multi-generational and sprawling fun for peers. Picnics reasserted norms of gender and sexuality, but also ruptured them. They served as showy markers of wealth (complete with porters and cut-glass) and were rough and tumble. Picnickers lounge, plunge, climb, hike, sunburn, loosen collars, hoist skirts, swat mosquitos and fend off bees.

"The people keep coming, climbing all over me, waving their damn cameras. I'll outlive 'em. Come back in the winter, bratya [Bulgarian: dudes], I'll show you something to photograph."

We know what Ottomans consumed on picnics: roast meat, grilled fish, vegetables, salads, sides, fruit, bread, cheeses, and more. To me, what is captivating is not what Sephardic Jews ate on the ground but how they ate it—in what clothing or position, with what company, and in tandem with which recreational pursuits.

In asking a "how" question, I am avoiding a "why" question more typically asked of scholars of Ottoman Jews. The point is not to see the picnic as a refraction of empire or state or law or citizenship or commerce or community or conflict or the transition from empire to nation: lofty domains which help us understand why earthy things are the way they are. I peer in the opposite direction, reconsidering Sephardic culture from the ground up—indeed, from the picnic blanket itself.

From my languorous location (and in the written text in italics and boxed text), I converse with fellow picknickers in the blend of languages they were likely to speak. The leisurely chatter may feel fanciful, but my motivations are complex. The narrative play reflects a dialogue with scholars of photographs who urge historians to "form affective connections" with photographic subjects—to watch, feel, and listen to them. It amplifies quiet, interior moments, encounters, and activities overlooked by Ottomanists and scholars of Sephardic life. And it uses a voice that my subjects might understand: welcoming them as partners in historical excavation.

So join me on the blanket. Kick back, pass the bread, and let's dig in.

"Eskidara" a Sephardic song performed in Turkish and Ladino, begins to play

Ottoman picnicking was an old, gender-segregated activity. Elite Ottoman women had enjoyed picnicking since at least the sixteenth century, shuttling in concealed carriages, eating at the graves of deceased ancestors, sometimes bringing eunuch guards for protection and propriety. Picnic gear was given to elite young women as part of early modern trousseaus. By the late Ottoman era, the picnic was popularized, “a pastime indulged in with great gusto by most Ottomans” across “nearly all social classes,” women and men alike—but still rarely together. A nineteenth-century local guild was as likely to host a picnic as a wealthy foreigner, if on a far more modest scale. European travelers to and residents in the Ottoman lands organized “picnic tours by train” from Izmir to vacation communities like Buca or Burnabat.

Picnics had a long Ottoman Jewish history, too. Anxiety about Jewish leisure was a constant of Ottoman Jewish religious literature since the sixteenth century, when Moses Almosnino cautioned readers against extreme social behaviors including “eating, drinking, taking walks, and all other kinds of pleasures” (which my colleague Minna Rozen has theorized included picnicking). Simply put, the picnic made Ottoman Jewish powerbrokers jittery. In his 1863 Ladino-language work of musar [ethical literature] *Shevet Musar*, Elijah ha-Kohen identified all-male picnics as a gateway drug sure to lead participants to “sing and dance and carouse and praise” and then to excess drink, vomiting, and wanton sexual desire. The Chief Rabbi of Salonica excommunicated a gaggle of young men for wiling away their time eating, drinking raki, gambling, and picnicking. The youths’ particular offense was roasting song birds against the rules of kashrut—but one imagines that the temptation to flaunt the law would be more subdued at home or sober.

Concerns about the picnic’s menacing qualities persisted into the nineteenth century, when the introduction of municipal parks to the Ottoman realm made public sociability easier. And it wasn’t just Jews who feared such spaces threatened traditional comportment. Ottoman parks were policed to keeping men and women from mingling, and to prevent public consumption of alcohol.

