

[ Report ]

# Report on the 127th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA) (New Orleans, Louisiana, January 3–6, 2013)

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The 127th Annual Meeting of the AHA offered a variety of seminars and presenters as well as an extensive line-up of special activities. As always, there was a wide variety of discussions, plenary sessions, special meetings of AHA-affiliated groups, film screenings, *et al*, and it was not difficult for this participant to find several sessions each day that were of substantial interest. For lovers of jazz, the venue was of particular interest this year, New Orleans being historically one of the cradles of jazz music in the United States (US). In this report, I shall offer brief summaries and a few critical remarks on the sessions I was able to attend.

## 1. “Blackouts : Using Energy Regimes to Narrate Place, Race, and Ethnicity”

1) Steven Stoll, Fordham University – “Subsistence Wages : The Political Ecology of Dispossession”

Speaking of the historical transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy, Stoll treated the issue of what it means to be modern. One possible response to this question is that “moderns” do not raise their own food. For example, the pre-Adam Smith political economist James Stuart did not consider peasants as part of society because they only produced their own food (an unsocialized idea). Stoll argued, however, that this is a false impression. In fact, gardens often support people, as they did on subsistence homesteads. Such subsistence activities were not just some past reality ; on the contrary, even in the capitalistic revolution, people still produced their own food, in some cases leading to conflicts between agrarians (who produced much food) and capitalists.

In the early stages of capitalism, people began to work for wages, and poverty came to be a serious social issue. Homelessness was rampant and a new kind of “household” pauperism began to develop. When wages were not sufficient to pay for family needs, families made up the difference by producing their own food. Faced with declining standards of living and more poverty, gardens were rightly touted. Gardens were also developed outside

of a family's living area. This was beneficial for labor, for when laborers went on strike, they would still have food to eat. Though the arrangement often did not work well, people nevertheless raised their own food while working, for example, in a factory. Early on, subsistence farming and market producing farming were adversaries. Interestingly enough however, subsistence development would much later become the wave of the future.

2) Mark Fiege – Colorado State University—Fort Collins – “Crude Freedom : Fossil Fuels, the Great Migration, and American Democracy”

Fiege began by expressing his disappointment concerning the lack of attention that has been given to the important historical effect of hydro-carbon energies on democracy. Suggesting that political results can differ depending on the energy sources involved, he explained a few fundamental differences between the political ramifications of coal as opposed to those of oil. On the one hand, coal production brought people *together* to work, leading to the formation and growth of labor unions. Oil, however, could be produced with fewer workers and, consequently, there was less pressure on oil workers to form unions. Fiege pointed out that in earlier years, land ownership by blacks kept them tied to the land. However, with the onset of the hydro-carbon age, there was greater spatial mobility and workers could spread out to work in different coal plants. As a result, their social and political power was diluted. Oil made possible transportation that enabled blacks to move to other locations. A kind of “carbon democracy” made it possible for activists to protest unjust attitudes and practices like the Jim Crow laws. Similarly, whites reacted to new expressions of black freedom and mobility by moving from urban areas and commuting to their jobs.

3) Neil M. Maher, Rutgers University-Newark and New Jersey Institute of Technology – “Spaceship Earth : The Urban Crisis and NASA's War on Poverty” (Mr. Maher was absent so his paper was presented by session chairperson, Ellen Stroud.)

Maher compared the different referents behind the symbol “spaceship earth” as that concept has been understood in different ways by NASA and Ralph Abernathy's Poor Peoples Campaign in the 1960s. NASA's understanding involved the development of environmental control subsystems that would support the production and use of NASA rockets (e.g., the Apollo) and the recycling of natural resources to that end. Abernathy offered a contrary view that was critical of the billions of dollars spent on rockets and compared these expenditures with what was spent on meeting the needs of the poor, and especially their need for good, public housing. As a result of the call of civil rights' activists for boycotts to protest the space race, NASA was forced to rethink its position. NASA began to use space technology to address environmental and social problems particularly in urban areas. It formed an alliance with the government department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and began a program called “Operation Breakthrough,” the purpose of which was to produce better housing environments. Maher concluded by pointing out that as a result of pressure from Abernathy-type activists and civil rights movements, Apollo program technology was utilized to help the poor.

