

ASA participation report

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To me, every conference participation is an opportunity to renew a commitment to—or, *faith* in—an academic labor, and the ASA 2024 in Baltimore was certainly no exception. In a daily life, busy with writing dissertation and teaching classes, I sometimes forget *why* I am in the academia, or *how* my work matters to the world. I just simply do not think about such things anymore. At a conference, however, getting out of such daily routine, I get exposed to a variety of inspiring ideas of my peer scholars, which in turn makes me think of the meaning of my being at the academia. This year's ASA was exactly that kind of opportunity, and I am immensely grateful to the ASA and JAAS for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

A few particularly memorable panels that I attended: “Truth Be Told: Descendant and Indigenous Community-Led Collaborations with Universities Studying Slavery” on November 14. The panelists reflected on the recent efforts by U.S. universities to deal with the legacies of slavery and colonialism on their campuses. Specifically focused on the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Harvard University, Louisiana State University, and Amherst College, the panelists (who belonged to these schools) exchanged ideas and challenges as they conduct historical research on this past and explore specific actions (e.g. reparation) upon it. Nothing is black and white, and as the panel progressed, it soon turned out that even basic notions of “descendant,” “reparations,” and “legacies” were so complicated that without a careful intellectual definitional effort for each, there was no way the conversation could move on. I felt like I was witnessing a process where an academic thinking was leading to a socio-political thinking for social justice. Another panel I found so great was the one called “Critical Okinawan Studies and Methodologies” on November 14. I had no prior knowledge of the field, but I was really inspired by the panelists who were trying to run this emerging field. The panel specifically addressed the questions over “indigeneity,” “territoriality,” and “identity,” and the speakers (who all had an Okinawan background) shared their own stories, including painful ones. As a historian of transpacific relations myself, I would like to collaborate with these scholars one day.

I also had the privilege of presenting my own paper at this conference. Titled “Between Empire and Liberal Faith: A Transpacific Formation of Inter-Religious Activism in the Early Twentieth Century,” my paper addressed American Unitarians and their Pilgrim tercentenary meeting in 1920. (As it had a lot to do with the “First Thanksgiving,” I found this to be a particularly appropriate topic for this season—although a part of my argument in this paper was precisely that we cannot take the holiday so naively given the complicated religious/ racial history of it.) I had just thirteen minutes to talk, which was less than ideal, and I am afraid I spoke too fast. I received some positive feedback, so this was assuring. I also found my fellow panelists' presentations so fascinating. All five papers addressed one transpacific story or another, and thus there were various common threads between our papers. Unfortunately, we did not have enough time for Q&A, so the conversations between us might not have been as productive as I had expected. Still, I could connect with individual panelists, and I am hoping that this intellectual collaboration will continue and develop in the years to come.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the committee members from both the ASA and the JAAS sides for having coordinated this wonderful panel. It was at last year's ASA meeting that I heard about this opportunity, and since then Professors Yuki Oda, Fumiko Sakashita, Yohei Sekiguchi, Jolie Sheffer, Anna Mae Duane, and Meg Wesling have worked so hard for this to happen, I imagine. I sincerely thank them for this and other important works.

2024 American Studies Association Annual Meeting
Ena Ozaki

Writing is political. As a dissertator working on people believing in the power of words and writing, I have been thinking about what that idea actually means, especially in this highly chaotic moment after the presidential election. This year's conference theme, "Grounded Engagement in American Studies," enabled me to think deeply about writing as a way of public and political engagement.

My panel, "Transpacific Intimacies and Cross-Border Encounters in the Long Nineteenth Century," was undoubtedly a great space to reflect on it despite the differences between the five papers in terms of topics, fields, and methods. My paper, "Among the Newspaper Women, Beyond the Newspaper Women: Margherita Arlina Hamm and the Community of Print Activism," explored a series of columns in *The Journalist* newspaper by Canadian-born journalist Margherita Arlina Hamm. Situating her columns in the context of the mobilization of women in print culture and the rise of professional organizations for writing women, I pointed out her effort to create a community among women in print culture while challenging sexism in the expanding print media industry. Chair and commentator Dr. Anna Mae Duane gave us an overarching framework of the act of rewriting/revising political, historical, and cultural narratives. The act of writing, whether in a literary or figurative sense, has the power to change our worldviews and historical understanding. Yet, because of its very influence, it involves tensions, conflicts, and systemic oppression. Dr. Duane's comments made me ponder the implications of Hamm's effort to rewrite the existing narratives. The question will allow me to explore Hamm's imperial feminism further in her later works.

Among many thought-provoking sessions at the meeting, "Who we Write to/Where we Write from" was a particularly memorable space to contemplate public engagement through writing. The panelists—media and dance scholars—shared their recent works on racial representation in the film and television industries and the writings of a lesbian feminist critic. A morning session on the final day of the conference, the panel became a relaxed conversation with the two panelists and two attendees—a critical whiteness studies scholar and myself as a cultural/journalism historian. The interdisciplinary discussion ranged widely, covering such topics as teaching strategies of writing and how to engage different audiences within and beyond academia through writing. We also conversed the role of spaces such as social media platforms, blogs, and op-eds, where we could share multiple voices as scholars, critics, and also individuals. Although we mainly discussed audiences and spaces, the conversation also led me to think about purposes: *why* we write and *why* it matters. The "why" questions might be where grounded engagement—an attempt to challenge the post-truth politics that underestimates the value of words and the press—happens.

Finally, I am grateful to the ASA-JAAS travel grant enabling me to attend the ASA meeting for the second year in a row. I appreciate the grant, with the newly established cosponsored panel, providing me with an excellent opportunity to participate in the conference as a panelist and attendee.