

CALL FOR PAPERS
2021 ASKHISTORIANS DIGITAL CONFERENCE
“[DELETED] & MISSING HISTORY: RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST, CONFRONTING DISTORTIONS”
19–21 October 2021

AskHistorians Public History Forum

Whether it's swords and sandals, corsets and wigs, or statues still standing, the past and its possible meanings resonate with twenty-first century audiences. Historical television series, public history projects, and books of popular history might claim to depict the past "as it really was," but nevertheless illuminate the ways in which we as a society continue to bring the past into dialogue with contemporary popular culture. In so doing, these narratives often reveal more about what we think about the past—and ourselves—than about the past itself. Today, shifting interpretations of the past reveal a growing interest in the inclusion of marginalized voices as well as in questions about the human condition, the relationship between race and national identity, and issues relating to the construction of sexuality, gender, and equality. Indeed, representations of the historical past have been used as lenses through which contemporary society has grappled with very modern examples of brutality, oppression, and the general uncertainty of life.

We therefore welcome proposals from individuals whose research explores representations of the past in any form. As the scope and influence of our topic is broad and far-reaching, we encourage proposals from a wide range of scholarly disciplines on the themes of gender, identity (both personal and national), propaganda, culture, society, accuracy, and authenticity (among others) as these pertain to the ways in which historical narratives have been constructed, represented, or misrepresented.

As part of our efforts to increase accessibility to scholarship and to foster an environment that supports vibrant interdisciplinary discussion, we will give due consideration to all proposals submitted, whether from faculty, graduate students, independent scholars, and senior undergraduate students from a variety of research backgrounds including, but not limited to: history, art history, literature, film studies, folklore, sociology, anthropology, museum studies, and political science.

We are especially interested in receiving abstracts from underrepresented groups in academia, and we therefore invite abstracts from people who identify as minoritized in any way, particularly those who may identify as BIPOC/BAME, women, LGBTQIA+, neurodiverse, and/or differently abled.

AREAS OF INTEREST INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Challenges to the current understanding of an historical event by restoring the perspectives or participation of marginalized individuals. This includes, for example, women's histories, BIPOC/BAME perspectives, LGBTQIA+ histories and queer studies, disability and neurodiverse perspectives, the perspectives of the Global South, decolonial and subaltern studies, and the perspectives of religious minorities.
- Depictions of minoritized groups or status in modern-day book, film, or other pop-culture work.

- Examinations of the commemoration of an historical event or person.
- Mobilization of the past to serve political agendas
- Questions of authenticity versus accuracy (what “feels” historically accurate versus what is)
- The role of museums and historical reenactments in changing the historical narrative

SOURCES OF INTEREST INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Art and Literature: art, books, poetry, and/or theatre
- Civic Life: statues, holidays, historic sites, and/or museums
- Education: history curricula, museum exhibits, podcasts, and/or public lectures
- Film Studies: cinema, television, and/or web-based video
- Folklore: folklore, urban legends, folk songs, and/or the folkloresque
- Gaming Culture: historical reenactment, role-playing games, and/or video games
- Internet Culture: memes, trending topics, and/or clickbait
- Journalism: newspaper and magazine articles, news websites, and/or television news shows
- Product and Other Promotion: Advertising, propaganda, and/or PR

Applicants are asked to please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words and a short biography of no more than 100 words to conference@askhistorians.com by **11:59 PM EDT on 1 June 2021**. For those for whom this may be their first conference, please consider consulting the Submitter’s Guide attached to this call for papers.

SUBMITTER'S GUIDE
2021 ASKHISTORIANS DIGITAL CONFERENCE
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AskHistorians Public History Forum

Whether you're a first-time submitter or simply out of practice after a conference-free COVID year, we've assembled some tips to help you write a winning abstract and speaker bio.