In a comment following the presentation, Andrew Wiese remarked critically that NASA was treating social problems with technological means rather than, for example, following an approach like Abernathy's which would have involved efforts grounded in human relations.

## 2. “God and Mammon : The Politics of Religion and Commerce in Mid-Twentieth-Century America”

### 1. Kevin M. Kruse, Princeton University – “Freedom under God : Corporations, Christianity, and the Revolt against the New Deal”

Kruse offered a short history of the idea of a “nation under God,” a phrase found in Lincoln’s Gettysburg address and which was later, in the 1950s, inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to distinguish the US from “godless Communism.” In fact, the idea of national freedom under God was an idea that developed for domestic reasons. The idea arose in the 1930s and 1940s as a response to the idea of free enterprise. Kruse cited the work of a pastor of an influential church that was attended by many businessmen. The pastor started a group called “Spiritual Mobilization” that opposed the New Deal and saw the welfare state as a perversion of Christ’s teaching. The main message of Christ, they argued, was salvation. The group stressed free enterprise and saw Christianity and capitalism as intertwined with each other (one should spread one and spend the other). Using the expression “freedom under God,” the group feared socialization of major aspects of American society. They began a radio program and also sponsored a sermon contest. In 1952 the “freedom under God” theme became a part of the annual Presidential prayer breakfast. At this time, many people saw America as a Christian nation.

### 2. Darren Grem, University of Mississippi - “Incorporating Conviction : J. Howard Pew, *Christianity Today*, and the Business of Evangelical Culture”

Grem spoke of the close relationship between Christianity and free enterprise, the latter which was a guiding factor in the development of evangelical Christianity in the US, with special focus on the role of J. Howard Pew and the magazine *Christianity Today* (CT). Business leaders like Pew shaped evangelical culture through their stress on the important connection between “sound” theology and “sound” business. They opposed collectivism and combined faith with free enterprise. They opposed the Christian liberalism of the *Christian Century*. Pew saw publishing as a good way to spread his gospel of Christianity and economics. He saw liberty and Christianity as interdependent and had a disdain for the more ecumenical National Council of Churches (NCC). Pew was supported by the widely known evangelist, Billy Graham, and the magazine supported Graham in his evangelistic outreach. A close colleague of Pew’s, viz., L. Nelson Bell, sought an independent voice to lead CT, and Carl F. H. Henry was chosen as the magazine’s first editor-in-chief. CT was unlike other popular magazines. Its covers gave the impression that it was *the* magazine for evangelical Christians. Its editorial reception was good, but the magazine’s reception by advertisers was not. The survival of CT depended a lot upon Pew and

other “movers and shakers” in the business world. Social and economic conservatism were hallmarks of the magazine. Bell used the magazine as a pulpit to argue against the “sexual obsession” of a nation that was slipping into degeneracy. Pew died in 1971 and, as Gem comments, Pew probably would not have been pleased with CT’s later focus on social issues such as poverty, evangelical feminism, *et al.*

### 3. Darren T. Dochuk, Washington University in St. Louis – “Go, Sell Thy Oil” : Evangelical Protestantism and Petro-Politics in Cold War America”

Dochuk began with a discussion of a famous evangelical movie entitled, “Oiltown, USA.” In the movie, Lance Manning, an oil man, after an oil explosion, experienced a crisis conversion after attending a Billy Graham revival meeting. As a born again Christian, Manning now saw his wealth as a way to help God’s work. The movie set attendance records, surpassing those of another popular Christian movie, viz., *Mr. Texas*, the showing of which led to 100,000 conversions. This marked the beginning of a revival of evangelicalism following a decline of the movement following the Scopes trial. At this time, oil was rising as an important commodity in the US. Many evangelicals joined the growing group of oilmen, and thus began what has been called “Oil-patch Protestantism,” a movement which, in a sense, fostered the sacralization of oil. The movement was particularly strong from 1930-1950. Many in the movement ascribed supernatural significance to this natural element. Churches used oil money to build Gothic cathedrals, and oil-patch evangelicals even began to frame their premillennial views to accord with an apocalyptic interpretation of oil that pointed to a future decline of America. Many saw the present dispensation coming to an end and sought to stress technology and other ways to forestall the national decline. Evangelicals and independent oilmen reacted against Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s attempts to regulate oil. Nevertheless, later on they were successful in lobbying Billy Graham to get President Eisenhower to support independent oil. Independent oilmen in Texas began to work on their image and teamed up with oil-patch evangelicals to do so. The collaboration produced a doctrinal combination of Christianity and capitalism, doing much to influence how many Americans thought about energy.

