

MINUTES

NERWHA Executive Council Meeting, 28 July 2020

Attending:

David Kalivas, President (DK)

David Northrup, Vice President (DN)

David Burzillo, Treasurer (DB)

A. J. Andrea, Secretary (AA)

Thomas Johnson (TJ)

Michele Louro (ML)

Violetta Ravagnoli (VR)

Luke Scalone (LS)

Heather Streets-Salter (HSS)

Kerry Vieira (KV)

Following an initial discussion between DK and AA regarding AA's possible pursuit of Italian and/or Greek citizenship, the threatened transformation of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, the fact that "Istanbul was Constantinople//Now it's Istanbul, not Constantinople//...//Why did Constantinople get the works?//That's nobody's business but the Turks,"¹ and COVID-19, the meeting turned to business at 1:07 PM.

AA: Moved the Minutes for 18 June be approved.

KV: Second

Unanimous agreement

¹ Lyrics from *Istanbul (Not Constantinople)*. Further pedantic footnote: Istanbul derives from the Byzantine colloquialism "εις τὴν Πόλιν" (to the city), as in "I am going...."

DK: What to do with book and symposium ideas raised in the last meeting?

Many books have been suggested. Though many of them might seem not to be strictly world history in focus, all are important studies of race and racism in the USA, thereby making them relevant to world history. Moreover, they are all the more relevant because of the way race, racism, and slavery are mis-taught today.

DN: There is an important difference between national history and comparative world history. Too many of these books make the US experience appear normative. We need works of comparative history in this regard, such as George M. Fredrickson's *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (1981), and *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (1995).

DK: The world is in crisis, and globally we are seeing how history is not taught or is mis-taught. Moreover, the field of world history is collapsing in schools, colleges, and universities. A white-supremacist, revisionist history is taking its place. In this regard, the USA is part of a global phenomenon. As world historians, we need to see what is happening at home. That is why I suggested books that are not comparative. We can start with any book on that long list, and it will have value.

KV: Tonight the WHA holds its third digital Baoba session.² We must figure out dates for NERWHA's events so we can get off the ground.

AA: I had suggested David Northrup's *Seven Myths of Africa in World History*, which certainly deals with race and racism, but David countered with his *Africa's Discovery of Europe*, a brilliant choice.

DN: In *Africa's Discovery of Europe* race is there, but it is secondary. The book does help us to avoid reading the present back into the past.

HSS: Love that book. It would be a great addition to our "book club." By the way, how many books? How often? David N's book moves us back It gives us a perspective on how race becomes a "thing." And having the author facilitate

² "Reframing Revolutions: Centering Indigenous, Black, and Women's Voices in the Age of Revolutions."

discussion! Will this book be in conjunction with a Fall symposium? And how many other books will we read together this Fall?

Given the words of AA and HSS, there was an implied motion that David Northrup's book be chosen as our inaugural "book club" reading. ML seconded that "motion."

HSS: This book does what the best world history class does. It gives us an angle we had not envisioned earlier. Before we begin talking about race, let's see its origins.

DN: The publisher has brought out three editions, but all are pretty much the same.

ML: What if we have three discussants and David responds to them? A teacher can discuss the book in terms of pedagogy, a graduate student can discuss it in terms of advanced study, and a professor in terms of scholarship.

AA: Are we agreed on this book?

DK: Yes, there is consensus.

TJ: Who will participate in this book discussion?

AA (*in an excess of enthusiasm*): Everyone! Open it to all!

KV: The WHA was thinking of a book group but then backed away because of NERWHA. Now it is a good time to think of NERWHA's joining its efforts with the WHA.

AA: And we had agreed in June it would be free and open to all.

DK: We really must limit the number of people in the on-line discussion. This is a difficult forum to manage, and most on-line book groups are limited to about 12-15.

HSS: There is a way to make it free and open to all. If we have discussants and a response, the moderator then selects questions submitted in Chat and communicates them to David. Meanwhile, all persons other than the discussants, David, and the moderator must keep their computers muted.

DN: A great idea. Also we can make a video of the proceedings and post it on our web site.

LS: Yes, with Zoom, we can also break into small discussion groups.

KV: The WHA has had successful breakouts. Another point: if free, we could get spammers. We will need password protection, and for that people must register. Of course, spammers can also register.

DK: We must have a way to protect against spammers through a carefully regulated list of registrants.

KV: I could be part of managing the list so that others can do their work.

DB: The Library of Congress has been running book groups with a moderator who reads questions submitted from a Chat room.

DK: Registrants can also send questions in advance, thereby giving David ample time to consider a response.

At this juncture, the Secretary complained that all of these technical details were far above his head. One member of the EC suggested that he simply record “the discussion now devolved into a discussion of technical details.”

DK: We now have the book, the format, and Kerry as gatekeeper.

KV: Yes, I can do that and let people in. During the program, I can send questions to David. We are not yet clear the number of people who will be allowed to register. That aside, I will use my personal Zoom account.

DB: Is there a limit to the number of people in that account?

DK: I also have a professional account with Zoom.

DB: Tonight with around 90 people registered for the WHA on-line forum, we will see how workable that number is.

KV: I will report back.

HSS: Are we agreed on September?

DK: Yes, September. Let's agree on a date and send out word.

DN: as in the past for our symposia, a weekend—a Saturday.

HSS: Either the 19th or the 26th.

Unanimous agreement on Saturday, 26 September.

ML: And the time? If we want west coast participants, we need an afternoon time.

DK: 1:00 AM? (*amended to 1:00 PM*).

Unanimous agreement on 1:00 PM EDT.

VR: What about discussants?

HSS: For the teacher, Angela Lee, Dave Burzillo, or Gustavo Carrera. Luke as the graduate student.

KV: The WHA is overworking Angela.

