*The newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*

# PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY

Volume 63: 3
May 2025

# AHA Awards

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# FEATURES




## ON THE COVER

For some of us, our love of history starts close to home. Photographs from generations past, treasured heirlooms passed down from parent to child, stories told so often they become legend—such objects and experiences can often be our first encounter with the past. So why not use that connection with undergraduate students? Teaching historical methods using family history and genealogical research, as Mary Ann Mahony shares in this issue, helps students connect their ancestors' individual experiences to broader historical contexts and challenges many of the assumptions they bring with them to class.

*Image: John R. Staples/Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*

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LAURA ANSLEY

# SPEAK UP

*Op-Ed Writing as Activism*

It's been a tough winter and spring here in the DC area. The AHA staff has seen firsthand the human impact of new federal policies and cuts, as family, friends, and neighbors who work for the federal government have lost jobs or lived with uncertainty since January. At work, we are constantly monitoring and responding to the federal government policies and cuts as they impact historical work. Agencies that support and are responsible for history research and education—including the National Archives and Records Administration, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Park Service, and the Departments of Education and Defense—are among the many under threat. Many of our members are feeling these pains acutely, and many are wondering how best to respond to these unprecedented events.

One arena you might consider is the op-ed pages. I have organized op-ed workshops at the last three AHA annual meetings that advise historians on how to pitch and write op-eds that use their deep knowledge of the past to inform the public. And more than ever, we need smart, knowledgeable, skilled communicators to explain what is happening at the federal, state, and local levels. There are risks that you should consider. Not everyone may feel they have the security, depending on factors including citizenship or employment status, to speak out in this format. But if you do, here are a few tips on how to get started:

First, think local. Many writers dream of seeing their byline in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or *The New Yorker*, but that's unlikely on your first attempt. Publishing in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, *The Des Moines Register*, or *The Tennessean* will reach not just your neighbors but your state and federal representatives. Plus, local credentials matter. If you are pitching *The Columbus Dispatch* as a professor at Ohio State University, they might pay attention.

Second, think broadly. Historians often conceptualize our historical expertise quite narrowly, typically on a specific research topic. But if you can teach a class on a subject, you can write an op-ed on it. If you teach the history of the early republic, for instance, you understand more about the Bill of Rights than the average American. Your modern Latin American survey course makes you more of an expert on immigration from Central America than most newspaper readers. If you feel comfortable speaking on a topic to a classroom of high schoolers or undergraduates, or to a group of museum visitors, you should be able to write about it for the public.

Third, think quickly. Many historians start writing for the public when they feel an imperative to explain current events and issues directly related to their life's work. When wars broke out in Ukraine and Gaza, when *Dobbs* struck down *Roe v. Wade*, when the COVID-19 pandemic started—historians of eastern Europe and the Middle East, abortion, medicine, and other topics helped the public understand what was happening around us. This kind of writing requires you to be nimble, especially when unanticipated events happen. But historians are also weighing in on events that are recurring flash points in history, such as the history of tariffs, the emergence and growth of the American welfare state, global migrations, vaccines, and white supremacy. Start thinking about what your argument will be so that you can pitch quickly when that topic becomes the news du jour.

If this is new to you, there are resources available. "Op-Ed Writing for Historians," a recording of a 2023 workshop on the AHA's YouTube, would be a good starting point. Put the AHA's fourth annual op-ed workshop on your annual meeting schedule in Chicago next January. Most importantly, read good public writing—from both journalists and your fellow historians—to learn about the structure and conventions of an op-ed. And when you're ready, start writing. Your voice can make a difference.

*Laura Ansley is senior managing editor at the AHA.*

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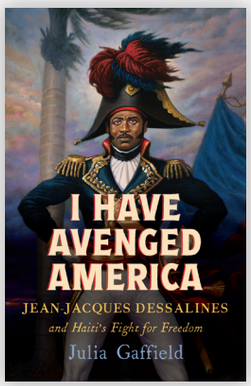


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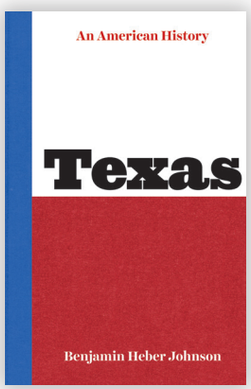


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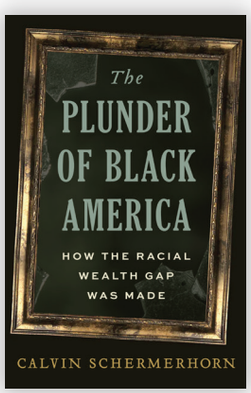


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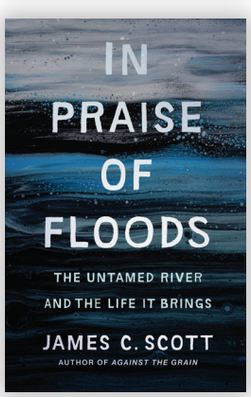


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# AHA STATEMENTS RESPONDING TO FEDERAL ACTIVITIES

## AHA–OAH Joint Statement on Federal Censorship of American History

The American Historical Association (AHA) and the Organization of American Historians (OAH) condemn recent efforts to censor historical content on federal government websites, at many public museums, and across a wide swath of government resources that include essential data. New policies that purge words, phrases, and content that some officials deem suspect on ideological grounds constitute a systemic campaign to distort, manipulate, and erase significant parts of the historical record. Recent directives insidiously prioritize narrow ideology over historical research, historical accuracy, and the actual experiences of Americans.

As the institution chartered by the US Congress for "the promotion of historical studies" and "in the interest of American history, and of history in America," the American Historical Association must speak out when the nation's leadership wreaks havoc with that history. So, too, must the OAH, as the organization committed to promoting "excellence in the scholarship, teaching, and presentation of American history." It is bad enough to forget the past; it is even worse to intentionally deny the public access to what we remember, have documented, and have expended public resources to disseminate.

At this writing, the full range of historical distortions and deletions is yet to be discerned. Federal entities and institutions subject to federal oversight and funding are hastily implementing revisions to their resources in an attempt to comply with the "Dear Colleague" letter issued by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and executive orders such as "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government." These changes range from scrubbing words and acronyms from websites to papering over interpretive panels in museums. Some alterations, such as those related to topics like the Tuskegee Airmen and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, have been hurriedly reversed in response to public outcry. Others remain. The scrubbing of words and acronyms from the Stonewall National Monument web page, for instance, distorts the site's history by denying the roles of transgender and queer people in movements for rights and liberation. This distortion of history renders the past unrecognizable to the people who lived it and useless to those who seek to learn from the past.

It is bad enough to forget the past; it is even worse to intentionally deny the public access to what we remember, have documented, and have expended public resources to disseminate.

It remains unclear whether federal agencies are preserving the original versions of these materials for future reference or research. Articles written by historians for the National Park Service, for example, have been altered, and in some instances deleted, because they examine history with references to gender or sexuality. These revisions were made without the authors' knowledge or consent, and without public acknowledgment that the original articles had been revised. The AHA's *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* is clear: "Honoring the historical record also means leaving a clear trail for subsequent historians to follow. Any changes to a primary source or published secondary work, whether digital or print, should be noted."

Words matter. Precision matters. Context matters. Expertise matters. Democracy matters. We can neither deny what happened nor invent things that did not happen. Recent executive orders and other federal directives alter the public record in ways that are contrary to historical evidence. They result in deceitful narratives of the past that violate the professional

standards of our discipline. When government entities, or scholars themselves, censor the use of particular words, they in effect censor historical evidence. Censorship and distortion erase people and institutions from history.

The AHA's *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* makes clear that historians can neither misrepresent their sources nor omit evidence because it "runs counter" to their interpretations. The OAH and AHA condemn the rejection of these professional standards. Classifying collective historical scholarship as "toxic indoctrination" or "discriminatory equity ideology" dismisses the knowledge generated by the deep research of generations of historians. It violates the training, expertise, and purposes of historians as well as their responsibility to public audiences.

Our professional ethics require that "all historians believe in honoring the integrity of the historical record." We expect our nation's leadership to adhere to this same basic standard, and we will continue to monitor, protest, and place in the historical record any censorship of American historical facts.

*Approved by the AHA Council on March 13, 2025.*

## AHA Statement Condemning Indiscriminate Cuts to the Federal Government

Federal agencies—and the historians who staff them—preserve, record, and interpret the history of the United States, serving the public and supporting the work of policymakers. The American Historical Association (AHA) condemns the dismantling of federal departments and agencies through the indiscriminate termination of federal employees and elimination of programs, including historical offices.

Nearly every unit of the federal government depends on the work of historians who provide resources essential to research and education. They document, analyze, and share histories of war, military service, diplomacy, and nearly every aspect of domestic policy. However, they are now on the front lines of an unprecedented assault that threatens to undermine the basic functions of government, from national security to the national park system, the environment to economic development, transportation and housing to education—nearly every aspect of civic life, from the highly visible to the quietly essential.

The list of agencies affected by sweeping executive orders and cuts applied by the Department of Government Efficiency continues to grow. The National Archives and Records Administration, including the National Historical Publications and Records Commission; the Institute of Museum and Library Services; the National Park Service; and the Department of Defense—these and many other vital agencies employ and support the work of historians and interpret history for the public. Our nation's museums and libraries provide a constructive gateway for the public to engage with the past; yet the Institute for Museum and Library Services is now targeted for dismantling.

Consider, for example, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Archivists and historians work with the three branches of government and their agencies to identify, preserve, and ensure the accessibility of materials subject to the Federal Records Act and the Presidential Records Act. That work ensures current and future access to our nation's records for purposes including historical research and genealogy, consultation by federal agencies and policymakers, and records requests from military veterans and their families applying for crucial benefits. Members of NARA's senior staff, who possess decades of institutional knowledge, have been terminated or forced to resign—along with dozens of recently hired employees—while budget uncertainty has required canceling an application cycle for projects that ensure online public discovery of historical records.

Nearly every unit of the federal government depends on the work of historians who provide resources essential to research and education.

The intended demise of the Department of Education provides another alarming example. Established by Congress, this agency works to ensure equal access to learning opportunities, collects and shares essential data on the nation's schools, distributes financial aid, and provides critical funding, guidelines, and research. Shuttering its National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) will eliminate data collection and research that guide educational policy and are essential to future scholarship in the history of education. Educators, policymakers, and parents rely on NCES data to measure student learning, track changes over time, and find places for improvement in public education. Students in fields that require deep knowledge of global challenges—including

history, business, and national security—benefit from the Title VI programs and Fulbright-Hays grants now under threat.

Closing federal history offices, rolling back protections granted by the Freedom of Information Act, firing archivists, and dismantling departments responsible for education, the humanities, arts, and sciences will render it impossible for Americans to learn about and from the past. Historians and researchers from all fields will lack the data—from the military, the US Census, and innumerable other sources—essential to providing a full picture of US history. Shuttering history and archival offices will foreclose the benefits of learning from the past to help inform the future.

> A scorched-earth approach to the federal bureaucracy will leave our nation without the records and accumulated knowledge to make well-informed decisions.

Good policy requires good history. We recognize that the AHA's singular focus on history describes only a portion of the chaos that ensues when those entrusted with our nation's institutions assume a mandate to move fast and break things. Chartered by Congress in 1889 "to sustain and enhance the work of historians," the American Historical Association recognizes that haphazard disruptions to federal services impede historical research, undercut historic preservation, and interfere with history education. A scorched-earth approach to the federal bureaucracy will leave our nation without the records and accumulated knowledge to make well-informed decisions. That historical foundation is essential to the nation's health and prosperity.

*Approved by the AHA Council on March 20, 2025.*

## AHA Statement Defending the Smithsonian

The Executive Order "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," issued on March 27 by the White House, egregiously misrepresents the work of the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian is among the premier research institutions in the world, widely known for the integrity of its scholarship, which is careful and based on historical and scientific evidence. The Institution ardently pursues the purpose for which it was established more than 175 years ago: "the increase and diffusion of knowledge." The accusation in the White House fact sheet accompanying the executive order claims that Smithsonian museums are displaying "improper, divisive, or anti-American ideology." This is simply untrue; it misrepresents the work of those museums and the public's engagement with their collections and exhibits. It also completely misconstrues the nature of historical work.

> No person, no nation is perfect, and we should all learn from our imperfections.

Historians explore the past to understand how our nation has evolved. We draw on a wide range of sources, which helps us to understand history from different angles of vision. Our goal is neither criticism nor celebration; it is to understand—to increase our knowledge of—the past in ways that can help Americans to shape the future.

The stories that have shaped our past include not only elements that make us proud but also aspects that make us acutely aware of tragedies in our nation's history. No person, no nation, is perfect, and we should all—as individuals and as nations—learn from our imperfections.

The Smithsonian's museums collect and preserve the past of all Americans and encompass the entirety of our nation's history. Visitors explore exhibitions and collections in which they can find themselves, their families, their communities, and their nation represented. They encounter both our achievements and the painful moments of our rich and complicated past.

Patriotic history celebrates our nation's many great achievements. It also helps us grapple with the less grand and more painful parts of our history. Both are part of a shared past that is fundamentally American. We learn from the past to inform how we can best shape our future. By providing a history with the integrity necessary to enable all Americans to be all they can possibly be, the Smithsonian is fulfilling its duty to all of us.

*Approved by the AHA Council on March 31, 2025.*

## AHA Statement Defending the National Endowment for the Humanities and American Public Culture

The American Historical Association condemns the evisceration of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

On April 3, 2025, the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), using a nongovernmental microsoft.com email address, notified hundreds of recipients that grants awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) have been terminated. These grantees include state humanities councils, museums, teachers, researchers, and organizations that serve the public, including the American Historical Association. Later that night, letters were sent from a DOGE microsoft.com email address notifying roughly 75 percent of NEH staff that they have been placed on administrative leave. This frontal attack on the nation's public culture is unpatriotic, anti-American, and unjustified.

> The NEH nourishes our democracy through research, education, preservation, institutional capacity building, and public programming for the benefit of the American people.

The NEH and the grants it administers nourish our democracy through research, education, preservation, institutional capacity building, and public programming in the humanities for the benefit of the American people. These grants support work ranging from professional development workshops for teachers to the preservation of historic sites, research initiatives, and a wide array of programs for politically and demographically diverse audiences. Despite these significant contributions to public culture, DOGE justifies the termination of these programs by declaring their destruction to be "an urgent priority for the administration."

The grant termination notices refer to a reallocation of funds to "a new direction in furtherance of the President's agenda." The specific reallocations remain unknown, but that agenda, as several executive orders have made clear, prioritizes narrow political ideology over historical research, historical accuracy, and the actual historical experiences of Americans.

The NEH was established in 1965 by an act of Congress. The legislation affirmed that "the arts and the humanities belong to all the people of the United States." The AHA recognizes that the chair of the NEH always has been a political appointment made by the president. The overall agency and its grant-making programs, however, include a wide range of topics, perspectives, and approaches. The agency was never intended to be, nor has it been, focused solely on a single president's narrow—and in this case, deeply ideological—agenda.

Under the guise of "safeguarding" the federal government, DOGE has terminated grants and diminished staffing to a level that renders it impossible for the agency to perform its mission responsibly and with integrity. These actions imperil both the education of the American public and the preservation of our history.

*Approved by the AHA Council on April 4, 2025.*

*For full lists of signatories, please see the online versions of these statements.*

BEN VINSON III

# FABULOUS MOMENTS

*In Conversation with Nancy Toff*

Continuing my conversations with AHA members, I was delighted to speak with Nancy Toff for my latest interview. For 33 years, she has been a visionary force of Oxford University Press's Academic Division as vice president and executive editor, acquiring and editing all varieties of history books ranging from monographs to reference and trade books. Toff is responsible for several book series, including the Very Short Introductions (on all subjects), Oxford History Handbooks, the New Oxford World History, the Oxford Oral History Series, and the Oxford Series on History and Archives. She was previously editorial director of young adult reference and trade reference at Oxford, and before that, she was vice president and editor in chief at Chelsea House Publishers. She has also worked at Grove Dictionaries of Music, Time-Life Books, and Silver Burdett Press.

Our conversation encompassed her celebrated career, technology's impacts on our discipline, and what she believes the future of history will look like as a result.

**What inspired you to take this particular career path?**

I think they call publishing the accidental profession, and that is certainly true for me. I wrote my undergraduate thesis at Harvard University on the history of the flute; it was a little longer than it was supposed to be, but they told me to keep writing. Then I got it done, and they said I should publish it as a book.

I needed to get back to DC because the collection that I worked on was in the Library of Congress, and by pure luck, Time-Life Books was moving there right at the right time. I got a job there as a researcher, a fantastic job in every way. I was trained in how to do everything. I wrote two books while I was there, and I traveled all over the country to do research. I went to all kinds of wonderful archives in small towns that I probably will never get to visit again.

When I returned to New York, I began working for the Grove Dictionary of Music, and one thing just led to another, which led me to Oxford. You know you've died and gone to heaven when you come to Oxford and set up a department. When that department was shut down by our friends in the UK, I moved to the academic trade department and brought some of my projects with me while developing many others.

