

## 2025 OAH Conference on American History

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The 2025 OAH conference in Chicago was a source of inspiration for me. Although this was my third time attending the OAH conference, I participated in the Chicago meeting for the first time as a recipient of the OAH-JAAS travel grant. Now that cultural and intellectual exchange programs are shrinking—and even Fulbright is no exception—I feel all the more grateful to have been able to take part in this conference through the international exchange program between OAH and JAAS, and to contemplate the public engagement of historians—an issue that demands our urgent attention.

At the OAH-JAAS business meeting and lunch, I enjoyed conversations with scholars from both organizations and exchanged thoughts on the differences between American and Japanese academic cultures. The OAH-JAAS co-sponsored panel after the lunch, “Security and History: Views from Japan and the United States,” was a great opportunity for me to contemplate the history of U.S. and Japan relations. The three presentations by Professors Masumi Izumi, Ayako Sahara, and Yutaka Sasaki addressed this significant subject from the perspectives of the Japanese American incarceration during World War II, the refugee policy under Cold War humanitarianism, and the U.S. and Japan security cooperation under the Security Treaty of 1960. It may be overly ambitious to summarize the breadth of insights I gained from these talks and the dialogue with the audience in this limited space. Yet overall, the panel enabled me to think deeply about how to teach U.S. history at Japanese institutions by weaving together the historical and political contexts of both countries to illuminate transnational interactions.

Other panels I attended also raised important pedagogical and public history questions. The panel on the Truth-Telling Project, an award-winning public history digital initiative launched by the Frances Willard House Museum and WCTU Archives in 2019, served as a space for reflecting on how to approach history without a clear conclusion. Featuring the conflict in the international press between Frances Willard and Ida B. Wells over the WCTU’s involvement in the anti-lynching campaign in the 1890s, the project aims to use that conflict as a window into the ongoing challenges of intersectionality in women’s activism. One of the panelists discussed her experience as a student in a course that incorporated the digital project, sharing her findings from

a critical close reading of primary sources representing both Willard's and Wells's perspectives. While one can easily point to Willard's reluctance to address issues of racial injustice, the panelists suggested that the Truth-Telling Project offers a more nuanced understanding of the limitations of her views and facilitates deeper reflection on the conundrums we face today.

This OAH meeting directly inspired my own project as well. As a participant in the OAH Mentorship Program, I discussed an excerpt from a dissertation chapter draft with Dr. Alison Parker on the final day of the conference. Despite the short time on Sunday morning, I received helpful feedback and suggestions regarding how to incorporate the experiences of women of color—including Alice Dunbar Nelson and Ida B. Wells—into my chapters on women journalists in Boston and Chicago. We discussed their writing activities, which were often separated from those of white women. As clearly seen in Wells's protest at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and the publication of the pamphlet *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (1893), for example, Black women's writing complicates the story of women's efforts to showcase their "progress" and achievements at international events like the fair by pointing to the exclusion of women workers of color from the exhibition. The conversation with Dr. Parker will help me illustrate the complexity of women's political involvement through the press. Indeed, I have benefited from this mentorship program, as I also participated in it last year and had a wonderful conversation with Dr. Lauren MacIvor Thompson, whose suggestions led me to a discussion of the broader political agendas women journalists pursued. I especially appreciate the sessions and workshops for graduate students, such as the mentorship program and lightning talks, as a great reminder that OAH is a place to nurture research.

As I walked to the conference venue, glancing at the iconic Michigan Avenue Bridge, a towering hotel—which claims to be the seventh-tallest building in the United States—caught my eye every day. When I visited the city two years earlier, it had seemed to me like just another glittering skyscraper among the many along the Chicago River. Yet this time around, its presence was unavoidable, reminding me of the tremendous power of politics that is altering entire systems of education and knowledge production. It felt symbolic that historians convened along the river to reflect on their collective voices and roles during this highly political moment. I sincerely hope that the interactions, networks, and communities of historians—including the OAH-JAAS scholarly exchanges—will survive and thrive in this turbulent time.

## 2025 Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting Report

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Attending the 2025 OAH Annual Meeting in Chicago was an incredibly valuable experience. I had the chance to attend presentations that closely related to my own research interests. The conference also reminded me of the importance of building networks and how much we can learn from simply talking to one another across institutions and borders. Especially in the current moment of political and social uncertainty, this year's meeting provided a meaningful opportunity to reflect on the fundamental value of studying history.

I enjoyed attending the panel session "The Freedom Struggle in the Rural South," which illuminated the often-overlooked experiences of Black communities in rural Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama. The papers not only expanded the timeline of the civil rights era but also complicated the notion of resistance itself—showing that, in many rural areas, survival in the face of overwhelming white control was itself a form of endurance. This session reminded me that re-centering rural voices is not just about inclusion but about fundamentally rethinking the questions we ask of the past and the ways we interpret justice, progress, and activism.

The session "In the Warmth of Our Own Suns: Historicizing African Americans' Enduring Attachments to the American South" was also deeply impactful. It offered a powerful and humanizing reframing of Black migration narratives, emphasizing not only departure from the South but also the lasting emotional, cultural, and familial ties to the region. I was especially moved by the personal histories woven into the presentations, such as the story of Armie White and her family's journey through the Mississippi Delta, which illuminated how Black women navigated poverty, labor, and community within the South. The presentation on the Rhythm Club fire similarly challenged linear understandings of migration by showing how tragedy in Natchez deeply resonated with Black communities in Chicago, revealing transregional networks of care and memory.

Attending the conference was rewarding not only academically but also socially. One of the highlights for me was the opportunity to connect with members of the Japanese Association for American Studies. It was a real pleasure to speak with scholars from Japan, and I appreciated the sense of community that emerged from those conversations. I also participated in several open events, such as receptions and breakfasts, which provided great opportunities to meet PhD students from other universities. These informal gatherings

allowed us to exchange information about our programs and research, and I found the discussions both encouraging and enriching. I also had the chance to have dinner with other Japanese doctoral students attending the conference. It was a relaxed and enjoyable time at a casual restaurant, where we not only shared a meal but also exchanged insights about our academic paths, future aspirations, and experiences living abroad.

Lastly, listening to David Blight's Presidential Address left a deep impression on me. Blight emphasized that we, as historians, now find ourselves in a moment when we must defend not only the content of our arguments, but also the very right to question, interpret, and teach history freely. He called for "a real coalition for history" to protect the integrity of our field at a time when historical scholarship is under attack. (He had even prepared "Defend History!" badges for conference attendees.) Blight's powerful declaration, "we cannot and will not be silent," served as both a warning and a rallying cry.