New Directions in Trafficking History: The Intersection of Intimate Labor and Migration
By Jessica R. Pliley

An extensive annotated bibliography supplementing this article appears online on the IEHS Blog.

Many historians of prostitution, sex work, and intimate labor have become cutting-edge immigration historians. These scholars bridge traditional divides in the study of trafficking to consider the ways in which the history of “the traffic in women” is intimately related to histories of global labor, slavery and unfree labor, and migration and migration control, as well as to prostitution and sexuality. Historians have long noted that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were awash with moral panic over migrating sex workers, while they saw the proliferation of terms such as “white slavery,” “traite des blanches,” “Mädchenhandel,” and “traffic in women,” for what is known today as sex trafficking or modern slavery. Migration formed a backdrop for these earlier studies; recent scholarship has centered the migrating female subject to reexamine anxieties about trafficking.

Recently, a new generation of scholars has taken up the topic of trafficking, no doubt inspired by current “melomentaries,” to use Carole Vance’s useful phase, the debates about the UN’s Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking, the fights among feminists over questions of consent and exploitation within sex work, and the role of moral panics about sex trafficking in fortifying white nationalism. Unlike their peers who research prostitution and trafficking in the contemporary context, these feminist historians share a common conceptual orientation toward the ethics of policing sex work. As Judith Walkowitz recently noted, feminist historians agree that “prostitution is and remains a form of sexual labor; intensified policing has negative effects on women in the sex trade; feminist interventions on behalf of their lost sisters have had a decidedly mixed outcome.”

The new research on the history of intimate labor, prostitution, and migration seeks to globalize the historiography of women and migration (see online supplemental bibliography). This new work draws upon Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas’ notion of “intimate labor” which, as they theorize, describes work that “attends to the sexual, bodily, health, and care of individuals.” Taking the insights of intimate labor, this new generation of scholars, scholars like Sandy Chang, Caroline Séquin, and Keely Stauter-Halsted, have considered the ways that women who migrated as wives, domestic servants, and prostitutes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prompted middle-class observers to worry about international sex trafficking, concerns that were voiced in their most racialized idiom as white slavery. Yet these scholars collectively try to center migrants’ agency, even if that agency is constrained by violence, compromised by the archive, or con-
From the IEHS President

It’s a great honor for me to take on the role of president of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society. I do so at a time when our field is more relevant to public discourse than ever and when our scholarship, teaching, and public outreach can and must make a difference.

Let me begin by thanking our outgoing president, Madeline Hsu. During her tenure, Madeline promoted the public dissemination of immigration scholarship, expanded our presence at the meetings of other learned societies, enhanced the diversity of our executive board, and embarked on an ambitious overhaul of our website. I also want to salute Madeline’s predecessor, Maria Cristina García, who has just completed nine years of service as vice-president, president, and ex-officio board member. On behalf of the society, let me also extend particular thanks and appreciation to Tim Draper, who served as secretary of the IEHS from 2009 to 2021, working with no fewer than four presidents—Barbara Posadas and Hasia Diner as well as Madeline Hsu and Maria Cristina García.

Together, these colleagues helped build the IEHS we have today. It’s a tough act to follow, but the task is less daunting given the current vitality of our organization. We are especially fortunate that Monique Laney has taken on the role of treasurer from Tyler Anbinder, who did great work in clarifying and consolidating our financial structure.

We are equally fortunate that Maddalena Marinari is assuming the role of vice-president/president elect. This is the time, also, for me to thank the outgoing members of our board and welcome the new members. Matt García, Beth Lew-Williams, and Ellen Wu have stepped down after serving three-year terms, and Julie Greene, Yuridia Ramírez, and Andy Urban have joined the board.

In mapping out the agenda for the coming year, I have identified three priorities. The digital communications team, led by Heather Lee and Bryan Zehngut-Willits, is about to unveil a brand new website and roll out a revamped communications strategy, which we will be implementing with the board’s help in the coming months. The programming committee, chaired by Maddalena Marinari, will be figuring out the best combination of in-person and online presentations as we enter the “new normal,” whatever that turns out to look like. And the professional ethics committee, under the leadership of Madeline Hsu and Deborah Kang and joined by several new members, will implement our new policy on professional ethics and sexual harassment.

