

History in Focus

Bonus: Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship

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Daniel Story

Welcome to *History in Focus*. I'm Daniel Story, and today we come to you with something a little different. On January 5, 2023, the American Historical Association council approved "Guidelines for Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship." And rather than me attempt to explain this rather weighty step taken by the AHA, we connected with two of the people instrumental in moving these guidelines forward. In part two of the episode, we have Mark Bradley in conversation with University of Michigan historian Rita Chin, who chaired the committee that put the guidelines together. But to begin, I spoke with AHA executive director, Jim Grossman.

Well, thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I appreciate it.

Jim Grossman

Oh, happy to do it.

Daniel Story

Maybe actually, to begin with, could I get you just introduce yourself, state your name and who you are, you know, [in] relation to the AHA.

Jim Grossman

Jim Grossman. I'm the executive director of the American Historical Association.

Daniel Story

How long have you been Executive Director?

Jim Grossman

I've been executive director now for 12 and a half years.

Daniel Story

Right. Is it a job you enjoy?

Jim Grossman

If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't have been doing it for 12 and a half years?

Daniel Story

A very evidence based answer.

Jim Grossman

I try to be evidence based as often as I can.

Daniel Story

Okay, so as you well know, Jim, on January 5, 2023, the AHA council approved the "Guidelines for Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship," which sounds like a pretty weighty thing to be doing. So I'd like to talk with you a little bit about that. And I wondered if we could begin by having you lay out some of the context for the putting together of these guidelines. In part I'm thinking about where the guidelines themselves start with this kind of tension that has developed in a way between the changing nature of historians work and maybe the lack of change in the way that historians are evaluated. So maybe with that dynamic in mind, but perhaps other things as well, what can you tell us about what led to the crafting of the guidelines?

Jim Grossman

What led to the crafting of the guidelines was a recognition among many of us that many forms of historical scholarship, many forms of historical work, that were informed by the expertise, the training, of the knowledge of historians, were not being considered when it came to hiring, tenure promotion, not only in universities, but to some extent in other places where historians work. This was not entirely a result of thinking about new forms of knowledge production, new forms of historical work. Many of the activities of historians that are specifically named in this document, and that we were thinking very much about, have been things historians have done for years—reference books, textbooks, expert witness testimony, op ed pieces—there are all sorts of things that historians have done for a very long time, that have gone under the category of quote, service, when their career has been evaluated, for whatever reason. And in the best of all worlds, that would be fine. In the best of all worlds, the tripod of service, teaching, and research would be a real tripod, with roughly equivalent weight placed on each of the legs of that tripod. But in point of fact, that's not the case in most institutions. In most institutions, service counts for almost nothing, or for very little. In too many institutions, teaching doesn't count for enough. And therefore, not to demean the significance of research, but that we need to be thinking harder about what are the many things that

historians do. The AHA is not likely to be able to convince institutions that service should be counted as highly as teaching and scholarship. On the other hand, many things that are called service are in fact scholarship. We just put it in the wrong box. So what motivated this was a recognition that these many different forms of work that historians do that involve scholarship that require the skills and expertise of a historian [and] need to be recognized. There's a second motivation here, which is, in some ways, more recent, perhaps, which is that the increasing recognition, I think, acknowledgement, among historians, that we have not provided enough incentives for our colleagues to participate in public culture and intervene in public policy. And one reason why historians, perhaps are not listened to often enough is that we don't give credit to our colleagues who we think ought to be listened to. Why should we ask the United States Senate to take seriously the perspective of historians, if we don't consider it serious scholarly work when a historian testifies before a committee of the United States Senate. So that's a second aspect of this, it's not only recognizing work that needs to be done. It's also thinking hard about how the work that needs to be done involves the importance of our influence in public culture. And we therefore need to incentivize that work.

Daniel Story

I do want to ask you to say, just even a minute or so, on the specific context for drafting this set of guidelines. As I understand it, a committee was formed. Who was involved in that committee? And what did that work look like?

