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## INSIGHTS: NOTES FROM THE CCWH



### CO-PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: HISTORY MATTERS

BY SASHA TURNER

It has been a struggle putting together our Summer Newsletter, published now one month later than its usual deadline. All our lives, not limited to our CCWH family, have been significantly altered by the corona virus pandemic. The predictable familiarity of our lives has been replaced by uncertainty and loss. As if the profound upheavals inflicted by the global health crisis were not enough, we still face the awful truth that the lives and dignity of Black people are being eviscerated by the very same state entrusted to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is a blight on this nation when the government fails to protect individuals and families from racist violence, but it is a crime against humanity when war and tyranny are inflicted by the state – a state that



defines itself as the very embodiment of freedom, progress, and equality.

It is profoundly regrettable that I cannot say farewell as co-president on a more positive note. I maintain hope nonetheless in what Gerder Lerner, one of our founding foremothers, defined as the transformative power of history, particularly “history from the bottom up” whose very existence came into being by challenging historical orthodoxy and dogma. We can access history’s transformative potential through the knowledge it produces that “things have changed and do change.”[1]

Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have made the difficult decision to publish an abridged newsletter this quarter. As an organization, we depend on our members’ generous gift of their labor, including the intellectual labor of writing and publishing. We respect this gift, and so we have chosen to make this accommodation due to the circumstances. The Fall newsletter will be published in the full as scheduled. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact ElizabethEverton at [atexecdir@theccwh.org](mailto:atexecdir@theccwh.org)

In this moment beckoning change, I return to Joan Kelly's influential 1984 essay "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Kelly's question and her unequivocal "no" marked a momentous point in the production of history, particularly its challenge for us to rethink notions of change. The liberating changes sweeping across early modern Europe did not extend to women, and indeed, imposed new restrictions on them. Kelly's question and response generated new work among scholars who generally agree that analytical categories and periodization for men are necessarily different for women because of their divergent experiences.

The lively debates engendered by Kelly's response also produced scholarship across historical fields presenting a more greyed analysis than Kelly's unambiguous "no." Scholars have shown more greying of women's liberation during the Renaissance, for example, by adjusting Kelly's lens from the literary texts of the secular elite to the religious texts of women within religious orders.[2]

Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream Speech" just under twenty years before Kelly's pronouncement. The Emancipation Proclamation, it seemed, was a symbolic "beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice." The Emancipation Proclamation appeared more symbolic of the possible than transmission of the real because

"One hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One Hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred

years later, the Negro...finds himself an exile in his own land."

When we examine state violence against Black people, the precarity of Black life, Black people's inadequate access to food, housing, healthcare, and education – all worsened by COVID-19 pandemic – our response to whether emancipation has fulfilled its promises to Black people, like Kelly and King our response may also be an unequivocal no. And yet to maintain hope in the possibility of change we must also recognize the rights of citizenship gained through the 14th and 15th Amendments and the Civil Rights Act.

We must take care then to understand what precisely has changed. A bottom up view of American history will contradict narratives of progress that privileges evaluating the Black question by measuring what Black people have gained while considering what was lost or what was never gained in the first place as but minor missteps along America's great progressive march. The long view of American history, including its European origins, is "the violent production of inequality" punctuated by fleeting moments of reprieve.[3] Slavery and Jim Crow transitioned into the veiled oppression and exploitation that are the war on drugs, racialized mass incarceration, school-to prison pipeline, health disparities etc. that very often erupt on pedestals like the murdering of Black people by the state in broad day light and on camera. Reframing American history as one of inequality and unfreedom rather than the unfettered progress of liberty and equality, as Hannah Nicole Jones aimed with the New York Times 1619 project, better prepares us to anticipate future metamorphosis. Such anticipation should inform the abolitions we demand today.