Building on these three initiatives, the IEHS can play a vital public role in deploying historical knowledge to combat racism and other forms of discrimination. With our new communications strategy, a dynamic approach to academic and public programming, and a heightened commitment to professional ethics, we are better placed than ever to do so. I look forward to working with all you as we enrich all aspects of our vital field.

Kevin Kenny, April 26, 2021

Implementing Sexual Harassment Policy
By Madeline Y. Hsu

In alignment with professional associations such as the AHA, OAH, WHA, LAWCHA, and SHAFR, IEHS has developed a sexual harassment policy which we are proceeding to implement. While president, I convened a professional ethics policy committee that included Alan Kraut, Debbie Kang, and Rosina Lozano. In designing a policy tailored to the specific configuration and membership of IEHS, we drew extensively on the approaches of similar organizations and consulted an attorney regarding best practices and limiting liability. The board discussed and voted to approve this policy at our 2020 annual meeting. The full text may be found at IEHS Sexual Harassment Policy.

The policy sets forth our professional and communal values as a set of standards of interpersonal conduct to ensure equitable and safe conditions for all participants in IEHS events and programs. Our implementation measures include requiring acknowledgement of having read the statement when joining or renewing IEHS membership. At each IEHS sponsored event, such as panels, meetings, and the annual dinner, we will field two sexual harassment committee members to receive complaints and take appropriate measures to resolve the situation. The sexual harassment committee members will wear identifying badges. The current members taking this responsibility—Kevin Kenny, Debbie Kang, Hasia Diner, Maddalena Marinari, Leigh Ann Wilson, Mark Steiner, Rosina Lozano, and I—have received training from the consultant Sherry Marts through AHA-sponsored workshops.

We are recruiting more members for this committee—the online training takes about four hours. If you wish to help IEHS address this important ethical aspect of our profession or you have questions, please contact me at myhsu@austin.utexas.edu.
2021 Awards

Theodore Saloutos Book Award
Uzma Quraishi, *Redefining the Immigrant South: Indian and Pakistani Immigration to Houston during the Cold War* (University of North Carolina Press).


First Book Award


Outstanding Dissertation Award

Honorable Mention: Katherine Reed, “Graffiti at Ellis Island: Personal Testimony, Mark-Making and Experiences of Immigration Detention, 1900–1924” (Manchester University).

George E. Pozzetta Dissertation Awards
Lauren Catterson, “Disreputable Conduct: Misfeasance, Malfeasance, and the US Immigration Service, 1903 to 1940” (University of Toronto).


Carlton C. Qualey Memorial Award (*Journal of American Ethnic History*)


In Memoriam: Judy Yung, 1946–2000
By Erika Lee

Judy Yung, a prolific scholar and community-engaged researcher whose work played a crucial role in establishing and expanding the field of Asian American history, died at the age of 74 on December 14, 2020 in San Francisco. Judy’s contributions to the history of the Angel Island Immigration Station and Chinese American women were particularly significant.

Among her many awards and honors were: the 1982 American Book Award for *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910–1940* (with Him Mark Lai and Genny Lim), both the 1996 History Book Award from the Association for Asian American Studies and the 1996 Robert G. Athearn Book Award from the Western History Association for *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, the 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for Asian American Studies, the 2007 Annie Soo Spirit Award from Chinese Historical Society of America, the 2011 Caughey Western History Prize for *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (with Erika Lee), the 2015 Immigrant Heritage Award in Education from the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, and the 2019 IEHS Lifetime Achievement and Distinguished Service Award.

The daughter of Chinese immigrants, Judy was the fifth of six children raised in a two-room Chinatown tenement in San Francisco. Her father was a hotel janitor. Her mother was a garment worker in Chinatown. She attended San Francisco State College (later renamed San Francisco State University) and earned her BA in 1967 with a double major in Chinese studies and English. She graduated from UC Berkeley with her MA in library science.

Judy began her career as a public librarian working at the
Oakland Public Library. She then opened the first Asian public library in America in 1976 in the Chinatown branch of the San Francisco Public Library in the 1970s. Frustrated with lack of scholarship and books related to the experiences of Chinese American women, Judy left her job and entered graduate school as a member of the first class of students in Berkeley’s doctoral program in ethnic studies. In 1990, she was hired as an assistant professor in the American Studies Department at UC Santa Cruz, was tenured, and eventually served as chair before retiring in 2004. On campus, her impact was palpable. She earned many teaching awards and was named commencement speaker four times.