### **3. “Amigo” – John Sayles, writer and director (Anarchist’s Convention Films, 2011)**

The film deals with the Philippine-American War in 1900. A village mayor is pressured to collaborate with the American military leader, Colonel Hardacre, and the mayor tries to do so without betraying his people. The movie describes graphically the often heart-breaking interactions of friendship, betrayal, romance, and violence in an occupied country. As the synopsis of the movie states, “Amigo is a page torn from the forgotten history of imperialism and a mirror of today’s unresolvable conflicts.” In the discussion following the movie, Sayles remarked that one of the lessons of the movie is that “you can’t just declare a war, you have to sell it.” The movie is really an exposé of historical aspects of the Philippine-American War that have only begun to come out in the last 20-30

years. Indeed, many Filipinos were not taught much of this history in their early schooling.

#### **4. Plenary Session – “The Public Practice of History in and for a Digital Age”**

Panel: Edward L. Ayers, University of Richmond, Claire Bond Potter, New School for Social Engagement, Mary Louise Roberts, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Niko Pfund, Oxford University Press, Michael Pollan, Graduate School of Journalism, University of California, Berkeley

1. Edward Ayers began with a few remarks on the role of factual knowledge in public history. He pointed out that if you know how things have changed (or not) you can get a hearing. It is difficult to determine the shape (interpretation) of knowledge. Digital history can show us the patterns of history. In this regard, podcasts have been valuable. Digital history also allows for more collaboration with other historians than was ever possible before. The past bears compelling shapes—it is the job of history to recognize that.

2. Claire Potter commented on the use and flexibility of blogging. Blogging can be done for general audiences, for cross-disciplinary discussions, and for promoting one’s own work. Blogging contributes to history by creating communities, even though we don’t meet the people in those communities. Through blogging, historians can create great spaces for intellectual conversation. In a blog, collaboration and conversation are at the center of what is being done. It is a constant process of “getting it right” and is not impeded by any professional apparatus. A blog has the advantage of being able quickly to respond to events. Furthermore, there are now fewer places than before where historians can get their work out in print; for this reason, blogging can be a good means for publishing one’s research.

3. Mary Roberts stressed the advantages of digital history for modern students who have a striking sensitivity to visual formats. Through the Internet they learn to view the past through the present by juxtaposing synopses, various lines, and other things with which they see worthwhile connections. Roberts also remarked, however, that she still supports the lecture format, since, now that so much is available to students, it is valuable for them to have something they can get only once.

3. Niko Pfund spoke of the enormous fragmentation that has taken place in writing in the last several years. Writing is becoming less linear and is being organized more into “chunks.” Pfund also spoke of the Oxford scholarly editions on-line that one can use if one wants to be looking at several sources at the same time. He also mentioned the need to consider copyright reform if we are to realize the possibilities offered by these new opportunities.

4. Michael Pollan, author of *Botany and Desire*, said he uses history as a tool to answer questions about how things came to be. History provides a narrative; it “connects dots.” We can bring history to readers through stories. Pollan cited the widespread skepticism

about using the traditional, omniscient view in writing and suggested that it was best to avoid that perspective in contemporary writing. He said he feels that it is better to tell stories “in a human voice” and to pose questions that are of current interest.

### **5. “Lone Star” – John Sayles, writer and producer (Columbia Pictures, 1996)**

This “cross-cultural murder mystery” is set in Rio County, Texas and deals with a complex combination of the social, personal, and racial aspects of life in a border town in Texas. The relationship between the past and the present serves as a powerful theme throughout the movie. The plot includes engrossing character studies of the various people involved in the plot. In a discussion session with Sayles and Rachel St. John of New York University following the movie, Sayles spoke of his own early background and interest in Texas. He was intrigued with Texas slavery and the border towns in which both English and Spanish were spoken. These personal interests served as a background for the development of Sayles’ later interest in cultural differences and legends that keep people fighting among each other. He spoke of being intrigued with the idea of taking a legend, poking around in it, and seeing what happens.