Histories critical of the nature of change, getting correct what precisely has changed (and what must change) attune us to elites' sleight of hand, disguising their own empowerment as redistributing power or acting in service of others. Reframing the real problem of state violence, homelessness, failed schools, impoverished neighborhoods, and poor health outcome as one of individual deficiency, moral failing, or criminality galvanizes support across many divides. When the problem and its purported solution (say, immigration) gets defined from the top down, the rest of us are pushed to take hard (build a wall) or soft positions (punitive legislation and policing) on the issue, with very few realizing the issue identified is not the real issue. Ronald Reagan, for example, gained the support of the Congressional Black Caucus in sponsoring the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act that simultaneously diverted money from welfare programs and disappeared people and resources from impoverished communities. The Act resolved neither the drug epidemic nor truly empowered and protected Black political leaders and communities, despite giving the appearance of doing so. [4]

Black power structured by racialized agendas reshuffles the pack without actually dismantling white power. Recognition of this crucial distinction defines the core demands of Black Lives Matter Movement. In addition to its critical stance against "representative politics as a stand-in for substantive change in the condition of Black people's lives," the movement "has patently rejected the hierarchical hetero-patriarchal politics of respectability that privileges the values of the so called best and brightest, emphasizing the needs of the most marginal and often-maligned sectors of the Black community." [5]

In our present world where change is rightly demanded, history as an evaluation of change matters more than ever. Viewing Euro-

American history as originating in and marked by inequality and the denial of freedom and understanding how Black empowerment sometimes becomes an "enabling condition" [6] of racialized goals, require our careful evaluation of past changes. We must continue to bring a bottom up knowledge of history to bear on our present demands for liberation and equality.

## Notes

[1] Gerder Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. This essay's title is also influenced by Lerner's collection, including her titling question, "Why History Matters."

[2] Theresa Coletti, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" A Medievalist Reads Joan Kelly and Amelia Lanyer," *Early Modern Women*, 8 (Fall 2013): 249-259.

[3] Alys Eve Weinbaum, "Reproducing Racial Capitalism," *Boston Review*, Spring, 2019.

[4] Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, "Identity Politics and Elite Capture" *Boston Review*, May 7, 2020.

[5] Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2018.

[6] *ibid.*

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

BY ELIZABETH EVERTON



We are living in difficult times. Three months ago, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, a pandemic. The highly contagious virus has killed over 400,000 people worldwide—well over 100,000 in the United States alone—and sickened millions. I am writing this column from my home in North Carolina, which is currently experiencing a spike in cases and hospitalizations.

In the United States, COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on all facets of everyday life. In the absence of a unified, effective national response, states and municipalities have been left to act—or fail to act, or to simply react—on their own. The pandemic has also resulted in widespread economic devastation, including the highest unemployment rate since the Great Depression. While no sector of the population is immune from COVID-19, people of color have suffered disproportionately from the virus, due to the effects of longstanding systemic discrimination. In North Carolina, about sixty percent of people known to have COVID-19 were Black or Latinx. In addition, the association of the virus with China has

resulted in a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes.

Two months after the pandemic declaration, the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a white Minneapolis police officer on May 25 sparked a wave of protests across the United States and beyond its borders. George Floyd's death, like the deaths of so many before him, has come to symbolize the tragic consequences of sanctioned violence within a white supremacist state. The pandemic and the protests alike speak to the America's long history of systemic inequality. Now more than ever, we must stand together to insist that Black lives matter.

Writing of Eleanor Bumpurs, LaShawn Harris, winner of the 2019 Gold Award for her superlative article, "Beyond the Shooting: Eleanor Gray Bumpurs, Identity Erasure, and Family Activism against Police Violence," states that the police shooting victim "[symbolizes] a powerful and painful parable about systemic police violence against nonwhite citizens." Harris cautions us not to lose sight of the person when talking about the act of violence and its aftermath, and her article meticulously reconstructs the life of Eleanor Bumpurs and the activism of her daughter Mary. We mourn the loss of a precious life, the indescribable loss to George Floyd's family and loved ones, as we condemn the situation and the system that ended it.

