

## Editors' Introduction

This issue's six research articles immerse readers in African social, economic, intellectual, and labor histories. Each offers a distinctive take on how Africans from different parts of the continent, and in different times, defined, defended, and aspired to socioeconomic well-being within structures of power, authority, and governance that constrained them. Each of the histories examined here offer compelling new interpretations of evidence that all connect to, and offer new vantage points on, African labor histories and their roles in political economies and hierarchies of power across time and space. The maneuvering of ordinary people within and across spaces shaped by colonial and postcolonial economies emerges clearly across all articles.

This issue's temporal center of gravity is the twentieth century. It reflects the continuing challenge posed by the dominance of the twentieth century in African historiography. At the same time, it illustrates the many dimensions of these more recent histories still awaiting scholarly inquiry.

Labor history forms a kind of connective tissue between the articles. **Folarin Ajibade's** article assesses the place of gambling in Nigerian politics from 1977–83. Gambling was a pleasurable and profitable activity for many Nigerians, as well as a source of employment through the (government-backed agency) Niger Pools. Bolstered by rhetoric about morality, ethics, and the need to protect society from the detrimental effects of gambling and loose spending habits, the Obasanjo government's sudden criminalization of slot-machines in 1977, then pools and casinos in 1979, provoked organized protests and coordinated responses among the industry's employees. They pointedly criticized the government's move as contributing to widespread unemployment and hardship for ordinary Nigerians whose livelihoods were damaged by the bans. Conservative political parties such as the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) supported the bans based on the supposed immorality of gambling, while progressive parties like the United Party of Nigeria (UPN) opposed them, foregrounding the plight of the Nigerian poor. The gambling issue played an important role in the 1979 federal and state democratic elections. Although UPN did not win federal office, it secured five state governorships, allowing it to overturn the ban in those states, which then also benefited from the revenues that poured into state coffers. Working-class and poor Nigerians, as well as progressive politicians, made the case that gambling was an integral part of Nigeria's economy. It was, in large measure, a labor issue.

**Paul Bjerk's** article on the hidden intellectual history of the ideas behind Julius Nyerere's renowned Arusha Declaration also suggests the value of postindependence African labor histories. Nyerere articulated the Arusha Declaration's tenets and ideals in speeches he gave in late January and early February of 1967. The content of the speeches, which became foundational texts in both Tanzanian and wider African history and politics, emerged from conversations and deliberations that occurred at the National Union of Tanganyika Workers (NUTA) general meeting in December 1966 and January 1967. Although the Arusha Declaration came to be seen as a hallmark of Nyerere's political career, Bjerk studies how it was made within an unplanned and fluid 'discursive context' that included NUTA's vocal concerns with the hollowness and corruption of Tanzania's nascent socialism; parliamentary rhetoric about NUTA's supposed administrative and political incompetence; and Nyerere's speechmaking in January and February 1967, in which he 'co-opted' NUTA, youth league, and parliamentary ideas, rhetoric, and recommendations. This discursive context, and the constitutive actions he announced, produced Nyerere as *the* socialist authority and the center of Tanzanian politics. Bjerk's attentiveness to the language and discursive formations that informed and infused the Arusha Declaration offers an important methodological

intervention that refuses 'archival pessimism' and points to the value of revisiting working-class visions for new nations and what they might achieve.

**Philip Janzen's** article opens another vista on African labor history through his research on West Indian railway workers in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. These workers were subject to the racism and violence of empire, and they were often proponents of ideas of pan-African unity. But in identifying as British colonial subjects, they upheld Caribbean colonial hierarchies that underpinned a kind of superiority complex vis-à-vis West Africans. Meanwhile, West Africans, largely shut out of recruitment for railway work, responded to their arrival with a different 'more genuine' vision of racial unity that was based in equality, not civilizationist hierarchies, as they expressed in letters to newspapers like *The Gold Coast Leader* and *The Lagos Standard*. West African intellectuals such as Joseph Casely Hayford and Mojola Agbebi emphasized the vitality of African institutions and opposed any notions of West Indian superiority and the intellectual scaffolding that upheld such ideas. A series of letters written by West Indians in Nigeria and Nigerians were published in *The Lagos Standard* in early 1915, exposing a contested terrain over ideas about racial unity between diasporic Africans and West Africans living with British colonialism on the continent. As in Bjerck's article, Janzen pays close attention to how the various writers in this newspaper exchange deployed language to convey ideas about supposed relative levels of civilization, the status of being 'native', and the possibility of unity without hierarchy across the diaspora. As Janzen puts it in his conclusion, 'Such exchanges, while centered on railway jobs, provide a window into the larger intellectual history of pan-Africanism in early twentieth-century West Africa'. Labor mobilizations of workers in the service of colonial economies created conditions within which critical discussions about Africa, Blackness, and pan-Africanism took place across empire.