Jim Grossman

Well, actually, the specific context is a little more complicated. This conversation has been going on for more than five years. Our council has been discussing this in council meetings for quite some time. And so it's one of these things where you discuss something for a while. And finally, you just say, Okay, let's do it. And it was much more along the lines of Okay, folks, let's do it. And so part of it is that this is a big deal. And it's a big step. And for some people, it was rather radical. So the council actually first appointed a committee to decide whether the council should even do it. And so that committee had to meet and discuss and consider and recommend to the council. Yes, we should do this. And the council accepted that recommendation, and said, Okay, we'll do it and appointed a committee to do it. So it's much more useful to see this as the outcome of a process and a series of conversations over a period of years.

Daniel Story

Right. That's helpful to know, and the sort of layers of committees in a way, it's kind of funny, but on another level, it underscores the weightiness of this, right?

Jim Grossman

Yes, it underscores the weightiness. But the other thing it does, is that it also reminds us that the AHA is not doing this lightly. When you're doing something important, you want to make sure that you do it in a way that is thoughtful, responsible, and takes a wide variety of perspectives into account.

Daniel Story

So maybe taking that idea of taking into account a wide variety of perspectives—were there particular concerns or even objections that as the committee was working through this, that you were kind of thinking about?

Jim Grossman

Well, from the very beginning of these conversations, there have been a wide variety of perspectives, concerns, certainly a sense that by taking things that had long been considered important as service and putting them into the category of scholarship research scholarship, if they are research scholarship, might diminish the significance of service. And that's not a good idea. Another concern was that some people felt that we would be diminishing, watering down standards. That saying, You don't need to have a book. You can have a body of scholarship that is equivalent to a book. That would be very difficult to actually implement that. In a way that it would seem like okay, this is lesser. But actually we've been doing that for quite some time. There are many scholars—Natalie Zemon Davis, and others—who achieved their stature in the field, became tenured, with a portfolio of important articles. So we had already taken that step of saying, You can in fact be credentialed in other ways. And remember, the crucial aspect of the credentialing already, in some ways, at some places, was not so much the format, but the peer review. So somebody comes up for promotion, tenure, to be hired, and has this armload of peer reviewed publications. It means that the department and the institution can say, Through our peer review process, you have demonstrated the quality and quantity of your scholarship. So one of the concerns was well, in that case, are we going to be promoting hiring, awarding fellowships, on the basis of scholarship that hasn't been peer reviewed? And that's why you'll see the report emphasizes the possibility and the potential of post hoc peer review.

Daniel Story

Can you say a little bit more about that?

Jim Grossman

If you can peer review a manuscript, you can peer review something after it's been completed. We peer review things after they've completed all their time. They're called book reviews. And so just as a scholar reads a book and writes a review of that book, and evaluates it, there's no reason why you can't take expert witness testimony, which has to be submitted in writing, in most cases, why you can't take a body of op eds, that the candidate has claimed to be scholarly work, why you can't take a textbook or reference book, or even one's work as a journal editor for five years.

Daniel Story

I totally track with you on the idea of post hoc review, or after the fact review, because I've taken that approach with some of my own work with podcasting: I produced a documentary podcast, and it was reviewed in a few places. And that became part of my review package.

Jim Grossman

Yes, there's absolutely no reason why a podcast can't be considered scholarship, if it is scholarship. Just like books, there are some books that are not scholarship either. So the notion being that we're being genre neutral here, and we're saying there are many ways of being a historian, and many ways of disseminating our scholarship. One of the crucial steps here that I want to emphasize is the notion of creating new knowledge as a singular yardstick for scholarly accomplishment, which derives to a considerable extent from the sciences. And one of the major accomplishments in this document is recognizing that the diffusion of knowledge, to use the term from the mission of the Smithsonian, is as important as the creation of new knowledge. Not more important, not more necessary. But it can be as important, as useful. What good is creating new knowledge, if we don't have ways of disseminating it to broad audiences? So what we're trying to do here is to say, there are many ways of being a historian, that includes the kinds of synthesis of work that brings the knowledge we create as historians to broad publics. And that can be an act of scholarship.

