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The Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter

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Edited by Ryan Keating (California State University, San Bernardino) with student editors Viviana Alvarez and Xavier Resendez

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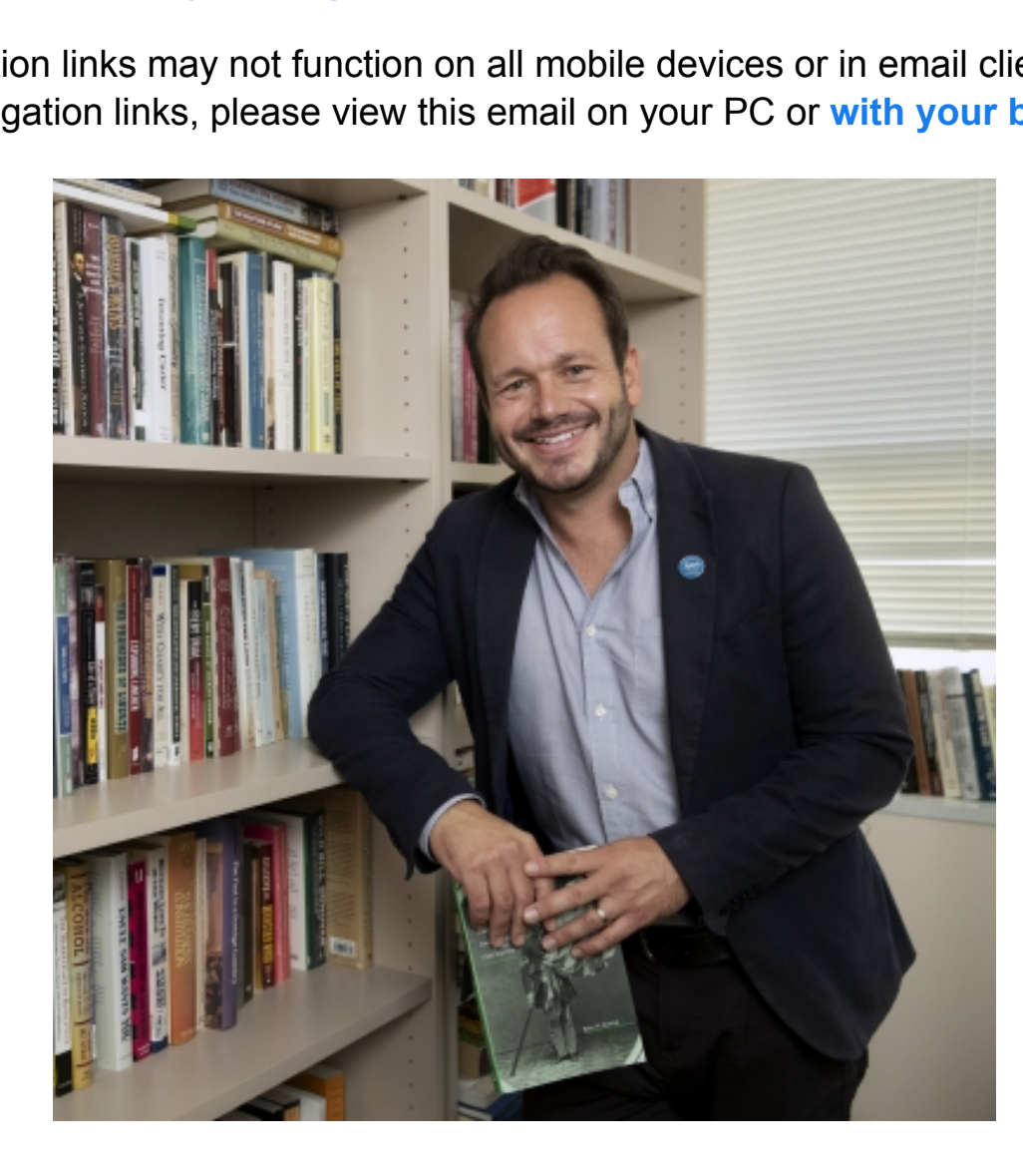