As teachers and writers and readers of history, we are accustomed to confronting crisis by teasing out its origins, assessing responses, highlighting individual and group experiences, and tracing the imprint on larger systems. In the fall of 2019, I taught a course that centered two global crises at the start of the last century: the First World War and the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919. While most of the students

had a passing familiarity with World War I, even the most seasoned students of history knew very little of the epidemic that arose at the end of the war. We read about the nature of the flu: the terrifying presentation, the high rate of contagion, the unusual impact on young and healthy adults. We read about how it became propaganda in the last years of World War I. We read about the varying death rates by region—1-2% in Europe, 5% in Africa, even higher in South Asia. We read about the way in which the experience of the flu spurred anti-imperial protest. We read about the Amritsar Massacre in India and the Women's War in Nigeria.

In November and December 2019, on the eve of a new pandemic, my students were fascinated and confounded by the 1918-1919 flu. How was it, they wanted to know, that something so widespread, so deadly, so obviously important could have left so little mark. How was it that we don't talk about the pandemic the way we talk about the world wars or the global depression of the 1930s. In other words, how was it that we didn't learn about it in high school history! Six months after the end of the course, it seems to me that we may be starting to understand.

The Women's War, the series of anti-imperial protests and uprisings led by women that took place in Nigeria in 1929, took place a decade after the flu pandemic. There is no bright line between the two, and the pandemic cannot be said to be a major underlying factor in the later uprising, which was of course a response to the political, social, cultural, and economic alienation and depredations of European imperialism, enacted in a form particular to the Nigerian context. Instead, the flu worked to make

the preexisting situation just a little bit worse, over a long period of time, ticking the situation over from awful to intolerable. The legacy of the pandemic lay not in redrawn borders or toppled regimes but in myriad changes to the way that people experienced and understood their everyday lives: what they did, who they saw, what they feared, what they dreamed of. These changes amplified grievances already held and injustices already known.

What effects will we see as a result of the interlocking traumas of 2020? We have already seen some powerful and positive reforms coming out of the protest movement, but there is still much to do. The CCWH was founded with the purpose of advancing women in the historical profession and combating gender-based discrimination and exclusion. In the fifty years, since, however, our mission has expanded to encompass a broader sense of justice. Our annual Ida B. Wells award and our affiliation with the Association of Black Women Historians speak to our commitment to an intersectional feminism that recognizes and struggles against the continuing oppression of people of color in a white supremacist system. At this moment, it's important to be clear: there is no feminism without antiracism. Antiracism must be at the heart of feminist praxis if the goal of justice is to be achieved.

Long-term consequences are notoriously hard to predict in the moment. The nature of the pandemic's effects—on our institutions, on our systems, on our society and our culture, on our everyday lives—are still obscure, lacking the clarity brought by hindsight. What we know is that those who are already

marginalized within our society are bearing the brunt, in terms of illness and economic and social impact. The experience of the pandemic varies along the axes of race, socioeconomic status, age, ability, gender—the categories around which sociocultural power dynamics are constructed. We must recognize this as we assess the legacy of COVID-19, and we must confront these dynamics if we are to move forward.

We honor and remember George Floyd and all those lost in the pandemic.

## PUBLIC HISTORY COLUMN

BY ELYSSA FORD



National Council on Public History 2020 Conference Round-Up, aka the Virtual Conference & Our New Virtual World (i.e., Remote Internships)

This normally is the time for the annual report from the National Conference on Public History (NCPH) conference, scheduled to be held March 18-21 in Atlanta, Georgia. With the theme of “Threads of Change,” the conference intended to examine historical meaning and cultural memory, both that which is tangible and elements that are intangible.

Just one week before the conference was to begin, it became one of the many academic casualties of COVID-19, and the conference theme suddenly felt all the more apropos as everything began to change so quickly around us. In a group filled with public and digital historians, the organization moved nimbly to a virtual conference. My own working group, Public History Parents, was held via Zoom, open to conference attendees, and recorded for wider dissemination. Other panels were live tweeted or found additional ways to share their conversations, and some sessions were well attended in this suddenly virtual setting. While these options made the conference accessible for many, I must admit that my own participation as an attendee was difficult. The conference fell in the same week that I – like many faculty members – was hurriedly transitioning my classes to an online environment and questioning how to best redesign courses while keeping my own sanity and that of my students in mind. These are questions that faculty members around the world, but especially public history faculty, have been asking themselves.