Daniel Story

Yeah, I'm glad you brought that up. I was going to circle back around to it later if we didn't get to it. But that's kind of almost front and center in the document, the idea of new knowledge, not versus but in addition to that, the increase in diffusion of knowledge, I believe is the wording.

Jim Grossman

There is no versus in this document. We are not trying to say something is better than something else. Nor are we saying that everybody should do the sorts of things that we're saying ought to be considered scholarship. We're not adding anything. We are simply saying there are many ways to be a historian, and many ways to do historical scholarship.

Daniel Story

Yeah. No, I like that. The document says that you're not recommending creating a universe of additional expectations or requirements. So the idea is not that one person would eat the whole pie themselves.

Jim Grossman

That's right. And when you asked before about what concerns have been raised, that was definitely one of the concerns that was raised, which is are we about to set the bar even higher by creating new expectations? And the answer is no, we are not creating new expectations. We're creating new possibilities.

Daniel Story

As we're talking now. The guidelines have been out in the world for almost two months, I think. What kind of reaction has been coming your way? What are people saying to you, or around these guidelines?

Jim Grossman

We've already held one webinar for our department chairs to talk about how this can be implemented, how this can be helpful to them, how the AHA can be helpful to them. And there were about 25 department chairs present, and they unanimously were pleased that we had done this. Many were concerned about how they would be able to implement it. It's already difficult to get peer reviewers, and so to get peer reviewers who could do post hoc peer review on these different kinds of work obviously is a challenge. But our department chairs that we've heard from thus far have been quite enthusiastic about this, in part because they have members of their departments that want to do this work, or have been doing this work, and want to receive, quote, professional credit for it. So it helped them help their colleagues. And the social media response has been quite positive. Whenever you do something meaningful and important, you're going to get criticism for not doing enough. And you're going to get criticism for pushing too far too fast, ironically. So we've gotten very little bits of that from both sides. But on the whole, the reaction has been very positive to this.

Daniel Story

I'm glad to hear that. I'm glad to see the AHA taking this step. And no doubt it will be an ongoing, unfolding process to actually see these principles played out in institutions.

Jim Grossman

Yes, I mean, a lot of this is because it's new. People will find out that some things work, some things don't. Some parts of this may be more difficult. And that's okay. If we say, well, we're not going to do it, because it's too hard, then we're not going to do anything very interesting.

Daniel Story

I like that. Are there any questions that I haven't asked that you think would be important things to touch on or bring up or emphasize?

Jim Grossman

I think it's important to emphasize that what we're trying to do is to encourage historians, whatever kinds of work they do, whatever field they're in, to think more broadly about audience, and to encourage their employers, to enable them, encourage them, incentivize them, to think more broadly about audience. The more we think broadly about audience, the more influence we can have on public culture, public policy. We also at the same time we're doing this, and it's not directly related, but at the same time, we're also establishing a new award for work in encouraging public historical literacy. And the goal here, in some ways, it's very similar. That part of the work of historians is to make our publics more literate historically. We think of mathematical literacy, we think of quantitative literacy, we think of literacy. Well, the AHA is thinking about historical literacy. And if we want to increase the level of historical literacy in the general public and among policy decision makers, then we need to work harder at speaking to those people. And I think the other thing is that we can do it. One of the things that makes history different from say STEM disciplines is that in STEM disciplines what matters is what you do in the lab, quality of work you do in the lab. The ability to communicate the knowledge that you're acquiring as a scientist is not as important as the ability to communicate what we learn as historians. And that's not a plus or a minus, a superior inferior. That's just the difference in disciplines. And we don't need, we shouldn't need, other people to translate what we do to broad audiences. We can do it ourselves. As you do. That's what you do.

Daniel Story

Yeah, no, I think it's great. You know, I like your point too, the point of the guidelines that, and you've emphasized it, that if we don't take our own work seriously, how should we expect others to take it seriously. And it seems like that angles into the crisis and humanities funding

in ways as well that, you know, if we don't make the case, and make it convincingly that we are not only a part, but an indispensable part of the academic enterprise, and in fact of our, our society, our public culture, it's going to be continuing to be hard to make traction in those areas.