### **6. “From the March on Washington to Tahrir Square and Beyond : Tactics, Technology, and Social Movements”**

Panel : Juan R. I. Cole, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and *Informed Comment*, Greg Grandin, New York University, Temma Kaplan, Rutgers University-New Brunswick, Adolph L. Reed, University of Pennsylvania

1. Juan Cole showed some slide pictures of Tahrir Square that he took in July, 2011. Organizers had arranged five stages on which people recited poetry and offered various harangues whereby they expressed their opposition to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. There were exciting acts on the various stages, to the point that it was almost like a competition among the various acts. Tents were set up for various factions and parties ; the vanguard was the middle class rebel groups. The use of social media in the protests was important, but people also “chanted” from their balconies to spread the word around. By occupying the central district of Cairo (not far from the centers of power) the protestors posed a serious threat to the regime. The protests were successful and led to Mubarak’s downfall. The occupying groups were very adept at “network-threatening.” Cole also commented on some of the background causes of the situation, explaining that neo-liberalism had transformed Egyptian socialism, with the corrupt Mubarak regime and much privatization being the result. In the discussion period at the end of the panel discussion, Cole commented that people become more revolutionary when they think it isn’t going to get any better.

2. Greg Grandin spoke first about Central and South America. He spoke of the use of the “human microphone” and the significant ethos and solidarity it represented. He

explained the beginning of democracy and the rise of the Left in Brazil and the effective use of social media within the Latin American Left to appeal to classic, leftist ideas. In his discussion of the use of the media as a strategy, he pointed out that in Brazil, Venezuela, and Ecuador, traditional media were very concentrated (in an oligarchic sense) and had a strong grip on the news. Leftist governments in Latin America have responded by broadening free speech through regulating corporations. They try to find alternative centers of communication through which citizens can become involved. Grandin also pointed out however, that the debate over regulations has become somewhat anachronistic, i.e., firmly entrenched in old means like TV rather than the Internet. At one point the mobilized right used social media to oppose leftist movements and there was a battle over media laws. However, recently, the Left has caught up. Protestors are raising media-related issues and expressing their opposition to the Mexican government's stranglehold on the election process. The social media have the information to disseminate, but the state has put clamps on the traditional media. The Zapatistas in Mexico have become quite skillful in using social media tactics and particularly at holding on to notions of time, e.g., timing protests with other history, events, historical memory, *et al.* Social media were even used to oppose the drug cartel. Unfortunately in this case, however, the drug cartel responded brutally with violent killings.

3. Temma Kaplan spoke of the new waves of social media sweeping the globe, and their success even in Canada. This wave is involving a variety of social classes and new publics are being organized. These new publics are organized horizontally rather than in the past patriarchal form. With the explosion of the use of social media, things will never be the same. Now, people with a few resources can reach out to a wider world and engage with it. E-mail has become an important tool for shaming people who participate in atrocities. Social media have become useful for opposing neoliberal attempts to control water. Though many movements are not yet well-worked out, we are at the beginning of a long process toward democracy.

4. Adolph Reed was critical of the decline of the Left in the US. He sees a dearth of traditionally leftist groups in the US that can challenge imperialism, push for universal health care, and fight for a clean and sustainable environment. Leftist groups have become more like care-takers than care-givers. They have chosen to work within the neoliberal framework, willing to take what they can but, at the same time, utilizing programmatic aspects of neoliberalism. As Reed points out, movements that gain traction will not be monolithic but, rather, represent a diverse group of people. The retreat of the Left has been a fact of life in the US for three decades. One problem is that leftist movements continue to be event-centered. By overemphasizing activism, the left has become marginalized. As Reed explained, the greatest impacts of the civil rights victories came through institutions, e.g., the Civil Rights Bill. The March on Washington was valuable and helped to bring about legislative victories, but the legislative and other institutional victories were what really altered the rules of the game. Reed feels that the young don't understand what

a viable, strong Left is, nor do they appreciate the importance of organizing in developing a viable Left.