For picnics were much too fun to heed words of approbation. Picnicking liberated the body from crowded urban quarters, religious and social expectations, and the oversight of family and community. It availed new spaces and new forms of movement—of body, senses, voice, and gut. Even religiously-inspired picnics, such as a grave-side hillula [a celebration marking the anniversary of a sage’s death], could tip raucous. Picnics were cheap, accessible to young and old, the strong and the infirm, work companions, extended families, and intimates. In short, picnicking was easy freedom, which is precisely why it annoyed traditionalists.

Early battles over picnics linked them to the indolence of the rich and men, but by century's end, Sephardic women, men, and children of all classes were picnicking—in co-ed groups and as families. As the Ladino and French press promoted the Gallic view that it was healthful to escape urban miasma, the picnic was reinvented as wholesome. Now the variety of picnics attended by Sephardic Jews proliferated; there were school picnics, wedding picnics, team picnics, businesses picnics for employees and their families, holiday picnics. Children were a constant, pointing to a growing consciousness of children's needs, vulnerabilities, and social value.

“Ety, you look so dreamy. What are you thinking about?” “Do los pasharikos [little birds, Ladino] sleep while they fly? If you caught one and put a string around its belly, could it carry you for a while? I want to fly over the sea (but I wouldn't want to be dropped.) Ms. Matilda smells like marsaspan!”

Elite picnics for women were once cumbersome and elaborate affairs, involving the transport of tables and chairs, tablecloths, proper plates, cutlery, glasses, and pitchers, prepared food in ceramicware, teapots, glasses, and more. Nineteenth-century Ottomans didn't object to traveling far for a picnic, with the wealthy journeying in canopied ox-drawn wagons and the less prosperous, donkeys. For the privileged, formal attire was a must. Everyone sat at a table, on a chair. The modern picnic offered a chance to work out different kinds of relationships to bodies, peers, land and landscape.

Though some Jews dismissed the picnic as too public a form of socializing, too dirty, dangerous, or *déclassé*, its lure intensified with time. By the 1920s, picnics were unstructured co-ed affairs. Tables and chairs were abandoned: sitting on the ground embraced. Even married women attended with bare heads, arms, and legs. (Though for the moment, shoes remained on.) Shifts in clothing eased the transition, for dresses were lighter and looser, hemlines higher, sleeves shorter. Girls sported accessories favored by modern girls around the world—a bob, a single barrette, a string of pearls, t-strap heels. They moved with modesty and confidence, betraying earthiness while keeping the sensitive bits covered, occasionally drank and ever so rarely smoked, and looked resolutely at the camera. All this was quietly radical.

“Got an extra?” “Help yourself. I'll light it off mine. Guay de mi [Ladino: oy]. The picnic: relaxing? Not for the mother! Buy the provisions, make the food, pack the baskets, ready the children, argue with my husband, order a carriage, trundle everyone in, hike to a clean spot, dodge the riff-raff, lay out the food, serve the food, remove a bee sting from a child's foot, hire the donkey, placate the kids who can't fit on its back, get everyone to look at the camera;

believe me, you'd need a smoke, too. Kapara [Ladino: a sacrifice]" "Pujados i no amenguados [Ladino: may it increase and not decrease, that is I hope things get better]."

The modern picnic invited lounging and touching. Photographs from the era show women reclining with their legs outstretched before them, or extended fully on their sides, with ankle, knee, hip, and elbow all making contact with the grass, blanket, or bare earth. By the 1920s, the habit of tucking one's lower legs under one's upper legs had gained favor among adolescents and young women, as had the practice of bending the lower leg at a forty-five degree angle to the side. As skirt hems rose, it was riskier (from the perspective of exposure) to direct your legs forward to the camera or eye. Equally as importantly, the coquettish leg tuck was the precise pose Alla Nazimova assumed while picnicking with Rudolph Valentino in "Camille" (1921).

Music from picnic scene in "Camille" plays

Picnics were local affairs, but women's comportment was globally inflected and highly self-conscious.

Indeed, family photos from the 1920s show picnicking Sephardic women and girls to be newly in control and aware of their own bodies and the bodies of others. Sephardic girls and women photographed picnicking lean atop one another, scrunching their bodies close—closer than the frame of the camera demands. They link arms, drape arms atop another's shoulders, hold hands. Picnics—and photos of them—were opportunities to construct a Mediterranean Jewish girlhood shaped in and by the natural world, with friends, and through tactile pleasure.