I've had the best of many worlds, but did I plan it that way? No, of course not.

**What have been the most interesting moments of your career?**

I don't know if they're interesting moments, but maybe fabulous would be better. One was a dinner with John Hope Franklin and his co-author Loren Schweninger in Toronto after the release of *Runaway Slaves*—that was just a total treat. Another was meeting with Sandra Day O'Connor in her chambers to convince her to let us do a young adult biography of her. One of my colleagues had grown up on the ranch next door to her, so we managed to get this interview and talked with her for about an hour. As we left her chambers, she pointed out the window toward Alice Paul's house and said, "Don't you think it's appropriate that the first woman Supreme Court justice looks out on Alice Paul's house?" As we left, I said to my colleague, "Oh boy, I don't ever want to do an oral argument in front of her!" He reminded me that I just had, and we got the project through.

**From a publishing perspective, what do you think is the role of technology in the history discipline, especially as it relates to the dissemination and production of history?**

Let's start with the production. Technology has certainly simplified and sped up the writing process. We used to have to type and retype, and it was much harder to make corrections. (The invention of the electronic footnote is god's gift to history, because we've all miscounted our footnotes when typing them manually.) But more importantly, these innovations give us a lot more flexibility. New editions used to be so


Nancy Toff representing Oxford University Press at the 2022 Society for Military History conference.

expensive, and you would have to take something out to put something in—now that's just not an issue. The cost of illustrations has come down: What used to cost $75 when I started at Oxford is now $4 or $6, because we're starting with digital materials. It's easier to edit. I was one of the very early converts to electronic editing, and I totally love it. But it's not all positive. It makes writers sloppy. It sets up expectations that we can do things faster than we can, because the intellectual work still takes just as much time.

The most important change probably is the ease of access to sources. As more materials are digitized, I don't think it will negate the need to go to the archives. Nothing substitutes for a live archivist and other people in the reading room who know their way around that archive, see what you're working on, and point you in the right direction. But digitization saves on travel, enables smaller archives to get their stuff out there, and allows for historians to find sources they would not otherwise be able to.

Digitization also leads to great public history opportunities, like the Citizen Archivist project at the National Archives, where anybody can go online to help transcribe documents and write metadata. And then there are the educational opportunities, because students can work with primary sources very easily and get excited about doing history.

All these things are two-edged swords, with great potential but also downsides and costs. Digital availability is great, but on the other hand, it skews the economic equation. People forget that making something electronic does not mean it's free. The engineering work that makes digitization possible is expensive. So there are huge opportunities but also cautions. I'm a realist—you're not going to see any rose-colored glasses on me.

**You've seen a lot of different history texts over time. How is the discipline changing? What are some of the grand challenges that you see ahead?**

I think the biggest change has been that people are not doing the big picture anymore. We don't have as many individuals who can look at huge spans of history with incredible erudition. Very few people are brave enough to tackle those big topics now. Everything is siloed. And it's not that people aren't doing good work in those areas—they're doing great work—but students need that big chronological framework. You must have the chronological skeleton on which you can

then build the flesh and then the clothing and the jewelry and all that to make the more textured picture. Very few people want to do that today. For example, for the Very Short Introductions series, it was very hard to find somebody to write American history in 35,000 words (Paul Boyer ended up writing it). Over the last 25 or 30 years, people have been scared to take on big topics. You don't have those public intellectuals who can do all of American history anymore. Eric Foner is probably the last survivor of that.

**Why do you think there has been that kind of diminution of that type of history?**

Partly because the academy values the more micro look. Also, bookstore culture has declined: The number of books we sell in trade now is a small fraction of what sold when I started. When I worked for Time-Life, we talked about selling books in the hundreds of thousands, and now we talk about a trade book selling maybe 5,000 copies, if you're lucky, maybe less. That's a big change. Obviously, there are many gradations in between, but the online bookselling culture has changed scholarship and writing.

In some ways, nonfiction writing is less valued today. We don't have the stylists whom we did overall. There are certainly some, but I don't think the academy values writing as much as it should.

**Since you brought up readership, is the public reading less history now?**

They are reading history. Of all the disciplines that Oxford publishes, history and political science probably have the most general readership. They certainly read military history and biography, but they are not reading as much as we probably would like.

There are trends or trendlets that you're going to see over time. Right now, the academy is very busy publishing about slavery. There's some terrific work coming out, but how much is a general reader really going to read? They're going to pick one or two books, probably, and not read more than that. Whereas Lincoln biographies, Martin Luther King Jr. biographies—they will read them forever. It's harder to sell topics like gender studies to a general reader. And we have political considerations now that are certainly going to affect the market. But there are plenty of people who are reading in areas like environmental history and women's history, where there is so much good work. I think we still have the really important opportunity to get history out there.

In fact, it's more important now. As the AHA says, everything has a history. If we think about law right now, law is based on precedent. Precedent, by definition, is history. It's incumbent upon us to get the good history out there, but it also means taking some care with writing and presenting things in a way that is the right length, the right tone, and what people want to read about.

> It's incumbent upon us to get the good history out there, but it also means taking some care with writing.

**In closing, is there anything you're optimistic or concerned about as we continue our practice of history?**

When I thought ahead about this question, I realized the concerns outnumber the positives. I really don't want that to be true, because I love doing this. Politicization, the death of expertise, overspecialization, jargonization—all that stuff concerns me. We can lose the respect of the public if we don't speak plain English. We also have to be careful about the STEM emphasis. We need STEM, but there are opportunities for the humanities and STEM to help each other. Liberal arts education and general knowledge are important.

The economics of the industry are tenuous right now. To every historian, I say: Buy books. Buy your books. Buy your friends' books. If you think it sounds interesting, buy the book.

And temper your expectations of what publishers can do. It still excites us when people come in with a great idea. I've done this for a long time, and I still get excited looking at new proposals. But it is a business, and it does have to pay for itself. Sometimes we have to say no.

I must put in my plug here that people have got to do peer reviews. That's the single biggest challenge we have in history publishing. We need specialists. We're very challenged to do that with fewer and fewer resources, but there's such good work out there and creative thinking about how to think about sources that we've used for a long time. We can think about people who have been neglected and shouldn't be. Those are huge opportunities.

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.* P

*Ben Vinson III is president of the AHA.*

JAMES GROSSMAN

# FIND YOUR SOAPBOX

*A Final Dispatch*

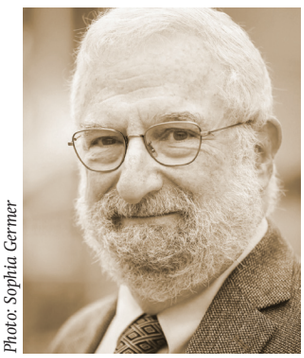

*Photo: Sophia Germer*

Fifteen years ago, I published my first column in *Perspectives on History*, encouraging historians to speak from the nearest soapbox regardless of logistical challenges. The occasion was my first actual soapbox performance as a participant in Chicago's iconic Bughouse Square Debates. The experience was daunting: My naivete about the size of an actual soapbox conspired with the Chicago wind to wreak havoc with my notes (and my dignity).

I write my last column as executive director in a moment when the challenges are political rather than meteorological, and the stakes perilous. In many states, legislatures are seeking to influence history education through prohibitions unprecedented in their scope and intrusiveness. State education agencies are revising curricula in the face of political pressure and in some cases in violation of legally mandated procedures, not to mention the AHA's guidelines. Here in Washington, federal agencies responsible for historical work confront existential threats, as do other structures that make it possible for government to be of the people, by the people, and for the people. What is the role of historians—and the American Historical Association—at such a moment?

When I urged historians in that inaugural column to "take risks. Get out there in public and talk about history and why it matters," I meant intellectual, even professional risks. The AHA had not yet issued its *Guidelines for Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship*. Other than for positions explicitly designated as public history, few colleges and universities awarded professional credit to op-eds, radio appearances, reference books, expert witness testimony, or other historical work targeted at public venues. These were (and still are) usually considered service, not scholarship.

Our perception of our own skills and the work environments to which we're accustomed compounded the risk. Extemporaneous speaking. Writing without professional jargon, without reference to historiography, and in fewer than 750 words; the general guideline for an op-ed is "one idea." Entering policy arenas where the political spectrum differed significantly from the campus cocoon and where it was not immediately obvious why a historian's voice should be heard. By the time I arrived at the AHA, I had already been declared "irrelevant" as an expert witness, conversed on radio call-in shows where the questions ranged from the incomprehensible to borderline offensive, uncomfortably watched a museum director walk out on a meeting I had organized (and learned only later that this meant I was now part of the community), learned to accept grant proposal rejections with aplomb as well as explain to a funder why a project had failed, and realized that I had no idea how to run an efficient meeting. These examples of what happens when a historian ventures off campus into the public arena might be part and parcel of the training and expectations of public historians, but my argument at the time—and subsequently the AHA's argument in broadening the definition of historical scholarship—was that this work should not be sectored off as "public history." We don't all have to do it, but far more of us can and should than was customary in 2010.

> There are many ways of being a historian.

This was a big part of the reason I left an enjoyable and rewarding job at the Newberry Library, a city I loved, and my favorite seats at Comiskey Park for a position at the AHA. Would it be possible to take to a national scale the ethos of the Newberry, where it was considered worthwhile for a historian to write a young adult book, to organize "academic" and "public" historians into a major historical reference project, to pursue just about anything that was academically rigorous and had an audience—be it higher ed faculty, politicians, high school teachers, students of all ages, business executives, or the library's neighbors. I learned at the Newberry that there are many ways of being a historian.

This idea has been a central theme in much of our work over the past 15 years, from the Career Diversity initiative that enlarges the culture and content of PhD programs to broadening the definition of historical scholarship, recruiting advocates for historical thinking in public culture, and reconsidering how we introduce students to our discipline.

That impulse to broaden informs one of the major changes to the AHA's scope of advocacy. One of the many ways to be a historian, after all, is to advocate for the work we do. At one time, "advocacy" took place largely on Capitol Hill, with occasional visits to federal office buildings. Most of that work involved promoting funding for relevant federal agencies and programs, access to documents, and occasional amicus briefs. With some exceptions, the scope of AHA advocacy lay inside the proverbial Beltway and remained substantively narrow relative to the work of our discipline.

But even 15 years ago, we were doing a lot more; we just weren't calling it "advocacy." According to the AHA's Congressional Charter, we exist "for the promotion of historical studies." If we think of our work as the "promotion" of history, a vast swath of AHA activity becomes "advocacy." If we consider the extent to which a particular activity includes historical work and historical thinking, then we generate a variety of ways a historian can be an informed and articulate advocate. (Not surprisingly, this framing resembles the AHA's *Guiding Principles on Taking a Public Stance*.)

The issue here—one I would like to leave our members with as I transition to a life where I will (to quote my friend Randall Miller) "read books and not take notes"—is a distinction between what the AHA can and should do in the current moment and what individuals can do *as historians*.

In both cases, we begin with the premise that everything has a history. The AHA energetically promotes the discipline itself. We provide congressional staff with briefings that offer historical facts, explanations, and context but take no policy or political positions, because we want *all* congressional staffers to think historically and to have basic historical literacy; if we preach at them, only those who share our views will show up. Our legitimacy depends on our neutrality, on our insistence that we are here to provide good history—not to tell listeners what to do when they leave the room.

What we *advocate* therefore is simply the discipline itself. This encompasses all aspects of historians' work, including ensuring access to sources; defending academic freedom and the professional integrity of teachers; obtaining financial and other resources for historical teaching, learning, and research; maintaining ethical standards; and, where consensus exists among professional historians (e.g., slavery was the principal cause of the Civil War; the Holocaust happened), resisting public policy that blatantly abuses the historical record. The AHA's role is to promote history, to protect the integrity and vitality of the discipline, and to defend the rights of historians *as historians*.

> Historians can and should think more broadly about what we might contribute to public culture.

Individual historians, however, can and should think more broadly about what we might contribute to public culture. Contrary to an argument made by literary scholar Stanley Fish at the 2017 AHA annual meeting, historians as individual citizens and scholars have something to contribute to policy discussions at every level. All decisions benefit from an understanding of historical context and from the skill we call "historical thinking." This premise should stimulate historians across the United States to use their skills and knowledge to weigh in on just about any issue. Local newspapers (those still fighting to exist) are hungry for content. In many places, getting onto local radio isn't difficult. When a film with a historical valence comes to town, find a venue to discuss it. Serve on the board of a local historical site or museum. Run for the local school board; most historians are, in one context or another, educators. Imagine a mayor with an understanding of the relationships among structure, institutions, culture, and human agency. Bring historical thinking to every table.

This was my plea 15 years ago; I have repeated it many times in *Perspectives* columns, emails to members, and at the annual meeting. It underlies our Career Diversity initiative and our promotion of the history major: Historians belong everywhere, and we can expand that "everywhere" by expanding how we define historical scholarship.

So I repeat: Take risks. Grab a soapbox and get out there in public—even when emotions run high or a strong wind leaves your notes in disarray. Talk about history and why it matters. And thank you—for reading, for responding, and for participating in a 15-year conversation that I hope will continue after July 1 and beyond.

*James Grossman is executive director of the AHA until his retirement on June 30.*

# FULBRIGHT Scholar Program


# Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award Competition Deadline: September 15, 2025

The Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and administered by the Institute of International Education.

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REBECCA L. WEST

# ADVOCACY BRIEFS

*AHA Supports History and Education at Federal and State Levels*

**In early 2025, the AHA issued five statements and signed on to two others regarding actions taken by the federal government that would affect archives, history education, and public history in the United States. In conjunction with this advocacy, we also released a working document of resources for historians whose jobs have been affected by actions taken by the federal government.**

At the state level, AHA staff member Julia Brookins testified before the Texas State Board of Education and the AHA wrote to the Iowa and Ohio Senate education committees regarding proposed legislation that would negatively impact history education in those states. Additionally, the AHA sent action alerts to historians in Oklahoma, Iowa, and Ohio about proposed legislation in their states that would have adverse effects on history education, encouraging them to reach out as constituents to oppose those bills.

## AHA Senior Program Analyst Testifies Before Texas State Board of Education

In November 2024, senior program analyst Julia Brookins testified before the Texas State Board of Education twice. On November 18, she spoke about the proposed approval of Bluebonnet Learning, new reading and language arts instructional materials developed by the Texas Education Agency; Brookins explained in her testimony why the history content is "a great disappointment." On November 22, she testified about the AHA's 2024 report, *American Lesson Plan: Teaching US History in Secondary Schools*. The report provides empirical evidence and rigorous analysis to inform current debates over how history is taught in our schools. Brookins discussed the report's conclusions: "Number one: secondary US history teachers are professionals who are concerned mostly with helping their students learn."

## AHA–OAH Joint Statement on Executive Order "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling"

On February 5, the AHA and the Organization of American Historians (OAH) released a joint statement on the presidential executive order "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling." The executive order "grossly mischaracterizes history education across the United States, alleging educational malpractice." "The executive order's narrow conception of patriotism and patriotic education does more than deny the actual history of American democracy; it also undermines its own goals of a rigorous education and merit-based society," the statement reads. "We reject the premise that it is 'anti-American' or 'subversive' to learn the full history of the United States with its rich and dramatic contradictions, challenges, and conflicts alongside its achievements, innovations, and opportunities." As of April 10, 40 organizations have signed on to the statement.

## AHA Sends Letter to White House Regarding Dismissal of US Archivist

On February 10, the AHA sent a letter to President Donald Trump regarding his dismissal of Archivist of the United States Colleen J. Shogan. "Federal law (44 U.S.C. Chapter 21 § 2103) requires that 'The President shall communicate the reasons for any such removal to each House of the Congress,'" the AHA wrote. "The Administration has not yet complied with this statute by communicating reasons for Dr. Shogan's dismissal. . . . Democracy rests on the rule of law. And the history of the United States rests on unfettered access to the archival record."

## AHA Sends Letter to Iowa Senate Education Committee Opposing HF 402/SF 322

On March 3, the AHA sent a letter to the Iowa Senate Education Committee "register[ing] strong objection to core provisions of House File 402 (HF 402) and its companion Senate File 322 (SF 322)." The AHA wrote, "This legislation threatens to undermine the quality of history instruction at Iowa's public universities and community colleges, tarnishing the reputation of these world-class institutions of higher learning. . . . The AHA recommends more effective ways of

improving the historical knowledge and civic awareness of college graduates."

## AHA Submits Testimony Opposing Ohio SB 1

On March 10, the AHA submitted testimony to the Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee opposing Senate Bill 1. During the previous legislative cycle, the AHA spoke out strongly against previous versions of this bill (SB 83), and our many objections to the proposed legislation remain. Our testimony warned, "If passed, SB 1 would undermine the quality of public higher education in Ohio."

## AHA–OAH Joint Statement on Federal Censorship of American History

On March 13, the AHA and the OAH released a joint statement condemning "recent efforts to censor historical content on federal government websites, at many public museums, and across a wide swath of government resources that include essential data." "Our professional ethics require that 'all historians believe in honoring the integrity of the historical record,'" the statement said. "We expect our nation's leadership to adhere to this same basic standard and we will continue to monitor, protest, and place in the historical record any censorship of American historical facts." As of April 10, 40 organizations have signed on to the statement. See pp. 5–6 for the full statement.