**7. “The Loving Story” – Nancy Buirski, writer, director, and producer ; Elisabeth Haviland James, producer and editor ; Susie Ruth Powell, writer (Icarus Films, 2012)**

This was an excellent historical documentary of the landmark 1967 Supreme Court decision which legalized interracial marriage. The film’s creators have deftly woven together 16mm footage, old photographs, and contemporary interviews to develop a narrative which deals effectively with the legal, personal, and social aspects of the exciting saga that led to the Supreme Court decision. As the synopsis reads, “the documentary takes viewers behind the scenes of the legal challenges and the emotional turmoil that they entailed, documenting a seminal moment in American history and reflecting a timely message of marriage equality in a personal, human love story.” In the discussion time that followed the showing of the movie, an interesting question was raised regarding how different the situation might have been if the man had been black and the woman white, instead of the man being white and the woman black, as was the case.

**8. “A Global History of Nuclear Non-Proliferation : The Beginnings, 1955–76”**

(Note : Regrettably, I arrived late and was not able to hear the presentation by Anna-Mart van Wyk, of Monash University entitled, “To Sign or Not to Sign : Pretoria’s Flirtation with the NPT, 1970–76” nor the first part of Taka Daitoku’s presentation.)

1. Taka Daitoku – “The Kishi Doctrine and the Construction of a Virtual Nuclear State in Postwar Japan”

Daitoku offered a historical evaluation of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which was signed in 1970. He explained that Japan had been seeking more independence from the US in regard to nuclear weapons. Especially since 1955, Okinawa has been a sticking point in Japan’s relationship to the American military. Up until the present, most of the leadership in this area has been provided by the political scientists in Japan. In recent years however, there has been little in the way of innovative thought on these matters and most political thought has focused simply on strategy. Leaders have used over-simplified concepts that seem almost ahistorical. Therefore, there is much need for historical evaluation. Indeed, current work on the nuclear problem has been virtually ignored. This is the case in spite of the fact that we are in the midst of a document revolution around the world, with much work being done in non-Cold War nations. Daitoku commented that the papers at this session showed a great deal of ambivalence regarding the NPT. The NPT has done little to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons, but the NPT is only the beginning of the story. Daitoku also pointed out that the nuclear story was not always a Cold War story since Cold War nations sometimes colluded against medium power nations. In the

following discussion period, Daitoku commented on the diverse attitudes in Japan regarding the development of nuclear power. Some people oppose it; some people want it. He called for more historical reconstruction of the issues. He raised questions about what the sources of nuclear opinions have been and what is being thought about nuclear weapons in Japan in a general sense.

2. William B. Burr, National Security Archive – “To Keep This Genii Bottled Up” : United States Policy on the Dissemination of Gas Enrichment Technology, 1960-74”

Burr dealt with the issue of gas centrifuge technology, concerning which the US is wrestling with developing a shared protocol that will keep the information secret. One current problem is the US’s European partners’ suspicions about the US in this regard. Burr pointed out that the NPT is not the be-all and end-all solution to the problem of nuclear proliferation; we also need to look at the problem of gas-centrifuge technology. The military nexus here is of great concern. Original efforts to deal with nuclear proliferation did a poor job of evaluating the military-commercial uses of nuclear energy. Burr also raised questions about efforts to maintain secrecy—i.e., can we truly keep the lid on *any* technology like this? Furthermore, how should we handle US-European relations in regard to these matters, e.g., in regard to matters like the A. Q. Khan security breach?

3. Ronald J. Granieri, Foreign Policy Research Institute – “Favorite Son or Stepchild? West Germany within the Atlantic Nuclear “Family”

Granieri raised several questions regarding the age-old dilemma of what to do with West Germany. In other words, for example, should West Germany have nuclear weapons? How serious is West Germany’s interest in nuclear weapons? Does West Germany want nuclear weapons or just the potential for them?

In conclusion, it was felt by the participants that we need to rethink our post-war narratives and to ask how nuclear weapons fit into these narratives. There is also the problem of superpower collusion whereby nations like the US seek to suppress nuclear information in order to prevent other nations from gaining access to that information.