THE ABSTRACT

Your abstract is not your paper

- Please don't submit a full paper.
- Abstracts for the AHDC should be 250-300 words long. A 10-minute paper is around 1500 words.
- Your abstract does not have to prove your thesis. Your paper will do that.
- Most conference participants do not write their papers until after they have been accepted. In other words: you do *not* have to have a completed paper in order to apply!
- If your abstract is accepted, you might discover during your research for the actual paper that the evidence points in a different direction, or that your original question is unanswerable but a related one *can* be addressed. That's okay!

What an abstract actually is

- An abstract is a short sales pitch for your proposed paper.
- Some people propose papers that are based on work they have already done, such as a research-based undergraduate thesis. If you already have your full argument and thesis, you can think of your abstract like a summary that fits the format described below.
- Other people propose papers based on the things they are currently investigating in their research, but for which they have not yet formulated a solid hypothesis. In this case, the goal of your abstract is to demonstrate that you have identified a historical question to solve and that you have a way to solve it.

Elements in a successful abstract for a history paper

Your abstract does not need to follow the order of elements listed here. In some cases, it will be appropriate to skip one or another of the elements (such as previous scholarship)

- **Historical context:** *You* are the expert here! You know far more about the setting for the history you are studying than anyone else does. Your abstract should begin with 1-3 sentences laying out enough of the historical context for non-expert readers to understand the rest of the abstract.

- **Historical problem:** What is the difficult or unexplained phenomenon that your paper will investigate? This might be based on an observation you have made in primary sources, or by comparing previous scholars' arguments about the past in their secondary books and articles.
- **Previous scholarship:** Has anyone tried to address this problem before you? Show us that you are aware of the scholarly discussion on your topic, and will be able to come up with original things to say instead of reinventing the Renaissance. Please note that many successful abstracts don't reference earlier scholarship at all! (LPT: If your abstract exceeds the word count, this is the first thing to cut.)
- **Evidence:** What primary sources will you use to investigate your problem? Or, if you are studying a scholarly debate over a question, which scholars' work do you plan to compare?
- **Methodology:** How are you planning to use your sources to answer your question?
- **Thesis (if you know it already) or what you are hoping to find (if you don't yet have a thesis):** "I will show that ____" "we will see whether ____ or ____" "a comparison of the sources will reveal how ____ occurred" are three possible approaches to this part of the abstract. (Don't worry, you don't have to use the first-person "I" or "we"!)
- **Why we should care:** This element might come at the very beginning of your abstract as a "hook", or it might follow your brief description of the historical setting, or it might be the mic drop at the very end. Wherever you put it, this is the place where you tell your audience why your research matters. Could it play a role in contemporary political debates? Does it take the first step towards a larger thesis? Or is your topic just really, really cool?

Title

Think of your title as the abstract of the abstract: a very, very condensed statement that names the historical context of your paper, identifies the general topic, and hints at the path your investigation will take

The following examples illustrate how the potential topics listed on the CFP itself might be turned into actual papers. Observe how, from the title alone, you can already map out some of the paper in your head:

Topic: Mobilization of the past to serve political agendas

Title: "What Would 'Deus Vult' Today? Crusader Imagery in the 1910s and the 2010s"

Topic: Questions of authenticity versus accuracy (what "feels" historically accurate versus what is

Title: "My Kingdom Come: Modern Whiteness and Medieval People of Color in Warhorse Studios' *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*"

Topic: Depictions of minoritized groups or status in a modern-day book, movie, or other pop culture work

Title: “‘With God’s Grace, Boys Will Follow’: Femininity, Masculinity, and Portrayals of Disability in Historical Drama about British Royalty”

Topic: An examination of the commemoration of a historical event or person

Title: “Emotion, Public Space, and the Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice in Argentina”

Topic: Challenging current understanding of a historical event by restoring the perspectives or participation of marginalized individuals

Title: “Do Lepers Get Leprosy? Seeing the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the 1980s through the Diaries of People with Pre-existing Visible Disabilities”

Topic: The role of museums in changing the historical narrative

Title: “Interactive Digital Displays and the Representation of the Global South in Children’s Museums”

Examples

To help you visualize the difference between an excellent abstract and a not-so-great abstract even better, we’ve included some examples here of both kinds.