Over the course of her career, she wrote, co-wrote, or edited eight books. Along with Him Mark Lai and Genny Lim, Judy conducted dozens of oral history interviews that would become the basis for the now-seminal book Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910–1940 (1980). This book was “not a best seller,” Judy and Genny Lim explained in 2014, but it “had a profound impact in the fields of American literature and U.S. history.” More important, they continued, it “openly aired the dark secrets of racial exclusion and illegal immigration,” thereby serving “as a catharsis as well as an exoneration of those who had been imprisoned on Angel Island.” With the publication of Island, the preservation of the Angel Island Immigration Station, and the bestowal of National Historic Landmark status on it in 1998, the history of Angel Island became an indelible part of American history.

Judy’s books Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco (1995) and Unbound Voices: A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco (1999) were major contributions to immigration history, Asian American history, and US women’s history. Texas cowboy and World War Two veteran Eddie Fung was the subject of her next book. The two enjoyed their oral history sessions so much that they decided to marry. The Adventures of Eddie Fung: Chinatown Kid, Texas Cowboy, Prisoner of War (2007) was a labor of love in more ways than one, and until his recent death, Judy and Eddie were inseparable.

Judy and I paired up to write Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America, 1910–1920, which was published in 2010 to mark the centennial of the Angel Island Immigration Station’s opening and which benefits the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. She also revisited and expanded Island in an updated and revised edition in 2014 with new sources, interviews, and research discoveries. Her last book was The Chinese Exclusion Act and Angel Island: A Brief History with Documents in 2018.

On a personal note, I was privileged to work with Judy on many occasions. First as a student researcher for Unbound Voices, as a fellow board member on the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, and then as a co-author for our book on Angel Island. Her intellectual generosity, mentorship, commitment to community-driven research, and scholarly meticulousness and brilliance shaped my own work in countless ways, and I aspire to follow her example in everything that I do.

In all of her work, Judy was a passionate storyteller, a community-centered researcher, and an advocate for telling the diverse histories of immigrants and immigrant women with a depth and respect that not only made their lives come alive, but also insured that their stories will be told and retold for generations of readers.

Confronting Anti-Asian Hate

Many IEHS members have been active participants in the campaign to end anti-Asian violence and harassment. In the wake of the Atlanta murders on March 12, the IEHS signed on to the AHA Statement on Violence against Asians and Asian Americans and presented its own denunciation of racist and misogynist violence against Asian women—and white supremacy more broadly. The IEHS statement includes a discussion of the implications of “benign neglect and chosen indifference” and provides links to resources for teaching, acting in solidarity, and bystander intervention.

Spotlight on Non-English-Language Work


RECENT MEMBER PUBLICATIONS


Sex trafficking emerged in the early twentieth century as one arena of international governance. International meetings on white slavery were held in London in 1899, Paris in 1902, Madrid in 1910, and London in 1913. These meetings provided a space for national delegates to establish international norms codified in the first international anti-trafficking agreement: the 1904 International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic. This convention established the principle that its signatories should be sharing information about traffickers. It was followed by the 1910 International Congress for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, which called for the criminalization of sex slavery and the prostitution of minors. The 1921 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children followed, mandating that signatories license employment agencies and post notices of aid available to traveling women at ports and railway stations. Most significantly, the League of Nations established a permanent committee tasked with monitoring the traffic in women and making recommendations to the General Assembly of the League. Consequently, historians like myself, Magaly Rodríguez García, and Jeanne Morefield, interested in international governance, human rights, and crime control have looked to the League of Nations records to map how the issue of trafficking led to the construction of international norms of migration control.

Recently, historians of women who sell sex have turned their attention to the ways that policing prostitution led to the growth of state power. Historians such as myself, Eva Payne, Julia Martinez, Philippa Hetherington, Liat Kozma, Torrie Hester, and Grace Peña Delgado look at local policing and carceral power, how immigration law and border control read women’s bodies and labor through a racialized lens, and the military involvement in controlling prostitution. Much of this research takes the migrating woman who sold intimate labor as its subject. The moment of border crossing was critical because as a woman moved from one jurisdiction to another, she potentially posed a threat to the moral and physical health of her new nation. When the state regulated prostitution through the military, in contrast, the problem for public health officials was not the migrating woman, but the migrating soldier, who expected to be rewarded for martial valor with sex yet remained vulnerable to venereal disease. Such moments produced the greatest anxiety and the clearest policy and enforcement outcomes. These questions about police power, incarceration, border control, deportation, and militarization reflect ongoing scholarly debates and also the anxieties about sex work, sex trafficking, and migration that are animating much contemporary debate.