At this point, several thought and one said aloud, "Since Gustavo is not with us, in the time-honored tradition of nominating the absent..." But our better angels prevailed.

DB: I am in the process of moving my home, but I can do it, but consider the gender imbalance—three men.

AA: My very thought. For the professor, I suggest either Heather or Violetta.

VR: I am honored but busy. But yes, I can do it.

HSS: If too much, I can pick it up.

DK: We have the book, the date, the discussants.

And while writing this, the Secretary realizes we did not elect a moderator. He suggests a woman, for further gender balance.

DK: We must now discuss registration.

DB: I will look into doing this without charge, but with our registration system that is problematical, given that the company that we use charges a percentage of registration fees. We might just have to ask people to email their registrations to us.

KV: Regarding security, what I am doing for the WHA is cumbersome. I send out the Zoom link twice--on the day preceding the event and on the day itself. And it is password protected.

DK: Yes, that is the secure way.

KV proceeds to offer a maelstrom of technical details on how to cut down spamming that leaves the Secretary in a fog and totally disoriented.

DK: Can NERWHA use the WHA data base?

KV: Sure. I can work with Dave Burzillo on this.

ML: And we will cosponsor this book event with the WHA to give it credit.

DK/DN (*simultaneously*): Sure.

Unanimous agreement.

DB: NERWHA's \$500 annual contribution to the WHA is forthcoming. We traditionally send it in the Fall.

ML: Put this video of the book discussion on the "members only" page of our website to encourage memberships.

HSS: We will need an August Zoom meeting to discuss the symposium and a second book.

Unanimous agreement followed by a break at 2:02. The EC reconvenes at 2:07.

DK: My concern about the book discussion's numbers remains. Do we want to limit the number of participants?

TJ: Leave the question open, and see how it works out for the WHA tonight.

AA: OK, two book discussions in the Fall, and we put off the Zoom symposium until the Spring.

All agree.

DK: The next book?

ML: We should have our second book discussion in November. Possibly on the crisis in democracy? I have written a chapter on India in the forthcoming *Anti-Fascism in Global Perspective*, which is due out in the Fall (\$35.95 for the pb.). Additionally, a former member of this council, Sana Tannoury-Karam, has also contributed a chapter on the Middle East.

DK: In terms of readability, how accessible is it to a non-specialist?

ML: It is aimed at an academic audience.

DK: Do readers need context and, if so, how much?

ML: I do not think that is an issue, but I would not be insulted if we chose another book.

DK: OK, that is one idea. Let's not ignore the books on the list.

DN: We need thematic integrity. Otherwise, we are likely to lose our audience if we shift topics. There are plenty of books on racism on the list.

TJ: Racism is relevant to fascism.

KV: The topic of fascism is fantastic, and multiple authors from NERWHA make it doubly great.

DK: Maybe we should select a few chapters.

ML: I am happy to take the lead if we decide on the book. Sana is in Lebanon right now but I talk with her often, and she soon will have a post-doc position in Berlin.

DN: Let me remind us of the cardinal rule we established at our last meeting. One must have read the book in order to nominate it. This book has not yet been printed. We have many fine books on the list. Among them are two comparative books by George Frederickson. We should put off a decision and think on it.

DK: That is a good idea. We have two avenues: 1) race and racism and choose a book from our list; 2) throw caution to the wind and go with anti-fascism.

ML: How do we want to frame this? Racism around the world? Crises around the world?

DK: One book does not do racism justice. We need to go beyond a single book to engage the topic in depth.

KV: Racism is discussed everywhere. It is universal. It is important to discuss it, but we must avoid overkill.

DK: But I do not trust what is being taught.

DB: Heather suggested that we meet in August. Let's not decide today.

TJ: To recap our timeline: Zoom in August; book discussion in September and November; a symposium in the Spring.

Unanimous agreement on August 20th at 1:00 PM.

ML: When we talk in August, we must agree on race or crises.

DK: Al sent me three agenda items that I wish to share with you.

AA: Two are now moot. I wish to discuss only one and move its acceptance.

Motion: A local author, Gabriela Gavrilov, has volunteered to resurrect the NERWHA Newsletter and would like to expand it to include mini-articles, book reviews of work by area historians, course syllabi, and the like. Shall we accept her offer? The NERWHA secretary has volunteered to assist her.

Following extended discussion, AA agreed to write her for further information regarding her vision for the newsletter and to invite her to join our book group.³

AA: I will also write up today an announcement regarding the book group and send it to Dave Burzillo, who will post it for me (gmail still defeats me).

VL: Will the WHA announce the book discussion?

KV: I will ask Laura Mitchell and Jonathan Reynolds. And we have 90 people signed up for tonight. It is not too late to register.

Following thanks and good wishes all around, the meeting ended at 2:55. The Secretary rushed off to turn compost piles, feeling much more comfortable with a turning fork, which is the outermost limit of his technical expertise.

Respectfully submitted,

Alfred J. Andrea, Secretary

³ On Monday, 3 August, President Kalivas sent the following announcement to the Executive Council:
Dear EC Members,

It has been sometime since we've had a NERWHA Newsletter, and as the fates would have it, a volunteer has stepped forward to resurrect the newsletter. After a careful review of the request, as well as scrutiny of her CV, I'm pleased to announce the executive committee (Al and the three Davids) have agreed to bring on Gabriela Gavrilov to coordinate the newsletter. Gabriela is a local independent scholar with extensive international travel and has published several historical novels about Russia and the Steppes. Al will work with Gabriela to engage the newsletter process including updates to the EC. This could be a good time to resurrect another form of communication to our members, so let's hope for the best as we move forward. We are thankful to Gabriela for agreeing to volunteer her services and thanks to Al for agreeing to run point on this endeavor.