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Presidential Address: Historians in the Present

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See table of contents

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Article abstract

Steven High's presidential address, delivered at York University in May 2023, grapples with many of the issues facing our discipline and what it means to be a historian in the present. Despite the extreme political polarization of our time, he expressed admiration at the courage of so many historians who continue to speak truth to power, even at considerable risk to themselves. He also addresses the structural violence of precarity within our discipline and what we as a professional association can do about it.

Presidential Address
Historians in the Present

STEVEN HIGH

Abstract

Steven High's presidential address, delivered at York University in May 2023, grapples with many of the issues facing our discipline and what it means to be a historian in the present. Despite the extreme political polarization of our time, he expressed admiration at the courage of so many historians who continue to speak truth to power, even at considerable risk to themselves. He also addresses the structural violence of precarity within our discipline and what we as a professional association can do about it.

> *To be an academic historian in the twenty-first century is to be on the front lines of battles about truth, identity, entitlement, and legitimacy. This is a dangerous place to be but not one that we should abandon for the safety of the ivory tower.*
> – Margaret Conrad, 2007

Margaret Conrad spoke these words during her CHA presidential address in 2007, but they could have been delivered first here today.[1] We live in a time of extreme political polarization where history itself is not only contested but weaponized in the culture wars raging around us. As a result, historians increasingly find ourselves in the line of fire. While I experienced some of this myself over the past two years, Black, Asian, and Indigenous scholars bear the brunt of today's white nationalist backlash. That is why it is incumbent on all of us, individually and collectively, to share the burden of going public with our research — raising critical questions about comfortable myths, not just for the sake of it, but when appropriate, and interrogating the ways that power structures our past and present. We should take courage in Conrad's insistence that we have an important contribution to make in the here and now.

Margaret Conrad was not the first CHA president to arrive at this conclusion. In his own 1997 presidential address, J. R. Miller told the assembled profession, "It is essential to the future of the discipline and of organisations such as the CHA/SHC that historians reassert their

role in the processes of researching, interpreting, and utilizing history in public discourse and academic arenas."[2] He went on to lament the fact that "historians as a group and their discipline tend to be invisible" in the public realm and urged us to take a "more assertive role and voice for historians in public discussions." According to Miller, we must become "more assertive and innovative in putting our discipline once more at the centre of the citizenry's consideration of history." I like to think that we are on the right track in this regard.

At the very least, the days of complacency when a CHA president can stand here, before you, and say that "the Canadian story is less dramatic" and less violent than elsewhere, as happened as late as 1993, are finally over.[3] Just as Canadians are reckoning with the legacies of settler colonialism and the genocide perpetrated against Indigenous peoples here in Canada, so too are we as historians.[4] The historical discipline does not stand above or outside the histories we study. Nor do we stand apart from the power structures of the present day. As Crystal Gail Fraser and Allyson Stevenson recently argued in their important article on the foundations of our discipline in the *Canadian Historical Review*:

> It is the responsibility of all history departments and historians to actively engage in reconciliation by scrutinizing our deep-seated beliefs about what history should be and for whom and consider how these actions relate to our research and teaching. As a profession, it is our responsibility to redress the legacy of Indian Residential Schools through calling attention to and renouncing our complicity in promoting racist, imperialist, and colonial historical narratives that have misled Canadians about their collective past. Specifically, we ask: what role did our discipline play during the twentieth century, a period in which Indian Residential Schools operated?[5]

It is an essential question, and one that our association is only beginning to come to terms with. Historians, individually and as a group, have an obligation to be highly reflexive about issues of power and authority, asking the hard questions about disciplinary structures and norms as well as who is, and who is not, in the conversation. Fundamentally, our responsibility, as professional historians, is to ask the difficult questions and to speak the hard truths even when, especially when, they make ourselves feel uncomfortable.[6]

The Canadian Historical Association celebrated its centenary last year, giving us the opportunity to step back and reflect on the past, present, and future of historical research and teaching. Out of curiosity, I read the CHA's first presidential address, from 1922, and was surprised to find a very broad vision of the historical community.[7] The aim of the new society was not only to encourage historical research, as is the case today, but also to promote public interest in history in general. The importance of collaboration with provincial and local historical societies is even mentioned as a priority. Clearly, the founding generation of the CHA understood that history was not simply an academic discipline; it was also a societal project.