Picnics put sexuality on display. Consider the languid ease that surrounds the outdoor meal of Flora Kohen, her beau Menahem Montiljo, and their friends along Sarajevo's Miljacka River in the 1930s. The group leans into one another, men's shirt sleeves rolled (or shirts removed altogether), bodies intertwining such that it is difficult to reconstruct all the vectors of physical contact. Touch was for pleasure, romance, and sociability, and a means of manifesting—for the camera, the self, and those present—physical independence and inter-dependence. The picnic could serve as a place for courtship precisely because it was a social and a group affair. The picnic was freeing—but it was also a portable, communal pod. This lent it a bit of safety.

To understand the magic of Kohen and Montiljo's picnic, one must contrast it with another held in Arta, Greece at roughly the same time. This picnic was not an affair of friends, but a gathering for employees of the National Bank of Greece and their families. The event is

documented in a tellingly staged manner. The adults form a receding V from the camera, framing an elaborately set table. In front, boys under the age of ten sit calmly on a blanket, raised glasses of tea in their hands. Behind them, adults, stiff and formal in chairs. In a chair in front, a girl, her bare legs are crossed, a physical compromise between the boys on the ground and the women at the table. Boyhood, girlhood, and adulthood are starkly delineated, the entire Sephardic life cycle modeled for the camera. Together, the contrasting photographs tell an important story. The picnic was not an agent of freedom. Company and context shaped it, a fluid capsule of history.

Muffled voices converse in the background

“I can’t keep ‘em all. The economy is for shit and getting worse every day. The king [George II] is back from exile, but who’s to say it’s not just another regime change—God knows we’ve lived through an endless stream of them. My son’s been deployed: I can’t risk losing my own job. These folks look to me as le patron [boss], but when it comes to buying my kids’ shoes, my own wife has to pagar en ratas [Ladino: pay in installments]. Today, una s’euda [a feast]. Tomorrow, layoffs.”

In the late nineteenth century, toys and games (such as rolling hoops and tricycles) appear in photographs of bourgeois Ottoman Jews. Around the same time, the Ottoman press published advertisements featuring women exercising. Only later, in the 1920s, do sports accessories, sports attire, and swimming costumes crop up in Sephardic picnic photos. Others have written of the rise of Jewish sporting culture (in Europe, as in the Balkans and Anatolia) as a palimpsest of nation building and self-imagining. Picnic photos have little bombast. Different, quieter dynamics come to the fore.

Birds and crickets chirping

“Hurrah for buds on trees! What a gorgeous spring day. Rahel, what do you like most about picnicking?” “The smells: almond blossoms, fresh grass, a hint of manure in the air. It’s amazing. I can’t play volleyball since my vision is bad, but I love the sound of the ball hitting the girls’ forearms—SMACK—and how they cheer for a good shot. Un dia sin dinguna mákula [Ladino: a perfect day].”

Picnic sports were largely an off-lens affair. One extraordinary exception captures [Rebeka] Rebi Evgin launching into an energetic jump-rope leap in Sultan Suyu, a forested picnic spot located just outside Istanbul’s city limit. This picnic took place in the early 1930s. Recalled

Evgin: “We would prepare our own food. My deceased husband had an Armenian friend. He would come to our door in his car, we would all pile in and go. Then, we would jump rope after eating.... Sultansuyu was one of the picnic spots we went to. The children had a lot of fun, and we would be happy.” A photograph captures the moment: Evgin tamps down her dress as she begins her barefoot jump, her body tense with anticipated movement. Her son and daughter look on, mesmerized. The motion was unthinkable for a woman of an earlier era, as are Egin’s unadorned feet. So little of Evgin’s body touches the ground, yet still, her unclad feet reveal a new sense of earthiness. Her pose is baldly joyous.