While all faculty faced challenges in the transition to online classes, historians faced fewer complications than our colleagues in fine and performing arts with studio art classes and instrumental groups or those in education field experiences and science labs. Public historians encountered some of these difficulties as many of our classes are practicum based and involve site work and other public projects. Internships in particular proved problematic as few sites previously had offered remote or virtual internship experiences and all sites were scrambling to reorient themselves and their own workers, leaving little time for them also to develop a robust online internship experience.

The NCPH, along with leading organizations like the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), have focused in recent weeks on the question of internships. Webinars directed at cultural institutions and faculty have provided guidance on how to create online internships that best meet the needs of institutions and students. The AAM has created a document to help students find remote internships and host sites are asked to post their online opportunities. Despite this effort and the growing conversation, only thirteen remote internship opportunities are posted on the AAM list, and students have been left with few options as sites, including those like the Smithsonian, have simply cancelled their summer internship programs rather than adapting them to virtual options. This, in turn, has created further problems for coordinators of public history programs who now must find alternatives for students who need internships now in order to graduate. In my state of Missouri, we are working with the Missouri Association for Museums and Archives (MAMA) to establish a database of remote internships and remote projects that sites can offer, both now during COVID-19 and in the future, as MAMA believes that doing so can offer greater opportunities for a more diverse set of students. It is my hope that COVID-19 can lead to positive changes for museums and public history programs. Expanding virtual internships is important in helping more students, particularly those of a more limited socio-economic class, to participate in and benefit from internships that otherwise are out of reach (i.e., due to distance, cost, and often unpaid museum internships).

This is an important issue that should be continued into the future, far beyond the end of COVID-19, and I encourage us all to undertake discussions like this, both formally

and informally. The 2021 NCPH conference provides one such opportunity. It is scheduled for March 24-27 in Salt Lake City, Utah. The theme “The Presence and Persistence of Stories” calls for proposals that examine the stories we have and the stories we tell. Submitters are asked to consider the following questions: How do our stories and their retellings reinforce relationships, bridge the past and present, and lay the foundations for the future? How can stories from and of the past help connect us today to that time and place? How can telling stories help us understand and engage in the dynamism and complexities of all communities, those known and lesser-known? Proposals are due by July 15, and more information can be found at <https://ncph.org/conference/2021-annual-meeting/calls-for-proposals/>. Even if you do not plan to participate on the program, the 2021 conference will offer many opportunities to explore the Salt Lake City area and to learn more about the city’s past and present and the diverse stories that it holds. Thank you – and let us be innovative and always safe in these new and trying times.

## MEMBERSHIP OUTREACH COMMITTEE CHAIR'S COLUMN

BY EINAV RABINOVITCH-  
FOX



Summer is usually the favorite season of academics. Teaching, and most importantly, grading, is done, ceremonies are over, and the campus is slowly emptying as things get calmer and moving into summer mode. Summers are usually the time to devote to your own projects and research, whether it is going to archives, or writing without too much distraction.

However, this is an unusual summer, and an unusual year. Covid-19 has upended not only our spring semester but our summer too, and possibly also the fall. While the weather is finally getting a bit warmer, many of us are still on lockdown measures, unable to enjoy it. Some of us have traded the calmness of summer, when the semester is over but schools are still in session, for homeschooling our children, or just giving up. For me, being unable to hide in my office at work has made Virginia Woolf's demand for "a room of her own" ever so present. Even when I do find an inspiration to write, the lack of a quiet or a designated space makes it all too impossible.

Finding the motivation to write in the midst of the pandemic is also a challenge. Somehow, writing an article or working on your manuscript doesn't look so important. Getting out of bed, or getting dress, or just doing the most mundane things have become an onerous task, not to mention doing some more rigorous intellectual work as writing. And for those of us who had to deal with the loss of loved ones or the worry for others, this period has been more than difficult. Indeed, for many of us, this pandemic has disrupted not only our daily lives but our academic productivity. Women are especially hurt, as the many studies on the topic have showed. And while it might be too soon to determine how much academics will be hurt from this pandemic in the long run, it is safe to say, that far more than men, 2020 is a lost year for women in academia.