## AHA Statement Condemning Indiscriminate Cuts to the Federal Government

On March 24, the AHA released a statement condemning "the dismantling of federal departments and agencies through the indiscriminate termination of federal employees and elimination of programs, including historical offices." "Closing federal history offices, rolling back protections granted by the Freedom of Information Act, firing archivists, and dismantling departments responsible for education, the humanities, arts, and sciences will render it impossible for Americans to learn about and from the past," the statement read. "A scorched-earth approach to the federal bureaucracy will leave our nation without the records and accumulated knowledge to make well-informed decisions." As of April 10, 19 organizations have signed on to this statement. See pp. 6–7 for the full statement.

## AHA Signs On to Joint Statement on Executive Order to Dismantle Department of Education

On March 24, the AHA signed on to a joint statement from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Phi Beta Kappa Society on the executive order to dismantle the US Department of Education, urging the administration to rescind the order. "For nearly half a century, the Department of Education has been critical in ensuring robust funding for colleges and universities nationwide and safeguarding student financial aid necessary to access colleges and universities," the statement said. "Dismantling of the Department of Education will result in catastrophic implications for students, faculty, communities, and the nation."

## Resources for Federal Workers

On March 24, the AHA released a working document of resources for historians whose jobs have been affected by actions taken by the federal government. The AHA recognizes that our colleagues in the federal government are facing unprecedented workforce reductions and compiled these resources in support. Additionally, the AHA is offering one year of free membership in the AHA to former employees of the federal government who have been terminated or resigned since January 20.

## AHA Statement Defending the Smithsonian

On March 31, the AHA released a statement in support of the Smithsonian Institution, the target of the recent executive order "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History." This order "egregiously misrepresents the work of the Smithsonian Institution" and "completely misconstrues the nature of historical work." As of April 10, 32 organizations have signed on to the statement. See p. 7 for the full statement.

## AHA Statement Defending the NEH and American Public Culture

On April 4, the AHA released a statement condemning the evisceration of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), as the current administration's Department of Government Efficiency has terminated hundreds of grants and put 75 percent of staff on leave. "The NEH and the grants it administers nourish our democracy through research, education, preservation, institutional capacity building, and public programming in the humanities for the benefit of the American people," the statement said. "This frontal attack on the nation's public culture is unpatriotic, anti-American, and unjustified." See pp. 7–8 for the full statement. As of April 10, 12 organizations have signed on to this statement. The AHA also signed on to the National Humanities Alliance's statement opposing threats to funding and staff of the NEH on April 4. P

*Rebecca L. West is marketing and operations associate at the AHA.*

JONATHAN COOPERSMITH AND ARTHUR DAEMMRICH

# THE ROAD NOT (YET) TAKEN

*Historians as Policy Professionals*

**Shrinking opportunities in traditional academic history positions, coupled with stagnant hiring for museum curators and corporate historians, has made the growing demand for policy expertise across federal and state governments, nonprofits, and industry a compelling alternative. Rather than concede these positions to public policy or administration program graduates, we advocate revising graduate training of historians with these occupations in view. Academic historians further along in their careers can contribute to public policy through a greater focus on implementation practices and by opening new pathways for the next generation through coursework and applied projects that complement existing conceptual and theoretical training.**

These recommendations are based on discussions with science and technology policy leaders and a series of workshops held over the last 18 months. Organized by Arizona State University's Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes and funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the "Technology Policy—Think Deeply and Build Things" workshop (a deliberate play on Silicon Valley's mantra to "move fast and break things") explored how historians' tools, insights, and knowledge can assist policymakers. We also held separate meetings with the Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics unit of the Government Accountability Office (GAO); specialists at the Congressional Research Service (CRS); and the Society for the History of Technology. Although our focus in these workshops and meetings was the role of history in science and technology policy, the lessons extend to the historical discipline as a whole.

In recent years, concerns with rising geopolitical competition, environmental risks, and regional economic disparities have underpinned significant federal investments in science, technology, and innovation. During the last two presidential administrations, federal agencies and government entities like CRS and GAO increased hiring of analysts, program managers, and other professionals with skills commonly taught in history graduate programs. Though significant cuts during the second Trump administration have so far broken with this trajectory, we expect that the hybridization of industrial, technology, and science policy that marked Operation Warp Speed—as well as efforts to onshore semiconductor chips and other manufacturing—will lead eventually to renewed federal hiring.

At the state and local levels, more pragmatic "technology-based economic development" (in the words of the State Science and Technology Institute) has fostered an array of government, private-sector, academic, and nongovernmental organizations that hire people with skills and perspectives of the kind developed by history programs. States with science policy departments include California, Idaho, Missouri, and New York. As multinationals respond to tariffs and other federal policies with new manufacturing investments in the United States—such as the $100 billion announced in early March by the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company—state and local governments will need policy insights rooted in historical methods.

State governments are playing an increasingly active role in technology-based economic development, with at least $1.25 billion appropriated by legislatures in FY 2023 alone to support innovation-driven economic growth. These investments range from targeted matching funds for federal initiatives to comprehensive approaches to build local research capacity, foster technology commercialization, support entrepreneurship, expand the STEM workforce, and provide seed capital. The scope and impact of these efforts highlight the need for policymakers and analysts who can contextualize state-level strategies within historical patterns of economic development, industry evolution, and regional policy experiments—another area where historians can make significant contributions.

A clear message emerged from our workshops and discussions. A period of

rapid changes to industrial, technology, environmental, and education policy requires critical—and actionable—historical insights. Agencies assigned to convert formal policy (from Congress and the executive branch) into projects and programs on the ground seek informed and inclusive approaches. These policy implementers increasingly recognize the importance of institutional structures in reform efforts, the need for deeper community engagement, and the value of historical analysis in evaluating program effectiveness and proposing major initiatives.

> Historical approaches can explore the policy choices that shaped a region's strengths over decades.

Industrial and technology policy are currently undergoing rapid change, including but not limited to implementation of artificial intelligence and the deployment of novel methods for community engagement. Newer approaches to historical scholarship resonate with policy areas that include reviving US manufacturing, building regional innovation clusters in the Midwest and rural South, reducing pollution and waste in agriculture, and devising new security strategies in the face of rapidly shifting global alignments.

Policymakers often replicate economic programs without fully understanding why they succeeded elsewhere or how adaptable they are to new contexts. Historians, trained to analyze complex institutional, economic, and cultural dynamics over time, can offer valuable insights into the conditions that enable certain policies to succeed when others falter. Rather than simply trace current economic metrics, historical approaches can explore the foundational networks and policy choices that shaped a region's industrial strengths over decades, identifying underlying factors for past success and more sustainable policy decisions for the future.

Preparing students for these opportunities requires curricular changes, starting with the modifications to graduate programs laid out below.

First, graduate seminars should incorporate sessions on how to work effectively with policymakers. Materials can include readings and discussion about existing and past efforts such as those found in the Applied History Project, an "explicit attempt to illuminate current challenges and choices by analyzing historical precedents and analogues" at Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (with coursework inspired by May and Neustadt, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers*, 1986). In a recent essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Patryk J. Babiracki and James W. Cortada recommend using business case studies and engaging with applied business history. Compelling policy ideas fail without economic feasibility, realistic technological assessments, and regional community support. Historians are trained to consider these key factors.

Second, graduate students should practice writing policy-oriented briefs or essays as seminar papers. A key challenge of participating in policy debates is the need to be succinct, precise, and focused. Instead of the term paper or monograph, the goal here is an "elevator pitch" composed of one or two paragraphs: putting the conclusion first, followed by separate supporting sections offering context and narrating the benefits of a successful policy change.

Avoiding bad history—especially politicized myths and poor analogies—can be as important as providing good history. "It's complicated" is accurate but not particularly useful. If a situation were simple, policymakers and implementors would not seek scholarly guidance. The pathbreaking historian of technology

A Works Progress Administration mural in the Wilbur J. Cohen Federal Building in Washington, DC.
*Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*

Mel Kranzberg's first law stipulates that "technology is neither good nor bad, nor is it neutral." Catchy, accurate, and influential, the phrase is not especially useful as a policy guide beyond seeing technology as a human creation whose consequences are fiendishly difficult to predict. Instead, if we put classic history together with scenario planning, we can begin to map decisions about technology adoption—identifying communities that have been empowered and technologies in need of regulatory oversight.

Third, at both university and departmental levels, policy-involved historians should be recognized and rewarded by expanding tenure and promotion criteria (as suggested in the AHA's *Guidelines for Broadening the Definition of Historical Scholarship*). An active discussion is underway in engineering and the sciences regarding "use-inspired" and "translational" research, institutionalized in part through the new directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships at the National Science Foundation (NSF). In a gradually expanding number of science and social science disciplines, faculty have secured grants (and, increasingly, tenure) by demonstrating engagement with a relevant user community and the potential for implementation of their research. Historians can adopt a similar approach by engaging policy professionals in dialogue, fostering the development of new research projects and job opportunities.

Fourth, and perhaps most challenging in terms of mindset and language, historians can position themselves as social scientists. For better or worse, the NSF and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine consider history a social science. In May 2024, the White House National Science and Technology Council issued a *Blueprint for the Use of Social and Behavioral Science to Advance Evidence-Based Policymaking*, which mandates that federal agencies engage social scientists and defines social and behavioral science as the study of "interactions between and among individuals, and of the characteristics, structures, and functions of social groups and institutions."

> We should create networks and organizations to benefit both historians and policymaking.

Historians do this kind of work already. We should not shy away from labeling ourselves social scientists when presenting ideas developed through the close reading of archival sources, engagement with communities, and research into the role of systems, structures, and language in shaping power and politics. The impulse widely shared among historians to interrogate how and why disciplines gain standing need not deter us from laying claim to that status on behalf of the discipline.

Fifth and finally, individual historians and their institutions should communicate, compare, and coordinate with one another, creating networks and organizations to benefit both historians and policymaking. There is much to be learned from projects like Bridging the Gap, which equips "scholars of all levels with the skills to produce influential policy-relevant research and theoretically grounded policy work," and the Industry Studies Association, which publishes a weekly "Federal Industrial Policy & Strategy Update."

Looking to the future, history faculty and the AHA can do more to actively guide historians toward policy-oriented futures. Since 2015, the AHA's Career Contacts program has provided aspiring historians the opportunity to connect with more than 300 senior historians working outside academia. The AHA also hosts a dedicated session at its annual meeting to encourage networking with professionals in fields such as public policy. Since 2005, it has organized over 50 public briefings on Capitol Hill to convey historians' perspectives on topics ranging from transportation safety regulation to representative democracy. The quality and number of questions posed by congressional staff indicate serious interest in historical perspectives. A next step would be to secure postdoctoral positions funded by federal, state, or private-sector groups for young historians to work on Capitol Hill, at federal agencies, in state government, or in regional innovation collaborations akin to the AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowships program.

Participating in policy creation and implementation would benefit not only individual historians but also our field and the nation at large. Historians can and should help lead US policy beyond technology-led projections toward a vision that attends to community needs and public values.

*Jonathan Coopersmith is professor emeritus at Texas A&M University. Arthur Daemmrich is director of the Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes and a professor of practice at Arizona State University.*

# *The History Teacher*

by the SOCIETY FOR HISTORY EDUCATION

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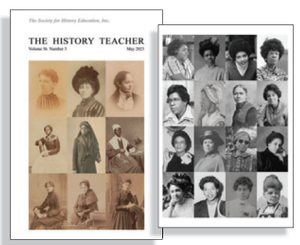
"Reclaiming Narratives Through Culturally Sustaining Teaching: Women of Color, Historical Significance, and the Civil Rights Era"

***The History Teacher***

Volume 56, No. 3

AHA-NEH SHARP* Special Issue



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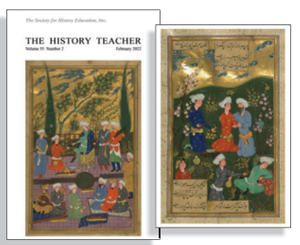

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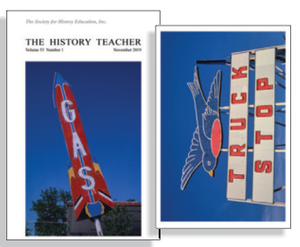


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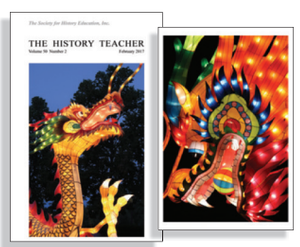

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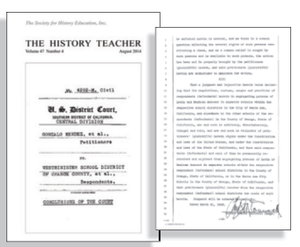

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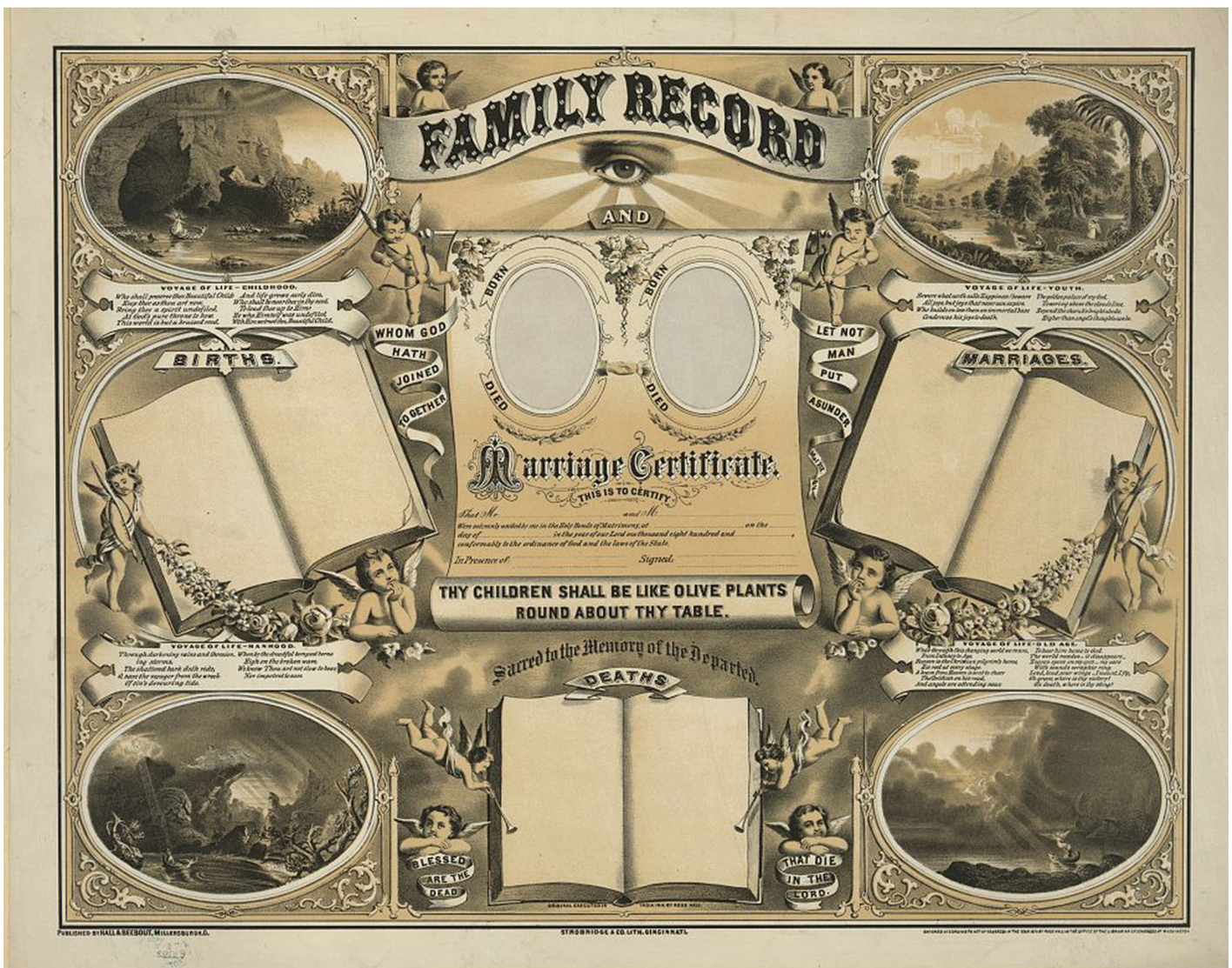
# FAMILY MATTERS

## *Genealogy in the History Classroom*




Using vital records, censuses, newspapers, and other documents, Mary Ann Mahony's students fill in their family trees.
*Strobridge & Co. Lith./Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*

ITALIAN IMMIGRANT Sebastiano Salafia was arrested for throwing rocks at the police during the 1919 mill worker strikes in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Cenovia Santos and her husband moved to Texas from Coahuila, Mexico, in 1917, two of the thousands who fled the violence of the Mexican Revolution, but they remained in contact with their extended family south of the border. Phillip Bouchard's youngest siblings spent several years in Waterville, Maine, orphanages during the Great Depression after their mother died, although their father was still alive.