Jim Grossman

That's right. There's no reason why we should not have to make the case for our importance. Everybody has to make that case. And we need to be able to do it. And we need to be able to make doing it part of what a historian learns, as they become a historian. So advocacy for the discipline, again, in certain ways, certain types of advocacy for the discipline, perhaps, might be considered scholarship. And perhaps it would be different at different kinds of institutions. We don't tell any institution what to do. But in some cases, there ought to be ways in which certain types of advocacy for what we do as historians, in public settings can be a scholarly activity depends on the content. So this is motivated, in part by our recognition that we ought to have more public influence than we do. But we can't have an influence unless we honor and respect our own work. That what we do in public is scholarship.

Daniel Story

Jim, I really appreciate being able to talk with you about these things.

Jim Grossman

And if there's anything else you want to follow up on, just let me know. Happy to do it.

Daniel Story

That was AHA executive director, Jim Grossman, on the AHA's recent "Guidelines for Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship." Up next, Mark Bradley talks with the chair of the committee that composed the guidelines, University of Michigan historian Rita Chin.

Mark Bradley

Rita, I wonder if we could kind of step back a little bit and talk about what was motivating this project for the AHA, and as you came into it, the kinds of things that you were hoping to see as the guidelines were put together.

Rita Chin

Well, I think if we took a step back, we would think about the ways in which more and more of our colleagues have been interested in pursuing projects that are more explicitly publicly engaged, and finding ways to make their scholarship accessible and available and relevant to broader publics. That's certainly part of the context for why there was a push to rethink or

broaden the definition of historical scholarship. But then, I think, also a sense that the kind of narrow definition of a single authored monograph was perhaps a little outdated. Or, you know, I hesitate a little bit to say this, but you know, like insisting on this model of the single authored monograph was a model that was really kind of from the most elite institutions down, right, and sort of held the entire profession to the standard that was really not realistic given the multiple ways that professional historians pursue their careers, right. So various kinds of academic institutions, public institutions (like museums), and libraries and archives, there are professional historians in all of those contexts, and not all of them are really able or even charged with writing single author monographs, but that doesn't mean that they aren't producing really important, robust, serious historical scholarship. And so I think part of the idea was to be a little bit more honest about how the profession works and where professional historians make their livings and the kinds of work that they do that are, in fact, worthy of the kind of imprimatur of scholarship. So I think that that was also part of the context.

Mark Bradley

The AHA had kind of moved a little bit in this direction several years ago around digital history and in sort of offering a set of guidelines and ways to think about how digital projects might have a kind of coequality with a monograph. Was that kind of foundational work helpful in thinking about an approach to what is a much broader statement about the nature of historical scholarship today?

Rita Chin

Absolutely. I mean, I think that the folks who worked on the digital history guidelines were central in sort of thinking through how one would evaluate that kind of work that was in a completely new medium. And that was very helpful for us, because we were thinking about broadening, yes, medium, but also other kinds of forms. So some of the forms that have been listed in the statement or in the guidelines are things like op eds, or testimony before Congress, but also things like synthetic books, right, books that are more synthesis than original archival research. And so I think that that kind of insight around the quality of historical scholarship being relatively stable was really important for us, because I don't think that we're changing the the kind of idea about how scholarship is evaluated right, in terms of the content. It's really the form. And then I think, what we also address, but the digital guidelines did as well, was impact, right? And the the question of impact, was something that we considered quite a bit.

Mark Bradley

Yeah. I guess one thing, I wonder, is kind of your thoughts on what is also a product of this, which is a kind of hybridity, you know, that people are simultaneously writing a monograph,

they may be doing an exhibition, they may be doing a digital project, you know, that, that all these elements, increasingly, particularly, I think, for younger scholars, come together in all kinds of interesting, sometimes unstable, but often very generative sorts of ways. But just in terms of a kind of intellectual trajectory of the field, do you see the kind of silos coming down? And that, you know, the difference between the monograph person and the exhibition person starts to dissolve, at least for some scholars?