What NOT to do

Concept does not fit conference:

“Masculinity in Femininity: Aspects of Male Dress in Women’s Fashion, 1837-1901”

The Victorian era saw women embodying the concept of performative femininity. By mastering dainty “accomplishments,” they proved their skill and mental prowess without entering on any topics considered too scholarly or esoteric. By concentrating their public force on “uplifting” pursuits like temperance and settlement houses, they portrayed themselves as taking on a maternal role toward society at large. And by dressing in figure-accentuating clothing, trimmed with silk bands and ruffles, and usually paired with elaborate hairstyles and jewelry, Victorian women were making themselves extremely visually distinct from men.

Despite all of this, however, there were aspects of women’s fashion that mimicked menswear that are left out when we describe Victorian dress in this manner. Riding habits, for instance, were typically made by tailors in much the same way as men’s coats, fitted to the female form. False lapels were also frequently added to women’s bodices in the 1880s and 1890s, giving them the look of a jacket worn over a waistcoat or shirtfront. Neckties would also become fashionable for women in smart shirtwaist/skirt combination ensembles.

Masculine elements in women's fashion in the Victorian period are not generally thought of, and are implicitly erased – removed from the record – when historians focus on the overtly feminine. In this paper, I will correct the distortion and offer explanations for how the rigidly gendered Victorians made space for this ambiguity.

Good concept but not presented appropriately:

“All You Need Is Love!”

Something that's always bothered me about how the many marriages of Henry VIII are portrayed in fiction is the way we see his relationships with his wives. Authors and screenwriters show Henry as a man in search of love, whether he's making arrangements to marry a suitable wife or having sex with a random courtier. He's shown as head-over-heels with Anne Boleyn (whether she's a seductress or a innocent he's fixating on), Jane Seymour, and Katherine Howard, and the reports of Anne of Cleves being unsatisfactory because of her looks or smell seem like basically putting the onus on her for their annulment for not being able to make him love her. Katherine of Aragon, on the other hand, is a problem for Henry because she had his love and then lost it.

The problem with all of this is that it takes away all of the agency and personality from Henry's wives, as well as the political goings on that gave Henry more reasons for selecting the specific women that he married. Anne Boleyn in particular gets flattened into whatever “type” the story needs, while Jane Seymour and Katherine Parr are made into good “wifey” characters. The relationships Katherine of Aragon and Anne of Cleves had internationally don't get much attention either. The point is, we need to look at the wives of Henry VIII in context, rather than letting the flattened, misogynist characterizations that have been used to make social and political points over the centuries keep going.

What TO do

These abstracts were some of the best abstracts submitted to last year's conference. You can see how they largely conform to the guides above while also injecting a bit of the authors' personality into the writing as well. All abstracts reproduced with permission of their original authors.

Abstract 1

Title: Everyone I Don't Like is Hitler: The Appropriation of Anti-Nazi Axioms by American Fascists, 1944-1949

Abstract: In the 1930s and early 1940s, American educators perceived of group hatreds as a significant danger when facing the growth of Nazism. They believed that the Nazis succeeded in coming to power and in conquering enemies through “divide and conquer” techniques. These methods fostered group antagonisms, which weakened the Nazis' enemies. In response, educators seized upon intercultural and unity education to defeat the subversive effects of what they saw as imported “Nazi racial ideology.” These efforts found significant purchase in educational curricula between 1933 and 1945.

By the end of the war, however, organizations which such educational initiatives had denounced, due to either their embrace of fascism or demagogic intolerance, began to use calls for unity to silence progressive educators. Decrying charges of bigotry as divisive, conservative educators depicted intercultural education as communist “divide and conquer” subversion. They, thereby, reoriented American’s understandings of Nazism by focusing on the methods of totalitarianism and ignoring its specific ideological components. This realignment submerged the racial components of the Nazi atrocities and silenced efforts at drawing parallels and lessons in U.S. society.