How the picnic had changed. Its constitution was occasionally multi-ethnic. A posh car added to its drama. It offered mothers the chance to transcend earthly duties, if only for a time. The early Republican picnic seemed defined by national and personal potential. Yet, the city’s rapid growth also threatened the picnic. In the decade of Evgin’s picnic, Istanbul’s capacious green space gave way to apartment complexes, and modest neighborhood parks emerged as chosen site of leisure. Could the picnic survive?

This article has blended a novel leisure activity (the Sephardic picnic), a novel genre (the photograph), and an experimental voice to tell their intersecting story. Together, these entry points give us insight on a form of history close to the ground.

For Sephardic Jews witnessing the end of empire and the early decades of the twentieth century, to picnic was to play, to flirt, to spend time with family, to relax with friends and co-workers, to defy authority, to dream and pose and perform. It was to hold tight to an urban and rural landscape that was evolving politically, socially, and spatially. The picnic was neither singular nor static.

Even in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the picnic was still undertaken in/by Sephardic Jews. The shattered Jewish community of Salonica, which lost 98% of its pre-war population to the Nazi death camps, was hosting and photographing a school picnic in 1946, but a year after its survivors were liberated from Auschwitz. The following summer, the youth of the community spent two weeks at the beachfront community of Agia Triada, sleeping in tents, playing volleyball, picnicking on lavish Sephardic food cooked by community matriarchs.

The 1946 photograph of Lela (née Saltiel) Abravanel, like others in her collection, bears a curious quirk. Abravanel has scratched out her youthful face, because, in her own words, she “didn’t like the picture.”

The post-war Sephardic picnic (and the post-war Sephardic picnic photograph) had a spectral quality, haunted by lost childhood, absence, and grief. In crisis and in recovery, the Mediterranean Jewish picnic was ripe for reinvention.

Daniel Story

That was Sarah Stein reading her "History Unclassified" piece "Eating on the Ground: Picnicking at the end of Empire," which you'll find in the December 2023 issue of the AHR. The theme music in that segment, which you hear in the background right now, is a Sephardic song known as "Eskidara," which grafted Ladino lyrics onto a nineteenth-century Turkish operetta, "Üsküdar." This version, used by permission, was performed in Los Angeles in 2019 by a Ladino ensemble comprised of musicians Elizabeth Kerstein, Alyssa Mathias, Sam Robertson, Sasha Strelnikoff, Brandon Wallace, Alexandra Yoralian, and Lilia Yaralian. The song is also discussed by Simone Salmon in her piece "Emily Sene's Sephardic Mixtape," which appears in the volume *100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles*, edited by Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Caroline Luce, published in 2020 by the UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies.

Up next, we take you around the American Historical Association 2024 annual meeting in San Francisco. The first voice you'll hear is me giving you a little window into how I got to the conference this year.

Daniel Story audio log

Okay, starting out from Santa Cruz, gonna ride to AHA in San Francisco a little over 80 Miles going to be a chilly start around 41 degrees. Okay, I made it through the first leg of my journey, more or less to the base of the main climb of this ride. Okay, I made it to the top of Mountain Charlie. I've now climbed about 2300 feet, gone 17 miles. Up next descending mountain Charlie on the other side.

SpongeBob SquarePants "Some time later" clip

So this is a little while later, I made it to the hotel in San Francisco. I guess I got a little distracted by riding, it's forgot to make any more of these audio logs. The long kind of slog north along the sort of eastern edge of the Santa Cruz Mountains was fun in a lot of places a little bit grueling in other places. And then the ride into the city actually was pretty fun for the most part. But there were a few stretches of the road that I just was not super happy to be riding on given the traffic but hey, it's a city, right? And so yeah, I made it to the hotel and I'm feeling pretty good, as good as you can feel after 84 miles and I definitely need something to eat so that's what I'm going to do now.

Music fades into the sounds of a crowded convention

Matt Hermane

So just what panels or sessions have you attended today?

Conference attendee 1

So I presented this morning at 8:30,

Matt Hermane

Oh, okay, great.

Conference attendee 1

We had an audience, I was so impressed.

Matt Hermane

What was your, what session were you?

