President's Column

Rebecca Jo Plant

Dear WAWH members,

It’s been a strange, alternately exhilarating and appalling, summer on the gender politics front. For the first time, we have a woman representing a major political party as a candidate in the U.S. presidential election. But because that candidate is Hilary Clinton – a figure who has occupied the national stage for more than two decades – and because so many young women now assume that women can occupy positions of power, public recognition of this historical milestone has at times seemed almost formulaic. It’s almost as if people have to remind themselves, “This is a really big deal!”

Meanwhile, the Republican candidate has all but exhausted our capacity for outrage with his offensive comments about women, immigrants, the disabled, and numerous other groups. (For an excellent analysis of Trump’s demonization of women, and the ways it resuscitates longstanding misogynist tropes, see WAWH member Ann M. Little’s video on the Historians on Trump Facebook page.) Even when he isn’t trying to be offensive, Trump’s remarks leave us agape. Asked about a potential scenario in which his daughter faced sexual harassment, he said that the ideal situation would be for her to “find another career or company.” Barraged with criticism, he then dug in deeper: “I think it depends on the individual. It also depends on what’s available. There may be a better alternative, then there may not. If there’s not a better alternative, then you stay. But it could be there’s a better alternative where you’re taken care of better. But some people don’t like staying in an atmosphere that was so hostile.” Where to begin with such a remark? It’s as if this business executive has never encountered the basic concept of sexual harassment – the notion that the onus might be on the employer, rather than the employee, to remedy the situation. Even his characterization of a “better alternative” as a place where “you’re better taken care of” smacks of grating paternalism. How about a non-hostile workplace that allows women to focus on their jobs and take care of themselves and their families?

In short, we’re witnessing a contest in which a woman candidate, running on the most overtly feminist platform we’ve seen in years, is up against a man whose views on women are at best retrograde in the extreme, and at worst downright misogynist. Interesting times. Whatever happens in the coming months, it is clear we will have a lot to discuss and digest when we meet at our annual conference in San Diego. Already we are deep into the planning stages and hope to make the conference an even better and more exciting event than our meeting Denver. (Thanks to everyone for making that conference such a wonderful experience!)

Author Readings in San Diego

We already have several members with forthcoming books lined up to give readings at Thursday night’s author event. Marisa Fuentes, associate professor of History and Women’s and Gender Studies at Rutgers, will read from Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). (When approached, Fuentes replied that a WAWH meeting had been the first professional conference she ever attended! Ann M. Little will read from The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright (Yale University Press), and Nick Syrett will read from Child Brides: A History of Minors and Marriage in the United States (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), both of which will be published this fall.

continued on next page
Honoring Regina Morantz-Sanchez

At the conference we will also be reviving our tradition of celebrating a woman historian who has recently retired or is about to retire, and who has made important contributions to the profession. Our honoree this year is Regina Morantz-Sanchez, now professor emerita at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Gina grew up in California and was a professor at UCLA for many years, where she helped to establish the Teaching Women’s History Workshop. Many of you are familiar with her pioneering work on women and medicine, including Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine (1985) and Conduct Unbecoming a Woman: Medicine on Trial in Turn of the Century Brooklyn (1999). She is also renowned for her devotion to her graduate students, and for the generous and enthusiastic support she has extended to many junior scholars (including, some years ago now, yours truly). If you would like to participate in the panel, which will reflect on her contributions as both a scholar and a teacher, please contact me at rjp@ucsd.edu.

Proposals and Plans

Please take note of the deadline for submissions: September 23. We have already begun to receive conference proposals, which our very able program committee (Erica Ball, Sharon Block, and Terri Snyder) will soon be shifting through. In light of this year’s historic U.S. presidential election, we plan to highlight panels that focus on women as political actors. Given our conference location, we also hope to receive a number of submissions in the fields of Mexican history, borderlands history, and the history of transnational families rooted in both nations. And finally, in light of the recent Supreme Court ruling Whole Women’s Health, we’re especially interested in submissions that focus on the role of reproductive rights. In fact, I may have some exciting news to report in my next column about our keynote speaker—so keep a lookout for your future WAWH newsletters!