Unfortunately, this changed at a certain point. As Don Wright has shown in his brilliant book *The Professionalization of History in English Canada*, there was a split in the historical community between the so-called professional historians in our universities and the so-called amateur historians in the community.[8] Museum curators and archivists have also become professionalized. While there is still some overlap, it's clear that this schism has impoverished both camps.

One of my favourite historians is Raphael Samuel. He founded the British "history workshop" movement in the 1970s, which brought together academic and community historians in the common cause of reconstructing the history of ordinary people. In doing so, he challenged "the tacit assumption that knowledge filters down. At the top, there are the few top professionals who shape new techniques, discover new sources of documentation and formulate striking hypotheses."[9] This trickle-down theory of historical practice reduced people to consumers of their own history. Samuel believed that it wasn't necessary to have a PhD to contribute to our understanding of the past. I couldn't agree more.

That said, the idea that historians study the past *in the present* runs counter to the deeply ingrained idea that historians study the past, not the present. Most faculty still tell our history students to write in the past tense and the third person, distancing ourselves from our objects of study. A good historian is supposed to be detached, dispassionate, and far removed from the history being examined. With distance comes clarity: this is the old disciplinary logic.[10] These acts of distancing remind me of what Bertold Brecht called the "invisible fourth wall" in theatre that separates audience members from those acting on the stage, creating the illusion that what we are seeing is real. For Brecht, the danger of this illusion is that it fails to implicate

the audience and thereby depoliticizes the art. In our construction of "pastness," do we risk doing the same thing by reinforcing notions of objective distance?

In the eyes of some, to be in close proximity to the histories we study is to be politically compromised. This can come about when the invisible wall between past and present is breached, either by us or by world events, which then politicizes our research, or when our perceived social proximity to our research subjects raises questions about our personal impartiality. Not coincidentally, the construction of scholarly distance often works against Black and Indigenous historians in a way that it does not in the case of most white historians, which is absurd. To make matters worse, in actively suppressing the present in our writing, we discourage asking ourselves hard but necessary questions about our own positionality as researchers and how this informs the topics we choose, the sources we consult, the questions we pose, the methods we adopt, the conclusions we draw, and who we are ultimately in conversation with. What does it say about our discipline when a pejorative term like *presentism*, used to describe "an interpretation of history that is biased towards and coloured by the present-day," continues to be used to police old disciplinary norms?[11] To be charged with presentism is to stand accused of the crime of disciplinary treason.

Thankfully, the discipline of history is changing. A case in point is the recent controversy over a column written by the president of the American Historical Association (AHA) entitled "Is History History? Identity Politics and Teleologies of the Present."[12] In it, James H. Sweet sounded the alarm that scholarly interest in the twentieth century was crowding out the study of earlier periods of history, something we are seeing in Canada as well.[13] This point needs serious discussion. That said, it is what he said next that proved controversial. Echoing the words of another AHA president, Lynn Hunt, in her own piece "Against Presentism,"[14] written twenty years earlier, Sweet blamed the "trend toward presentism" on the "allure of political relevance" and identity politics. He then called on historians to hold the line between politics and scholarship.

Sweet's column sparked disbelief, but also anger, as the examples he used to bolster his argument seemed to dovetail the viewpoint of the radical Right at a time when critical scholars are under threat. As we all know, a growing number of US states have forbidden the teaching of "divisive concepts" such as critical race theory, even allow-

ing students to sue professors for teaching these concepts. Individual historians have likewise been placed on right-wing "watchlists." We are also seeing the political targeting of the humanities for program closures, including those in our own discipline, not only in the United States but also the UK. Under pressure, the AHA president issued a statement of regret, which sparked another round of recriminations, this time from the political Right, about the woke mob and cancel culture.