These are just a few of the stories that have emerged from student research in my family history courses, most of which I have taught as sections of an undergraduate history methods class. Every semester, my department offers two or three sections of this 15-student research-and-writing-intensive course, each on a different topic or theme. Since it is a required course, sections reflect the broad cross section of our majors, who in turn represent Connecticut's increasingly diverse population. At least half of our majors are first-generation college students, with diverse backgrounds including African American, Western and Eastern European, Canadian, Caribbean and Latin American, and South Asian ancestry. The methods course requires students to spend half of the semester learning about primary and secondary sources, locating scholarly articles in databases such as JSTOR, and reading examples of monographs and scholarly articles. Then they spend the second half of the semester researching, drafting, and revising a thesis-driven research paper based on primary sources.

In my section, students write papers that place their own family's history in a broader historical and historiographical context. Using basic genealogical methods, they begin to build a family tree. They interview family elders. They learn to identify their female ancestors by their birth names. They move beyond a simple "who begat whom" framing to contextualize their ancestors' experiences. They add their ancestors' siblings and parents to their trees, learn about those extended families, and think about their ancestors in various life phases. They search for primary sources to document their ancestors' lives and expand their trees. As they do so, they frequently move well beyond what their elders know.

The results have been extraordinary. Students are enthusiastic about their research assignment, engage in animated class discussions with peers, talk about their projects with their extended families, bring this experience into other classes, and write wonderful papers. In the process, they acquire essential elements of a history education, including the abilities to assess contradictory evidence, recognize change over time, and identify how their families' experiences reflect the historical events and trends that they have read about for years.

Over the course of the semester, students use many of the standard documents of genealogical research. They use birth, baptism, marriage, and death records; obituaries; census records; slave schedules; immigrant ship passenger lists; naturalization petitions; and newspaper articles, among others. In class, we discuss how to find these various document types and how to read them, so all students encounter examples of each type at some point during the semester.

Students move beyond a simple "who begat whom" framing to contextualize their ancestors' experiences.

Some students find evidence of family instability, including divorce, separation, children born outside marriage, and family violence. (Since the class does not include DNA testing, biological relationships are not tested or questioned.) These discoveries can cause embarrassment, consternation, and even shame, as students engage with their preconceptions about religious faith, premarital chastity, racial difference, ethnic culture, or a past in captivity. To help students process such information, early in the course I introduce documents about my family. At least two of my great-grandmothers bore children outside of marriage, although one married the father of her children days before the second was born and the other went home to Canada, where she told her parents that her husband had died. A third great-grandmother gave birth in such difficult straits that she placed my infant grandmother in a basket and left her on the steps of a Boston physician's home in May 1884. Her case was not singular: page 217 of the 1884 Boston birth registry reveals numerous such children, all of whom appear to have had European ancestry. These examples do not eradicate all sensitivity around family stability, but they allow us to discuss the issues, with support from their historiographic readings, in a way that doesn't reinforce erroneous assumptions.

Using genealogy in the methods class has had other unexpected benefits. Although not initially a goal, students emerge from the class with a less abstract and more personal view of history. Family history research forces them to examine their assumptions about the past as well as their current political and ideological positions. Many begin the class with strong opinions about hot-button issues such as immigration,

slavery and freedom, gender, morality, race, ethnicity, and religion. As we examine and discuss the documents that they find, students confront the inhumanities of the Slave Schedules of the 1850 and 1860 US Census and the slave registers of the former British colonies. They see examples of two-parent Black families emerging from bondage and learn that many Puerto Rican families are Afro-descended. Through the examples of French Canadian and Mexican families, they learn about the experience of having relatives on both sides of national borders and making frequent crossings. Descendents of European immigrants find relatives who arrived in the United States without visas, as links in a chain of people from the same village, who never learned English and never became American citizens despite living in the country for decades.

> Encounters with their ancestors challenge students' assumptions about the past and present.

These encounters with the lived experiences of their or their classmates' ancestors challenge their assumptions about the past and present. The resulting class discussions are when some of the most interesting student learning takes place. Students learn about the deep roots of French Canadian, African American, Mexican, and Puerto Rican families in North America. They learn that most of their families moved to Connecticut in search of better opportunities, whether from the South, Canada, Italy, Poland, Ireland, or, more recently, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Mexico, and Pakistan. They also learn that the rules governing immigration to the United States in the past were quite different—and, at least for Europeans, usually much more lenient—than those current immigrants face, despite political rhetoric to the contrary. They perceive that white families' apparent stability can obscure the terrible cost that women and children paid for transgressions and gain new sympathy for multigenerational matrilineal families that appear to be more accepting of women and girls who give birth to children out of wedlock. And many learn about the roadblocks that non-English sources present in pursuing their research. In other words, by incorporating genealogy into my classes, students become more complex thinkers as their understanding of themselves and their families, of their peers, of history, and of current political debates grows.

Every semester, one or two students prefer not to research their own families or cannot find documents on them. As an alternative, they may locate a volunteer whose family history they can research, or they can research their hometown or nation of origin. With these options, everyone can find enough to write a research paper, which I grade based not on the number of sources they can find but on the quality of the evidence that they bring to support their thesis.

For this course to proceed well, access to a comprehensive collection of documents is essential. Numerous free websites are available for genealogical research, including FamilySearch, 10 Million Names, and Enslaved.org. I prefer Ancestry.com because almost all students can find something there related to their family's past. The institutional version of the Ancestry.com World Explorer with the Newspaper.com add-on, to which our university library subscribes through ProQuest, provides over 11,000 document collections from all over the world (although the vast majority are from the United States, Canada, and Western Europe). An individual or family paid subscription offers access to over 33,000 collections and allows the subscriber to build family trees on the website and take advantage of the hints that Ancestry's nominative linkage data algorithms provide.

Since their research is based primarily on digital genealogical resources, we also explore contemporary debates related to that type of research. We examine the relationship between Ancestry's collections and the genealogy marketplace, the company's roots in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, national and international privacy laws, the impact of political violence on document collections, and the millions of documents that have not been indexed and thus cannot be searched. We now discuss issues around artificial intelligence, which Ancestry has begun to incorporate. We also raise issues related to digital research. We usually agree that research in both digitized and undigitized sources is important, but that that the ability to access sources remotely is essential for history majors at a university with limited research collections who do not have money or time to travel for research, even within Connecticut.

By the end of the semester, students produce microhistories embedded in their or someone else's family experiences. Few students discover great men and women in their family's pasts, but they all discover that the experiences of their ancestors are intertwined with major historical trends. They also learn that "history from below" can teach us all an enormous amount about the past. And they realize that the past, and therefore the present, is more complicated than they imagined. Over the course of the semester, they become more critical thinkers and see themselves and history in new, more nuanced ways. They become historians.

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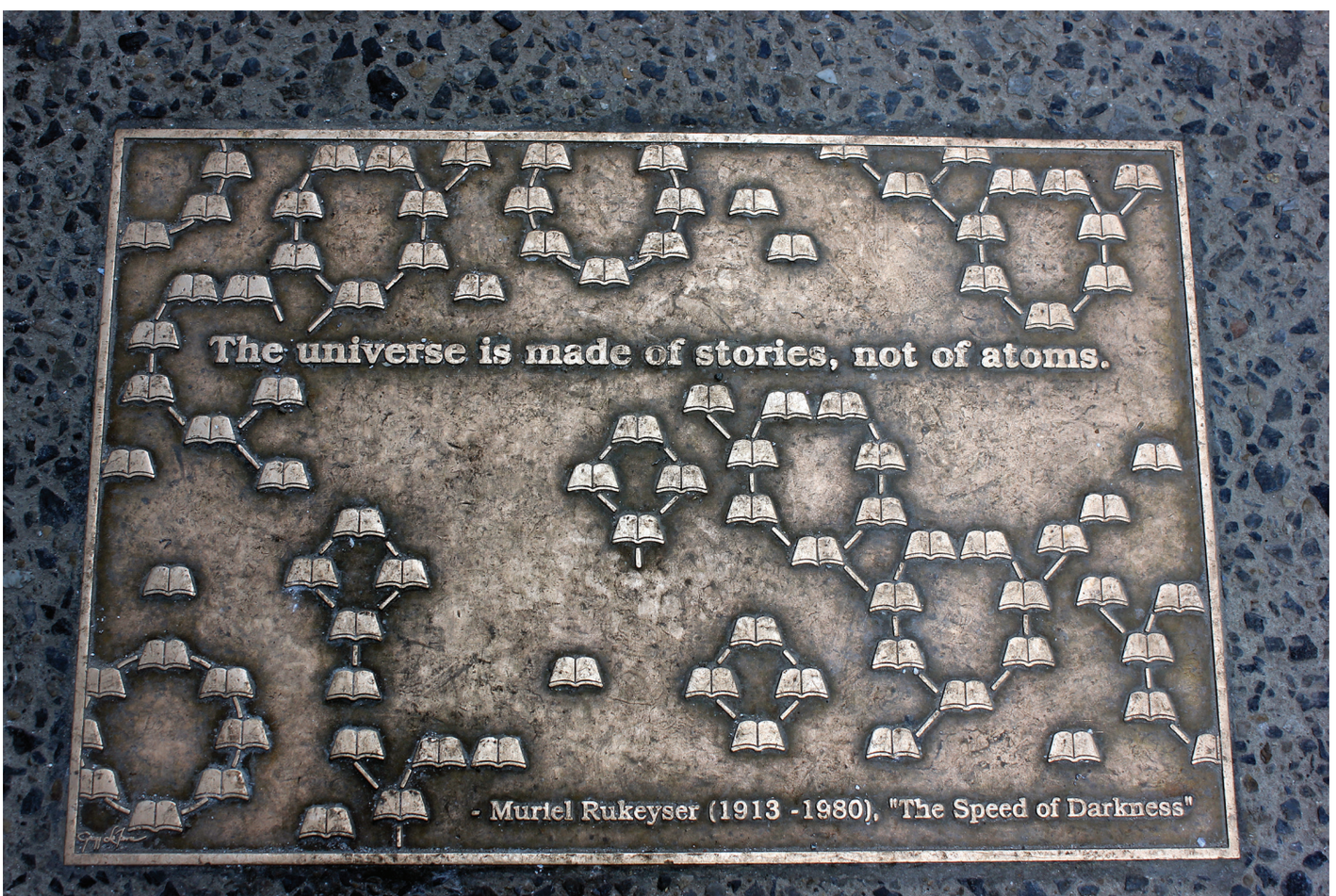
MEGAN PORTER

# THE AHA25 K–16 CONTENT COHORT

## *A New Model for Teachers at Academic Conferences*




The New York Public Library's Library Way includes poet Muriel Rukeyser's words.
*Heike Huslage-Koch/Wikimedia Commons/public domain*

"THE UNIVERSE IS made of stories, not of atoms." In January, I had a quintessential New York moment, pizza in hand, as I stood reading this Muriel Rukeyser quote engraved on Library Way outside the Main Branch of the New York Public Library. I had wandered there upon the advice of Lendol Calder (Augustana Univ.) during my first session of the AHA annual meeting. Rukeyser's point, of course, is to put stories at the forefront of the daily work that we do in understanding the world around us. As a high school teacher, I found in her words a valuable framework for my role as an educator. I carried them with me for the rest of the weekend as I worked with the AHA's inaugural K–16 Content Cohort to consider how stories help center resilience in the history classroom.

Teachers from across the country, and at all levels of education—including me—met to explore the theme of "resilience and history education." Throughout the weekend, the K–16 Content Cohort convened for several seminar-style discussions on the topic, as well as to attend recommended panels and workshops that specifically examined resilience, teaching, or the intersection of the two. The cohort provided crucial support and connection for its attendees, as well as the intellectual framework and space to think critically about the work we do as educators.

> The cohort provided crucial support and connection for its attendees.

This new format addressed challenges I have experienced as a high school teacher attending big academic conferences like the AHA: the breadth of such a large event, and the accompanying isolation. At previous meetings, K–12 teachers could choose from a selection of panels that spoke either to their individual academic pursuits or, occasionally, to teaching. It was rare to find panels and workshops that did both, and rarer still to meet colleagues with whom you could share a discussion. But the K–16 Content Cohort set out to address both issues, with a track of recommended sessions and events, private sessions for our group alone, and a built-in community to travel with through the weekend.

Participation in the cohort started even before the conference. On an AHA Communities message board, cohort members could introduce ourselves and make connections before January. Here, I found a diverse group of high school teachers, professors, and history professionals working in both the public and private sectors. Several weeks before our arrival in New York City, the cohort received three articles on resilience to read in preparation. The articles—"Genealogies and Critiques of Resilience" by Yoav Di-Capua and Wendy Warren, "Critical Investigations of Resilience: A Brief Introduction to Indigenous Environmental Studies and Sciences" by Kyle Whyte, and "The Stories We Tell" by Lendol Calder—encouraged participants to think about resilience's evolving definition, the forms it can take over time, and what it can look like in the history classroom. Calder's article introduced the concept of stories as an essential component of resilience—a focus that I carried with me to the conference.

Together, these readings formed the foundation for our three cohort meetings over the course of the weekend. The introductory event on Friday was a panel discussion on resilience and history education, with presentations from researchers and educators at the secondary and postsecondary levels. The second meeting was a cohort seminar on Saturday chaired by Brendan Gillis, AHA director of teaching and learning. This event gave the cohort our first opportunity to work alongside one another as we developed individual and collective understandings of what resilience can look like in history teaching. The final meeting on Sunday allowed us to share and discuss assignments designed by participating teachers that demonstrated resilience. Each of the three meetings created a unique space to think about the theme of resilience as central to the work of history educators, and helped give us a foundation for the other sessions and events that we attended throughout the weekend. Throughout these meetings, storytelling served both as a topic of discussion and as a means to facilitate other lessons on resilience.

For those in the cohort, storytelling brought a strong sense of our connection to one another, which is another essential component of resilience. We heard from our peers in Delaware and Harlem at the opening reception for K–12 teachers about their hard work teaching contested history. We had formal and informal discussions with other members of the cohort during our daily meetings. We told tales about disgruntled parents and students, about assignments and lessons gone wrong and those gone gloriously right, and about the stories from the past that we love to tell our students. As we talked and shared, we forged connections with one another. When one cohort member lamented the politicization of history, and the personal toll it took when directed at educators, we were able to empathize with him and provide comfort. These relational moments bolstered our individual resilience, as they affirmed that we were not alone in our experience, and that there was a professional community holding space for the ways that teaching history can lead to moments of tension, turmoil, and frustration.

Telling stories to one another about our experiences and the histories we each hold dear also facilitated individual reflection and learning. The panels and workshops recommended for those in the cohort to support our exploration of resilience each emphasized the importance of continually examining how and what we teach. Sessions such as the *K–16 Educators' Workshop: Finding and Elevating Missing Voices from the Past* and *Teaching History Writing in the Age of AI* used both the expertise of presenters and the stories from participants to encourage conversations about the craft of teaching. Educators of all levels shared stories about successfully finding primary source images for niche research projects on the Library of Congress website, organizing student writing workshops that yielded impressive results, and integrating AI prompts into grading criteria for smoother evaluation. With each story came an opportunity to reconsider our own practices and how we might improve.

> This weekend of telling stories about our shared work and passion had reconnected me with my professional self.

Similarly, in our seminar discussions, we learned from each other. Amie Wright (Carleton Univ.), a PhD candidate and instructor, spoke of how using graphic novels and comic books in the classroom could make complex stories from the past more accessible. Kayanna Adams (Field Kindley High School, Kansas) shared her success in engaging students in discussions about protest through the film *Iron Jawed Angels*, which depicts the US suffrage movement in the 1910s. Hearing about these experiences and sharing resources with other educators encouraged us each to consider our own practices. Through these stories, it became clear that striving to improve our teaching can be its own form of resilience.

While stories facilitated our connections to each other, and our reflections on our teaching, it was the cumulative experience of the K–16 Content Cohort that bolstered both our individual resilience and that of the teaching profession at large. The weekend provided an indispensable opportunity for me to think deeply about the work of history teaching. At its close, I was profoundly moved by how this weekend of telling stories about our shared work and passion had reconnected me with my professional self. Teaching students to know themselves, to question and affirm that sense of self, and to empathize with others through stories is why I love both the historical discipline and my job. Stories, I'm convinced, are what matter. Without the opportunity for stories to bring colleagues and concepts together at previous conferences, I often struggled to find my place. The opportunity to connect with colleagues who value stories as much as I do, and to discuss those stories in depth, was a balm to the isolation and exhaustion I have been navigating as I near the middle of my career. As such, I returned to my classroom following the annual meeting feeling reinvigorated for, and more resilient in, my teaching.