Greetings from the Editor

Ryan Keating

The slight delay of the winter edition of the IEHS Newsletter comes as a result of a host of factors, including ice storms in the Pacific Northwest, everyone being sick, and an unexpectedly heavy service load that no graduate program ever prepares their students to adequately handle (perhaps we should collectively work on that). As the old saying goes- "Man Plans, God Laughs" so we will just roll with the punches and carry on. As I reflect on the current events at home and abroad I am struck by the myriad ways in which our field and research is vital to understanding contemporary situations playing out across the globe. The ongoing scholarship in our field helps inform policy and dispel myth and misconception; combatting racism, ignorance, and hate, while uplifting voices of and stories of the past and present. This edition highlights the ongoing work of scholars to do this that. In her piece *On the Trail of Bad Women*, Dr. Yvette Saavedra (University of Oregon) illuminates the ways in which women challenged gender-norms in the California borderlands during the 19th century. Michael Chavez (UCLA's Fowler Library) shares his journey into the arena of public history and his current curatorial work as part of the "Race in the Global Past Through the Native Lenses" project a UCLA's Fowler Library, which was recently funded by the Mellon Foundation.

Looking forward, we would continue to welcome members to submit news of their many achievements—personal and professional alike—so that we can celebrate you on these pages. Please **let us know about all of your successes**. We also continue to solicit recommendations for any ongoing public history projects with the newsletter staff so that we might highlight that work and bring it to the attention of our readers!

Finally, the Immigration and Ethnic History Society mourns the loss of Dr. Philip Gleason, who served as IEHS President from 1997-2000. An acclaimed historian and scholar of Catholicism in the United States, his contributions to the field are many and his loss felt deeply. An **overview of his illustrious career can be found here.**

On the Trail of Bad Women: Reframing La Mala Vida in Nineteenth Century Mexican Los Angeles, 1790-1850[i]

Yvette J. Saavedra

[i] This piece includes excerpts from a previously published work. Please see, Yvette J. Saavedra, "**Speaking for Themselves: Rancheras and Respectability in Mexican California, 1800-1850**." *California History* 100, no.1, (Spring 2023): 3-26.

In nineteenth century, Mexican Los Angeles, Californio authorities used the letters "MV" which stood for *mala vida* or bad life, to publicly denounce women they believed had violated the gendered norms of Californio respectability. Attaching the MV to a woman's name in local *padrones* or census was meant to publicly mark her as an incorrigible woman guilty of bad behavior. Used throughout colonial Mexico and the early Mexican Republic, the label was meant to stigmatize and shame women for living in ways that transgressed socially defined gender and sexual norms.[i] Consisting of violations of sexual and gender expectations, alleged transgressions included promiscuity, extramarital affairs, prostitution, unmarried cohabitation, the bearing illegitimate children, as well as gender transgressions of female outspokenness and resistance to patriarchal authority. Regardless of the alleged bad act or behavior, an MV designation resulted in a bad reputation that supported a woman's social mistreatment, ostracization, and marginalization in the community.

Taken at face value, officials' use of the MV merely illustrated efforts at punishing moral perdition, a policing of so-called bad women that centered their bad acts and nothing more. However, if we look past the MV as a punitive measure and instead conceptualize it as a proto-feminist space through which women could contest imposed gender and sexual norms, we can more closely examine the gendered contours of a formative moment in the nineteenth century California borderlands.

Building California: Gendered Dynamics of Californio Society

Following Mexican independence, liberal ideology served as the bedrock for the foundation of the early Mexican Republic. Centering political and economic liberalism's ideals of individual liberty, equality, property, and free trade, liberals undertook efforts to create a constitutionalist, secular state free from the influence of the church or military.[ii] Although often seen as one ideology, liberalism fractured into numerous factions. Additionally, as Karen Caplan contends, in Mexico City, liberals sought to establish a dominant liberal ideology, what she terms "official liberalism, while in the outer, rural areas people developed "local liberalism[s]" that were specific to their political and economic realities.[iii] As the political and economic elements of official and local liberalism took shape they produced gender and sexual discourses that defined the social and cultural ideals and expectations of masculinity and femininity in accordance with local specificities.

