

2023 OAH Annual Meeting Report

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This spring I attended the Organization of American Historians conference on American history at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel and Suites in Los Angeles, California from March 30 to April 2, 2023. I was previously registered for the OAH conference in Washington D.C. in 2020, but it was canceled at the last minute due to the spread of COVID-19. I was very glad that I was finally able to attend the conference in person after three years. I am grateful for the opportunity that was made possible with the travel stipend I was granted from the organization.

Among all the sessions and roundtables I attended during the conference, I found the session “Youth in the Movement: High School Student Activism in Postwar America” most interesting. The presentation topics in the session ranged from American high schools and civil rights activism in Virginia and colonial-transnational high school activism in postwar New York City to very recent high school student activism in Salt Lake City. Through this session, I gained much insight for my current research project on the interracial student activism in Jackson, Mississippi in the 1950s. We had stimulating discussions in other panels as well, such as “New Approaches to Carceral Studies” and “The Church as a Site of Struggle: Faith and Social Mobilization in Latinx History.”

The most memorable part of the conference was the OAH’s special tour focusing on the hidden histories of Los Angeles’ beaches. This tour took us to Santa Monica on Saturday morning, first making a stop at Historic Belmar Park, a Santa Monica commemorative justice initiative. The park features an outdoor exhibition and we explored Black life in the area in the first half of the twentieth century. We then walked to some of the nearby landmarks of early twentieth-century Black Santa Monica, including Phillips Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and Bay Street Beach. The tour concluded with visits to Crystal Beach, an

essential space of sociability for gay men and women in the 1950s-70s, and Muscle Beach, a place for acrobats and bodybuilders to exhibit their toned bodies back in those days. It was very interesting to learn that all these beaches—though they all look almost the same at first glance—historically played different roles.

During the four-day conference, I enjoyed meeting new people at evening receptions and breakfast events. On the second day, I was invited to attend the annual OAH-JAAS luncheon at a Pan-Asian restaurant in downtown Los Angeles, where I had a chance to talk to several other scholars of American history over lunch. Volunteering at the registration desk for an afternoon was also a good experience, as I learned how some staff members work behind the scenes and help participants with questions and troubleshoot minor problems. Overall my first experience at the OAH conference was great and I hope to come back in the near future.

The Report of The OAH 2023 Annual Conference
Minami Nishioka, Lecturer, University of Tennessee Knoxville

The OAH 2023 annual conference was held at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel and Suites in Los Angeles from March 30th to April 2nd. This was my first time visiting Los Angeles and presenting a paper at the OAH. I attended many intriguing panels during the conference, explored several historical sites in Los Angeles, and had the opportunity to meet other scholars. I am grateful to the OAH-JAAS committee for sponsoring our panel and making my trip to Los Angeles possible.

As my research interest lies in the history of the U.S. in the Pacific and Christian missionaries, I attended several panels that shared similar interests. One panel that particularly inspired me was “Transnational History and Its Discontents,” where Dr. Yu Tokunaga advocated for the use of non-English primary and secondary sources. I agree with this view. Transnational historians should pay more attention to marginalized voices that challenge the dominant historical narrative and image of the United States. Other interesting panels I attended include “Transpacific Crossroads: Identity, Geopolitics, and the Mobility Turn” and “Lave Kuleana (Taking Responsibility): Peoples of Hawai‘i at the Time of Crises.” In the former, I was intrigued by Dr. Constance Chen’s presentation. She discussed the travel writings of the American women in East Asia in the early 20th century and how the act of writing and publishing empowered these women. I was fascinated by her analysis of tensions between Americans’ desire for assimilation and fear for being corrupted by Asian cultures.

Our panel, “U.S.-Asia Relations: Trade, Empire, and Religion” was on Saturday morning, and was well-received. Other presenters were Dr. Greg Robinson and Dr. Marie Nitta, who discussed how Japan became the largest export destination of the U.S. South after the Civil War and the intersection between U.S. land-grant university and colonialism in Japan, respectively. My paper was about American missionaries depiction of Okinawa at the turn of the 20th century. Commentator Dr. Yoko Tsukuda nicely synthesizes the panel theme. The audience was engaging, and we received many insightful comments.

In addition to attending panels, I enjoyed a tour to the National Japanese American Museum, which was organized by the OAH. The museum is in Little Tokyo and focuses on the experiences of Japanese Americans in internment camps. On the second floor of the museum, there was a Heart Mountain barracks, an original structure saved and preserved from the concentration camp in Wyoming. There, I heard the firsthand experience from a volunteer, who had been confined to an internment camp in his childhood. The museum put effort into preserving the oral testimonies of Japanese Americans by utilizing cutting-edge technologies of AI. They created “The Interactive Story File” which enabled visitors to have conversation with the video of *nisei* Lawson Iichiro Sakai, who died a few years ago. This made me wonder how the AI will change museum exhibits in the future.

I would like to express my appreciation with the JAAH-OAH committee for making my trip possible. It was lovely to see Drs. Yoko Tsuda, Glenn Eskew, Jennifer Dorsey, Jane Kamensky, and Judy Wu at the luncheon, and Hikaru Abe, another grantee, not only agreed to share a room but also taught me cool places to visit around the area. I would like to thank all the JAAH-OAH members and staff who made my trip memorable experience.