In addition to the experience of individuals, the creation of the K–16 Content Cohort and its initial success reflects how our discipline continues to adapt and find new ways to be resilient. The cohort created an intellectual space where the work of reflecting on history education at all levels could be done in collaboration with colleagues who value the interconnected nature of scholarship and teaching. Because of this, AHA25 provided a professional development opportunity far and away more effective than those typically offered to educators in the K–12 sector and unique to professors who spend their time on college campuses. We are all better off for this collaboration. The more we come together as historians and teachers, the stronger—and more resilient—we become.

The K–16 Content Cohort created an essential space within the AHA annual meeting for teachers at all levels. The theme of resilience and history education was a framework that helped us better understand the art of teaching history. Coming together to share our own stories and the stories of the past that we love, we forged a strong community where we could reflect on our own practices and learn from one another. The panels, workshops, and seminars worked together to affirm, challenge, and expand our professional practices far more than any conference targeted at a single level of history instruction could. The work that we did together set a precedent that history teachers at all levels have a place at the AHA annual meeting. It is in this coming together that the field will continue to build its resilience—no doubt an essential mission in the years to come.

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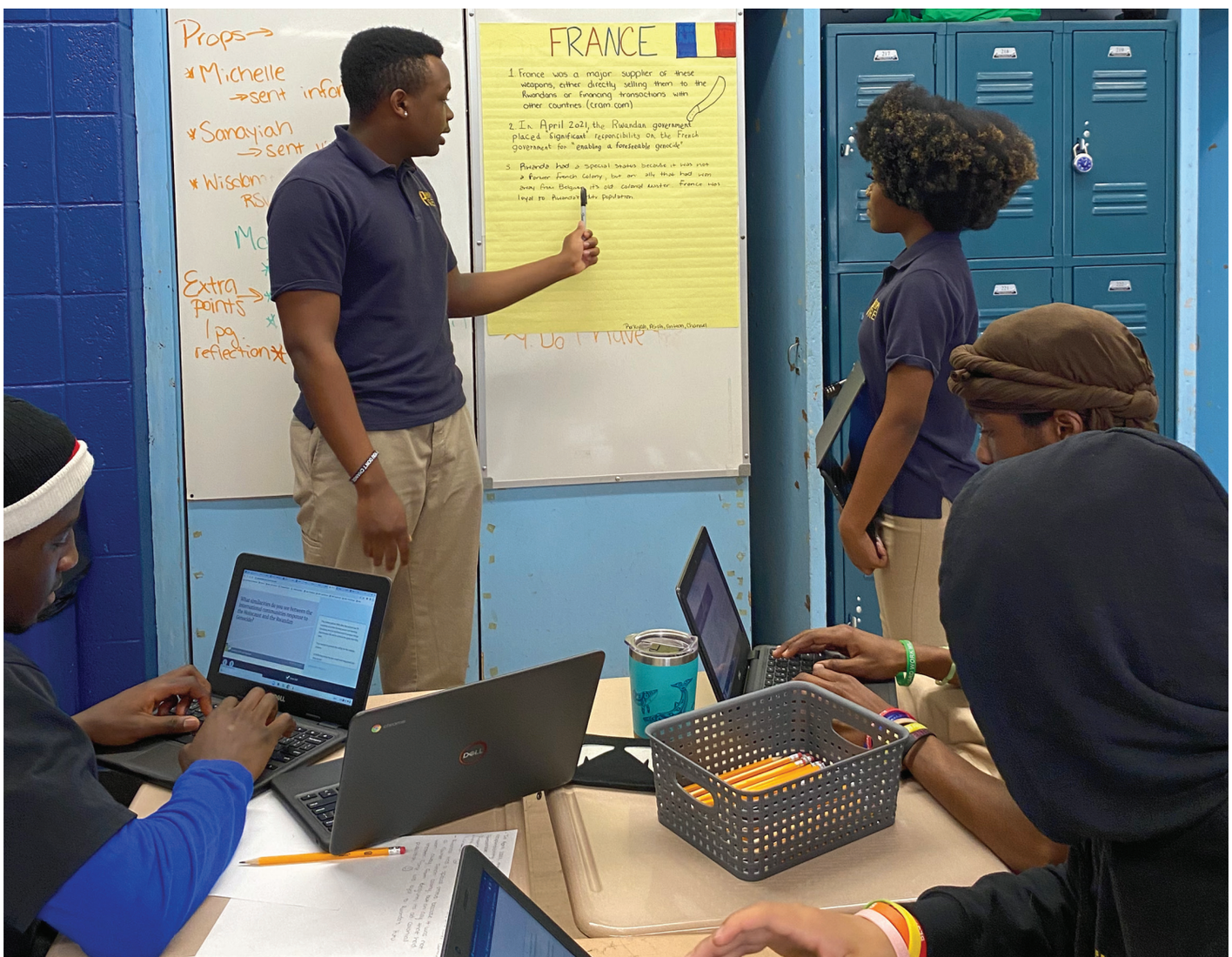
KYRA DEZJOT

# BEYOND VICTIMHOOD

## *A Person-Centered Teaching Approach to Holocaust and Genocide Studies*




Students in Kyra Dezjot's course History of the Holocaust and Genocide Studies teach each other about the history of Rwanda.
*Kyra Dezjot*

IN AUGUST 2022, I began designing my first course at People's Preparatory Charter School in Newark, New Jersey. During my teacher training, mentors like Tracy Pelkowski emphasized the importance of culturally responsive teaching. Yet I was still unprepared for the experience of starting my first teaching role in New Jersey's largest and most diverse city. As a dual-enrollment class in collaboration with Kean University, the History of the Holocaust and Genocide Studies course was for juniors and seniors. I anticipated that my students would have limited knowledge of Jewish culture and history—a largely accurate prediction. As I recognized that, for many of them, I might be their only source of education on the Holocaust, my initial feelings of fear and uncertainty gave way to determination and resilience.

> I was concerned that all my students would learn about Jewish people was the Holocaust.

I reviewed the New Jersey Student Learning Standards to design my course using a backward-design approach (i.e., standards, objectives, assessments, and instruction). When I first read the standards for social studies, I was pleased, as a Jewish teacher and a historian of Jewish life, to find the inclusion of the history of the Holocaust and genocide. New Jersey had a seemingly robust mandate for Holocaust education and even had a law requiring Holocaust education in all schools. New Jersey is not alone in these requirements: According to the AHA's 2024 report *American Lesson Plan*, 29 US states require or promote Holocaust and genocide history in their state standards or laws governing K–12 education. Given New Jersey's prominent Jewish population and several universities' Holocaust resource centers, the presence of a Holocaust mandate did not surprise me. Still, I felt reassured that the New Jersey Student Learning Standards backed the Holocaust curriculum I planned to teach.

But though relieved that the standards aligned with my course objectives, I nonetheless was concerned that all my students would learn about Jewish people was the Holocaust. The standards focus entirely on genocide, the international response to genocide, and citizens' responsibility to fight oppression. If I stuck only to these requirements, students would not learn about the prosperous Jewish communities in eastern Europe before World War II; Jewish inventors, scholars, and politicians; or anything about Jews outside Europe.

This is perhaps unsurprising. When teaching the experiences of minority groups—including Indigenous peoples, African Americans, and Jews, among others—state standards tend to focus on teaching what journalist Lucy Dawidowicz called "oppression studies." In the case of Jewish identity, the discussion in most classrooms begins and ends with the Holocaust. With their stories starting in the 1930s and ending in the 1940s, Jews are often presented as victims of Nazi fascism rather than as individuals with whole lives. But I didn't want the only Jewish history I taught to be about genocide and oppression. I realized I needed to expand the history of Jewish experience in my classroom—even if it meant going beyond the New Jersey standards.

I decided that a research-based approach would allow me to include a more holistic view of Jewish life. Therefore, I decided to approach Holocaust studies from a person-centered lens. A person-centered lens stems from sociological modules, where some seek to see people beyond their illness or disabilities. In an education context, the University of Minnesota Center for Practice Transformation defines the goal of person-centered language as "respecting the dignity, worth, unique qualities and strengths of every individual. A person's identity and self-image are closely linked to the words used to describe them." I decided to take this framework and apply it to history education, going beyond a one-dimensional portrayal of Jews and other minorities as victims and focusing on other aspects of their lives to convey a three-dimensional account of their histories.

My course began with the Armenian genocide and Jewish life before World War I. After learning about the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, students jumped into independent research, during which they investigated the Armenian genocide using primary and secondary sources. We read *Ravished Armenia*, Aurora Mardiganian's firsthand account, and *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* by Peter Balakian, whose ancestors survived the genocide. In addition to reading, we watched clips from *Ararat*, a fictional film commemorating the Armenian genocide. Students presented their findings on diverse aspects of the Armenian genocide by creating posters and presentations. On presentation day, the classroom felt transformed into a museum exhibit, with students (now experts in their specific topics) presenting on different aspects of the Armenian experience. Shifting into the teacher position early in the course, students were prepared and able to engage in independent research about the Holocaust.

We began our Holocaust unit in the 19th century, leaning heavily on resources from the United States Holocaust

Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, and Hidden Voices. A project produced by the New York City Public Schools, Hidden Voices aims to "help City students learn about the countless individuals who are often 'hidden' from traditional historical records," including Jewish narratives beyond the Holocaust. These resources often focus on the intersection of Jewish life with other minority groups, citing Jewish American activists in the LGBTQ+ and civil rights movements. By encountering Hidden Voices stories before instruction on the Holocaust, students learned a framework of aspects of Jewish life I had never learned when I was their age. For example, we studied the cultural aspects and importance of the Yiddish language and the creation of Jewish communities in Poland, Russia, and Germany. We also looked at the accounts of Jewish immigrants to America during the interwar period to draw a connection to the Jewish community in the United States. Once students understood that Jews existed in prosperous communities before 1923, then I was ready to teach the history of antisemitism and the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party.

> Oppression was just one element of Holocaust victims' complex identities.

Throughout the unit, I incorporated performance-based assessments and shifted the focus to students in the classroom, asking them to teach me about the Holocaust using assigned sources. For example, students completed a project where they researched victims of the Holocaust other than Jews. Students researched their group—for example, the Roma people or LGBTQ+ individuals—and then taught the class using materials, a presentation, and a lecture they created.

By engaging with the Holocaust from various lenses, students learned that Jews and other victims were not only oppressed people in Nazi Germany. Instead, oppression was just one element of their complex identities. These individuals were also mothers, fathers, children, politicians, religious leaders, store owners, and so much more. By learning a complex background history of Jewish life, students saw Jews beyond victimhood. By expanding their knowledge of the Holocaust to non-Jewish victims, they also came away with a more complex understanding of these atrocities.

I continued this strategy in our unit on the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda. We looked at the demographic makeup of Rwanda from the 18th century to the 1990s, explored the education system in Rwanda, and learned about Rwanda's four national languages: Kinyarwanda, French, English, and Swahili. This interested my students since some were Swahili or French speakers and some shared comparisons between their home countries and Rwanda's history. After exploring Rwanda and its ethnic groups, the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, we focused on the events of 1994. Given the recentness of the genocide's events, I was able to use an incredible number of online primary sources translated into English. Using IWitness from the USC Shoah Foundation, students explored the testimonies of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. By hearing the testimonies of both perpetrators and victims, students grappled with the responsibility of European colonial powers for the genocide. Students left this unit demonstrating a rich understanding of victimhood and responsibility in their summative assessment essay on responsibility for the genocide.

In the last section of the course, we studied a contemporary and controversial "genocide." In the first year I taught this course, we discussed the experiences of Uyghur Muslims in China. In 2024, we studied the complex history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, focusing on media literacy.

The results were the same in each of the class's four units. Regardless of the group being studied, purposefully teaching their rich history led students to understand these people as not simply victims. Students used person-centered language to discuss the experiences of oppressed peoples, and they came away with a deeper understanding of cultures and experiences before tragic events affected these communities. Although state standards do not outline how teachers can be more inclusive when teaching about the Holocaust and genocide studies, if teachers work together and use the many available resources, they can empower their students to deepen their historical understandings using a person-centered mindset. P

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SHRIYA DASGUPTA

# DOCUMENTING AN AGE OF FIRE

## *Creating a Digital Oral History Archive*

Today, a statue of revolutionaries Benoy Basu, Badal Gupta, and Dinesh Gupta stands near the Writers' Building in Kolkata.
*Sujay25/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0*

AGNIJUG, OR "age of fire," is used in Bengali scholarship to denote the period of anticolonial revolutionary movements that took place from 1906 to 1935. Born and raised in Kolkata—the hotbed of such movements—with grandparents who were refugee migrants from East Bengal, I grew up hearing stories of the armed uprisings that the government-prescribed textbooks used by my school often omitted.

To address this concern, contribute to a holistic narrative of the Indian freedom struggle, and bridge the gap between academic and oral histories, I founded Agnijug Archive, a digital oral history repository dedicated to preserving the stories of anticolonial Indian revolutionaries through interviews and archival material. In the three years of its existence, Agnijug Archive has collected more than one hundred interviews.

The project started on a summer afternoon in July 2022, when, taking a break from exam preparations, I decided to find a house in South Kolkata that I'd read about in a recent news report. In 1930, its owners, Malinabala and Kalicharan Ghosh, provided refuge to two adolescent boys, Ananda Gupta and Jiban Ghoshal. Regarded as "vicious terrorists" by the British colonial administration, Gupta and Ghoshal were on the run after participating in the Chittagong armory raid, part of a longer guerilla uprising that began on April 18, 1930, when Surya Sen led the Indian Republican Army force in laying siege to Chittagong. The coordinated rebellion that followed saw rebels take control of the town for four days, seizing key locations—from police lines and the armory to telephone and telegraph offices—cutting off communications, gathering weapons, and sparking a broader uprising. On April 22, a math teacher and 60 schoolchildren managed to defeat hundreds of British soldiers at the Battle of Jalalabad Hill. Twelve revolutionaries died, and the British endured significant (though undocumented) casualties.

By 1931, continuous guerrilla attacks took the form of targeted assassinations of government officials, including an assault on the European Club by a 21-year-old woman, Pritilata Waddedar, in September 1932. Regarded as the first female martyr in 20th-century Bengal, Waddedar hoped to inspire other young women to join—even die for—the same cause. (Her suicide note, describing her goals, can be found in Poulomi Saha's *An Empire of Touch*, 2019.) But the movement gradually subsided after Surya Sen's arrest and hanging in 1934.

The Chittagong Uprising is notable for the example it set of communal harmony. According to the 1931 census, Muslims accounted for 73.8 percent of the district's total population, and Hindus composed 21.84 percent. Not only did the Indian Republican Army have Muslim participants—a rare phenomenon, since Bengali revolutionary circles were made up largely of upper-caste Hindus—but Chittagong also withstood British attempts to fuel communal riots in the district. In fact, Surya Sen remained in hiding for four years only because he was given shelter by local Muslim families.

The house I visited in 2022 is now owned by Shibshankar Ghosh, Malinabala and Kalicharan's youngest son. Gathering the courage to ring his doorbell, I expected to be turned away. Instead, a three-hour discussion followed, in which Shibshankar, now in his 80s, shared his family's account of the revolutionary movement in Bengal.

Shibshankar's father was deeply involved in the anticolonial struggle, serving as secretary to Sarat Bose—a barrister, president of the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, and brother of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Both prominent members of the Indian National Congress, the Bose brothers worked with revolutionaries across Bengal who sought their advice and financial assistance. After the uprising in Chittagong, it was Sarat Bose who requested his secretary provide temporary shelter to Ananda Gupta and Jiban Ghoshal before they could be moved to a safe house.

> Our conversation made me realize just how many stories like this are waiting to be told.

Talking to Shibshankar was my first encounter with the family's perspective on this action. As glorious as it may sound in hindsight, sheltering the two young men posed its own set of practical problems. The children, for instance, were instructed to refer to the visiting boys as "uncles," prompting nosy neighbors to ask how Malinabala came to have such fair and handsome brothers.

Our conversation made me realize just how many stories like this are waiting to be told. Though some have been reported in historical accounts, they have not been systematically collected or given an archival home. With every passing generation, narratives will be lost, while documents such as letters and photographs will disappear once the second or third generation of family members has passed. I felt a powerful urge to preserve these stories. So I began collecting oral histories and created the Agnijug Archive.

Perhaps my greatest takeaway thus far is learning that those we hail as heroes today were just ordinary men and women with an extraordinary sense of purpose. One of my favorite

interviewees, Asha Sahay Choudhry, joined the Indian National Army (an alternative fighting force to the British military) as a soldier at age 16 during World War II. Now 96, Asha-san—as she is known, both for having been born and raised in Japan and for her love of the Japanese language—remains sharp as a tack. Excitedly recounting tales from some 80 years ago, we spoke for over two hours.

> My work with the Agnijug Archive had one interesting outcome: a reunion of the families of Benoy Basu, Badal Gupta, and Dinesh Gupta.