Rita Chin

Well, if we were speaking, honestly, I'd say that the fact that we still assume that every history PhD is going to write a dissertation with a longform argument and deep archival research means that the basis for a single authored monograph is still there. Right. And so I think you're right, that what we're seeing is that people are experimenting with different forms to reach different kinds of audiences, or to do more publicly engaged work, but that often those things sit alongside what you know, they're working on as a single authored monograph. Right? I mean, the thing that I think is a little bit, not dangerous, but I guess I would want to be a little cautious of, is that—and we say this quite explicitly in the guidelines—the idea is not that everybody has to do more and more and more, right. And so we are, as you know, thinking, you know, as representatives of the AHA, not trying to say, Now, everybody has to write a single author monograph, and write op eds, and do a digital exhibition, and, and, and, right, but I do think that, especially among younger scholars, there's a real interest in this kind of experimentation, and thinking about different forms for different kinds of audiences, and for different kinds of purposes. And that I think, is all to the good, right? Because what's very clear is that history is at the center of public cultural debate at the moment in our country. And we want to be part of that, right? We don't want to let other people define the terms of what is historical knowledge and memory in our culture and society. And so we absolutely have to be involved. And I don't think that we can do that entirely through single authored monographs.

Mark Bradley

I mean, the journal becomes a kind of interesting space for thinking this out. Because, you know, as you know, we've always done articles. And we've always reviewed books, right? So the classic things that you know historians do are there. And now we've created this AHR History Lab, which is a kind of open space where people can do a variety of different projects, many of which fall under the kinds of guidelines that the AHA has just passed in rethinking definitions of scholarship. But I find it interesting to talk to different constituencies, you know, within our discipline about what the relationship between History Lab and the rest of the journal looks like. And it's like, in microcosm, you kind of have the conversation that you were just saying. So some people will say to me, Well, that's great, you know, that there's this

alternative space, but the articles will still be the articles, right? And other people will say, Well, okay, you've got these spaces, but do you think about these spaces as ones that, again, would kind of cross pollinate? Or, you know, do you want the separation? And I think, you know, my answer to that is if the forms could move back and forth, and if the forms could help us rethink what an article is, that would be great. But it's just interesting to see. And I know, this was also part of the conversation that you all had on the committee. Guidelines are guidelines. And the guidelines, as I understand them, are to help individual departments talk this out, amongst, you know, their colleagues where opinions vary, just as they have varied as I've been talking to people about the History Lab, so that in local spaces, people are finding a way to work this through that's satisfying and that people can collectively support.

Rita Chin

Yeah, I think that's right. I mean, I think we knew, or tried to keep at the forefront of our minds, the fact that, you know, these guidelines will be worked out differently in different institutions in different departments in different contexts, right. So archivists and public historians, people who work in museums, can use the guidelines as a kind of productive way to then catalyze their own discussion about how they want to define scholarship or historical production within their context. And I think we were just trying to sort of say, there are more ways to do professional history than just the single authored monograph. And that that is actually a good thing, and not something that we should be sort of trying to batten down the hatches around.

Mark Bradley

What do you think this all means for graduate training? You know, with doctoral students, how much room do students have to start messing around with what the thesis project looks like? Or do these projects probably necessarily need to remain adjacent for now? And even if they do, how does one think about training, you know, in what is a really different kind of climate?