Conference attendee 1

We were a session on—I have no idea what it was called even though I created the panel myself—it was on global connections from Central European history and efforts to metabolize and global change in Central Europe in the 20th century.

Matt Hermane

Okay, and you had good attendance?

Conference attendee 1

We did I was impressed

Matt Hermane

Good, very good. What about anything else?

Conference attendee 1

Um, I attended the, what is it? "Going Quietly Into the Night"? about historiography and undergraduate, teaching historiography to undergraduate students. It was a really cool conversation. I didn't present but we had an undergrad student there who was talking and all the way up to other professors, and it was fun.

Conference attendee 2

It was amazing, wasn't it? The variety of—we have high school teachers, we had the undergraduate students, we had college professors from JC to four year—it was a wide variety. Impressive that so many turned out and wanted to really understand how can we think about historiography in our teaching. It was fantastic.

Dr. Aaron Olivas

I am Dr. Aaron Olivas.

Daniel Story

Where are you at?

Dr. Aaron Olivas

SUNY Maritime College in New York City.

Daniel Story

Yeah. What have you been up to here?

Dr. Aaron Olivas

Seeing panels, connecting with old colleagues, checking out the exhibition space.

Daniel Story

Did you present?

Dr. Aaron Olivas

Yes, I presented. I don't know about 8:30 panels. But a good crowd came. So I was impressed with that. It was on women in colonial Mexico, and looking at different aspects of sort of like institution of marriage, women's engagement, unfortunately, with the Inquisition. My paper and my colleagues was on consumerism, indigenous women as Atlantic world consumers. But yes, please bring the AHA to the West Coast more often.

Leslie Waters

I'm Leslie Waters, and I'm a professor at University of Texas at El Paso. I've just been meeting up with people I haven't really like, I'm not presenting or anything. So I've just been kind of using this as a way to catch up with former colleagues. And one of the thing that's weird about the AHA or interesting, good, I suppose, is that once you've been a historian long enough, you

start to see people from like different eras of your life at AHA, you know? Like, there's the grad school people, and then there's the first job people, and the second job people, and so this like life trajectory that you can experience at an AHA that it's hard to experience anywhere else, right? Like you do get like such a good variety of different types of historians, who are in different eras and different places that I think you get, like the full gamut of, of what history has to offer in a way that you don't get at other conferences.

Conference attendee 3

So for me, I, as an up-and-coming historian and graduate student, I'm really looking forward to meeting different historians and also attending panels that kind of generate new ideas for me. It really just kind of like networking and branching out and coming in front of ideas I may not have had before.

Conor Howard

Wonderful, are there any panels in particular you're interested in?

Conference attendee 3

I believe, tomorrow, there's one on race in the Atlantic world. That's one I'm really looking forward to, because that's kind of my interest, that whole Atlantic kind of

Conor Howard

I think that's on my list too

Conference attendee 3

Yeah.

Conference attendee 4

Well, about the conference, this is my first year at the American Historical Association, and I'm presenting at posters. Um, I'm also moving through my graduate program, I'm about to finish my master's and at this point, I don't plan on going back for a PhD. So I'm also in some ways trying to learn more about different career options, the different companies that exist that might be willing to hire someone with my skill set. So that's one of the really fun things. Oh, there's also a book fair happening next door. I'm super excited for that. I love collecting books.

Michelle Kahn

Hi, my name is Michelle Kahn. I'm a professor at University of Richmond. I have four undergraduates who I brought to the AHA this year to present their research two in the poster

session, two the Lightning Rounds. And I've found that the undergraduates so far are building a great community, having meetups, so I'm really grateful for this opportunity.

Daniel Story

Does it seem like there are a sizable number of undergrads here at the conference?

Michelle Kahn

Yeah, the undergrad reception was very well attended. They started a GroupMe actually, so they're texting each other and like, hanging out, and yeah, it seems really great.