All historians of sex work must still contend with the issue created by the missing voices of the women who stood at the center of trafficking debates. Historians such as Julia Laite, Nancy Wingfield, and Elisa Camiscioli have taken up the challenge of interrogating migrating women’s agency. To highlight the agency of these women, we all engage in the feminist practice of reading against the grain. Yet this can be a frustrating experience because not only do the records mute, alter, or translate women’s voices into recognizable scripts of sexual slavery or sexual deviance, but they also present us with only brief glimpses of our women at the moment when they encounter the bureaucracy of the state or “rescue” agency. We rarely learn of women’s lives before or after they appear in the archives. Consequently, these archival moments serve the interest of the state, render mute their (and our) object of study, and eliminate the fully human dimension of our migrating women. But they also document our women. Ironically, it was in the moments when the state suggested women had little agency that we find women’s migration documented, and in moments when the state recognized agency we lose sight of women migrating for intimate labor.

In addition to reading against the grain, most historians of trafficking follow Ann Laura Stoler’s call to seek the mechanisms of governance in the archive. Together these works reveal an image of governance that includes overlapping systems of carceral and border control; public-private partnerships that could be fraught with tension; the geopolitical considerations of population management; production of the border and migration control through the construction of the categories of legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate; and the construction of racial and ethnic categories, particularly within imperial spaces. The processes of immigration control constituted the category of the “illegal immigrant,” who was defined in part by the threat, if not the reality, of deportation and repatriation. In the US context, policing women’s sexuality underwrote the development of deportation and immigration policy. Prostitutes were one of the first categories of migrants to be declared illegal in the modern era (1875 in the US) and the examination of anti-trafficking governance at both the local and international level exposes the gendered, racialized, and aged nature of the creation of an “international regulatory regime” of migration control.

Taking a global approach to histories of trafficking alerts
us to the dynamic movement of women conducting intimate labor. As border control measures became stricter in the early twentieth century, these women saw their freedom of mobility undermined at the very moment when feminists in the League of Nations were fighting to codify women’s right to independent citizenship, which would ensure their right to migrate and cross borders independently. This juxtaposition reminds us that the freedom to migrate was gendered, but also classed and drenched in the politics of respectability. Women who migrated to sell sex sat outside the protections offered by the state and became dispossessed subjects as they were subjected to deportation regimes globally.

Notes


5. The convention also established travelers’ aid relief in railway stations and ports, set up protocols for the repatriation of foreign prostitutes, and regulated employment agencies that operated in more than one country. Over twenty countries, including the leading imperial powers, eventually signed the world’s first international anti-trafficking treaty.


Jessica R. Pliley, associate professor of the history at Texas State University, is the author of Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI (Harvard, 2014) and co-editor of Global Anti-Vice Activism (Cambridge, 2016). Her service to the profession includes co-directing the Working Group on Modern-Day Slavery and Trafficking at Yale’s Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition.

New Publications Noted


Inside This Issue

New Directions in Trafficking History: The Intersection of Intimate Labor and Migration by Jessica R. Pliley
From the IEHS President
Implementing Sexual Harassment Policy
2021 Awards
In Memoriam: Judy Yung
Confronting Anti-Asian Hate
New Member Publications
New Publications Noted

Special thanks to Laurence Matthews for help with this issue.

New Publications? Awards? Conferences planned? Let us know! Email newsletter@iehs.org.

Membership

All rates include membership in the Immigration and Ethnic History Society, the quarterly Journal of American Ethnic History, and the biannual Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter.

Individuals (1 Year):
Print or online: $45; Both: $55

Students (1 Year):
Print or online: $25; Both: $35

Institutions (1 Year):
Print or online: $257; Both: $310
Non-U.S. postage (Canada/Mexico): + $10
Other non-U.S. locations: + $35

Single Issues of the JAEH:
Individuals: $20; Institutions: $50

Back Issues of the newsletter:
Digital copies available at http://iehs.org/ (no cost to access).

Email change of address to Cheyl Jestis, Subscription Manager, at jestis@illinois.edu (specify JAEH) or update your information directly at https://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/jaeh.html.