Rita Chin

Yeah, I mean, at the University of Michigan anyway, you know, we've tried to do some more experimentation around a course that we actually call History Lab, that really is about group projects that students are doing together, and often in dialogue with a kind of external collaborator. And so, you know, we aren't giving up on things like seminar papers, you know, research papers, where, you know, students are expected to use archival sources and sort of engage with historiography. I mean, that is certainly still very much at the center of how we train. But we also have this other space where students can do this kind of collaborative research work, where they're really in the trenches with faculty, thinking about how you define a research question, how you go from a bigger topic to a narrower topic, how you might sort of

produce once you sort of pull your your sources and begin to interpret them. And part of it is really teaching students how to do that together in group conversation. But once you do that, that you might be writing for, you know, in our case, the Experiencing History website of the US Holocaust Museum that has primary source collections, right. And that's a very different form of producing historical scholarship than a, you know, seminar paper. So, you know, we have given students the opportunity to experiment. I mean, I guess I would say that, you know, what we're really talking about, there's the training of graduate students. There's also what assistant and young professors have the opportunity to do. And then there's the kind of work that you're sort of freer to do once you get tenure, and then certainly once you become a full professor. And so I think, you know, there are in the profession, over many, many years, there have been people, especially at the full level who do start experimenting more, right? Who become kind of public figures who write op eds. And you know, that's partially about stature and having a reputation. But that's also about sort of thinking differently about how one kind of disseminates their scholarship. That has been less open, traditionally, I think, to mid career, and certainly younger scholars, and part of what we're trying to suggest is that those kinds of opportunities ought to be on the table for younger scholars as well. Of course, what that requires is a change in kind of academic evaluation, not so much in terms of the profession, though that too, of course, but you know, institutions and how they're evaluating the standard for tenure and promotion.

Mark Bradley

In that way I've been sitting in on some of the ACLS is conversations about public facing work in the humanities more broadly. And they had, I think it was a Luce Fellowship, maybe a Mellon Fellowship, for a couple of years. And there were five institutions that they were working with. And so I was sitting in on some of the sort of final conversations, and they were five different institutions, you know. There were R1s and R2s, liberal arts colleges, smaller regional. So they were doing, you know, a kind of mix. And it was interesting that across those very different institutions that they were reporting that when they talked to provosts and deans about doing this kind of work, and how it would figure for evaluation purposes, the deans said, that's great, no problem at all. And then when they went back into departments, and these were chairs who were on the call, they said, you know, colleagues aren't necessarily there yet. Right. So I think one interesting result of this will be how these conversations move forward. Has there been some thought in sort of helping people think about not outcomes of conversations but facilitating conversations, given that people are going to come into the room, probably not like the chairs or the provosts or the deans are being described, but all over the map. And you know, how you have a productive conversation that lands in a new place that people are comfortable with that that just seems from a facilitation standpoint, complicated, I think.

Rita Chin

I agree. And, you know, I think it's an interesting idea, Mark, to think about the role that the AHA could play as a facilitator of those kinds of conversations, because certain colleagues in departments have been thinking about these issues for quite a while, right. So it's not as if those conversations haven't happened, at least in casual contexts, right. But what's difficult is that when there's already a sense of where the dividing lines are, and then you try to have a more formal conversation, say in the context of a department meeting, sometimes those conversations don't go that well. And they can be very difficult conversations. And so you know, it'd be an interesting thing to have someone who's a little bit askew of those conversations, right, somebody who is not sort of invested in the department itself, who could at least ask provocative questions that might be answered slightly differently, because the people in the room would be slightly different. It's an interesting thing to think about.

Mark Bradley

You know, I mean, one of the metrics by which we do get measured on in terms of impact is the students who are coming to our classes, who's majoring, that kind of thing. That's not the only metric, but it's certainly an important internal institutional one. And on the whole, I don't know where Michigan's at with this, but, you know, nationally, majors are pretty much flat or declining, and enrollments...it's a complicated picture about, you know, what that looks like, for a variety of reasons. But you wonder if a kind of fulsome embrace of this more capacious way of thinking about historical scholarship is one answer to how we're rethinking ourselves in an environment where people, even kind of sympathetic people, aren't so sure about what the humanities is about for them?

Rita Chin

Oh, that's a really interesting point. Because, you know, at Michigan majors, yes, have declined, but we also tend to pull large numbers of undergraduates because of topical interest, right. So students are interested in particular topics and they will take those classes, irrespective of what major they happen to be declaring. But we've also done some experimentation around kind of the History Lab model at the undergraduate level, and those classes are hugely popular. They're also much more diverse than classes that are, you know, sort of traditional lecture and discussion classes. The kind of hands on work around, especially, projects that are understood to have social impact are very, very popular and huge draws among our undergraduates. And so I think you might be onto something there.

