THE INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL STUDY

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## Black Speech Is Everywhere

### By Steven Sodokoff

*Free Your Mind. . .and Your Ass Will Follow*
—title of Funkadelic's second album

In researching recently how deeply the entertainment industry has shaped America's cultural identity, I've discovered that the heart of this story is the influence of the African diaspora, the history of slavery, and the ways African-American sound and slang have left a permanent mark on our mother tongue, tempo, and even our global imagination. Black Speech, like jazz, lives and breathes—a comical air, creating and improvising in real time. It bends old words, invents new ones, and repurposes language through cypher, rhythm, and neologism (newly coined words).

**Slavery and Slang as Subversion.** Ghetto lingo—once called "jive talk"—traces its roots back to slavery. The term "ofay", meaning "whitey," comes from Pig Latin for foe. It's a subtle act of rebellion, born out of necessity—parlance used to shield, mock, and survive. Spirituals carried double meanings during the years prior to the Civil War. They weren't just religious, "call and response"—they were wailing road maps to freedom. Songs like "Wade in the Water" signaled how to elude slave trackers and their dogs. These encrypted expressions were early acts of resistance, layered in metaphor and melody.

**Hokum and the Verbal Trickster's Stage.** Hokum—a form of exaggerated, mischievous storytelling—arose in 19th-century minstrel shows, vaudeville, and blues clubs. It was satire wrapped in slang, often used to smuggle truth beneath a layer of laughter.

**Jive as Jazz.** From spirituals to blues to jazz and rap, the African beat and plaintive oral tradition pulse through improvisation and American music. In 1938, *Cab Calloway's Catalogue: A Hipster's Dictionary* listed "jive" and urban colloquialisms (much of it from Harlem). It was playful on the surface, but it had a deep, private patois. Was Cab making up words as Shakespeare did? Take "Flat Foot Floogie (with a Floy Floy)"—a 1938 jazz hit. The title was a cipher:

- Flat foot = a clumsy person
- Floogie = floozy or prostitute
- Floy floy = venereal disease

It was streetwise poetry, spinning new worlds from auditory vernacular pyrotechnics.

**Continued on page 12…**

# A Note from the Editor…

*A generation which ignores history has no past and no future*.
—Robert A. Heinlein

There is no doubt that, for better or for worse, we are living in a turbulent historic time, one in which history itself is being besieged. It most certainly would be remiss for an organization called the Institute for Historical Study not to have a voice in the defense of history-related scholarship during this perilous time. In this issue, you will read about what the Institute is doing to help protect our country's rich historical trove. On page 4, you can read the Institute's prepared statement addressing Trump and his minions' egregious undertakings, and on page 13, you'll find John Barnard's enlightening article explaining the use of petition and how it can be put to use today to counter the madness.

**—Rose Marie Cleese**

**Upcoming Monthly Programs, 10 AM**
**Sat., 8/16/25** – Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada and Patricia Southard,
"First Ladies and Women's Rights:
From the Jacksonian Era to the Civil War"
**Sat., 9/20/25** – Maria Sakovich,
"The Making of a Pilgrimage:
Fort Ross, 1925–2025"
**Sat., 10/18/25** – Tammy Farmer,
"Listening with Intention:
A Model for Rural Oral History"
**Sat., 11/15/25** – Liz Schott,
"Dorothy Liebes and the Golden Gate International Exposition, 1939–1940"
Note: No monthly program in December.

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear fellow Institute members:

Since his inauguration in January, President Trump has sought to reshape the presentation of American history to the public. He has called for the removal of "divisive, race-centered ideology" at the Smithsonian's museums and research centers, directed the Secretary of the Interior to revoke recent changes to landmarks and monuments if they "perpetuate a false reconstruction of American history," instructed federal agencies to erase information on the historical contributions of women, African-Americans, and other minorities from government websites, and ordered the dismantling of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. And this is just in his first six months in office.

The "Statement by the Institute for Historical Study on the Trump Administration's Assaults on History" can be found on the following page. Thank you to Dan Kohanski, Peter Meyerhof, Jody Offer, and Louis Trager for working on the statement and to all members who commented on the draft. With the approval of the Board of Directors, the Institute has also signed the American Historical Association statement in support of the Smithsonian Institution, which appeared in the spring newsletter issue, and endorsed "A Call for Constructive Engagement," which can be found on the website of the American Association of Colleges and Universities.