This project has also taught me to value the living traces that archives leave in the present. My work with the Agnijug Archive had one interesting outcome: a reunion of the families of Benoy Basu, Badal Gupta, and Dinesh Gupta—three young men (22, 18, and 19 years old, respectively) who stormed Kolkata's British headquarters on December 8, 1930, killing Colonel N. S. Simpson, the inspector general of prisons, who was known for his brutal methods of torture. Captured, convicted, and imprisoned, Benoy and Badal died by suicide; Dinesh was executed. There was no time for solidarity in 1930 as the families mourned their sons. But in 2023, I organized an online gathering of the current generation. Emotions ran high as they exchanged stories of the young men and read letters written by Dinesh Gupta from his prison cell, reminding us of their humanity and youth.

Most of the revolutionaries from this period belonged to or had families in East Bengal, and I was interested in understanding how they were impacted by the 1947 Indian Partition and forced migrations that followed—the price paid for independence from Britain. Many families lost their homes in a country they'd fought to free. But partition also resulted in significant loss of material records, especially in the case of deceased rebels, whose families could carry only the essentials while being displaced. Family members recounted feelings of betrayal among the revolutionaries, emphasizing how distant the country seemed from the independent India they'd dreamt of. Unhappy and disillusioned, most refused to accept the Freedom Fighter's Pension offered by the government. Ullaskar Dutta, a first-generation rebel once incarcerated in Cellular Jail, British India's penal colony, for his role in the 1908 Muzaffarpur Conspiracy, refused to live in a divided Bengal. Heartbroken, he moved to Silchar (Assam), where he spent his last days. Lokenath Bal remained stoic even as his brother Tegra was killed by British bullets at the Battle of Jalalabad Hill. But he became emotional decades later while recounting to Shibshankar Ghosh that "this is not the independence" for which he had denied his 13-year-old brother a last sip of water on the battlefield.

The archive has also turned up the significant role played in refugee rehabilitation by former revolutionaries including Ambika Chakraborty and Ganesh Ghosh, who joined the Communist Party after being released from prison in the late 1940s. They helped the displaced populace organize and deliver their demands to Free India's government. Even decades later, Ananta Singh, a Chittagong revolutionary, joined the Naxal Uprising in the hope of reuniting the two Bengals. He was arrested and imprisoned from 1969 to 1977 for participating in bank robberies organized to gather funds for the movement.

Through gathering these stories, I have come to understand Agnijug Archive as having a two-part mission. The first and most significant is archiving oral histories for the benefit of both scholars and nonacademics. The second is to disseminate these stories widely enough to create awareness about anticolonial armed revolutionaries; this goal veers toward public history. Working on this project has alerted me to the regrettably small impact made by many official gestures, such as paying tribute to national heroes by naming places after them. As part of the project, I led a public survey, asking pedestrians in Kolkata about several popular revolutionary leaders after whom important places in the city had been named. One young man said he knew nothing about Surya Sen and was aware only of a tube station by that name. At the same time, the warm reactions I received while presenting this material at high school workshops and international conferences made clear the power of a story well told.

As an oral historian working on the revolutionary movement in Bengal, I want to draw attention to the fact that these young women and men could have been anyone—to make my audience feel that they could have come from our own families. The best tribute we can pay them is to remember their struggles and triumphs in everyday conversation. Deifying them risks forgetting the complicated history in which they played a vital part. P

*Shriya Dasgupta is a PhD student at Purdue University who researches armed anticolonial resistance, gender, and displacement in Bengal.*

***ONCE YOU GO BLACK, YOU NEVER GO BACK: The National and International Impact of African American Cuisine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (2025).**

**Available in hardcover, paperback, and ebook from Amazon.**

The demise of the Reconstruction years could not stop it. *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the ensuing laws put into effect into the twentieth century did not curtail it. Even the rise in the elite status of European cuisine could not overpower it. Despite hundreds of years of slavery and oppression, institutionalized and legitimized by racist city ordinances and federal legislation, African Americans developed Black owned businesses and continued to retain a dominant presence in every venue of food service.

*Once You Go Black, You Never Go Back* not only showcases African American caterers, restauranteurs, hotel owners, and others in food service who became successful in the United States and Europe, it is a cookbook containing archival recipes from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many attributed to the Black cooks and chefs of some this country's most famous authors, as well as recipes of my own creation. It is also a culinary and social history presenting correctives such as attributing the "Schomburg" cookbook proposal to its true author, Walter F. White, former Executive Secretary of the NAACP. Relying on primary and archival research and documentation and secondary sources, *Once You Go Black* offers a focus on the national, as well as the international interplay between African Americans and the dynamics of American (and European) culture, politics, and cuisine.

Diane M. Spivey is a culinary historian who has devoted forty-five years to the study and recording of African American food traditions and cooking. Her previous books include the much heralded *At the Table of Power: Food and Cuisine in the African American Struggle for Freedom, Justice, and Equality* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022), and the pathbreaking *The Peppers, Cracklings, and Knots of Wool Cookbook: The Global Migration of African Cuisine* (State University of New York Press, 1999).

SARAH MUNCY

# RETHINKING A CONTINENT

*In the June 2025 Issue of the* American Historical Review

The June 2025 issue of the *American Historical Review* features articles on opium, terminology for slavery, and counterrevolution, and includes contributions on the concept of "Big Asia," searchability in the age of mass digitization, and the use of archival databases in the classroom.

The issue begins with "Opiated Oceans" by **Alastair Su** (Westmont Coll.). Su analyzes the role and regulation of opium in the 19th-century *trata amarilla* ("yellow trade") of Chinese indentured workers ("coolies") to the Caribbean. Su explains that while scholars have presented different reasons for opium's ubiquity—from a form of recreation to a method of social control—he argues that its widespread use among the indentured workers highlights the correlation between substance dependence and infectious diseases. The genesis of regulations that shifted the provision of opium from discretionary to mandatory was rooted in efforts to stave off seaborne epidemics. Opium, Su explains, suppressed symptoms of diseases, especially dysentery and typhoid, and low-cost contract labor was too profitable not to institute polices to promote workers' survival, if temporary, at this intersection of labor and global migration.

In "Mesopotamian Words for 'Slave,'" **Seth Richardson** (Univ. of Chicago) traces the linguistic ambiguity surrounding terms for slavery in social, economic, and legal Mesopotamian contexts. He shows that "terminological questions about what slavery is are as old as the terms themselves." Ambiguity of language profoundly shaped and informed socioeconomic notions of slavery, and definitional vagueness that permitted the nonspecific meanings for personal status, legal object, and economic institution in turn enabled slavery to change and thrive across the ages. Richardson argues that lexical ambiguity was a strategy that enabled the practice of slavery in legal and commercial practice, untroubled by social logic or critical definitions.

**Nathaniel George** (SOAS Univ. of London), in "'Survival in an Age of Revolution,'" examines the political biography of Lebanese philosopher and statesman Charles Malik, primarily known as the principal author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to historicize counterrevolution in the 20th century. George argues, "While great effort has been invested in analyzing the role of revolutionary intellectuals in history and theory, much less attention has been paid to the counterrevolution and its guides." Countering the presumption that in the era of decolonization, anticolonial efforts were the default, George shows that Malik and the struggle for the Lebanese state can serve as an "instructive window into the global battle between imperial, revolutionary, and counterrevolutionary conceptions of sovereignty and political representation."

> Seven authors trained in different subfields of Asian history discuss the constructed idea of Asian geocultural unity.

The History Lab begins with the forum "Big Asia: Rethinking a Region." Seven authors, **Sakura Christmas** (Bowdoin Coll.), **Amy Beth Stanley** (Northwestern Univ.), **Nile Green** (Univ. of California, Los Angeles), **Mustafa Tuna** (Duke Univ.), **Rachel Leow** (Univ. of Cambridge), **Melissa Macauley** (Northwestern Univ.), and **Jeffrey Wasserstrom** (University of California, Irvine), trained in different subfields of Asian history, discuss the constructed idea of Asian geocultural unity, sketching how the idea of "Asia" was disseminated across the different lands it labeled and conceptually unified. Green, the forum's organizer, remarks that it "is an apt moment to grapple with the multiple ways in which that biggest of continents is conceived—especially in its own languages." Four shorter commentaries from **Hyunhee Park** (John Jay Coll.), **Ruth Mostern** (Univ. of Pittsburgh), **Cemil Aydin** (Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), and **Sebastian Conrad** (Freie Univ. Berlin) conclude the forum.

This issue's cover features an 11th-century world map that was published as part of Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Diwan Lugat at-Turk* (*The Compendium of the Turkic Dialects*). The representation is oriented with the East at the top and centers the Turkish-speaking areas of central Asia. Adjustment to the scale also gives the impression that central Asia is magnified in the center. In the History Lab forum "Big Asia: Rethinking a Region," the contributors consider the concept of a unified "Asia" and new approaches on the macro scale, pushing readers to adjust their own view and framing of "Big Asia" and prompting a reexamination of globalization and Asian history.


The Lab also includes "In Defense of the Search Bar," in which **Hannah Frydman** (Harvard Univ.) looks to the "infinite archive"—the ever-expanding terrain of mass digitization projects—and its search capabilities. Challenging assumptions that full-text search can lead to decontextualized history, she argues that the "anarchy of the mass digitization and its search bar" can push researchers to "think outside of long-established classifications." Using the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's digital library, Gallica, as a case study, Frydman proposes that queer history provides an opportunity to deconstruct and reconstruct the archive and its categories.

Continuing the collaboration between *History in Focus*, the *AHR* podcast, with other historical podcasts, **Daniel Story** (Univ. of California, Santa Cruz) teams up with **Kate Carpenter** (Princeton Univ.), host and producer of *Drafting the Past*, to discuss the craft of writing history. They highlight the approaches, themes, and challenges that have come up in conversations with guests, while unpacking the minutiae of both the writing process and podcast interviews.

The Lab includes the latest module for the #AHRSyllabus project with **Edward Cohn**'s (Grinnell Coll.) "Teaching Historical Thinking Through a Primary Source Database." Cohn shows how instructors of intro-level college history classes can work not just with preselected primary sources but with an entire archive of documents—an online collection of oral history transcripts about everyday life in the Soviet Union known as the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. The module includes a lesson plan introducing students to the collection and a writing assignment to help hone their skills in using and synthesizing archival material.

The Lab concludes with two History Unclassified essays. In "Las Que Van Quedando en el Camino (The Women Who Are Left by the Wayside)," **Thomas Miller Klubock** (Univ. of Virginia) examines a recently discovered oral history interview of a woman peasant (*campesina*) and leader of Chile's 1934 Ránquil rebellion, Emelina Sagredo, with Chilean playwright Isidora Aguirre. In reviewing the interview and Aguirre's dramatization of the Ránquil rebellion, Klubock considers the sources' importance alongside the ethical questions that abound regarding subjects' privacy and the nature of writing a history of largely illiterate women. **Pernille Ipsen** (Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison), in "Writing My Seven Mothers Back Together," recounts her experience writing and publishing a memoir of the seven feminists she called mother during her childhood in Denmark in the early 1970s. She details the difficulties of this work and of revisiting the conflicts that drew the women apart, as well as the solace she found in ultimately reminding her mothers of "the feminist alliances they formed across their differences." P

*Sarah Muncy is managing editor of the* American Historical Review.

COMPILED BY LIZ TOWNSEND

# 2025 AHA NOMINATIONS

The Nominating Committee for 2025–26, chaired by Bianca Murillo (California State Univ., Dominguez Hills), met in February and offers the following candidates for offices of the Association that are to be filled in the election this year. The list also includes candidates nominated by petition. Voting by AHA members will begin June 1.

## President

**Suzanne Marchand**, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (Boyd Professor; European intellectual, history of humanities/material culture/arts, Germany and Austria 1700–1945)

## President-elect

**Lonnie Bunch III**, Smithsonian Institution (secretary; US, museums, African American history, American presidency/sport/film)

**George J. Sánchez**, University of Southern California (professor and chair, American Studies & Ethnicity; Chicana/o immigration, American West)

*By petition*: **Annelise Orleck**, Dartmouth College (professor; 20th-century US politics, labor, immigration, women, social movements, race and migration)

## Professional Division

### Vice President

**William Deverell**, University of Southern California (professor and co-director, Huntington-USC Institute; US West, environment)

**Karin Wulf**, John Carter Brown Library and Brown University (director/librarian and professor; colonial America, women, family and politics)

*By petition*: **Sherene Seikaly**, University of California, Santa Barbara (associate professor; modern Middle Eastern capitalism, consumption, and development)

### Council Member

**William Kuracina**, East Texas A&M University (professor; Indian socialism, Indian nationalist movement)

**M. Raisur Rahman**, Wake Forest University (associate professor and chair; South Asia, Muslims, local and urban)

## Research Division

### Council Member

**Niko Pfund**, Oxford University Press (academic publisher and president, OUP USA; publishing, scholarship, media)

**Nadine Zimmerli**, University of Virginia Press (editor in chief; transnational, US and German-speaking central Europe)

*By petition*: **Van Gosse**, Franklin & Marshall College (professor emeritus; African American struggle for citizenship, Global Cold War politics and culture)

## Teaching Division

### Council Member

**Kelli Y. Nakamura**, Kapi'olani Community College (professor; world, US, Asian American history, Hawai'i)

**Amy G. Powers**, Waubonsee Community College (professor; benevolent societies in New York City, prostitution regulation)

*By petition*: **Karen Miller**, La Guardia Community College, CUNY (professor; internal migration programs, settler colonization, long 20th-century US empire in Philippines)

## Committee on Committees

**Laura Matthew**, Marquette University (associate professor; Mesoamerica, Spanish colonial Guatemala)

**Laura J. Mitchell**, University of California, Irvine (associate professor; colonial South African labor/slavery, African environmental, world)

## Nominating Committee

### Slot 1

**Ernesto Chavez**, University of Texas at El Paso (Dr. and Mrs. W. H. Timmons Professor of Borderlands History and chair; film, sexuality, Latino)

**Marc Rodriguez**, Portland State University (professor and editor, *Pacific Historical Review*; Chicano/Mexican American civil rights, legal)

*By petition*: **Alexander Aviña**, Arizona State University (associate professor; Latin America, activism and social movements, immigration)

### Slot 2

**Jeffrey Ahlman**, Smith College (professor and chair; African political and social, global Black intellectual)

**Mariana P. Candido**, Emory University (Winship Distinguished Research Professor; West Central Africa, land and property, gender, slavery/slave trade)

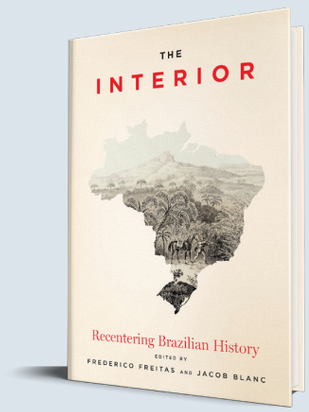
### Slot 3

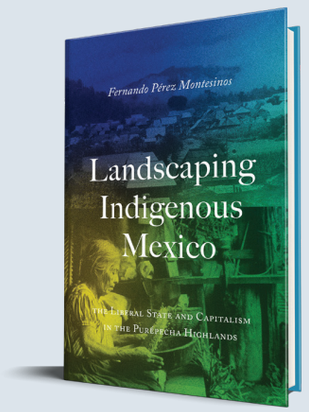
**Michele Louro**, Salem State University (professor; modern South Asia, world, British imperialism)

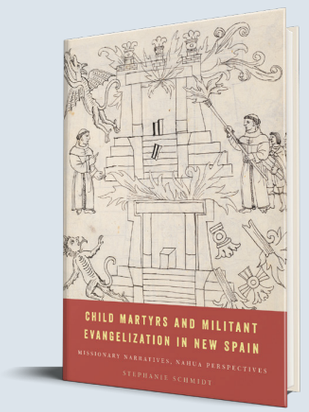
**Prasannan Parthasarathi**, Boston College (professor and chair; South Asia, India, economic and social, environmental)

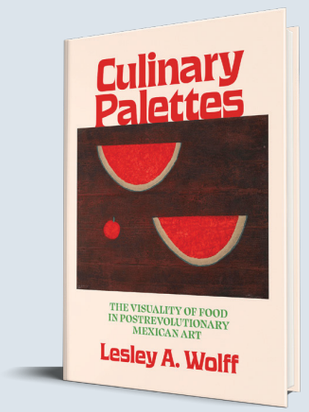
Nominations may also be made by petition; each petition must carry the signatures of 100 or more members of the Association in good standing and indicate the particular vacancy for which the nomination is intended. Nominations by petition must be in the hands of the Nominating Committee on or before May 15 and should be sent to the AHA office at 400 A St. SE, Washington, DC 20003 or committees@historians.org. All nominations must be accompanied by certification of willingness of the nominee to serve if elected. In distributing the annual ballot to the members of the Association, the Nominating Committee shall present and identify such candidates nominated by petition along with its own candidates. P

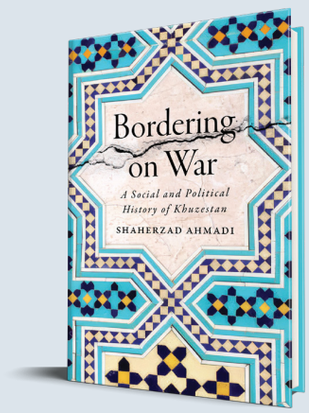
*Liz Townsend is manager, data administration and integrity, at the AHA and the staff member for the Nominating Committee.*