## 9. “Religious Lives, Religious Subjects : Biography and American Religious History”

1. Rachel M. Wheeler, Indiana University, Purdue University Indianapolis – “Joshua’s Story : Biography from the Margins”

Wheeler talked about her experience of writing the narrative of an 18th century American Indian (Mohican) man. The Indian, Joshua, was born after the French and Indian War in 1742 in a Moravian community. Wheeler developed the biography largely from Moravian missions’ documents. She describes a revolutionary era in which Christianity in America was transformed by native people; indeed, Wheeler emphasized that native people were not just influenced *by* Christianity, they *themselves* influenced Christianity. Joshua’s story was one of revival, war, and expansion. Wheeler showed that the First Great Awakening was not just a European-generated movement, but that Indians too influenced how

the Awakening developed. Wheeler concluded by emphasizing that native communities and movements made their own contributions to the development of Christianity in the American colonial period.

2. Christopher D. Cantwell, Newberry Library – “The Gospel According to Frank Wood : Biography and the American Evangelical Laity”

Cantwell spoke about the importance of both the testimony and the testifier in biographies of evangelicals. His example was Frank Wood, a man who had an evangelical upbringing but later “backslid” from the faith after leaving home to move to the city. He was brought back to Christianity through a Bible class he attended. Cantwell explains how biographical story-telling was a key to the Christian life of evangelicals. Evangelicals would tell the story of their personal conversion, a story they spoke of as their “testimony.” These testimonies were powerful tools that were used to convert others. These religious autobiographical portraits, these testimonies, even became a sort of rite of passage for becoming a member of the Christian community. Cantwell evaluated the social and cultural power of these biographies. Wood had an interesting background, as Cantwell explained it. A fundamentalist Christian, he was also a Socialist and active member of the Socialist Party. He drew upon the Bible to address issues from a Socialist perspective. Cantwell concluded by saying that historians should look not only at the testimony, but also at the life of the testifier.

3. Kathryn Lofton, Yale University – “The Self in the Social : Making Senses of the Masses through Biography”

Lofton dealt with the problem of doing historical analyses of “the masses” as opposed to biographies of individuals. She offered a social critique of biography, suggesting that biography is the “space of modern self-consciousness.” In analyzing masses, one needs to identify them through the use of key images, e.g., a protesting group, a consumer group. One also needs to link masses to individuals who have been parts of those masses and whose biographies have already been written.

## 10. Thinking Through History with John Sayles

(Participants commented on several of the films of John Sayles.)

1. “Matewan” – Thomas G. Andrews, University of Colorado Denver

As Andrews pointed out, the movie is about the Matewan Massacre of May, 1920. This was a labor conflict in which union miners were victorious. It has become an important part of labor history. The movie probes the challenges the roles of whites and immigrants in the battle with the union.

2. “Men with Guns” – Gabriela Soto Laveaga, University of California, Santa Barbara

Laveaga explained how Sayles had used this film to interpret history. One important theme that comes out in the movie is the theme of the responsibility to know.

3. “Amigo” – Paul Kramer, Vanderbilt University

This film was set in Luzon, Philippine Islands in 1900. As Kramer explained, the

movie portrays Philippine village life under American domination and renders the Philippine-American War a visible reality ; it makes this war present even to many Philippine people who know little about it. The movie treats American soldiers with wit and recognizes their complexities as persons. It shows how the Philippine people gradually began to win over the soldiers. Sayles uses parallelism to show the common humanity of the soldiers and Philippine home life. He shows the language games played, e.g., through the false translations made by the priest. The movie treats the right to vote critically, indicating that it was nothing new for the people. The film is a good example of the history of antagonisms.

#### 4. “Lone Star” - Rachel St. John, New York University

St. John spoke of this movie as a thoughtful meditation on the issue of boundaries. Most of the film is set in the 1990s ; it is not a period piece. There are interesting uses of flashbacks and the past is constantly confronting the characters in the movie. St. John remarked that “Lone Star” is a great movie for teaching, especially if one is teaching the American West of the 1990s.