In Alta California, localized liberalism, or what I term Californio liberalism produced gendered and sexual discourses that supported Californio elites' visions of a socio-cultural and economic order based on private land ownership, and the growth of a powerful ranchero class.[iv] Located on the rancho and materializing through the California rancho home, Californios' gendered discourses of liberalism were grounded on patriarchal and paternalistic ideologies reliant on the heteropatriarchal institutions of the ranchero family and marriage.[v] Insistent on the assertion of patriarchal authority, Californio liberal discourse called on men to control their lands, their homes, their wives, their children, and their workers, setting the parameters of a dominant ranchero masculinity. Concurrently, Californio liberal discourse centered women as the mothers of the nation and the purveyors of culture. It designed an honorable, hegemonic ranchera femininity based on women's roles as wives and mothers and expectations of feminine subordination and submissiveness.[vi] Used as a model for larger Californio society, ranchero gender ideologies, structures, and norms were central to California's cultural growth and permanence.

Interested in creating a society organized around a Californio identity based on their own self-designation as a non-indigenous and culturally Spanish-Mexican class, California's ideas of gender and sexual propriety became integral to the social order. Because liberal discourses framed women as mothers of the nation, this made them the physical reproducers of civilized and strong Californio society. This ideal mother required Californios to articulate discourses of gender and sexual propriety, and honorable womanhood that were embedded into social institutions such as civil and criminal courts and would become cornerstones of the larger Californio socio-cultural gendered imaginary.[vii]

Patriarchal authority and control manifested at both the familial level and in broader society. Influenced by social class and racial/ethnic identity, women experienced this in unique ways. For instance, among the elite women, the expectation that they would bear the heirs of familial wealth and sustain the ranchero oligarchy, resulted in a patriarchal supervision that included strict social protocols pertaining to courtship, marriage, enclosure in the home, and clothing, among other things.[viii] Far from an absolute imposition, elite women negotiated and contested patriarchal control within Californio culture in a variety of ways, ranging from feigned submission and outright resistance. With access to privilege and social capital, elite women's transgressions of gender and sexual propriety rarely resulted in their public admonishment. Their social status and power allowed them the space to contour, or continuously (re)define, gendered expectations for themselves while articulating and enacting a hegemonic ranchera hegemonic femininity for larger Californio society.[ix]

For non-elites, mestiza, indigenous, landless, or otherwise marginalized women, patriarchal supervision undoubtedly occurred in the family, however, because their social class, often required them to live their lives more publicly (e.g. as workers, servants, sex workers, etc.). Their alleged transgressions of proper femininity often became a matter of public record (i.e. census, criminal, and civil court records, etc.) and censure. Where elite women's transgressions were hidden, and their reputations rescued through narrative reframing of their alleged misdeeds, marginalized women's lower social status and lack of social capital left them little recourse to officially challenge public accusations of transgressive behavior. In this dynamic, elite Californio women became the models of femininity propriety and respectability, while poor, landless, and racialized women were often permanently marked as living *mala vidas*.

Reframing La Mala Vida

In the 1836 and 1844 Los Angeles *padrones* forty-two women were designated as living *mala vidas*.[x] Census entries provide information about the number of people in the household, their ages, location of residence, occupation, place of birth, and marital status. It was in the occupation category where the census taker placed the MV designation. However useful, the census is limited by design and purpose, and only provides the most basic information. Giving only a glimpse into these households, they leave questions regarding the specifics of these women's identities, their complexities, and the challenges they faced in their daily lives. In efforts to find out more about these women, I have examined hundreds of civil and criminal court documents, and genealogy records for any information they could provide about these women. While I have successfully begun to reconstruct bits and pieces of a number of these women's lives, sadly for many, their only appearance is in the census. The census makes these women only marginally visible, that is, it enumerates them as part of the community—but their absence from other official records may parallel the marginalization they faced in their daily lives, rendering them voiceless. Unable to contest or explain their public naming as bad women, the MV designation constitutes an enduring besmirchment on the reputations of socially marginalized women.