Moreover, as universities and colleges around the country are laying off and furloughing their non-tenure-track faculty—the majority of them are women and minorities—this summer is also a period of uncertainty and dread for many of us. Uncertain regarding positions for next year, and watching the job market decimates before our eyes, many of us need to recalibrate our plans and to rethink our futures.

Our organization cannot ignore these dire circumstances, and I hope that through its various programs and initiatives it will continue to provide support and a community for our members. Support letters and petitions like this one <https://www.change.org/p/elected-officials-immediately-protect-and-strengthen-public-higher-education-for-the-post-covid-world> have been circulating, and I urge everyone to sign.



## CONNECTIONS COMMITTEE CHAIR'S COLUMN

BY ILARIA SCAGLIA



Additionally, if you are in a position of power in your institution, this is a time to show solidarity with contingent faculty and the more vulnerable people in the university. Words are not enough. In a time when many universities are moving to survival mode, actions are needed. This is also true for graduate students. This is a time to show compassion, and yes, also monetary aid. In a period when many of the archives are closed, air travel is shut down, and research plans are being halted, we need to think about strategies that will help students to finish their dissertations and find solutions for their post-graduate stage. This is a good time to think about alt-ac careers and other routes to put these PhDs to good use. The CCWH Mentorship Committee has recently held some e-sessions that addressed these issues, and more are planned for the future.

As academia as we know it is going to dramatically change in the next couple of years, we as an organization also need to think how we can best serve our members in this time of crisis. I invite everyone to contact me regarding suggestions for actions we can take and how to make better use of existing resources such as the mentorship program and the e-sessions. This is a global pandemic and there is no reason we should go through it alone. The challenges that many of us facing are not individual ones but systemic and structural. And support and help should be the same – we are all in this together.

In the meantime, be safe, keep healthy, stay well and try to enjoy summer as much as possible.

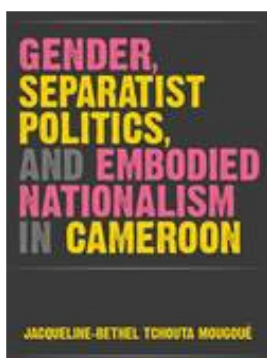
Under the snow, bread.

*Sotto la neve, pane*, “under the snow, bread,” we say in my native Italian Piedmont to refer to the apparent inactivity over the winter months when nonetheless the future harvest is being prepared. The same can be said about this season at CCWH. If you have not signed up to be a university representative or a conference liaison, please do so if you can: email [representatives@theccwh.org](mailto:representatives@theccwh.org) or <https://theccwh.org/ccwh-resources/conference-liaisons/>.

You can send an email to these addresses even if you have ideas, needs that you think we can meet, etc. While accepting that we all have to readjust our activities to fit these challenges times, let's put our heads together to think about what we can do to help one another. The beautiful season, *la bella stagione* as we call it, will eventually come.

## MEMBER NEWS

CCWH member Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué (University of Wisconsin-Madison) has been awarded the 2020 Frances Richardson Keller-Sierra Prize for her book *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (University of Michigan Press, 2019). The Keller-Sierra Prize is given annually by the Western Association of Women Historians (WAWH) to recognize the best monograph in the field of history.



CCWH member Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué (University of Wisconsin-Madison) has been awarded the West African Research Association Post-Doctoral Fellowship to conduct research in West Africa for her second book project, "Transnational Histories, Nodes of Encounter, and Belonging in Africa."

CCWH member Fernanda Bretones Lane has won the 2020 Sturgis Leavitt Award for Best Article from the Southeastern Conference on Latin American Studies (SECOLAS) for her article "The Congress of Vienna and the Making of Second Slavery," which appeared in the *Journal of Global Slavery* 4, no.2 (2019): 162-195. The Sturgis Leavitt Award is given annually for the best article or book chapter on a Latin American or Iberian subject published by a SECOLAS member in the previous calendar year. Bretones Lane co-authored it with Guilherme de Paula Costa Santos and Alain El Youssef.

CCWH member Victoria Phillips's book *Martha Graham's Cold War: The Dance of American Diplomacy* is now available from Oxford University Press.