#### 5. “Sunshine State” – Nathan Connolly, Johns Hopkins University

According to Connolly, this film demonstrates that struggles over history are, in a very real sense, everyday business. The film shows clearly how commercial development can threaten individual lives. The movie is a story about invasive capitalism—land is turned into real estate and history is turned into property. It is a powerful work of social history that shows clearly the “everyday-ness” of capitalism.

#### 6. Responses to comments by John Sayles

Sayles remarked that one cannot explain people without knowing their historical context. He said that in these movies, place is a character, suggesting, in a sense, a sociology of character. Each of us carries baggage from the time of his or her birth. Sayles says that when he is making a movie he looks to find the “lay of the land.” He tries to get this from oral history, i.e., from talking to local people and asking them to critique the screenplay. It is important to ask what the original sources are and to return to them. In the beginning of a movie, Sayles tries to establish the historical context of the characters. He explains that movies do well at polarizing, for example, when they simply represent people, e.g., heroes. Sayles however sees his characters as more complex, as characters that are themselves a function of history ; as a result, not everything can be explained in the movie. Commenting on “Lone Star” he said that the movie showed the selling of history as a commodity. Similarly, in “Sunshine State” he discusses the problem of selling history as a commodity. When one sells one’s history as a commodity, that history loses its meaning, its significance ; e.g., when Abraham Lincoln vampire movies are made, the meaning and significance of Lincoln is lost. On the other hand, one of the things that can stop rapacious land development is the discovery of artifacts, bones, *et al.* Sayles further explained that to understand an area, it takes several years of living there. (Parenthetically, we can see therefore the foolishness of US efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.) Sayles also

remarked that he uses his expectations of the audience in the planning of his movies.

### **11. Plenary Session – A Conversation with John Sayles**

Panel : Peter Galison, Harvard University, John Sayles, independent filmmaker, Vanessa R. Schwartz, University of Southern California

In response to questions from the panel, Sayles spoke about his approach to making movies. He explained that he tries to understand what went through people’s minds when they acted the way they did. This is not just a matter of psychology, but also a question of the education and political influences people have received as well as the groups with which they have been associated, *et al.* He sees every movie as a world with its own rules. He is particularly interested in the tension between the way people are supposed to act and how they actually do act. For example, when his movies deal with American situations he is interested in the tension between various representations of America and how America actually is. Sayles said he tries to maintain the individuality of the characters in his films. He pointed out that when history becomes legend, sometimes that legend can become destructive. Sayles is concerned with people’s expectations regarding a film. He thinks about the usefulness of these expectations. For example, there are “genre expectations,” i.e., when people enter a theater, what do they expect? This is an important concern for Sayles. At the end of the discussion he suggested three other films for those interested in what he had been saying, viz., “Harlan Country” (a labor film), and two films by Sayles himself, viz., “City of Hope” and “Eight Men Out” (a movie about jazz).

### **12. “Beyond Bordellos : Race, Sex, and Jazz in Turn-of-the-Century New Orleans”**

1. Emily Epstein Landau, University of Maryland at College Park – Basin Street Blues : Sex and Segregation in New Orleans’s Storyville District, 1897-1917”

“Storyville” has been romanticized by its reputation as a jazz area in New Orleans. Historically speaking, it was the first red light district in New Orleans after the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), in which the Court upheld the constitutionality of state laws that required public facilities to be racially segregated, in accord with the legal doctrine known as “separate but equal.” Storyville became part of the New Orleans business agenda to improve the city’s image. Storyville’s facilities were racially segregated and whites were dominant. The 1890s were a racially divisive era. There were race riots and much sentiment in favor of killing Negroes. New Orleans has long had a reputation for sexual excess and vice ; but it has, of course, also been known for its music, and especially its jazz. In Storyville, Basin Street was the street of pleasure. Houses were filled with luxury. There were high-class bordellos for whites. However, there were also houses for the lower class people. The tenderloin district was very busy. There were different kinds of prostitution and much of it was successful from a business standpoint. There was also a flourishing drug trade in the area. There were many piano

players and in the high-class houses, there were girls that sang. Several different kinds of music were played including honky-tonk, barrel-house, and other styles of jazz. Even church music made its way into the houses in Storyville. New Orleans had a multiplicity of roots. It is important to recognize that gender was a crucial factor in the power relationships in the jazz community. Sometimes women replaced men on the basis of merit.