**Domenico Cristofaro's** article brings in another kind of labor history: that of African colonial intermediaries and their powerful roles as buffers between colonized populations and British colonial administrators in northern Ghana, creating an 'impenetrable hedge' between them. The article is in conversation with earlier research on African colonial intermediaries, with Cristofaro finding many similarities to work by Emily Osborn, Joël Glasman, and others who have written about how they shaped colonial practice. The impenetrable hedge, however, differed from other West African models, because of the specific character of militarism, warfare, and politics in northern Ghana, which mimicked 'patterns and networks formed during the precolonial past'. Even though these intermediaries created an impenetrable hedge for the colonial officers they served, their coercive actions against colonized populations in turn made them targets of dissent and violence. Their 'precarious position' stemmed directly from their choices to serve in the intermediary role. In the 1916 'Bongo uprising', African resentments about colonial entrenchment and chiefs' involvement in maintaining colonialism led to violent attacks against the constabulary. Predictably, constables responded with disproportionate force. Further violence erupted over chiefs' recruitment drives for army service. By the 1920s, a new kind of intermediary class was in the making, composed of literate Christians who contributed to 'colonial knowledge production' as interpreters, working alongside anthropologists and others in the interwar period. Their roles became less coercive and more precise. Cristofaro's sensitive reading of primary sources that only 'provide faded and unclear images of the intermediaries' nonetheless yields a textured study of a class of colonial workers who 'formed a hedge almost as invisible to the historian as it was impenetrable to the colonial officers'. The historiography of intermediaries advances apace, recalling the labor conditions of those who chose to protect colonialism.

Some of the central actors in **Gary Kynoch's** article on the history of South Africa's Cato Manor killings of 1960–1 are also African police. In this case though, nine African policemen were killed by Cato Manor residents during a January 1960 liquor raid. Those convicted of murdering (described as 'rioters', much like those who fought against police in the Bongo uprising explained in Cristofaro's article) the police were executed in Pretoria's Central Prison in 1961, their verdicts

‘clearly exercises in retribution’. Kynoch’s article traces South Africa’s history of violent police raids on African households and domestic businesses, noting both the similarities and differences between South African policing practices and policing elsewhere on the continent. In South Africa, he writes, ‘raiding was ultimately about white security’. Liquor and pass offenses led to the imprisonment of thousands of Black South Africans. Reading the official documents generated by the state’s commission of inquiry into the Cato Manor raid, Kynoch finds that ‘In trial proceedings, African voices were refracted through a white supremacist legal system that excluded most, silenced many, coerced some and determined what others felt they could say’. Yet Kynoch’s evidence provides glimpses of Cato Manor residents’ outrage over everyday police harassment and violence, manifested in protests, many of which were organized by women whose home-based businesses and livelihoods were destroyed by liquor raids. The violent history of policing in South Africa underpinned apartheid’s political economy, just as the ‘impenetrable hedge’ did in northern Ghana decades earlier. And in both cases, these political economies required labor for enforcement of rules and expectations that constrained African ways of making a living under colonialism.

**Megan Crutcher’s** article is the only one in this issue situated in a temporal frame earlier than the nineteenth century. Her history of Kru mariners begins with their ancestors’ migrations to the coastal areas of today’s Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Their reputations and roles as canoers took shape over the next five centuries, with Kru mariners playing key roles in twentieth-century European and North American maritime trade and military logistics. Crutcher contextualizes their identity and labor within the region and globally, and across a vast span of time. Crutcher’s work suggests Kru involvement in a less-studied mode and location of intermediary work — maritime labor aboard European vessels — which went hand-in-hand with their much sought-after skills as mariners. In the eighteenth century, alongside the solidification of a corporate labor identity, they also began to mark their bodies with distinctive tattoos, signaling their ethnicization. Their skill set positioned them to be involved in both the slave trade and abolitionist work, and through their work, ‘Kru identity became unified, at least while at sea’. While many Kru mariners remained tied to their coastal homelands, intending to return after earning enough money for bridewealth, others settled in distant locations, forming diasporic communities. During the First World War, their ties to British imperialism brought them into conflict with the Liberian state, which used its Frontier Force to violently defeat them. As Crutcher writes, ‘While Kru identity overseas may have deepened because of diasporic maritime labor, at home Kru maritime employment diminished in the face of increased colonial oppression’. The article ends by suggesting paths of future research that would investigate Kru identities and memory within Liberia’s nineteenth-century nation-building project. Her research demonstrates the importance of anchoring more recent labor and social histories in longer African and global economic and cultural histories.

This issue’s History Matters section focuses on the processes and outcomes of the Belgian Parliament’s recent formation of a special commission tasked with researching the colonial past in Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. The commission included five historians, including **Sarah van Beurden** and **Gillian Mathys**, who coauthored the essay ‘History by Commission? The Belgian Colonial Past and the Limits of History in the Public Eye’. They explain the commission’s charge, assessing the possibilities and limitations historians face in undertaking such sensitive, complex, and ultimately fraught, work. The report’s completion and publication documents Belgian colonial pasts and provides pathways for ongoing study and engagement with these troubling histories. In this way, the commission succeeded, despite the government’s failure to adopt its recommendations. **Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu’s** contribution, written from his vantage point as a Congolese scholar based at the University of Lubumbashi, emphasizes the need to center oral histories and other Congo-based sources in any such project. Taken together, these essays indicate the vast amount of work still to be done to connect colonial histories of violence with the current political work of

restitution, reparations, and reckoning being done by scholars, activists, and museum professionals around the world.