Clearly hurt by the "emotive" response from fellow historians to his earlier defence of a once widely accepted disciplinary norm, Sweet agreed to be interviewed a few weeks later for a piece on "The New History Wars" in *The Atlantic* magazine. He took the opportunity to express his fear that the "cherished ideals and methods of the historical profession" were weakening.[15] If the definition of scholarship was expanded beyond the scholarly book, even a tweet could become the basis for tenure and promotion. Besides, he asked, "How do you determine, then, what is political and what is scholarly?"[16] Sweet went on to equate the tactics of his detractors with those on the extreme Right. More howls of outrage ensued, as he seemed oblivious to the hard work of his own association to defend academic freedom and provide guidelines for assessing the rich diversity of scholarly outcomes. In my view, a more socially diverse professoriate unsettles these kinds of normalized assumptions about scholarship and the scholar's place in society.

These clashing perspectives reflect important changes within our discipline. As the profession becomes more racially diverse, driven in large part by the social movements of our time, challenging questions are being asked. What is our relationship to the communities we study? In what ways might collaboration become more central to our practice? How can we move beyond extractive approaches to research? Whom is our research ultimately for? These questions are not necessarily new, but they are now being asked of the discipline as a whole. As Joanne Meyerowitz argued in her 2020 presidential address of the Organization of American Historians: in studying the past, historians need to also "study the present, to make the present historical."[17] France even has a field of historical inquiry called "l'histoire du temps présent," or history of the present time, which recognizes the liminality of the recent past when history and memory cohabitate.[18] It is past, but not so long past that its historical significance and identity are settled; it is still in the process of *becoming*.

As an oral historian, I am quite comfortable thinking in terms of the ongoing relationship between past and present.[19] We interview in the present about the past, which places memory front-and-centre. But the line between past and present often blurs in other ways. In my oral history work with Montreal-area survivors of the Rwandan genocide, for example, I learned how the impact of the violence of those hundred horrific days in 1994 rippled outward through individual lives, families, and communities.[20] The violence might have ended, but it was still very much present. That this research was undertaken in close partnership with Page-Rwanda, which represents Montreal-area survivors, was important as it shifted the wider orientation of my research project away from "learning about" to "learning with." This represents a fundamental political shift in how we do research and who we do it for, holding us accountable to the communities we study. It also enriches the research process. To be fair, this is not always possible in historical research, there are many ways to be a "good" historian, but we need to do more as a discipline to break away from the extractive approaches of the past.

That said, breaking the fourth wall that separates the past from the present can come at a steep personal price. My good friend Leyla Neyzi, a brilliant oral historian at Sabanci University in Turkey, saw the political ground shift beneath her feet after the failed army coup in that country. Her research on Turkey's Kurdish and Armenian minorities became suspect and her signing of a 2016 Academics for Peace petition was enough for the Turkish state under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to put her on trial and convict her for abetting terrorism.[21] She is now working in exile in Scotland. Historians of Palestine, meanwhile, risk being branded anti-Semitic for raising critical questions about the history of Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank. We don't often associate historians with courage, yet I am struck by how much of it we are seeing these days.

To cite one more example, Jan Grabowski, a respected professor of Holocaust history at the University of Ottawa, was found guilty by a lower court in Poland after a woman claimed her deceased uncle was defamed in a short passage in his co-edited volume *Night Without End,* which identified the man as having robbed a Jewish woman and been responsible for the murder of a dozen others.[22] The assertion was based on first-person testimony recorded by the USC Shoah Foundation. The issue of Polish collaboration in the Holocaust is a politically explosive one in a country dominated by conservative nationalists.

Holocaust scholars, Jewish organizations, and historical associations like the CHA rose to his defence, seeing this rightly as a matter of academic freedom. Eventually, the court of appeal in Poland rejected the lawsuit. However, back home, Grabowski had to endure a campaign by conservative elements of Canada's Polish community who demanded that his university fire him. Thankfully, he has a union.

