

## The Loose Ends of History

No history can encompass all historical evidence. In every paradigm, whether methodologically or historiographically generated, some evidence is privileged and some neglected. Some evidence will always be ephemeral or irrelevant to a dominant paradigm that weaves together the historically specific into a larger, broader narrative of the past. At the same time, professional historians understand that new lines of historical analysis have been generated by fresh attention to neglected evidence: the *loose ends* of history. Every historian has, in the course of their research in archives, libraries, and museums, come across compelling evidence that does not contribute to dominant narratives of their subfields, or fields, of history. These loose ends of history have tremendous generative potential.

In treating the effort to rehabilitate loose ends as a shared methodological and epistemological enterprise across a range of historians, this panel series is inspired in part by the methodological challenges raised by Michel-Rolph Trouillot, who identified the production of historical silences at the moment of 1) the production of sources, 2) the making of archives, 3) the retrieval of sources and 4) the assigning of retrospective significance. Our effort is twofold: to share methodological solutions for retrieving historical loose ends, and to begin an open inquiry into considering what new stories can be found in them.

Recognizing the interpretive value of such evidence has led to important methodological breakthroughs and new fields of historical research. With these efforts have come new arguments about causation and motivation, and new understandings of outcomes and trajectories. Thus, studying the evidence of women's lives and works revealed the complex historical impacts of a previously-neglected half of humanity, reshaping our understanding of labor, family, and politics through the lens of gender. The study of collection inventories as epistemological evidence rather than mere curiosities initiated new lines of thought about the relationship of art, science, materiality, and a world with increasingly-close networks of communication and flow. Across all fields of historical inquiry, when historians stopped dismissing anomalies to their assumed narratives, they started seeing significance in the evidence once set aside. Some creative recent subjects of analysis have included:

- gender fluidity (e.g. cross dressing)
- forms of religious hybridities and coexistence (e.g. simultaneum churches)
- transnational networks (especially ones that cross linguistic boundaries not bridged by previous historians)
- migrations and movements across borders
- studies of bureaucrats, functionaries and other ambiguous agents of states (e.g. archivists)
- the roles of indigenous peoples in shaping colonialism (e.g. mapmaking)
- role of the informal economy within capitalism (e.g. brothels)
- studies of non-textual elements of the human experience (e.g. soundscapes)

Our goal is to provide new windows into alternative historical narratives, creating a space and an audience for further discussion and thought about the questions they raise. Panels will be organized around themes associated with historical methods and interpretation such as:

- alternatives to dominant narratives

- new readings of traditional sources attentive to evidence previously ignored
- the interpretation of sources often shunted aside as ephemera
- the agency of individuals once treated as marginal to historical change
- the production of historical silences

Please send a 250-word abstract, brief bio (of less than 150 words), information about any A/V, scheduling, or letter of invitation needs to Jesse Spohnholz, Washington State University, (spohnhoj@wsu.edu) and Carina Johnson, Pitzer College (carina\_johnson@pitzer.edu) by March 26, 2020.