Letter from the Executive Director

Cheryl Krasnick Warsh

Happy Summer, WAWH members, from Nanaimo, British Columbia. Just a few reminders:

2017 Conference: We are moving from a highly successful and enjoyable conference in Denver to the preparations for our upcoming conference in San Diego. The Call for Papers is on the WAWH website. All individual paper and panel proposals, including AV requests, have a deadline of September 23rd, 2016.

Welcome to New Members

These members joined between May and August 5, 2016

Annual Members
Laurel Angeli
Nancy Beriage
Kirstin Bloomberg
Hailey Groo
Rachel Klein
Mary Marki
Ariel Schnee

Three-Year Members
Kathleen Brown
Alejandra Dubcovsky
Nancy Fernandez
Kathleen King
Karen Langlois
Kelli McCoy
Paula Michaels

Members Directory: If you want updated information to be included in the 2016-2017 Members Directory, you can send me any changes until August 31st. Only members in good standing will receive the final version, so remember to renew your membership.
Why We Still Need Women’s History

Mary Klann, PhD Candidate
University of California, San Diego

I received my MA in Women’s History from Sarah Lawrence College, home to the first graduate program in Women’s History, founded by Dr. Gerda Lerner in 1972. Although my class shared a recognition of the importance of women in history, we frequently disagreed on how gender should be used as a category of analysis. Our seminar rooms were filled with loud, impassioned, even comical arguments about race, class, power, sexuality, and the legitimacy of universal sisterhood. For example, a good friend became so worked up over what she perceived as a threat to the concept of “sisterhood” that she brought a copy of Robin Morgan’s Sisterhood is Powerful to class, only so she could dramatically drop it on the seminar table while making a point about the day’s reading.

Within this unique environment, we were free to dig deep into criticism of theories and scholarly arguments, without having to defend women’s history as a discipline. In 1979, Gerda Lerner published, The Majority Finds Its Past, where she argued that “Women’s history asks for a paradigm shift.” Lerner asserted that women’s history demanded “a fundamental re-evaluation of the assumptions and methodology of traditional history and traditional thought.” In our Sarah Lawrence bubble, which Lerner herself had created, we were fully invested in this conceptualization. I didn’t realize it then, but that understanding of women's history as a paradigm shift was a gift. I was fresh out of my BA, and I was frustrated with the dense theory and the real work participating in Lerner’s paradigm shift involved. As a result, I had a very tumultuous relationship with one particularly important theorist, Joan Scott.

In Gender and the Politics of History, Scott challenged historians to address how bringing women to the foreground as important actors in history might not be enough to force the paradigm shift we desired. Scott demanded that we assess the ways in which history itself had reified gender differences, recapitulating “women” and “men” as universal categories. I was reluctant to engage with Scott’s critiques because they forced me to take responsibility for these issues in my own work. Scott argued for a “reflexive, self-critical approach,” which would elucidate the “particularistic status of any historical knowledge and the historian’s active role as a producer of knowledge.” As a 22-year-old MA student, a “reflexive, self-critical approach,” was daunting and nerve-wracking. Scott’s work suddenly made my own scholarship infinitely more complicated. It took me a few more years to fully appreciate what that unnerving, frustrating experience has done for me as a scholar and a person. As I expanded my understanding of the role of the historian and began to couple my research of women and gender with the role of racism and settler colonialism within the American state, I realized what was at stake in Scott’s call for reflection and self-criticism. Writing women’s
Why We Still Need Women’s History, contd.

Writing women’s history wasn’t just about inserting women into history, but, for me, writing women’s history fundamentally changed how I thought about all categories of historical identity formation.

