

## *Letter from the Editors*

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Preparing this issue, which marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Western Society for French History's founding, provided our team with a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the past, present, and future of the Society, and the field more broadly. As we set the editorial direction for this volume, we developed features that highlight all that the Society has accomplished over the last five decades. We also wanted to connect that past to the many challenges faced by today's scholars of French and Francophone history in a political and professional landscape that is ever changing. As always, we seek to balance the journal's traditional mission to publish the work of the Society's members with our *engagé.e.s* editorial mission.

Volume 50 features three articles that showcase the range of research conducted by WSFH members across themes and time periods. Jun Huang returns to an infamous poisoning plot that scandalized the musical establishment of Louis XIV's France. Shifting attention away from the principals to the mask maker Jacques Ducreux, Huang uses court records to provide insight into the world of the Parisian artisans who crafted masks, costumes, instruments, and other items for the Paris stage. E. Claire Cage also examines judicial records in her examination of legal debates over childhood and sexuality in colonial Algeria. Drawing on assize court cases of child sexual assault, Cage demonstrates how the courts sexualized North African children and denied them status as minors under the law. In her article on family planning in postcolonial Tunisia, Hannah Olsen compares two studies produced by French medical students employed at a natal health clinic in Sfax. Olsen demonstrates how these reports reflected the persistence of colonial ideologies in medical schools, and the ways these different perspectives aligned with the priorities of the Tunisian government. Taken together, these articles show the extraordinary archival breadth and methodological richness at work in contemporary French historical studies.

In the last volume of *JWSFH*, we introduced new editorial features to provide space for scholars to address the institutional and political contexts that shape French and Francophone studies, and the larger professional terrain of humanistic research and teaching. For this volume's "Interventions"—a forum in which colleagues can respond to emerging and developing issues and events—our colleagues Sarah Horowitz, Jacqueline Couti, Corinne Gressang, Terrence Peterson, and Kristin Ringleberg have kindly

permitted us to publish a written version of their 2023 virtual discussion, “The Politics of French History in Times of Crisis.” Reflecting on teaching and researching French history and studies at a moment when higher education in the United States is under various forms of attack, the roundtable participants emphasize the need to build alliances within and beyond the university. They also show how the teaching of French history can offer students opportunities to explore sensitive questions of power and difference in a charged national political context.

This volume also features three “Notes on Sources,” short reflections focused on a written or audiovisual source drawn from a scholar’s area of expertise. Drawing from her current research on polio and its legacy in twentieth century France, Rebecca Scales analyzes two posters produced by the Association des Paralysés de France. Jakob Burnham shares a 1734 essay on a “monstrous” fetus that was submitted to the Royal Society of Medicine by an anonymous author based in Pondichéry. Richard Ivan Jobs and Steven von Wolputte introduce us to their collaborative project, a forthcoming graphic novel based on Bernard de Colmont’s 1934-35 and 1936 expeditions to the mountains of Chiapas, Mexico to locate the “lost” Lacandón people. These essays enrich our understanding of the past by making exciting primary sources accessible and in a form that might be shared with students, while testifying to the creativity and originality of researchers in our field.

Finally, commemorating this 50<sup>th</sup> volume of JWSFH and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Western Society for French History, is our closing section: the “JWSFH Mixtape.” This new feature looks back on the five decades of scholarship that has been published in the journal. We invited three colleagues—Tabetha Leigh Ewing, Sarah Miles, and Robin Walz—to comb through back issues of the journal and select a single paper/article from each decade that stood out for them. Featuring a unique design and artwork by Terrence Peterson, the playlists of the “JWSFH Mixtape” emphasize our roles as scholars and teachers, as well as the collegial relationships that have shaped WSFH and our field over the past half-century. We hope you enjoy this new feature as much as we do, and we look forward to curating more editions in future issues.

After delving into back issues of the journal ourselves, we have been struck, not just by how scholarship on France and the Francophones world has developed and diversified since WSFH’s beginnings, but by how many of the themes that animate the best work in the field today—gender, culture, sexuality, colonialism, questions of method and historiography, etc.—also drove that first meeting of the Society in San Francisco back in 1974. We hope this issue successfully showcases some of the paths WSFH has forged and suggests where we might be headed in the future.