As we stand up against this assault on history, the Institute's endeavors continue to flourish! Our longstanding Writers Group, led by Rob Robbins, is as active as ever and the Jewish History Study Group (JHSG) and the Women's History Study Group (WHSG), two groups formed this year, are well underway. My thanks go to Louis Trager for serving as the JHSG facilitator and to Jody Offer for volunteering as the WHSG recording secretary. These study groups are held on Zoom, and all three welcome additional participants. Meeting times are listed on the IHS website and announced via email. Plans are also afoot to revive the California and the West Study Group.

Mini-grants will be available for the year 2025–2026, and applications must be received by September 15, 2025. Detailed information on the grants and how to apply is available on our website.

The Institute's Annual Potluck will take place on Saturday, October 11th, from 12:00 noon to 2:30 p.m. at the home of Jim Gasperini in Berkeley. Members will be able to attend in person or on Zoom. More information will follow closer to the date.

Institute membership offers historians fellowship in these challenging times. We look forward to seeing you at the study groups, monthly programs, and our upcoming annual potluck.

**Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada**

## IHS STATEMENT ON THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S ASSAULTS ON HISTORY

The Institute for Historical Study stands absolutely opposed to the Trump administration's efforts to distort history, to rewrite history, to erase history. As historians, we know that our grasp of history is imperfect—which is why we are always working to improve it. We can only do that when historians are free to examine *all* the evidence, free to discuss *all* the possible interpretations, free to express our thoughts and to shape our conclusions without concern for anyone's political agenda.

The Trump administration is pushing to make history serve its partisan ideology, not the truth. It seeks to drive any evidence that challenges that ideology out of history books, out of the archives and museums, out of our classrooms, out of our memory. But those who do not remember history, or worse, those who would deny history, are condemned to repeat it. Karl Marx wrote that when Hegel said history repeats itself, he should have added that it does so first as tragedy, then as farce. In a bizarre parody of efficiency, the Trump administration would have it do both at the same time.

Indeed, by denying our history of racism, of sexism, of white supremacy, Trump hopes to repeat it. To succeed in that, he needs to suppress the history of how badly that worked out the last time.

There is danger in ignoring evidence that challenges an ideology. History teaches us about how communities prosper, how civilizations survive, how they succeed through compromise—and how ideologies fail. Unless we acknowledge the past, both good and bad, we will repeat our past mistakes in the future.

This is what history is about. And it is why autocrats attack history. The Institute stands with historians all across the country, all over the world, in calling out the administration's actions for what they are: a pernicious effort to force a false memory on the American people. The administration would have us ignore the unforgivable stain of African slavery. It would deny the accomplishments of immigrants, of women, of minorities. The administration would also erase the separation of church and state that up to now has saved the United States from the religious wars that used to convulse Europe—another historical lesson Trump wants us to forget.

Inevitably, despite all they can do, Donald Trump and his administration will one day face the judgment of history. When that day comes, we want to be recorded as having done all we could to keep history alive.

# MONTHLY PROGRAMS

### "The Y2K Problem and What It Means"
**presented by Dan Kohanski**
**April 19, 2025**

Dan presented a succinct and entertaining history of the Y2K problem, drawing on both his 35 years as a programmer and his specialty as historian in the history of religion.

He began by recounting the religious anxiety that gripped Europe as the end of the year 999 approached. Many people believed the world would end, some so fervently that they sold all their possessions and did everything they could to atone for their sins as the Day of Judgment approached. Pope Sylvester II predicted the end of the world on January 1, 1000. Though he was one of the most brilliant intellectuals of his time, Sylvester's accomplishments drew suspicion.

To explain the origins of the more secular but equally fervent belief in worldwide catastrophe on the dreaded date of January 1, 2000, Dan began by summarizing the evolution of computer programming languages. The earliest of these languages were specific to each computer. This meant that when people wanted to run a program on a different machine, it needed to either be rewritten from scratch or run in an "emulator" that mimicked the workings of the earlier machine. As time went on, to run important programs required emulators of emulators—an increasingly inefficient and error-prone process.

The first high-level language, COBOL, designed to align machines with the way humans thought rather than the reverse, enabled the efficient transfer of programs between different machines. Though deficient in many respects, this language became widely adopted, particularly after its endorsement by the Department of Defense.