Mark Bradley

One last question I wanted to ask, which kind of takes it back to a sort of higher, more conceptual plane. One of the interesting things that was said after the guidelines were passed was people talking about the production of new knowledge and people talking about the dissemination of knowledge. And that part of what the guidelines enabled was that dissemination of knowledge had an equivalence in significance and importance to new knowledge. And that all made sense to me, but I thought to myself, like, that suggests that there is an obvious line, right, you know, about what's new, and what's, like you had said earlier on, you know, if you were writing a book that was more synthetic, that that could be considered a contribution. It just, it's like when the rubber hits the road, you know, like, op ed. okay, that would seem like diffusion. But I don't know, somebody might want to make a new knowledge argument. But it does seem to me that there's a kind of tension between the new knowledge diffusion thing, and how this gets worked out in practice, because in a sense, many people's comfort zone is the notion about creating new knowledge rather than simply passing it along, you know.

Rita Chin

Yeah, no, I mean, I hear you. And I do think that there is a tension there. I mean, I'm a firm believer in the possibility of synthesis producing new knowledge, right, that seeking large amounts of information and seeing new patterns, right, and thereby kind of understanding the whole quite differently is a form of new knowledge, even if you aren't in the archive discovering new documents or reading documents differently. And so, you know, part of it is how we define what's new, right? And is that about being the first person to set eyes on a set of documents? Right? I mean, that doesn't happen very often anymore. Right. And so that standard, I mean, I think has sort of gone by the wayside. But I do think that, you know, thinking about what is new and how we understand newness and innovation, could use a little bit of a broadening. And I think that's part of what we were trying to say. Part of it, I think, is that there's this kind of, in terms of the relationship between new knowledge and dissemination, that tension, there's a way in which it gets framed as a zero sum, right? Either you are producing new knowledge, or you are focused on dissemination. And I think what we were just trying to say is, we haven't paid much attention to dissemination. And that should count, at least partially as well, right, that if you write a book that only five people read, that might not be as important, right, as writing a synthetic book that opens up the field or a set of questions for a much broader audience. Right. And so to say that, because it's single authored and a monograph, so deeply researched in the archives, that that is, by definition, scholarship, that counts. And the other that is more synthetic, but has a broader impact doesn't, would seem to be kind of wrongheaded. And so I think that's kind of what we were trying to get at by saying, we haven't

really taken into consideration the question of dissemination. And we would do well to at least make that one of the elements in our mode of evaluation.

Mark Bradley

That makes sense. Thank you. You know, I think one of the great parts about this process was just the intellectual engagement that people were bringing to the table. So the guidelines aren't just, you know, like 1, 2, 3, 4, but really trying to kind of get inside the issues and to think out the larger implications of the issues and also not necessarily to prescribe, but to set up an agenda for conversations that follow, and you led that process forward in just a beautiful way. So thank you.

Rita Chin

Well, thank you. I mean, it was, you know, a real pleasure to be a part of those conversations. They were intense conversations. We didn't all agree. And so it was really a kind of rigorous and engaging process that was, I think, you know, pretty meaningful for the people who participated. And, you know, thanks for inviting me to talk with you. And, you know, let's hope that this makes a difference in terms of how we as a field, as a discipline, think about what counts.

Mark Bradley

Yeah, well, maybe we get together five years from now and see where we're at.

Rita Chin

That would be an interesting conversation.

Mark Bradley

Thanks again, Rita.

Rita Chin

Thanks.

Daniel Story

That was Mark Bradley in conversation with the guidelines committee chair Rita Chin. Earlier we heard from AHA executive director Jim Grossman. You can read the full text of the guidelines at historians.org/definitions. *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 bonus episode was produced by me,

Daniel Story with audio engineering support from Myles Rider Alexis. Find out more about this and other episodes at americanhistoricalreview.org. That's it for now. See you next time.