With its robust History Matters section, this issue continues the evolution of what had formerly been book reviews into something different. Although we will continue to publish many book reviews — highlighting new and innovative works especially — the Journal's proverbial 'back end' will now engage the field in multiple ways.

One occasional feature will become more regular: featured reviews, which either offer an exhaustive analysis of an important text, or put multiple texts — of various sorts — into conversation. This issue's featured review does the latter. In *Malian Women in Public History and Public Memory*, **Devon Golaszewski** surveys recent work on the women's history and political action in Mali. Golaszewski shows how museum professionals, historians, videographers, essayists, and others have recently rewritten Mali's national story to incorporate women's history, in multiple registers: as politicians, as quotidian social actors, and as protesters. Popular and professional historians have seen biography as a useful tool with which to rewrite the Malian historical canon; Golaszewski considers the benefits and problems that result, including the recurrence of particular names and personalities in this novel history. 'Politics', Golaszewski concludes, might be too vague a category to capture the range of Malian women's activities, while Mali, the nation-state, might be too small, given how many Malian women collaborated with their peers across Francophone West Africa. Ultimately, Golaszewski's featured review reveals that women's history to be a vital field of endeavor in Mali, across multiple registers of historical production and dissemination.

In addition to Golaszewski's essay, the reviews section for this issue contains nine reviews, considering texts that range from the seventeenth century to the present day. Intellectuals and creative approaches to political life are a consistent theme. **Vanessa Oliveira** reviews **Mariana Candido's** recent award-winning book on land regimes in early colonial Angola. Established 'property' regimes were inconvenient from the Portuguese perspective, and were promptly ignored. We remain in the Lusophone early modern world with **Walter Hawthorne's** review of **José Lingna Nafafé's** biography of **Lorenço da Silva de Mendonça**, a West Central African intellectual, whose lawsuit against European nations for the crime of slavery challenges both the chronology and personalities involved in the history of abolition. Da Silva de Mendonça's suit at the Vatican was one attempt to hold power accountable. Surveying six centuries of history, **Holly Hanson** argues that the Bugandan state was constituted and sustained by dialogue between rulers and the ruled. **Patrick Otim** is our reviewer. Jumping ahead to the twentieth century, **Alicia Decker's** review of **Katherine Bruce-Lockhart's** *Carceral Afterlives* shows how, when that dialogue broke down, Ugandan power elites used confinement to manage dissent — a practice that often generated exactly the sorts of opposition that the state was trying to suppress.

Twentieth century political culture is the focus of our next two reviews as well, in the Belgian Congo / Congo. Both **Daniel Tödt** and **Pedro Monaville** study the genesis and practice of African political life under Belgian rule and thereafter. Tödt's focus is on the thin strata of *évolué* (relative) elites, whose frustrations with Belgium's restrictions led to efforts to escape what our reviewer **Charlotte Grabli** describes as 'the colonial waiting room'. As elsewhere on the continent, *évolués* often found ethnic nationalism as the most effective space for their political aspirations, which militated against efforts to build a common Congolese nationalism. Monaville's theoretically rich study introduces a different set of political actors who aspired to do just that: university students, who aspired to mediate between their nation and the globe amid the riotous 1960s. Our reviewer **Emery Kalema** shows that students imagined themselves as political actors, committed to real decolonization, only to see their efforts come apart on the shoals of Mobutu's repressive state.

This issue's final three reviews look north, first to Nigeria, then to Senegal, and finally beyond the continent. Former Book Review Editor **Emily Osborn** returns to the reviewer's chair with a wonderfully expansive discussion of **Robyn d'Avignon's** *A Ritual Geology*. The latter proposes a new way to study topics ranging from Senegal's agrarian history, to the history of mining as intellectual

labor, to the histories of indigeneity and ethnicity in the West African interior. **Judith Byfield's** *The Great Upheaval* is no less rich; Byfield's multiply-charactered and careful analysis of how Abeokuta market women and others responded to economic and political changes after the Second World War hearkens back to this issue's featured review. **Chima Korieh** is our reviewer. Finally, **Eric Burton** shows how African history is enriched by going beyond the continent itself. Burton's review considers **Sara Pugach's** recent book on African students in East Germany during the Cold War. Based on archives in multiple countries, and considering African nations from a diverse array of countries, Burton reads Pugach's book to show how — as in the Congo — students' voices were often more critical and varied than the conventional narrative of Cold War solidarities would allow. The story of disputatious and frustrated thinkers at home and abroad is a fitting note on which to bring this issue to its close.