Dan next discussed the evolution of computer memory and data storage. Early memory devices were huge, compared with modern memory chips, had only a tiny fraction of their capacity, and were very costly. Since memory was expensive, languages such as COBOL used tricks to store as much data in as few memory bytes as possible. One such trick was to use two-digit memory "boxes" for month, day, and year. This worked fine for month and day, but how to handle year, a four-digit number? The solution in COBOL and later languages was to ignore the "19" in a date such as 1960 and just record the "60."

Early programmers didn't anticipate that their software would still be in use decades later. As the year 2000 approached, people became alarmed at what might happen when databases that assumed "00" meant "1900" tried to handle data for "2000." Mortgages would be 100 years overdue! Newborns would be 100 years old! Computer systems on which the world had come to depend would crash, causing planes to fall from the sky—massive destruction and chaos! (In the later discussion, one participant remembered how a friend spent years preparing for the apocalypse, moving "off the grid" to a fortified farm in the hills of northern Georgia.)

Dan explained that though the Y2K problem was of serious concern, the world was never on the brink of collapse. He worked for years with a team at Bank of America assigned to address these issues. The problem was eventually solved, but at an estimated cost of $100–$600 billion worldwide. Some fixes were temporary,

and similar issues may arise in the future. He expressed concern about Elon Musk's plan to replace Social Security's computer system, still based on COBOL after all these years, in just seven months. To do such projects correctly takes years and requires extensive testing. Dan concluded by drawing parallels between the Y2K problem and current challenges posed by artificial intelligence, urging that we learn from past mistakes.

The discussion afterward ranged widely. In response to questions, Dan provided more historical context about the parallel events in 999, referencing his book, *A God of Our Invention,* and how predictions of the timing of Christ's second coming have had to be postponed many times over the centuries. We discussed the origins of the "common era" dating system, the importance of accurate data storage, and the problematic position of intellectuals during several periods of history, including Augustine, Galileo, and women intellectuals in general.

**—Jim Gasperini**

### "Football and Technology: The Essence of the Bay Area"
**presented by Ted Atlas**
**May 17, 2025**

In his presentation, Ted Atlas discussed how football and technology have been an integral part of the Bay Area almost since the start of European settlement and have grown in parallel. Thus, while in 1869 the transcontinental railroad was completed, four years later the University of California at Berkeley played its first football game. Edward Muybridge's famous photos of a horse's gait were financed in 1878 by Leland Stanford, whose eponymous university started playing football as soon as it opened in 1891. From then on, college football in the region has had a major role alongside technology in shaping the cultural landscape of the Bay Area.

In technology, Ted discoursed on the early history of aviation and wireless communication in the San Francisco Bay Area, highlighting significant events such as the 1910 and 1911 air meets at Tanforan Park and the military's use of airplanes for scouting and photography. He mentioned key figures like Louis Pollin, Earlinas, Army Lieutenant Paul Beck, and Eugene Ely, who made important contributions to aviation and wireless communication. Ted also noted the dangers of early aviation, with several pilots dying in crashes, and mentioned the establishment of Federal Telegraph's wireless service to compete with Western Union.

The presentation then moved on to two more of the Bay Area's major contributions to technology: electronics and computing. He discussed the invention of the vacuum tube by Lee De Forest and its impact on electronics, as well as the establishment of companies like Lockheed and Fairchild Semiconductor. He concluded by mentioning recent developments in the tech industry, including the founding of Google and the return of Steve Jobs to Apple. One interesting side anecdote he shared was that Bill Hewlett and David Packard, two giants in the world of computer technology, met in 1930 when they both tried out for Stanford's football team. (Only Packard made it.) These two went on to be major players in the development of the personal computer, and their company, Hewlett-Packard, is still a technological giant.

Simultaneously, Ted also covered the evolution of college football in the region, including the founding of the National Football League and significant games at Stanford and other universities. In an early instance of the Bay Area's commitment to diversity, in 1951 the University of San Francisco was invited to the Orange Bowl, but because Black players were

not allowed, the whole team voted to decline the invitation.

Ted's presentation explained how the two seemingly unrelated topics intersect, particularly through the naming of microchip grids after football terms and the role of colleges in both fields. He highlighted key figures and innovations in both fields, including the founding of Hewlett-Packard and the development of the West Coast offense. This was a comprehensive history of sports and Silicon Valley, tracing the development of technology and football in the Bay Area.