Following the trail of the so-called bad women who do appear in the records, I am critical of the purpose of the MV designation. I reconceptualize and reframe the MV as a proto-feminist space that instead of stigmatizing women for alleged bad behavior allowed them to create what I term a transgressive femininity, a femininity that challenges heteronormative expectations of gender and sexuality and unsettled Californio patriarchy by reframing and reshaping gender norms through discursive and embodied acts of resistance.[xi] For instance, I found that many of these women, some as young as fourteen years old, were single, others were widowed, and most of them were mothers. They lived in various types of households. Some lived with their parents, siblings, and young children. Others survived alone as single mothers, while many of these so-called bad women, lived in all-women households—and raised their children alongside others who shared the MV designation. A handful of these women were labeled as *mala vida* for refusing to stay with abusive husbands, insisting their husbands follow through with their responsibilities, asserting their parental rights over their children, or engaging in sex work. By publicly contesting women's expected submissiveness and not showing deference to patriarchal authority these women were actively redefining Californio femininity—no matter the cost to their reputation. In this way the MV became a proto-feminist space through which to critique and challenge patriarchal society.

Looking past the MV into these women's lives allows us to see the complexities behind the label. Finding the story behind the designation shows the intentionality with which these women acted. These alleged bad acts/behaviors constitute a transgressive femininity that unsettled the presumed patriarchal control of Californio social institutions and cultural imaginary. Choosing to assert their voices, demand respect, assert bodily autonomy, and live outside direct patriarchal supervision gave them the space to redefine femininity, and live their lives on their own terms.

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[i] Prior to the nineteenth century the phrase *mala vida* underwent significant semantic change. It was used in ecclesiastical and later civil courts to describe the bad and unhappy living conditions of married women. By the nineteenth century it had become a term used by the Church and courts to shame women for transgressive gender and sexual behavior. See *Richard Boyer, "Women, La Mala Vida, and the Politics of Marriage," in Asunción Lavrin (ed.), Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 252–286.*

[ii] As the early Mexican Republic took shape, liberalism fractured along conservative, moderate, and radical factions, each with their own understanding of the linkages between the church and the state. For a discussion of nineteenth century Mexican liberalism, see Charles A. Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

[iii] Karen Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens: Local Liberalism in Early National Oaxaca and Yucatán* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 3.

[iv] Saavedra, "Speaking for Themselves," 4.

[v] Saavedra, "Speaking for Themselves," 6.

[vi] The terms hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity are often used to describe Euro-American white supremacist and colonialist gender ideals imposed on Mexicans during the nineteenth century. Here, I use these phrases to describe Californio imposition of their own understandings of gender and sexuality on the lower and landless classes. Because these gender and sexual ideals were rooted in racialized and classed understandings of Mexican-Californio settler colonialism, they reflect a dominant form of gender order that determined larger societal gender and sexual expectations. See, Saavedra, "**Speaking for Themselves**," 4-5.

[vii] Saavedra, "Speaking for Themselves," 6-7.

[viii] For works examining Californio women's experiences and negotiation of patriarchy in nineteenth century California, see Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The California Testimonios* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Antonia Castañeda, "Engendering the History of Alta California, 1769–1848: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family," in Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Richard J. Orsi (eds.), *Contested Eden: California before the Gold Rush* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 230–259; Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770–1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); María Raquél Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land: Spanish-Mexican Women and Interethnic Marriage in California, 1820–1880* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2007); Linda Heidenreich *This Land Was Mexican Once: Histories of Resistance from Northern California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Louise Pubols, *The Father of All: The de la Guerra Family, Power, and Patriarchy in Mexican California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Erika Pérez, *Colonial Intimacies: Interethnic Kinship, Sexuality, and Marriage in Southern California, 1769–1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018); Yvette Saavedra, *Pasadena before the Roses: Race, Identity, and Land Use in Southern California, 1771–1890* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018).