During a 2012 seminar on theory in my current PhD program, we were assigned another Joan Scott essay. By then, as a “wizened” graduate of Sarah Lawrence, I felt more of a connection to and appreciation of Scott’s work. But this time, Scott faced additional challenges reaching the graduate student audience. The reaction to Scott was personal. And to be clear, no one brought Robin Morgan to class to dramatically drop on the seminar table. Reading Scott was challenging for some, not because of her critique of universal gender categories, but because she was talking about women and gender. Students became defensive about their own research, claiming that there just were no women in their sources. The critique culminated with a colleague asking, “Well, if there’s women’s history, why isn’t there men’s history?” This all-too-recent exchange reflects the reality that women’s history might not quite be, in Scott’s words, a “recognized insider” within the field of history. Something about women’s history itself is still challenging for today’s students.

So why do we still need women’s history? Training in women’s history provides the opportunity for self-criticism and self-reflection and expands what are considered legitimate lines of historical inquiry. When we frame our understanding of women’s history as the paradigm shift that it is, as conceptualized by Lerner, Scott, and many others, it becomes bigger than women. It even becomes bigger than gender. It is about recognizing that the historian plays a role in the production of knowledge and about interrogating seemingly fixed categories. It is about challenging what is “significant” in history. It is threatening and uneasy, nerve-wracking, and frustrating. That is why we still need it.

2 Ibid.
As a graduate student, I always look forward to the annual WAWH conference. It’s one of the few professional spaces where the majority of people who attend are women, not men. I leave feeling inspired and rejuvenated. The type of supportive camaraderie among women the conference offers is a rare and invaluable experience for graduate students as panels and panelists mix the personal with the professional. Karen Lystra’s talk on “Women’s History as General Education” and her personal journey with teaching women’s history throughout her career was particularly moving. She argued that teaching methods and curriculum of women’s history classes should continue to grow, adapt, and change not just in tandem with the current literature, but also with the new interests of undergraduate students themselves. On her last day of instruction, before retirement, for example, she and her class analyzed Beyoncé’s *Flawless* to better understand contemporary feminism.

Similar approaches were implemented at the roundtable on “The Future of Women’s History,” during which Eileen Boris, Ula Taylor, and Mary Klann gave emotional accounts of their experiences and thoughts on the direction of the field, and what’s at stake with the turn towards a more niche tailoring of gender studies. The Q&A portion that followed brought larger questions to the floor regarding how much we, as teachers, should move with the direction of students who are more interested in queer analysis than gender analysis, or whether we should continue to remain grounded in the social and cultural studies of women.

Blending the personal with the professional and considering and listening to the intersectional perspectives that different women brought to these panels is at the base of my feminism, and at the heart of WAWH’s origins. What I got out of this year’s annual meeting, however, is that my feminism may not be the same feminism as my students’ and probably will not be the same feminism of the next generation’s students. What I think is more important is that the conference provides a space where graduate students can feel comfortable having these types of conversations with professors who have more experience. This sentiment is reflected in WAWH’s emphasis on graduate mentorship and in the scholars the annual meeting attracts. It’s refreshing to hear historians present on historical subjects from 100 years ago, and be open and honest about how their personal narrative is reflected in their own scholarly work. This marrying of the personal with the professional is why I consider WAWH a conference that should not be missed.
Member Column

On Friendship, “Woman” & the West

Sharony Green, Assistant Professor
The University of Alabama

At WAWH, the friendships made give meaning to the work we do. WAWH in particular was the sort of history conference, however, where a scholar opening a fancy box of chocolates will lean over and offer you one. You will be grateful for this, but also with the revelation that the chocolate comes with the giver’s long time friendship with someone you met in Paris years before you ever thought about going back to school.

WAWH is also the place where the closing group dinner invites all present to sing clever lyrics concerning women’s history to the tune of “The Battle of the Hymn of the Republic.” Mention of Linda Kerber is in one of the verses.