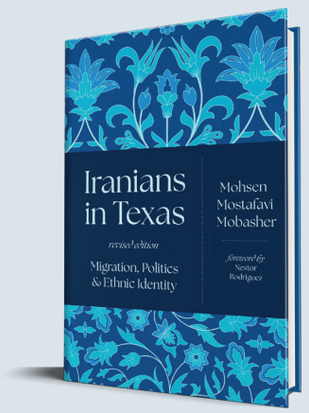


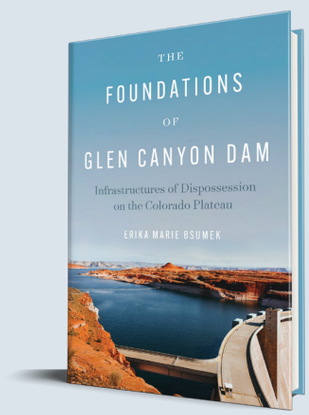



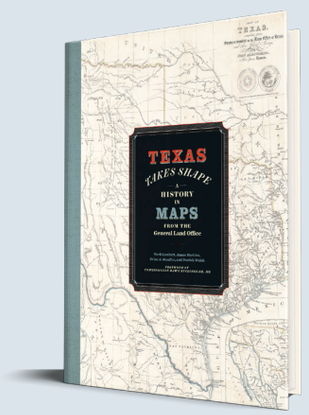

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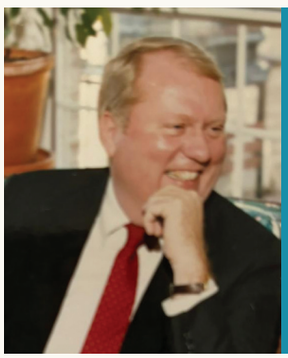


# William D. Barnard

**1942–2024**

US Political Historian

On December 13, 2024, William Dean Barnard died in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Bill was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 18, 1942. His early education was in the local public schools, and he went on to earn a BA in history at Birmingham–Southern College, followed by an MA and a PhD both earned at the University of Virginia. His dissertation, written under the supervision of Edward E. Younger, was revised and published as *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942–1950* (Univ. of Alabama Press, 1974). One reviewer described the book as "elegantly concise" and "the labor of conspicuous scholarship." Bill taught in the Department of History at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, from 1979 to 1993. He served as chair of the department and earned the rank of professor emeritus. He also served as assistant to the chancellor of the University of Alabama System. While working at Alabama, Bill began his long-standing relationship with the University of Oxford—first as the administrator of a study-abroad program that brought students from Alabama to Balliol and Wadham Colleges. Later, after he moved to Oxford, he became chief invigilator at the university.

But there was more to Bill than his academic career. Since his graduate school days, Bill was a political junkie, and his finger never left the pulse of the American governmental scene. He was always a shrewd analyst of national and state-level maneuverings. After Bill moved to England in 1998, he became involved with Democrats Abroad UK. He was elected to a four-year term as chair of that group in 2007, during which he oversaw the organization of absentee voting by citizens working or living in the United Kingdom. In addition, he represented the Democratic Party's position to the English media, including frequent appearances on the BBC and Sky News. When his chairmanship ended, he continued to appear regularly on British television as an analyst of the American political scene.

Bill was a true son of the South. He was a gentleman with courtly manners and elegant speech, but he could also explain in astonishing detail the differences among regional variations on Southern barbecue. He had wide-ranging tastes in both music and books. He liked classical to country, and there was no literary genre that he hadn't at least sampled.

His many achievements notwithstanding, Bill was a humble man. He had a spirit that was generous and warm and an intellect that was unassuming and modest. His book is dedicated to his parents, who, "by their example, instilled in their children a respect for the dignity of all human kind." That was a lesson that inspired his support of the Civil Rights Movement in his youth and a commitment to social justice throughout his whole life.

Bill Barnard was a friend of mine for a number of years. We saw each other more regularly after he came to the same part of Florida to escape English winters that I had come to escape Pennsylvania winters. In a Venn diagram of our respective historical interests, there would be little intersection, except for a shared appreciation of beautifully written history. We spent many happy hours introducing each other to our favorite historians and their work—and thanks to him, I learned some Southern history.

Bill is survived by his husband, Rob, with whom he shared the last 33 years. Also surviving are three children from his first marriage, seven grandchildren, and one sister. He also leaves behind many, many friends, and he will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Brian R. Dunn
*Clarion University of Pennsylvania (emeritus)*

# Roberta Marx Delson

**1945–2025**

Historian of Brazil, Latin America, and the Caribbean; AHA Member

Roberta "Bobbie" Alice Marx Delson died suddenly and unexpectedly on February 11, 2025, just months short of her 80th birthday.

Born and raised in Queens, New York City, Bobbie developed an interest in Latin America through a childhood friend from South America. She attended Syracuse University, earning a BA in international relations through the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. She graduated *cum laude* in 1966 and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

In 1966, she entered Columbia University in the Department of Anthropology, supported by a "National Defense" Foreign Language Fellowship in Portuguese. She met her future husband, Eric Delson, early in that academic year; he was a PhD student in paleontology. In the summer of 1967, with Ford Foundation funding, Bobbie traveled to Brazil, where she undertook a study of the Jewish community of Porto Alegre. It was just after the Six-Day War and the community was beginning to open up to gentiles, so she developed a questionnaire to elicit their changing views. She wrote up the results for her MA in anthropology. She moved to the history department for her PhD, under the tutelage of Bradford Burns. After archival research in Portugal and Brazil, she wrote a dissertation on town planning in colonial Brazil, supervised by John Mundy and Herbert Klein.

Bobbie began teaching history at Rutgers University–Newark in 1972 and was appointed assistant professor after defending her dissertation in 1974. Also in 1974, Bobbie gave birth to William Charles Delson, and the family moved to Fort Lee, New Jersey, midway between Rutgers and Eric's job at Lehman College, CUNY. At Rutgers, she taught introductory history courses and upper-division classes on Latin America, Brazil, and the Caribbean, as well as city history and urban planning, which were taken by students in the schools of architecture and engineering. She served as associate director and acting director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the main campus in New Brunswick.

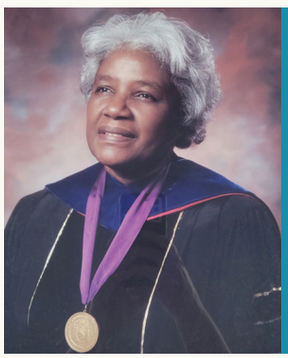
Bobbie left Rutgers in 1981. She taught briefly at Princeton University and spent 10 years at the US Merchant Marine Academy in her hometown of Kings Point, New York, and 12 years as an adjunct associate and full professor at Drew University. After this, she formally retired from teaching undergraduates, which she loved—and they loved her. She was appointed a research associate in anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), a position she held with pride. She was a longtime member of the Columbia University Seminar on Brazil, which she co-directed for many years. In 2016, following the death of her mother, Bobbie and Eric moved to the family home in Kings Point, where she passed away this February.

Bobbie's dissertation was published in 1979 as *New Towns for Colonial Brazil: Spatial and Social Planning of the Eighteenth Century* (Dellplain Series in Latin American Studies, Syracuse University Department of Geography); it was translated into Portuguese as *Novas Vilas para o Brasil-Colônia* and published in Brazil in 1998. She demonstrated that colonial administrators laid out backlands towns, refuting the "standard" view of an unplanned Brazil. She edited a collection, *Readings in Caribbean History and Economics: An Introduction to the Region* (Gordon and Breach, 1981), and built on that work to edit an eight-volume series titled Caribbean Studies.

She wrote 25 major papers that reflect the wide range of her historical interests, mainly on colonial and imperial Brazil: town planning and its visual record, landscape conservation (often co-authored with John Dickenson), training of military engineers, canoe shipping on the Amazon (and canoe mechanics), the textile industry, and indigenous dress. Farther afield, she wrote on 19th-century sugar production; polycystic ovary syndrome; ethnicity and migration of global textile workers; a plea for comprehensive Caribbean history; and, most recently, aspects of the AMNH and "scientific Pan-Americanism" in the early 20th century. She also published numerous encyclopedia entries, book reviews (including 92 in *Choice*, from the American Library Association), and a survey of historic New Jersey school buildings with recommendations for preservation and reuse.

Her final project is a book-length treatment of the multifarious roles of AMNH curators and other staff during World War I, which will be published posthumously by Springer Science. Bobbie is survived by Eric, William, daughter-in-law Lisa, and extended family members.

Eric Delson
*American Museum of Natural History*



# Ena Farley

**1938–2024**

Historian of African America; AHA 50-Year Member

Ena Lunette Farley, a passionate advocate for African American studies at a time when the field was still struggling for recognition, died on August 4, 2024, after a long career as a faculty member at the State University of New York (SUNY) College at Brockport. Dedicated to scholarship and teaching, she was also devoted to the relationships she forged with colleagues, friends, and family members.

Ena was born in Race Course, Jamaica, on September 15, 1938, to Edna and Richard Morris, both educators. After graduating from the Wolmers High School for Girls, she earned a BA in history (with honors) from the University of London, University College of the West Indies. Subsequently she received an MA from the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education in Vermont. In 1961, she married Rawle Farley, an economist. Ena completed a PhD in American history at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1973.

In 1967, Ena became assistant professor of history at SUNY Buffalo, where she taught until 1973, when she was appointed to Brockport's recently founded Department of Afro-American Studies. In 1980, while serving as interim chair, she found herself at the center of a controversy over the selection of the department's next leader. When a department vote resulted in a tie between Ena and a male colleague, the college president resolved the matter in her favor. Given the difficulties she faced as a woman seeking to lead a fractious group of men from multiple cultural backgrounds, her adversary's accusation that the college administration had displayed "paternalistic" behavior by choosing her as chair is fraught with irony. But Ena held her ground, just as she advised her students to do when faced with obstacles in their own lives.

During the remainder of her career at Brockport, Ena threw some of her energies into planning events that advanced Black history. A commemoration she helped organize in 1990 to mark the 20th anniversary of her department, by then called African and Afro-American Studies, epitomized her values: She brought in Harold Cruse, author of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), as the keynote speaker, remarking to the student newspaper, "We're dignifying the discipline of African and Afro-American Studies in the best way by bringing in a top-flight intellectual."

At the same time, Ena shared her expertise as a scholar, with a primary focus on the histories of African Americans in New York state. Her book, *The Underside of Reconstruction New York: The Struggle over the Issue of Black Equality* (Garland), was published in 1993. In paper presentations, she also ventured into other areas, such as Puerto Rico and World War II, as well as the biographies of colonial Black Americans. After her retirement as professor emerita in 1995, she was a consultant to the New York State Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau to identify sites of importance to African American history. In 1997, she was appointed to the New York State Board of Regents, continuing the public service that had included membership on the Board of Education for Brockport Central Schools from 1986 to 1994. In 1998, she and Rawle were honored at the 50th anniversary celebration of the University of the West Indies. Rawle died in 2010.

Ena was notably generous as a mentor, earning the praise of her students for her high standards and confidence in their ability to succeed. The current chair of her former department recalled her assistance to a young scholar of African American literature. Ena also persuaded a professor of African dance who was reticent about displaying his talent as a visual artist to mount an exhibit of his work, enriching the lives of its many viewers.

Dominating any other personal quality, however, was her pride in her four children, Anthony, Felipe, Christopher, and Jonathan Farley, each of whom graduated from either Harvard College or Harvard Law School. Once when Ena was speaking at a public symposium, she said to the person introducing her, "Be sure to mention my sons." Although she regarded them as her biggest achievement, she deserves to be remembered for much more, including her contribution to SUNY Brockport's ongoing effort to bring global perspectives into all aspects of its curriculum.

Joan Shelley Rubin
*University of Rochester*

# Henry L. Feingold

**1931–2024**

Historian of Judaism in the United States

It is with great sadness for his passing in December, and admiration for his lifetime of scholarly work, that I write this tribute to Henry L. Feingold, who spent most of his career at Baruch College, City University of New York.

A key figure in the field of American Jewish history, and notably the first historian to tackle systematically the issue of American refugee policy in the face of Nazi persecution of the Jews, Henry contributed much to our understanding of the intersections of foreign policy, domestic politics, Nazism, and modern and American Jewish history through his many lectures, conference presentations, and his book *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938–1945* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 1970). The book, which grew out of his New York University doctoral dissertation, involved meticulous combing of the archives of the US Department of State.

Born in Ludwigshafen, Germany, Henry fled with his parents to the United States at age seven. Educated in the New York public schools, he received his BA and MA from Brooklyn College in 1953 and 1954, respectively. He then taught at Brooklyn's Samuel J. Tilden High School and served in the US Army from 1954 to 1957. Here he was assigned the task of interrogating defectors from the German Democratic Republic, East Germany. Upon returning to civilian life, he enrolled in the doctoral program at New York University, studying under Henry Bamford Parkes. He received his PhD in 1966.

Henry went on to a long and distinguished career, teaching US diplomatic history and American Jewish history at Baruch College and the CUNY Graduate Center. His passionate concern with trying to understand the actions and inactions of the Roosevelt administration in response to Hitler continued well beyond *The Politics of Rescue*. He published *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (Syracuse Univ. Press, 1995) as well as numerous articles on the subject. With that history always on his mind, he opened scholarly discussion on the involvement of the American government and American Jews with the Jews of the Soviet Union. In 2007, Henry published *"Silent No More": Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish Effort, 1967–1989* (Syracuse Univ. Press, 2007). In all these studies, he asked historians to contemplate the contexts of inaction and to make sense of the mix of the possible and the impossible when states face each other and confront evil.

His interest in and commitment to the field of American Jewish history extended well beyond themes of rescue, activism, and diplomacy. Henry helped build the field from its previous state as an enterprise marginal to both American history and modern Jewish history. This history, as Henry presented it, involved rich, complicated, and fascinating issues of integration, community building, adjustment to new circumstances, and intense discord among Jews.

He did this most importantly in his superb editorship of the Johns Hopkins University Press series The Jewish People in America. A five-volume endeavor, to which he contributed the volume covering the period 1920–45, the series made the point that the experience of the Jews in America helps historians and others understand American history in its complex entirety and the global history of the Jews since the 17th century. He had the difficult task of imposing consistency on the individual books so that they held together as a coherent whole, while encouraging innovation, creativity, and individual interpretation. He handled this with aplomb.

I had the immense honor to be included among the five authors of the series, writing the second volume, *A Time for Gathering*, which focused on 1820–80. He was a wonderful team member while also being a sharp and exacting editor. He encouraged me, as he did so many other younger scholars over the course of their careers. He asked hard questions while respecting good scholarship that offered interpretations different from his own.

Beyond what I hope will be the enduring legacy of his writing, editing, and service to a number of scholarly boards, Henry will be remembered for his humor, wit, and kindness. In conversations with others and his presentations at scholarly gatherings, he recognized that not everyone agreed with him, and he did not always agree with them, but he respected their dedication to the scholarly enterprise.

Hasia R. Diner
*New York University (emerita)*

*Photo courtesy Feingold family*

# Peter Kolchin

**1943–2025**

Historian of Slavery; AHA 50-Year Member

Peter Robert Kolchin, Henry Clay Reed Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Delaware, died at home of lymphoma on January 13, 2025, at the age of 81. A distinguished and award-winning historian, Kolchin specialized in American slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and comparative slavery. The author of five highly regarded books and many essays, he won awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship, two National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships, a Bancroft Prize, and election to the Society of American Historians.

Kolchin was born in Washington, DC, on June 3, 1943. He grew up on the Upper West Side of New York City, attending the Walden School and Columbia University, where he majored in history. In 1970, he earned his PhD in American history from Johns Hopkins University, studying with David Herbert Donald. He was proud to have attended the 1963 March on Washington and to have suspended his graduate career in order to campaign for Eugene McCarthy in 1968, a move that cost him his graduate school fellowship for a time.

His second book, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Belknap Press, 1987), brought immense scholarly regard. Praised by one reviewer as a "massively erudite and elegantly crafted study," it received the Bancroft Prize and merited a sequel, *Emancipation: The Abolition and Aftermath of American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Yale Univ. Press, 2024). His best-selling *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (Hill and Wang, 2003) was judged by a fellow historian of the South to have achieved "the nearly impossible" by "synthesizing the voluminous, contentious, and often conflicting scholarship about slavery in the United States." No surprise, because along with his flair for forceful argument, Kolchin enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for his mastery of that immense body of historical writing. His international reception was also extensive. His books were reviewed in the major Soviet and Russian journals, and Russianists considered his work groundbreaking in their own field.

Kolchin taught at the University of California at Davis, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the University of New Mexico, and Harvard University before coming to the University of Delaware in 1985. His engagement with students and colleagues shaped an esprit de corps that advanced the department's aspiration for outstanding teaching and research. In 2002, the University of Delaware awarded him its highest faculty honor, the Alison Professorship, recognizing outstanding scholarship, teaching, and service. He supervised over a dozen doctoral students, who remember him as a brilliant mentor whose tireless support inspired them to superior work. Several of his former students honored him with *New Directions in Slavery Studies*, edited by Jeff Forret and Christine E. Sears (Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2015).