[ix] I use "contour" as an analytical and conceptual fulcrum to convey the ranchero elite's intentionality and power in the production of gendered discourses. I distinguish "contouring" from "shaping" because I see Californios' articulation of gender discourse as part of multiple intersecting systems of power taking shape during a transitional period.

[x] The number of Spanish-speaking women included in the 1836 census was 427; in 1844 it was 500.
Although the census counted Indigenous persons, the enumeration did not record last names or identify them as men, women, or children. Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest*, 46.

[xi] This research is part of a book project in progress, tentatively titled *Living la Mala Vida: Transgressive Femininities, Morality, and Liberalism in Mexican California, 1790-1870.*

Yvette J. Saavedra is an Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Oregon. She is the author of *Pasadena Before the Roses: Race, Identity, and Land Use in Southern California, 1771-1890* (University of Arizona Press, 2018). Her most recent publications include, "Speaking for Themselves: Rancheras and Respectability in Mexican California, 1800-1850" (*California History,* 2023). She is currently working on her book tentatively titled *Living la Mala Vida: Transgressive Femininities, Morality, and Liberalism in Mexican California, 1790-1870.* Her research examines the U.S. West, Southwest, and the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands as sites where the land and its people actively engage with multiple moments and legacies of conquest, colonialism, and nation-building.

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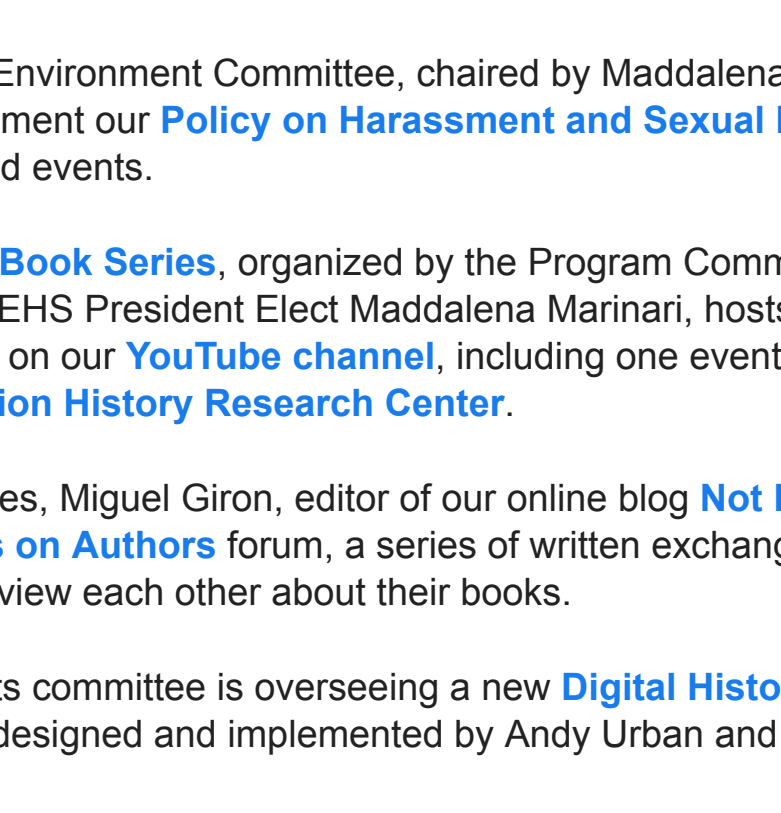

From the IEHS President

As I enter my last semester as president of the IEHS, I look back with gratitude over the last three years.

Through the extraordinary work our members, we have successfully continued our mission of promoting the study of immigration, acculturation, and conflict in North America and enhancing research and publication in a field of vital importance to American history and society.