WAWH is a place where two historians can have a post-conference chat in a local independent bookstore and do as much wanting earlier conversations to continue. We said goodbye offering to someday swap houses as she wants to know more about the South and I’d love to spend a month in California again.

At the risk of this sounding like a promotional campaign, I will also say WAWH is a place where a historian who is a woman of color can feel the sort of kinship felt as conferences like the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD).

During this conference, I continued to think through the difficulties experienced in sharing this story with wider audiences and received much-needed encouragement from two scholars in particular who regularly do this via blogs and freelance writing. Thank you both.

But I have mostly thought through the discussion had during a panel inviting attention to why “women” as a category still matters. I was forced to retrace my encounters with women’s history in the academy.

The only time I can recall sitting in a class focused primarily on how “woman” is a useful category of analysis was in a course taught by Elizabeth Pleck, University of Illinois Professor Emerita. At the time, I was just a prospective student. The year was 2009. After being admitted into Illinois’ History doctoral program, I recall being introduced to a lot of literature presenting other labels and concepts. Indeed, I was once interested in “queering” antebellum “mulattos.” I am glad I did not do that. While I see value in such terms, I can see why scholars and students need not discard “woman” or “women” either.

Before attending this WAWH meeting, I had not thought deeply about the possibilities and limitations of using “woman” beyond working on various syllabi though. I have a 75 percent appointment in the University of Alabama’s Department of History and 25 percent appointment in Gender and Race Studies. Sometimes words like “gender” seem to help us reach students with different interests more than the word “woman” does. Indeed, I have been, generally speaking, impressed by the ways in which my students have embraced women’s history. I have worked with even undergraduate students who are drawn to various concepts, among them, “intersectionality.” For
example, this was the theme of a paper from a graduating student in my “Bebop to Hip Hop: Young America and Music” class this past spring. She wanted to explore how Janet Jackson sits at the intersection of oppression experienced by both women and people of African descent.

But during the WAWH conference, I found myself wondering if I should assess if this student was a unique case. Should I go back and look at old exams from my “American Civilization to 1865” course and count how many students in a class of more 200 selected the ever-present question on the unique challenges and triumphs of women of varying backgrounds in the early national and antebellum period? That question is always among three from which they get to choose. If memory serves, many of the students choose that question.

Should I assess my upper level undergraduate classes, among them my “Antebellum America” course? I teach in a region that produced the southern belle image. So womanhood is not easily discarded as a concept worth studying. That said, sixty five percent of our freshmen are residents of other states. Some of them are from California and Illinois, places that are hardly southern. If these demographics dilute regional attitudes, I do not easily see it.

During the WAWH panel addressing the future of women’s history, “youth culture” was mentioned as being something that influences my students’ ways of seeing. Such a culture includes Beyoncé’s feminist politics, something I get to hear a lot about in my “Bebop to Hip Hop” course. Not all agree with Beyoncé’s portrayal of her political position though. I recently sat on a Masters committee for a graduate student who is not persuaded (This was before the artist’s *Lemonade* visual album). I have decided even if this recent graduate is not persuaded, she was engaged and that’s what we want as teachers.

There is much to ponder. I will try to stop here and simply say the people I met and ideas shared at WAWH will be with me. I hope the same will be true for a graduate student I emailed while in Denver. I rushed to tell her about Sharon Romeo’s, *Gender and the Jubilee: Black Freedom and the Reconstruction of Citizenship in Civil War Missouri*, a study on how black women used military law to claim power in St. Louis during the Civil War.

I was particularly impressed by meeting Kate Aguilar whose dissertation addresses the gender and racial politics faced by African American men who played for the University of Miami’s football team during the program’s rise to prominence during the “Reagan revolution.” While the initial reaction of most scholars looking at the same thing as someone else would be, “Oh no. Not my topic!” mine was “Yay! Someone else is interested in ‘The U’ I have someone to talk to.”

