Editor’s Note

On the Immigration and Ethnic History Society’s Mission

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WITHOUT FANFARE AND PERHAPS UNNOTICED by any reader of the journal, with the Summer 2015 issue (vol. 34, no. 4), the Immigration and Ethnic History Society instituted a revised Mission Statement (labeled in the JAEH as the Society’s Purpose), as endorsed by a vote of the Society’s members. Whereas the Society was founded in order, among a list of purposes, “to promote the study of the history of immigration to the United States and Canada from all parts of the world,” the Society’s new mission statement now identifies this focus of interest as “the study of the history of immigration to North America” (emphasis added).

As most of the readers of the journal may be historians, some historical background of this change is in order. The impetus for the change in the mission statement’s wording arose from a perception that the original language was both out-of-date and Eurocentric—or worse. The wording certainly was out-of-date, considering the dramatic changes in migration flows since 1965 and the attendant changes in the migration and ethnic history subfield and how we now practice it. But the suspicions about the illiberal motivations for the original wording can be shown to have been unfounded.

In 1965, when the Immigration History Group was first organized, American historical scholarship had yet to be roiled by the upending historiographical trends of the new social history, radical history, women’s history, and kindred subfields; and, similar to the deracinated maps that still appear on television weather forecasts like floating bubbles or disembodied heads, American history focused rather myopically on the history of the continental United States, disconnected from an international context and, at that,
possessed of a decidedly northeastern tilt. To its credit, the Immigration History Group broke from this pattern. Among the founders of the organization was the late Robert F. Harney, and, in its early years, the Immigration History Group maintained strong relations with the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (http://mhso.ca/wp/), which Harney and some of his Canadian colleagues founded in 1976.¹ The inclusion of “Canada” in original descriptions of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society’s interests, representing a decidedly progressive and avowedly internationalist political and intellectual position at a time when the work of most American historians focused exclusively on the United States, established a trajectory for the organization and its journal that has continued to the present day.

After the founding of the *Journal of American Ethnic History* in 1980,² journal editorial policy under the *JAEH*’s founding and long-serving editor, Professor Ronald Bayor, was admirably ecumenical and intentionally “inclusive,” and the journal featured contents that were remarkably comprehensive in their scope.³ Of the journal under Bayor’s leadership, David Roediger has written:

“There is no other journal that has so energetically taken up such differences [among groups] and given us the demythologized histories of those white citizens-in-waiting who migrated to the United States as a choice (although, to borrow from that great scholar of immigration, James Baldwin, with a “vast amount of coercion,” economic and political, shaping their choice), of those dispossessed by white settlement, of those brought in chains, and of those admitted or excluded according to labor market needs and other exigencies and withal considered unfit for citizenship. Moreover, to a remarkable extent it has done so without supposing that such stories can or should be collapsed into one narrative.”⁴

That policy has continued since Professor Bayor passed the editorial torch. Between 2010 and 2014, about sixteen articles on European topics have appeared or were in press, while all the rest of the articles have been on non-European topics—two African American, one Native American, one Armenian, and twenty on other non-European groups (Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, etc.). Incidentally, between Winter 2010 and Summer 2015, articles authored by women heavily outnumbered articles authored by men, even though a majority of the members of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society are male.⁵

Since its founding, the Immigration History Group (successively renamed the Immigration History Society [1972] and the Immigration and Ethnic
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History Society [1998]), together with the Society’s *Journal of American Ethnic History*, have been the proverbial “big tent.” The new wording, “North America,” now better comports with the message communicated by the Society’s venerable logo, a map of North America superimposed upon a representation of the globe. The Society and the journal remain committed to publishing a broad range of scholarship covering the ethnic history of ethnic groups in the United States and migration flows connecting North America co-equally to all regions of the world and all of the world’s populated continents, including Europe, Asia, South America, Africa, and Australia, as well as those liminal borderlands—the spaces and places lying in between, with the diversity of the journal’s contents limited chiefly by the distribution and quality of the submissions it receives. The journal aims to include not only work on the migrations from “Italy” or “China” or “Poland” or “Mexico,” for example, but also on the assorted constitutive translocal and transregional movements contained therein. It considers manuscripts on ethnohistory, Caribbean migration, African American history (particularly as related to migration, race and ethnic relations, intragroup ethnic relations, and topics that relate to the problematics of race, color, and ethnicity), and internal migrations (particularly as they involve the migration of ethnic and racial groups and kindred topics). Finally, the journal also has helped draw analytically useful lines of comparison and contrast among the experiences of Central, Southern, and Eastern European migrants and the various racialized minorities (migrant and native-born alike), especially insofar as it has probed the way in which those subalterm European groups themselves also have been racialized and re-racialized, and how their experiences were similar, and how they were profoundly different.

At its celebratory fiftieth year, it is especially fitting that the Immigration and Ethnic History Society should have re-examined its mission and re-centered itself, positioning the Society for what we all hope will become another fifty years of scholarship and service.

NOTES

I would like to thank Ron Bayor, former editor of the *JAEH*, for his comments on this document.


2. The first issue appeared the following year.

3. For the founding editor’s take on the journal’s evolution, see Bayor, “Journal Years,” 53–59.


5. During this period, about twenty-eight articles were authored by women and fifteen by men. This pattern resulted from the happenstance of submissions and not by design. Two co-authored articles, one by a male/female co-author team and one with two male co-authors and one female, have been excluded from these rough statistics.