2. Sherrie Tucker, University of Kansas – “Not the Whole Story(ville): Early New Orleans Jazzwomen as New Jazz Studies”

Tucker explained that, in the early years, jazz was a part of life in Storyville. Storyville’s prostitutes and musicians were kept busy by American servicemen. Tucker pointed out that academic scholars of jazz have changed their emphasis from “whole stories” to individual aspects of jazz history. Tucker is particularly interested in the women who worked in the jazz field and sees gender as an important tool for better understanding the jazz culture. She talked about some of the early great women jazz pianists like Billie Pierce, Emma Barrett, Dolly Adams, Lizzie Miles, Jeanette Kimball, and Ann Cook. Mamie Desdunes (b. 1880?) was one of the first influences on the great Jelly Roll Morton. The music itself was a product of a diversity of influences from Haiti, Cuba, *et al.* Dolly Adams (1904–1979) was born into a Creole family and became a pianist and band leader; she also doubled on bass and drums. Gradually, it became more acceptable for women to play in bands. In 1961, Preservation Hall, probably New Orleans’s most famous jazz club, challenged the status quo and became an integrated space for those committed to equality. Tucker offered the following website for those interested in pursuing these matters further: <http://www.nps.gov/jazz/historyculture/people.htm>.

3. Court P. Carney, Stephen F. Austin State University – “Stomp Off—Let’s Go”: Race, Gender, and the Complicated Narrative of New Orleans Jazz after the Exodus”

Carney expressed regrets that, in seeking to create a holistic survey of jazz, many jazz historians have covered over many important, individual aspects of that history. For example, when Louis Armstrong left New Orleans for Chicago, it was a pivotal moment in jazz history. Also, New Orleans jazz in the 1920s made a significant break from the earlier days of jazz. As part of the early story of jazz, New Orleans had a unique position outside of the mass culture. New Orleans was a culture of race and racism at the time, and it is worthy of note that a man like Johnny Dedroit, a white musician, could be significantly influenced by the Negro style of jazz and himself make important comments on black music. By the 1920s, a different culture was emerging, as evidenced by the rise of the Rhythm Kings and other groups who became counterpoints to the established narrative of the period. Unfortunately, many of the important places where jazz was heard have been overlooked by historians over the years. For example, the room in the Grumwald Hotel spoken of as “The Cave” was an important place for jazz. The Blue Room of the Roosevelt hosted Cab Calloway and other stars who received big reviews of their performances. The jazz repertoire of the groups that played in these many rooms included Dixieland and show tunes. There was a wide array of bands including some from Mexico.

### 13. Presidential Address by William Cronon – “Storytelling”

The presidential address was an excellent discourse on the nature and use of storytelling in teaching. I will not summarize the speech here since it can be read in the *American Historical Review* for February 2013. I would like, however, to quote a short excerpt from the speech which deeply moved me as a teacher. In the following quote, Cronon tells about an encounter with one of his university professors that showed the kind of attention that, I believe, should be given to class lectures.

It should be obvious that I was very much under the spell of this teacher, and I went out of my way to talk with him during office hours about all the exciting stuff we were studying in his class. One day I made the mistake of stopping by his office outside the regular time—in fact, just half an hour before the class was scheduled to begin. I found his door ajar, suggesting that he was probably inside, and when I tentatively knocked on it, not knowing whether I should interrupt whatever he was doing, it swung open to reveal him sitting at his desk, with his Kodak Carousel projecting onto the wall in front of him, his little deck of 3 x 5 cards in his hands . . . and I suddenly realized that he was actually delivering the lecture that we were about to hear. His performances in class had always seemed so extemporaneous, so stream-of-consciousness, so thinking-out-loud in their brilliance, that it had never occurred to me how much they might be scripted ; indeed, how much he might have polished and rehearsed them to produce the rhetorical and interpretive effects—maybe even some of those famous and beloved digressions—that he seemed to generate so effortlessly in the magical space of his classroom.

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