Right-wing nationalism has also stoked the fires of the culture wars here in Canada. To a remarkable degree, we are seeing a confluence of increasingly aggressive Canadian and Quebec nationalisms over the past few years. The war on woke fills the daily columns of our newspapers in both official languages. It therefore took considerable courage for Catherine Larochelle to publicly call for the renaming of the Lionel-Groulx book prize during her 2022 acceptance speech at l'Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française. She spoke about how her path-breaking book *L'école du racisme* examines how racist thinking was integral to the social construction of French Canadian identity (as was also the case with its English Canadian counterpart).[23] For Larochelle, "Produit de cette école, Lionel Groulx a fortement contribué – tout au long de sa carrière – à assurer la pérennité de cette pensée raciste dans le système scolaire du Québec."[24] She then drew an important distinction between critical history and commemoration. The speech predictably triggered a social media firestorm as nationalists blasted her for questioning Lionel Groulx's treasured place in the Quebec pantheon. She knew that her gesture would trigger a backlash, but she spoke out anyways.

But what is at stake today goes well beyond debates over cultural recognition and commemorative symbols. Historian Peter McInnis, now president of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, recently wrote a column showing how the restructuring of Laurentian University under the Companies Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA) saw three of the university's four history programs axed, including its two French-language ones. It turns out that the restructuring process was guided by Australian post-secondary consultants who followed "a well-established plan devised for Australian universities, [where] cost-cutting measures are recommended, often with special attention given to disciplines in the humanities and social sciences."[25] Creditors protection gives companies experiencing financial difficulty the opportunity to break collective agreements and to radically restructure in order to return to profitably. But this was the first time it has ever been applied to a public institution in Canada, creating a dangerous precedent.

We must never forget that hundreds of Laurentian University staff, including several francophone CHA members, were let go without severance pay. Mid-career scholars like Joel Belliveau, author of *Le « moment 68 » et la réinvention de l'Acadie*, were stopped in their tracks.[26] When I asked Joel if I could mention his name in today's address, he sent me a message to share with you:

> The events in the spring of 2021 at Laurentian University have inflicted a severe blow to all those who believe in the importance of classical academic subjects and fundamental research. Several programs that are usually considered to be at the heart of the university's mandate have been eliminated, either in both languages or in French.
>
> For a region such as Mid-Northern Ontario, this is an immense loss. Members of the francophone community, in particular, must now travel hundreds of kilometers to access similar programs.
>
> These disproportionate and short-sighted cuts, made on a purely accounting basis, represent nothing less than an attack on the idea of the university as a public institution at the service of citizens and the community. In light of this *fait accompli*, the academic world must mobilize. First, to say "never again" to the application of the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* to universities. Secondly, to revalorize the fundamental disciplines, arguing that the critical sense they inculcate in students is the most transferable skill there is, not only applicable in multiple jobs, but also fruitful for civic life and personal fulfillment."[27]

As you can see from Joel's statement, the loss of Laurentian University's French-language history programs, and its English-language MA, will be felt for many years to come.

To put it bluntly, Northern Ontario, my home region, has been put through the wringer. It has hemorrhaged jobs and people since the 1970s. As a result, the region is littered with former mining towns, forestry towns, and railway towns. The exodus of young people has left behind a declining and aging population. It wasn't supposed to be this way. The 1950s and 1960s were a period of economic growth and unionized prosperity for many, but not all, as the industrial economy was heavily racialized. A high level of unionization resulted in collectively bargained social mobility for many people. It was a time when

many blue-collar families could aspire to send their children to college or university. The establishment of new regional universities like Laurentian greatly facilitated the social advancement of working-class people, including a pathway into our ranks as professional historians. Michel Bock and other professional historians got their initial training at Laurentian. There is therefore an important class dimension to the issue of post-secondary restructuring, as humanities programs at newer working-class or regional universities are the ones being targeted for downsizing or closure. It seems working-class people need a trade, not a liberal education.

It is an old story. Streaming in Ontario high schools used to kick in at Grade 9. Maybe it still does. Middle-class students were streamed into Level 5, as they were university-bound. White working-class students, such as myself, were streamed into Level 4, as we were supposed to complete high school and then enter the industrial workforce. I only escaped this fate by retaking courses later. And in my Thunder Bay high school, Indigenous students were largely streamed into Level 3, which meant that they were destined to leave school as soon as they turned sixteen, without a high school diploma. Our class and racial horizons were, and are, baked into the system.