Here I would like to highlight some of the initiatives that help make the Society such a dynamic and inclusive forum for historians of immigration.

The Professional Environment Committee, chaired by Maddalena Marinari, continues to implement our **Policy on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct** at all IEHS-sponsored events.

The **IEHS Online Book Series**, organized by the Program Committee under the leadership of IEHS President Elect Maddalena Marinari, hosts three events annually, archived on our **YouTube channel**, including one event co-sponsored with the **Immigration History Research Center**.

As part of this series, Miguel Giron, editor of our online blog **Not From Here**, hosts the **Authors on Authors** forum, a series of written exchanges in which the speakers interview each other about their books.

Our Digital Projects committee is overseeing a new **Digital History Seed Grants** program, designed and implemented by Andy Urban and Heather Lee.

With a view to sustaining and broadening IEHS membership, and making the Society attractive to new members, the IEHS executive committee has embarked on three related initiatives:

- Alison Efford chaired a committee this year to boost IEHS membership, offering free and discounted rates by category, making it easier to join the Society and to stay a member, and highlighting the advantages of being part of our community.
- Leigh Ann Wilson and Hana Murayama designed and implemented a new IEHS **Mentorship** program to foster relationships among scholars at different stages of their careers and ensure the vibrancy of community for future scholars.
- Heather Lee is chairing a committee on graduate affairs, where we listen to the needs and concerns of graduate students today.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the nominating committee, chaired by María Cristina García, for putting together the slate for a new Vice-President/President Elect and three positions on the Executive Committee in 2024; to the chairs and members of our various **Awards** committees—Saloutos, First Book, Pozzetta, Dissertation, Qualey, and Travel—who are busily considering this year's submissions; to everyone who served with me on the Executive Committee over the last three years; and to all the members, who helped in so many way, to make our Society what it is today.

We look forward to seeing everyone in New Orleans in New Orleans for **OAH 2024**.

Please mark your calendars for the highlight of the year, our annual banquet on Friday, April 12, hosted by incoming president Maddalena Marinari.

Kevin Kenny
NYU

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News and Noteworthy

Kenyon Zimmer- University of Texas, Arlington- published a new anthology *With Freedom in Our Ears Histories of Jewish Anarchism*, (University of Illinois Press) with Anna Elena Torres and a new article "National Subjects and Subversive Subjectivity: Deportation and the Paradox of the Anarchist Citizen in the Era of the First Red Scare," in *Nations & Nationalism* 29, no. 1.

Hardeep Dhillon notes she is now an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania and published her first article the intersection of race, citizenship, and alienage which is **open access**.

Christina Ziegler-McPherson writes that "The history museum, Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg, in Stuttgart, Germany, will be opening a 9-month special exhibition and I have spent the past 17 months curating, entitled "American Dreams, Ein neues Leben in den USA (a new life in the USA). The exhibition tells the story of 32 immigrant families from Baden and Württemberg between 1710 and 1992 and their pursuit of the "American Dream," which is interpreted to mean the search for political or religious freedom; economic opportunity and upward mobility; or escape from fascism. German immigrants' interactions with Indigenous Americans is also a thread throughout the exhibition. The exhibition will run until July 28, 2024, so if you are in Germany, please come visit!"

Diane Vecchio, emerita professor of history, Furman University, published *Peddlers, Merchants, and Manufacturers: How Jewish Entrepreneurs Built Economy and Community in Upcountry* (University of South Carolina Press).