Abstract 2

Title: Sex, Murder, and the Myth of the Wild West: How a Soiled Dove Earned a Heart of Gold

Abstract: Women involved in sexual commerce in the American West typically experienced harsh, short lives, and with death, they too often faded from historical memory. Popularly referred to as "soiled doves," these women were often granted patronizing forgiveness, excused as intrinsically good but too frail to avoid the pitfalls of prostitution. A few became noted for having a "heart of gold," a cliché that allowed remembrance of generosity and kindness. Julia Bulette was an average sex worker in Virginia City during the 1860s. She was murdered with sensationalized gory details, but she would probably have been forgotten if it were not for the later conviction of someone who was hanged in the first public execution in the mining town. This allowed for a reconsideration of the victim, setting her on course to rise above the ranks of the average "doves" and earning her a golden heart in regional folklore. The long process of Bulette taking on legendary attributes is well documented: it is consequently possible to understand how historical memory adjusted to a changing world and how a woman, who once walked the streets, transformed to fit the evolving view of the mythic Wild West.

Abstract 3

Title: Elisabeth Achler’s Dirty Laundry, or, the Medieval Saint and Her Suffering Sisters

Abstract: In late medieval Europe, women who wanted to be saints had to imitate Christ’s suffering in specific and horrific ways. Eating nothing but thin wafers of sacred bread. Stigmata wounds that never stopped bleeding, screaming fits, never bathing. Accurate prophecies, levitation, and constant adulation. We overlook the impossibility of these acts to focus on their cultural significance. But St. Catherine of Siena starved herself to death in 1380. Blessed Elisabeth Achler von Reute (1386-1420) tried to starve, but could not stop herself from binge-eating at night on food she stole from the convent kitchen. Real women attempted to achieve these goals, and real women failed. This raises the question: what was it like to live with a bleeding, stinking, screaming, saint?

Her friends’ (successful) attempts to explain away Achler’s failure let us see beyond the curated Instagram of sainthood. They reveal the sisters who washed the stigmatic blood out of her bedsheets every day, who risked their own safety in public to protect her virginity, who complained about it frequently, and who loved her anyway. Achler’s sisters turned her insufferability into their own suffering to imitate Christ. They stole her sainthood for their souls—but only Achler got the glory.

THE SPEAKER'S BIO

What the speaker's bio SHOULD include

- Speaker's name
- Speaker's preferred pronouns (if they are comfortable sharing this information)
- Speaker's profession
- Speaker's institutional affiliation if there is any
- Speaker's history research interests
- OPTIONAL: Any relevant professional accomplishments like history books or articles published or history prizes won

What the speaker's bio should NOT include

- Speaker's current location
- Speaker's hobbies and interests outside of history
- Information about speaker's pets, spouse, children, etc.

Basically, the speaker's bio is a professional blurb to contextualize the speaker as someone who can be seen as an expert on the topic they're presenting a paper on. Personal information of any kind is therefore not exactly appropriate for this kind of bio. Below you can find some examples of good and not-so-good speaker bios.

The Good

Lisa (she/her) is a doctoral candidate at the University of Guelph. Her research uses natural language processing and vector space modeling to examine language and discourse as instruments of social control in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Britain. She is particularly interested in the control of women and the regulation of ambition. Lisa has published on the use of invective to reestablish patriarchal authority over politically active women at the court of James VI/I, and she is currently co-editing the fifth volume of the *Guelph Series in Scottish Studies*. She is also an AskHistorians moderator and AMA coordinator.

The Bad

Lisa is pursuing a PhD in history in the great Canadian North. She also holds a degree in psychology. She is interested in gender and women's history and in the history of Scotland. She has been a member of AskHistorians since October 2015 and was created a moderator of the forum in summer 2020.

The Ugly

Lisa is a PhD candidate in history at the University of Guelph. She lives in the Great White North with her husband and cat and is passionate about sewing, cooking, and doing history. She is also a moderator and AMA coordinator for AskHistorians.