These reflections naturally lead me to the question of precarity within our discipline. The publication of the "Precarious History Instructors Manifesto" in *Active History* in February 2020 was a wake-up call to those of us with tenure-track jobs. [28] Its publication effectively shattered the silence surrounding precarity in the CHA, opening a space for some hard conversations about graduate student funding and precarious employment after graduation. The fact that it was published anonymously speaks volumes about power relations in our discipline. In response, the Canadian Historical Association organized a series of well-attended virtual roundtables on precarity in 2021 that culminated in a major report and the adoption of a series of recommendations.[29] The fundamental problem of precarity, according to Jeremy Milloy, is not a problem of supply and demand, or a problem of training, but a problem of power, a problem of exploitation: "We all love what we do deeply.… This love is taken from us by our institutions, employers, and administrators. It's used to exploit us every time we do extra work or support the students we teach or mark papers properly even though we're not paid enough to do it, or get a course outline just right even though we've only been given a week."[30]

Thanks to the courage of Jeremy and other precarious historians, the Canadian Historical Association now recognizes precarity within our discipline for what it is: a form of structural violence. The "collegial" structures within the academy implicate full-time faculty in a system, while not of our making, that is fundamentally unfair and exploitative. As Rob Nixon has shown, structural violence is a slow violence that is normalized to such a degree that many don't even recognize it as violence at all.[31] The dismissal of precarity in our universities has been aided by the corrosive idea that we live and work in a meritocracy: that the "best" candidates do find full-time employment. On the one hand, the internalization of the meritocratic idea has caused many contingent faculty and recent graduates looking for work to doubt themselves. If only they had worked harder, published more, met more people, then the outcome might have been different. On the other hand, meritocratic thinking has served to comfort the comfortable, effectively depoliticizing precarity and rendering the structural violence all but invisible to others.

Since the adoption of the report, the CHA council has been working hard to respond to issues of precarity. In our regular survey to departments of history, we now inquire into various matters related to contingent faculty. In the 2021 survey, for example, only twelve of forty-three departments reported that there is a pathway — however winding, narrow and unbeaten — to regularize long-time sessional instructors as permanent faculty. Otherwise, the line between full-time and part-time or sessional instructors is a hard one. Think about that for a second. To help departments think through these issues, the CHA's incredibly hard-working Committee on Precarity (composed of David Webster, Karine Duhamel, and Godefroy Desrosiers-Lauzon) has developed best-practice resources and guidelines for history department chairs.[32] If your department has not consulted these yet, or held a substantive conversation about precarity, it is time you should.

A recent study published in the journal *Nature* reported that hiring decisions for US academics were largely influenced by the prestige of the university where candidates had received their PhD.[33] One-in-eight US-trained faculty got their PhDs from five elite universities (the University of California, Berkeley; Harvard University; the University of Michigan; Stanford University; and the University of Wisconsin–Madison). There is an unfortunate tendency to equate excellence with what school you attended, placing many history graduates at a distinct disadvantage in the reputational marketplace. It appears to be

no different in Canada, as the data compiled by the recent CHA Task Force on the Future of the PhD supports a similar conclusion.

Over the past year, the members of the task force have undertaken an enormous amount of research. Their report represents an important milestone for our association. But don't take my word for it. The magazine *University Affairs* ran a headline earlier this month that read "The Canadian Historical Association is Leading by Example" and called on "Canada's academic disciplinary associations to use the work of the CHA as inspiration to create a similar disciplinary evidence base."[34] I would like to acknowledge, once again, the vital contribution made by Catherine Carstairs, Will Langford, Tina Loo, Sam Hossack, Martin Pâquet, Christine O'Bansawin, and John Walsh.