Colleagues remember Kolchin just as fondly. A model of collegiality, he helped new hires feel welcome the minute they arrived in Delaware. Many recalled the warmth with which he and his partner, Anne M. Boylan, welcomed them to dinners and gatherings at their home. In equal measure, colleagues remember Kolchin's uncommon intelligence. "Any time he presented his research, it felt like watching a master class in how to handle historical evidence," remarked the current chair. His wry humor, love of debate, and uncanny grasp of historiography shaped a vibrant department culture. His warm friendship, sense of community, and concern for the discipline of history will be greatly missed.

Kolchin served that discipline in many roles. He was elected president of the Southern Historical Association (2013–14) and to the executive council of the Organization of American Historians. He served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of American History* and *Slavery and Abolition*, and he further helped other learned societies award book prizes, grant fellowships, and set professional policies. He was an OAH Distinguished Lecturer and served on the AHA Nominating Committee.

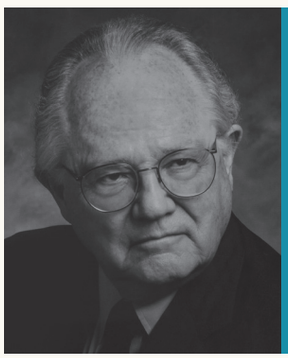
He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Anne M. Boylan; their sons and daughters-in-law, Michael Boylan-Kolchin and Ann Fornof and David Boylan-Kolchin and Sara Handy; and four grandchildren. Also surviving are his sister and brother-in-law, Elly and Andrew Hardy.

Christine Leigh Heyrman
*University of Delaware*

David R. Shearer
*University of Delaware (emeritus)*

James M. Brophy
*University of Delaware*

*Photo courtesy Anne M. Boylan*



# Donald G. Mathews

**1932–2024**

Historian of American Religion

Donald G. Mathews, professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), died on April 30, 2024.

Mathews was born in Caldwell, Idaho, to a family of teachers. Drawn to the Methodist ministry and history while studying at the College of Idaho, he pursued the first at Yale Divinity School followed by Methodist ordination, and the second at Duke University with a doctorate in history. Stints at Duke and Princeton University led him to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he spent the rest of his career.

A stalwart of UNC's history department, Mathews was a leading scholar of religion in the American South. He was a treasured mentor who taught students to listen closely to all voices from the past. A careful and compassionate student of Southern evangelicalism, Mathews showed how this faith of the 18th-century disinherited continued to comfort and inspire an enduring congregation of Southerners, from common folk to slaveholding patriarchs. He then described how white Southern evangelicals embraced racism while Black ones resisted and survived it. Over time, both became part of the South's cultural bedrock while fostering such diverse descendants as the Civil Rights Movement and Christian nationalism.

Mathews pursued these themes in a series of profound books. He began with *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780–1845* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), which traced the Methodist struggle over slavery from the circuit riders' earliest criticisms to the birth of the proslavery Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Building on this work, Mathews devoted his second and best-known book, *Religion in the Old South* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), to an ambitious interpretation of evangelicalism, the Old South's dominant religious idiom. He argued that evangelicals first promised spiritual—not temporal—liberty to the outcasts of Southern society and grew by expanding that promise to ever-higher social ranks. When success confronted evangelicals with the evils of slavery, they shrank from a frontal attack. Instead, they befriended slaveholders to gain access to their captive Black audiences and to sanctify slavery by seeking their conversion. Ironically, these efforts led not to a purely submissive Black church but to a flexible, strategic movement that salved wounds when necessary and resisted oppression when possible. For Mathews, Southern white and Black churches were not opposites but co-heirs of a strained cultural complex that mingled white conservatism and Black radicalism.

Co-authored with his then-wife, Jane Sherron De Hart, Mathews's next book probed the 20th century. The new interpretive framework of *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1990) used the example of North Carolina to show how religion, gender, and culture intersected to revolutionize American politics, transforming apolitical evangelicals into the New Right.

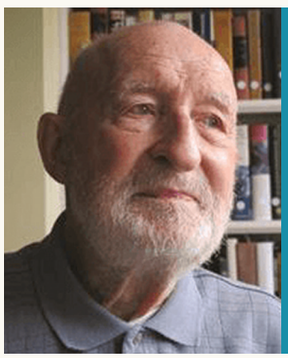
After editing a wide-ranging collection of essays and receiving an impressive Festschrift, which together demonstrated the breadth and maturity he brought to his field, Mathews closed his career with *At the Altar of Lynching* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017). Mathews's darkest book grappled with a legacy of lynching in his own family to explore how the most passionate voices of Southern evangelicalism could belie their claims of spiritual liberation with blood sacrifice on the "altar of lynching." In a work that pained him deeply, Mathews left us a striking testament to intellectual courage and physical determination.

Mathews was married twice. De Hart made her distinguished career on the faculties of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the University of California, Santa Barbara. Elizabeth F. (Betsy) Buford was a dedicated public historian who served as director of the North Carolina Museum of History and director of the Division of State History Museums. Sadly, she and Mathews's beloved sister, Alice, both predeceased him. He is survived by numerous nieces and nephews.

Directing 24 completed dissertations, Donald G. Mathews left his greatest mark on students and readers. The editors of his Festschrift, Regina D. Sullivan and Monte Harrell Hampton, may have spoken for all of them when they honored Mathews's "compelling but rare combination of sensitivity and skepticism" and his "refusal to dismiss those dimensions of the past that do not yield readily to the expectations and moral framework of present academic discourse." May all of us follow that good example.

Harry Watson
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (emeritus)*

*Photo courtesy University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*



# Albert J. Schmidt

**1925–2025**

Historian of Britain and Russia; AHA Life Member

Historian Albert J. Schmidt died on January 18, 2025. Born in the Germantown neighborhood of Louisville, Kentucky, on August 27, 1925, Schmidt came of age during World War II and enlisted in the US Army Air Forces in 1943. He completed his first year at DePauw University before being called to duty in New Guinea and the Philippines.

Following his graduation from DePauw in 1949, Schmidt entered the doctoral program in history at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1950, during his second year, he became a life member of the American Historical Association. His doctoral research was completed during a Fulbright year at the University of London in 1952–53, and he earned his PhD in 1953. His dissertation, "Thomas Wilson, Tudor Scholar and Statesman," led to several articles that enhanced our understanding of early modern British history. A relatively unknown figure, Wilson played a central role in Queen Elizabeth I's government as secretary of state, advising her on domestic and foreign matters, managing her correspondence, engaging in diplomatic and military missions, and overseeing her secret service. Because earlier historians had focused on Tudor secretaries such Thomas Cromwell, William Cecil, and Francis Walsingham, Schmidt had the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the field with his studies of Wilson's career.

Schmidt taught history at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from 1953 to 1965 and at the University of Bridgeport (UB) in Connecticut from 1965 to 1990, where he served as the Arnold J. Bernhard Professor of History. At UB, he chaired the history department and served as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, vice president of academic affairs, and, from 1978 to 1990, professor of law. He received UB's Scholar of the Year award in 1969 and was the recipient of numerous prestigious grants and fellowships.

In the early 1960s, Schmidt retooled himself as a scholar. Deeply affected by the Hungarian revolution of 1956, he delved into Russian history. In 1960–62, he studied Russian history and language at Indiana University's Russian and East European Institute and at Moscow University. He also embarked on a new scholarly project focusing on Russian architecture and town planning during the era of Catherine the Great (1762–96) and her successors. This resulted in a book, *The Architecture and Planning of Classical Moscow: A Cultural History* (American Philosophical Society, 1989), half a dozen scholarly articles, and an unpublished book manuscript. The book explores Catherine's quest to create an orderly urban environment that harnessed architecture and town design to her goals of controlling urban society and emphasizing Russian identity as a Western power. Although the role of her predecessor, Peter the Great, in establishing Saint Petersburg was widely known, Catherine's rebuilding of Moscow had been little explored before this book. Schmidt's unpublished manuscript, "Provincial Russian Urbanism: Shaping Catherine the Great's Imperial Space (1760–96)," moved to the provinces of central Russia, where Catherine transformed the appearance of some 400 towns and cities, replacing local architectural styles with a uniform Russian one that underscored their subordination to Catherine's imperial power. Many of these cities served as new administrative centers that allowed the Russian autocracy to extend its imperial reach.

Schmidt's interest in legal history, which included a year as a student at the New York University Law School, led to two more research fields. Schmidt returned to Lincolnshire, the home of Wilson, to investigate the emergence of the country attorney as a profession in the late 18th century. In the late 1980s, during the Soviet periods of glasnost and perestroika, Schmidt joined a team of scholars who organized conferences and edited books on these developments' impact on Soviet law.

After he retired from teaching, Schmidt served with the Organization for Security and Co-operation as an elections supervisor in Bosnia (1997 and 1998) and Kosovo (2000), where he helped to ensure that voting was free and fair. He also held a one-month lectureship at the University of Lviv in Ukraine (1998). As a resident of Washington, DC, in his retirement, Schmidt was a regular attendee of events at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and George Washington University's Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, where he was a visiting scholar. He was also a dedicated member of the League of Women Voters lobby corps and a docent at the National Portrait Gallery. Schmidt's publications, photographs, and documents are available in the DePauw University Archives and at albert-schmidt.com.

Elizabeth Schmidt
*Loyola University of Maryland (emerita)*

*Photo: Michael Dolan*

# William D'Arcy McNickle

**1904–77**

Writer, Historian, Advocate

A prolific fiction writer, historian, and stalwart advocate of tribal sovereignty and self-determination, William D'Arcy McNickle stands as one of the most important intellectual and political figures of 20th-century Native America.

Born in St. Ignatius, Montana, on the Flathead Nation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes on January 18, 1904, McNickle entered a world amid its unmaking. Within months of his birth, the US Congress passed legislation to survey and allot the reservation, with "surplus" lands put up for sale. Non-Indigenous people took possession of the most fertile land, and Flatheads became marginalized and minoritized within their own homeland. McNickle's mother's family had been displaced previously. In the 1880s, his Métis grandparents fled the Red River settlement in Manitoba, first for Saskatchewan and then for the Flathead Reservation. His mother, Philomene Parenteau, married William James McNickle, a Scots-Irish laborer. When she petitioned the tribal council to enroll her and her children as citizens, they became entitled to allotments.

Throughout his education, McNickle would have had it conveyed to him that there was no place for unassimilated Indigenous people within this world. He attended a local Jesuit school, an off-reservation boarding school in Salem, Oregon, and public schools in Washington and Montana, before enrolling in 1921 at what is now the University of Montana. In 1924, McNickle sold his allotment to attend the University of Oxford in 1925–26. Unable to finish his degree because of issues with transfer credits, he returned to the United States to work as a car salesman in Philadelphia and in publishing in New York City. Desperate to make ends meet for his family of three during the Great Depression, McNickle secured a position with the Works Progress Administration in 1935 and with the Office of Indian Affairs in 1936. All the while, he pursued his dream of becoming a writer. He published his first novel, *The Surrounded*, a poignant window on Indigenous struggle and survival in 1936; it has become a key work in the American Indian literary renaissance and has been in print continuously since its 1978 republication.

McNickle's involvement in Indigenous politics deepened, as did his engagement in community development, education, and capacity building. McNickle was a founding member of the National Congress of American Indians in 1944. In 1952, McNickle left the Bureau of Indian Affairs to become the executive director of American Indian Development. In 1960, McNickle led the drafting of the "Declaration of Indian Purpose," a statement on federal Indian policy that was formalized at the American Indian Chicago Conference in 1961 and presented to President Kennedy the following year. Such efforts were informed by McNickle's commitment to combatting tribal termination with an approach modeled on US international development and nation building.

During these years, McNickle continued writing. In addition to numerous popular essays, scholarly articles, and two novels, he published *They Came Here First: The Epic of the American Indian* in 1949 and *The Indian Tribes of the United States* in 1962 (expanded into *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals* in 1973). He co-authored a historical overview for the American Indian Policy Review Commission in 1977, which pushed for federal Indian policy that prioritized Indian peoples' desires—a mission that captured the spirit of McNickle's life's work, particularly his advocacy for nations' self-determination.

Despite not finishing his BA, McNickle was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1963 and an honorary doctorate from the University of Colorado in 1966. That same year, he became head of the anthropology department at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina. In 1972, he was appointed the first director of the Newberry Library's Center for the History of the American Indian. In 1984, it was renamed the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History and is currently the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies. These name changes speak to the fruits of McNickle's own labor, and especially his efforts to reshape the field of American Indian history and to cultivate new generations of Indigenous scholars.

D'Arcy McNickle spent his later years in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he died in 1977. He was an extraordinary man known for his gentleness, and his life and life's work reimagined and remapped boundaries of Indigenous identity, place, belonging, and home. In both formal and ordinary ways, he insisted on the recognition of the beauty, integrity, durability, and adaptability of Indigenous people, nations, and ways of life.

Daniel M. Cobb
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

*Photo courtesy D'Arcy McNickle Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago*

MIRIAM F. ASCARELLI

# THE MORRIS CANAL


Courtesy Canal Society of New Jersey

At the corner of Lock and New Streets in Newark, New Jersey, busy students enter the New Jersey Institute of Technology campus. Most are unaware that this corner was once a bustling checkpoint along the Morris Canal, a now-forgotten 100-mile, man-made water highway. Gone is Lock 16E and the lock tender's house, which gave Lock Street its name. Gone is the nearby canal basin, where boatmen could load and unload cargo and tie up their boats for the night. Gone, in fact, is any trace of a waterway having run through the city's center. Yet this now-disappeared transportation infrastructure helped shape Newark into an industrial powerhouse.

The Morris Canal was an engineering marvel, part of the canal-building boom set off by the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. Completed in 1831, the Morris Canal scaled the hilly terrain of New Jersey's iron-producing region, connecting Phillipsburg near the Pennsylvania border to the banks of the Hudson River in Jersey City. Shipping goods from one end of the state to the other took just five days. Canal boats, 90 feet long and laden with goods including coal, iron ore, manure, wood, whiskey, and cider, made pickups and deliveries up and down the route, creating a business-to-business transportation network that connected once-isolated farms, gristmills, and iron mines with manufacturing facilities and ports.

But it was hard-stone anthracite coal extracted from the hills of eastern Pennsylvania that changed everything. Discovered in the late 1790s, anthracite coal seemed unnecessary. Colonial American machinery was mostly powered by waterpower and charcoal (made from partially burned wood); homes were heated with firewood. But in the early 19th century, when deforestation caused a massive fuel shortage in much of New Jersey and parts of southern and eastern Pennsylvania, anthracite coal became the way forward for both home heating and industrial processes. And canals were essential for bringing coal to market.

Though the Morris Canal itself was never a financially successful enterprise, businesses along its route prospered. Small communities like Boonton, Waterloo, and Rockaway catered to canal traffic, and the iron industry grew as companies located manufacturing plants in towns along the canal to take advantage of nearby iron mines and transportation. Coal transformed Newark from a town of home businesses into an industrial powerhouse. Between 1830 and 1910, the city's population grew from 10,953 to 347,469, and by 1911, there were some 2,000 factories in Newark. Here at the intersection of New and Lock Streets, the factories were humming, including T. P. Howell and Co., a massive leather manufacturing plant. In 1912, the company dominated the corner, with 24 buildings spread across six acres, and it claimed to be the largest producer of patent leather in the world.

The Morris Canal's heyday was short-lived. Shipments peaked in 1866, and canal boats were replaced by the big tech of the day—the railroads. Unlike boats, which did not operate at night or in winter, trains ran 24/7, 12 months a year. They cut the time to cross the state from five days to just five hours. By the early 1900s, canal traffic was down to a trickle.

Today, Newark's portion of the canal is long gone, transformed into the Newark subway system (now the light-rail) in the 1930s. Gone, too, are most of the city's industrial facilities, including T. P. Howell, which closed in 1931. In fact, by the mid-1960s, as factories continued to shutter, industrial remains at the corner of New and Lock Streets were bulldozed to make way for the expansion of NJIT. Today, this intersection is the unofficial gateway to campus. All that is left of T. P. Howell's massive compound is a single building, now known as the Lock Street apartments. It is an aging brick structure with a perpetual leak in its foundation—perhaps a sign that somewhere, buried deep beneath the ground, is an old canal basin that doesn't want to be forgotten. P

*Miriam F. Ascarelli is senior university lecturer in humanities and social sciences at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.*

The American Historical Association staff

*congratulates executive director*

# JIM GROSSMAN

## *on his retirement*

***after 15 years of service to the AHA***


***Everything has a history... even Jim Grossman!***

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- ❑ Read a history of a resistance movement.
- ❑ Read a history that uses material culture.
- ❑ Read an edited collection, journal forum, or other multiauthor work.
- ❑ Read a history that's been sitting on your shelf too long.
- ❑ Read a piece of historical fiction (novel, story, poem, play).

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