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Public History Spotlight

Michael Chavez

Archaeological Collections Manager, NAGPRA Project Manager,

Fowler Museum at UCLA

Venturing into the world of public history, though well-prepared thanks to my extensive classroom and internship experience, seemed like following a road clouded by mist and smoke. Exhibit design and development, collections and curation management—among many other courses that I took as an undergraduate and graduate student—provided me with a firm base of knowledge that complimented my background as a historian. At the same time, internships provided me with working experience on how to implement these lessons in real-world environments. Museums, I saw, were staffed by scholars wearing multiple hats and filling a variety of roles in order to keep up the momentum, drive forward their shared goals, and maintain relevance. These views and perceptions, shaped by education and lived experience in a variety of institutions, raised few, if any, concerns or red flags in my mind when I embarked on this career—and why would they? However, it became clear that one of the challenges that I would face was bringing diverse voices and alternative views and narratives of our shared history into spaces in order to questioning the status quo. That path and passion was illuminated through one of the current projects I am a part of. Titled **"Race in the Global Past Through the Native Lenses"** this project is funded by a generous one-million dollar grant from the Mellon Foundation and aims to upend historical epistemologies that have been established through a Western European centric point of view.

History (at least in the broad sense) is often taught as a timeline with a focus on historical events such as the "Dark Ages" or the "Renaissance" which establish markers that are used to dot the linear view of history. The preoccupation with historical events in one small region of the world has, without question, erased histories of indigenous populations wherever colonial policies have taken hold. In creating a historical hegemony and, in many instances, instituting policies aimed at restricting traditional passing of cultural and historical knowledge, colonial governments have successfully promoted a singular history. With that in mind, **"Race in the Global Past Through the Native Lenses"** focuses on racialization and the creation of "difference" during the period of early colonial expansion.

The goals of this project are important for two reasons. On the one hand, we seek to understand and showcase how lives, knowledges, worldviews, land and water, objects, practices, and relations, have been racialized by Western epistemology in that early contact period, which then proceeded to exclude them from the Western construction of the world. At the same time, by tracing the making of the Western categories of "indigeneity," we aim to understand how the lives, knowledges, worldviews, land and water, objects, practices, and relations were understood by Native communities in their contexts and in their time. Our broader goal then becomes bringing these philosophies, worldviews, and history, into the broader historical discussion, not with the goal to assimilate it to the Western way of telling history and transmitting knowledge but, rather, with the goal of reshaping Western disciplinary frameworks. Racial constructs, reinforced by hundreds of years of practice have become so ingrained in both practice and perception that challenging them can often be met with resistance from academics who, through no direct fault of their own, can view this challenge as nihilistic. It is for this reason **"Race in the Global Past Through the Native Lenses"** places a premium on collaboration with indigenous communities. Indigenous voices have been long been not just ignored, but actively silenced, benefiting the racial constructs of which colonial hegemony. As an example of this, we can point to continents like Africa and North America where the "history" (at least to general audiences—and indeed the *challenge* of our profession is bridging the gap between academic and the public) of these continents often only begins with the first contact between colonial powers and those geographical spaces. Those presumptions have the potential to erase thousands of years of history while painting a picture of an uncivilized and untamed landscape.

Therein lies the origin of the issue at hand and the issues we hope to tackle with this project. It is in light of this thread that **Race in the Global Past Through Native Lenses** emerged. Working directly with indigenous community members who have longed wish to promote their own traditional histories and understanding of "race", especially at the point of European contact, our aim is not to "undermine" but rather to examine how and why history and race have developed in this way. Simultaneously this project does not seek to merely facilitate this conversation but works to establish pipelines into academia from these communities in order not to silo these efforts but rather to expand the breadth of historical understanding by including knowledge bearers from non-academic backgrounds. In coinciding with colonial practices of establishing history and race, academia has long also functioned under colonial constructs by creating standardized and often prohibitive requirements around the term "scholar" or "lecturer" which has only served to perpetuate this narrative. The valuation and preference of knowledge to the detriment of other knowledge base is simply self-serving to the status quo.

Receiving my education and being trained in museum practices gave me the tools necessary to be in my profession and have the opportunity to be included in these types of projects. At the same time, I must also recognize both were the product of hundreds of years of racialization; promoted with no ill-will but tainted all the same. Through this project and hopefully many more like it to come, historians and museum professionals can come together with willing indigenous community members not to further extract for our own self-promotion but to come to the realization that all of the knowledge we claim to have is only a tiny percentage of what is and was.

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