According to their 2022 report, there were 562 PhD dissertations completed at Canadian universities between September 2016 and August 2022. Only 10 percent of those graduates have so far found tenure-track employment. A few more will have likely found positions since then. Interestingly, one-quarter of these fifty-eight new hires were in departments other than history. This cross-disciplinary reach speaks to the growth of interdisciplinary programs and the ways that historians can find a place in unexpected places. We see this cross-disciplinary reach at more senior levels as well. At present, the CHA executive and council include members from departments of sociology, political science, Indigenous studies, and human rights as well as those located outside our universities altogether. Karine Duhamel, for example, served as director of research for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

As the Task Force found, eighty-seven historians, in total, were hired into tenure-track positions in history departments across Canada between 2016 and 2022. Sixty percent of these new hires graduated from a PhD program in Canada and 31 percent from the United States. But the lion's share of the Canadian-trained PhDs was hired to teach Canadian history. Even then, only 16 percent of PhD graduates in Canadian history find tenure-track employment. The rates for Canadian-trained historians of the United States and Europe were even worse: 2 percent and 4 percent, respectively. To put this into perspective, 27 percent of PhD history graduates from US universities in 2017 found tenure-track employment within four years (and this does not seem to include US graduates hired elsewhere in the world, including Canada).[35] The history jobs crisis in Canada is therefore exponentially worse than that unfolding south of the border. If we are not going to

hire our own graduates, it makes me wonder why we have doctoral programs in the first place.

It gets worse. If anything, the concentration of faculty from a few large, or elite, universities is even more pronounced in Canada than the United States. As it stands, the University of Toronto, York University, and Queen's University account for more than half of the doctorates held by full-time history faculty in Canada. Another third got their PhD at seven US and UK Ivy League schools.[36] If we set aside francophone universities, these already high numbers rise considerably. The current situation leaves very little room for other graduates, including the eighteen other Canadian universities with PhD programs. The prestige factor seems to be alive and well in our own history departments.

To some extent, controversy over the under-representation of Canadians in our universities is nothing new. In the 1960s, those concerns centred on the informal old boy's network that saw Americans hired without advertising the position. According to one estimate, the proportion of Canadian faculty at fifteen surveyed universities declined from 75 percent in 1961 to 49 percent in 1968.[37] Once established in Canadian universities, "foreign academics tended to hire individuals who were much like themselves in terms of training, outlook, approach."[38] The controversy led to the establishment of the Commission on Canadian Studies, chaired by T. H. B. Symons, and eventually to the unfortunately named "Canadians First" policy in academic hiring in 1981.[39] Between 1981 and 2001, Canadian universities were required to conduct a Canadian search first before opening it up to non-citizens or non-permanent residents if no qualified candidate was found. Not surprisingly, many university administrators never liked the policy, seeing it as an "obstacle to achieving top international standards."[40] Academics are also more likely to see themselves as global citizens and believe, to varying degrees, that knowledge knows no borders. Who would not want to work with or learn from the best? But, as I have been saying, "excellence" is a slippery fish.

This two-step hiring policy, first adopted by the Liberals under Pierre Trudeau, survived the Brian Mulroney years and the free trade agreement only to die under the Jean Chrétien Liberals. The 2001 policy change, which followed the blanket exemption for the new Canada Research Chair program the year before, was prompted by doomsday predictions about the coming shortage of qualified candidates given the expected increased university enrollment with the baby

boom "echo."[41] The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada had issued a report entitled *Revitalizing Universities through Faculty Renewal* in 2000 that warned of a serious labour shortage, predicting they would need to hire up to thirty-two thousand new professors by 2010.[42] Canadian universities were expected to graduate only half that number.

In response, the federal government relaxed the policy, allowing universities to advertise domestically and internationally at the same time. But the promise remained that qualified Canadians would be first hired. The "Canadians first" policy is still in place today at least in theory: "If a suitable Canadian could not be found, only then could the institutions seek candidates outside the country."[43] After getting the green light, Canadian universities used the federal government's Temporary Foreign Workers Program as its primary vehicle for hiring permanent employees outside of the country.[44] The program, however, is supposed to be limited to where there is a demonstrated labour shortage: and that is the rub. The argument that there is a labour shortage within the humanities and social sciences at Canadian universities is simply untenable, as the research of the CHA task force has confirmed.