I take this position because of the words of wisdom from my dissertation advisor who said one should never be afraid to share one’s work. The more people you have participating in a conversation, the better. Thank you, WAWH, for reminding me of that.

*Printed with permission from Professor Green’s blog. For her full post see: https://sagreen1.wordpress.com/*
Call for Papers

WAWH 49th Annual Conference
Town & Country Resort • San Diego, California
April 27-29, 2017

The Western Association of Women Historians (WAWH) invites proposals for panels, roundtables, posters, workshops, and individual papers in ALL fields, regions, and periods of history. The program committee especially invites proposals with gender, generational, geographic, racial, and institutional diversity in regard to panel content and/or panel composition. This year we are particularly interested in panels that focus on women and public life, including women’s engagement in politics, reform movements, and other efforts to spur social change, as well as women’s ever-evolving place in the workforce. We also welcome panels on public history, academic publishing, and alternative career paths for historians, as well as panels on issues relevant to women and adjuncts in academia today. Finally, we would especially like to encourage Canadian and Mexican historians to apply, as we hope in coming years to become more representative of Western North America as a whole. Priority will be given to proposals for complete sessions, but individual papers, or two papers submitted with a suggested theme, will be incorporated where possible.

Scholars may self-nominate as commentators or panel chairs by providing a short curriculum vitae and submitting a brief statement outlining their areas of expertise and topics of special interest. Please specify whether you are willing to serve as commentator, chair or both.

WAWH welcomes scholars at all career stages (from students to senior faculty), as well as independent scholars and teachers. We award a prize for the best conference paper presented by a graduate student and another for the best poster presented by a graduate student, as well as a number of others awards for articles, monographs, dissertations, and electronic publications by WAWH members.

The submission deadline is Friday, September 23, 2016.

Submission guidelines and required forms can be found at www.wawh.org. All AV requests must be made with the submission.

Membership and Registration Requirement:
WAWH membership and 2017 conference preregistration will be required of all program participants. Membership runs conference to conference and is open to all. Annual membership fees are on a sliding scale, ranging from $10 for graduate students to $50.
Announcements

Prize Winners, WAWH 2016

The Western Association of Women Historians is proud to announce the winners of our 2016 prizes:

2016 Chaudhuri Prize – Winner

2016 Chaudhuri Prize – Honorable Mention
Lori Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (Yale University Press), 2015

Founders Dissertation Prize-Winner

Founders Dissertation Prize-Honorable Mention
Mary Klann, “Citizens with Reservations: Race, Colonialism, and Native American Citizenship in the Mid-Twentieth Century American West.”

Judith Lee Ridge Prize-Co-Winner

Judith Lee Ridge Prize-Co-Winner

Frances Richardson Keller-Sierra Prize

Carol Gold Graduate Student Paper Prize
Jessica Derleth, “Kneading Politics: Cookery and the American Woman Suffrage Movement.”

Barbara “Peggy” Kanner Prize

Graduate Student Poster Prize
Carrie Streeter, “Swedish Movement-Cures and American Reform Movements.”

Congratulations to this years prize winners! For more information on WAWH prizes, please visit our Awards page at wawh.org

WAWH Speaker at AHA-PCB

The WAWH is pleased to announce our lunchtime speaker for this year’s AHA-PCB. **Professor Erica Ball** will discuss her current research in a talk entitled “Roots, History, and the Politics of Popular Culture” on Saturday, August 6th. Professor Ball’s talk will reflect on her recently co-edited book (with Kellie Carter Jackson): a collection of scholarly essays on the iconic 1977 television miniseries *Roots: Reconsidering Roots: Race, Politics and Memory* will be published by the University of Georgia Press in spring 2017. Ball is currently working on a cultural history of *Slavery in the Modern American Imagination* and a study of beauty and black self-fashioning at the turn of the twentieth century. Tickets for the event may be purchased through the PCB.
The Networker
Western Association of Women Historians

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