Conference attendee 5

So I'm a junior and senior level high school teacher. So I love history. And so I'm ready to absorb all this knowledge. But I think for me going into it, I really wanted to be able to find ways to engage student learning and history, and also being able to expand my own knowledge. So all of the sort of teacher resources that they've been able to provide for K through 16 level has been great. But also just getting to engage with like current events stuff, I was able to go to a session today on the Second Amendment, and so being able to expand on my own knowledge, but being able to implement that in the classroom has been super interesting.

Matt Hermane

Hi, my name is Matt, I work for the American Historical Review, I produce their podcasts History in Focus. And I was just walking by and I saw this and I couldn't believe that there is no AP course on US women's history.

Conference attendee 6

One hundred percent. So this, we wrote the entire course. So Harvard two years ago gave us the Schlesinger fellowship, to come to the archives and create the course. So we did and we wrote the whole course period by period based on you know, the CED of the College Board. The goal is a five-year rollout.

Matt Hermane

Okay, wow, and can you kind of explain to me what the whole arrangement here is? Are these your students?

Conference attendee 6

Sure so these are all AP History students,

Matt Hermane

Okay.

Conference attendee 6

They've all completed AP US History. And several of them are in AP government. You know, I think all of you are in AP government. Yeah, so very experienced AP students. So these three students go to our school so we teach at Sacred Hearts in Atherton and then Gabriela goes to Burlingame High School.

Matt Hermane

What would it mean for the four of you to have a US Women's History class, an AP class?

Conference attendee 7

At least for me would mean a lot, because I have currently been blessed by these two amazing teachers here. And I've learned so much about women. But so many of my classmates who had different teachers, or so many of my peers who attend different high schools, they didn't get the same experience as me because they didn't have the set curriculum. And that just breaks my heart. Because there are so many amazing women out there who had such a big impact on our history that no one really knows their name. So that's why we're really trying to make this an AP course, so there's a national standard for this learning, because these women are so vital and so crucial for our history and for us, like moving forward.

Matt Hermane

Wow, right, well said.

Conference attendee 8

I had a very different experience with my history courses since I had a different teacher. And I left the class probably not being able to name three women, I learned about an entire year of AP US History. Like half the population are female, so that's a bit of an issue. And I felt like I came out of that before I met them kind of just like, I guess they weren't there. I guess they weren't really important. It's very much not the case. There are so many important women. It's just, that's how the history courses were created. They were created by men, and so they teach about men, but we need to change that.

Conference attendee 9

Yeah, it ties into history. It's also about the future what CoCo was talking about the idea of seeing yourself, especially as young high schoolers, seeing yourself in other women who have made change, who have made an impact knowing that like you have a place in society and there's a spot for you to go and make an impact make a change.

Daniel Story

Your name first, is that okay?

Bianca Premo

...is Bianca Premo. I'm from Florida International University in Miami. And I've been attending the AHA for a long time. And I want to say that watching this trajectory through the pandemic, feels like we're back. And it feels like we're back with more energy than before the pandemic. Think the pandemic has made us appreciative of being together. It's really got us excited. A particular organization that's within the AHA that I'm part of had overflow seats at a luncheon and it was you know, we were wondering about the future of that luncheon. And it seems as if it's a new generation that are happy to be together. So it's been a great experience so far.

Daniel Story

That's awesome.

Daniel Story

A big thanks to the AHA attendees who spoke to us for that segment. Those were just some of the conversations that producers Matt Hermane, Connor Howard, and I had around the conference. And yes, I did ride my bike there from Santa Cruz, but I did not carry my luggage with me on the bike. Thanks to my UC Santa Cruz colleague Jeff Erbig for taking care of that. Earlier you heard Sarah Stein reading her History and Unclassified piece "Eating on the Ground: Picnicking at the End of Empire" from the AHR's December 2023 issue. *History in Focus* is a production of the *American Historical Review*, in partnership with the American Historical Association and the University Library at the University of California Santa Cruz. This episode was produced by Matt Hermane, Connor Howard, and me Daniel Story, audio engineering and transcription support was by Phoebe Rettberg. You can find out more about this and other episodes at americanhistoricalreview.org. That's it for now. See you next time.