While I understand the complexity of the issue, and how paying attention to it might prove awkward for us, we need to recognize that there is no shortage of well-qualified, indeed excellent, professorial candidates in Canada. To say there are no *qualified* Canadians, permanent residents, or international students trained at Canadian universities for these positions is a lie, and not even a subtle one at that. Our PhD graduates deserve more than precarious part-time or occasional work. After all, sessional and per-course university instructors must be Canadian citizens or landed immigrants — and are overwhelmingly trained in Canada. We must ask ourselves if a two-tier system is emerging out of our own departmental hiring committees. We need to own this: nobody is making us do this.

The meritocratic idea that only "the best" get hired into tenure-track jobs provides political cover for what I can only describe as a streaming process, not unlike my high school, based on the prestige of the university you attended. It is my belief that our profession is impoverished by these structural barriers.

These are some of the foundational issues that we, as a profession, are facing. But it is not all doom and gloom. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is the importance of coming together at

conferences like this one. The Canadian Historical Association is a professional association, but it is also an intergenerational community. It is made up of graduate students, just starting out, mid-career historians at universities and heritage institutions, and long-time members like Kathleen McCrone from the University of Windsor who joined the CHA in 1967, fifty-six years ago. She recently wrote to me to suggest that our association could do more to recognize long service and retirement — I could not agree more. We frankly need more initiatives like the *Canadian Historical Review*'s autobiographical lives lived series with long-time historians and to do everything we can to care for each other on life's short journey.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my partner, Barbara, a great historian of childhood, and my son Sebastian, who are here today. I wish my daughter Leanna could be here too. Being the father of a severely disabled child who cannot speak or move on her own has taught me a lot over the past sixteen years and has put everything else into perspective.

I will end my presentation today where I began it, with the wise words of Margaret Conrad: "We have spent nearly a quarter century building barriers to ward off those who might challenge academic approaches to the past. In the twenty-first century, our urgent task must be to build bridges."[45] But building bridges and going public with our critical historical research comes with some risk, especially in this polarized political environment. Historians therefore need a strong Canadian Historical Association to have their backs: you are not alone.

***

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Endnotes

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2 J. R. Miller, "The Invisible Historian," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 8, no. 1 (1997): 3–28.

3 Phillip Buckner, "Whatever Happened to the British Empire?" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 4, no. 1 (1993): 3–32.

4 Ian Rocksborough-Smith, "'History Wars' in the U.S. and Canada Provoked by a Racial Reckoning with the Past," *The Conversation*, 11 October 2021, https://theconversation.com/history-wars-in-the-u-s-and-canada-provoked-by-a-racial-reckoning-with-the-past-168639.

5 Crystal Gail Fraser and Allyson Stevenson, "Reflecting on the Foundations of Our Discipline Inspired by the TRC: A Duty to Respond during This Age of Reconciliation" *Canadian Historical Review* 103, no. 1 (2022): 1–31. We also see foundational questions being asked in fields such as labour history: Fred Burrill, "The Settler Order Framework: Rethinking Canadian Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail* 83 (Spring 2019): 173–97. For another reckoning, see Constance Backhouse et al., *Royally Wronged: The Royal Society of Canada and Indigenous Peoples* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021).

6 A false dichotomy is sometimes made between "activism" and being a "good" or "objective" historian. Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, "History Is Not Objective – Never Has Been, Never Will Be," *Canadian Issues* (Spring/Summer 2022): 58–62; and, Steven High, "Contesting Clio's Craft: Activists, True Professionals, and the Debate over Genocide Recognition in Canada," *Canadian Issues* (Spring/Summer 2022): 7–11. See also Andrew Nurse, "Post-Colonial Historical Practices," *Scholarly and Research Communication* 12, no. 1 (2021): 1–12; and Erica Dyck, "Doing History that Matters: Going Public and Activating Voices as a Form of Historical Activism," *Journal of History of the Behavioral Sciences* 57, no. 1 (2021): 75–86.

7 Lawrence J. Burpee, "The Annual Meeting of May the Eighteenth at the Victoria Memorial Museum, Ottawa: Presidential Address," *Report of the Annual Meeting* 1, no. 1 (1922): 7–8.

8 Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

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