**—Daniel Kohanski**
(AI contributed to this report)

### "Tourism and War: Their links throughout history, from antiquity to Gaza and Ukraine"
**Presented by Bert Gordon**
**June 21, 2025**

Bert's presentation defined the concept of "war tourism" broadly. It encompasses a wide range of activities, from visits to war zones organized by business enterprises to individuals observing conflicts taking place near their homes to "virtual" tourism when watching war movies. He showed advertisements for trips to Ukraine during the ongoing war with Russia and images of Israelis watching cross-border strikes by Hezbollah. He discussed the role of social media and the internet in shaping how wars are viewed and documented, referring to the Ukraine conflict as the "first TikTok war."

Bert's interest in the subject was sparked by his discovery of a German magazine called *Der Deutsche Wegleiter* in the French National Library. During World War II the German military organized tours for civilians and soldiers. This research resulted in his 2018 book, *War Tourism*, which discusses both tourism during the war and post-war heritage tourism to war-related sites. In his book, he delineates our types of tourists: soldiers on active duty, civilians during wartime, 'hot battlefield' visitors to recently active war zones, and heritage tourism to historical sites.

While tourism is generally associated with peacetime, there is a significant history of people traveling to observe wars and battles. Bert cited examples that included 17th-century Dutch-English conflicts, the American Civil War, the Crimean War, World War II, and more recent conflicts in Iraq and Ukraine. A well-known story tells of fashionable Washingtonians riding out to watch the Battle of Bull Run, though some question the accuracy of these accounts. He touched on questions of the morality of war tourism, particularly in relation to concentration camp visits. He introduced the concept of "virtual tourism," which might include viewing such films as *Saving Private Ryan.* He then discussed recent technological developments in war tourism, such as the Anne Frank House replica in New York and smartphone apps for exploring historical sites.

A lively discussion followed. Could some war tourism be healing for affected communities? Bert thought that yes, it can be potentially healing and economically beneficial. The conversation included other types of violent public spectacles such as lynchings, public hangings, and gladiatorial combat, and also touched upon the motivations of war tourists, the impact of war memorials on children, and the role of schools in organizing those visits. Members recounted personal experiences, such as an Italian guide expressing gratitude as he led a tour of an American cemetery in Tuscany.

Bert acknowledged that his definition, as presented, could use refinement. All agreed that his talk and the discussion that followed were interesting and provocative.

**—Jim Gasperini**

# SPECIAL GROUP REPORTS

## Women's History Study Group

In April, the Women's History Study Group (WHSG) explored the topic of asylums. IHS member Pam Peirce is writing a book about Katharine Gibson Wicks (1893–1960), a children's book author who wrote a memoir about the four years she lived in an asylum. Pam recommended Kate Moore's book, *The Woman They Could Not Silence*, about Elizabeth Packard (1816–1897), which shows how the struggle for women's rights is often tied to that of asylum history. Liz Thacker-Estrada's subject, First Lady Abigail Fillmore (1798–1853) and her husband, President Millard Fillmore, supported the work of mental health care reformer Dorothea Dix (1802–1887), who advocated asylums as a humane alternative to chaining the mentally ill in prisons. Leslie Friedman's work on English writer Mary Lamb (1764–1847) reveals that she would have been interned in Bethlem Royal Hospital, better known as Bedlam, for killing her mother had her brother Charles not offered to be her guardian.

Dot Brovarney described her research on 19th-century women and the *Overland Monthly*, mentioning her challenges in accessing primary materials and her plans to visit the Huntington Library. One of her research subjects, Netta Eames (1852–1944), was a significant figure in the life of Jack London. The group also discussed the tragic story of Bessie London (1876–1947), Jack's first wife. At each meeting this quarter, Susan Nuernberg discussed the book she is writing about Charmian London (1871–1955), Jack London's second wife. In May and June, she shared her preface and general introduction and discussed Charmian's diaries spanning 50 years, which Susan has been transcribing. These diaries were not available to the public for many years due to privacy concerns.

In May, Jody Offer reported on the Library of Congress conference that she had attended on Zoom: "StageStruck!: Women and the American Musical." Three academics gave short presentations on three different major theater players: Albertina Rasch (1891–1967), a dancer and long-time choreographer for the Hippodrome in New York City; Juanita Hall (1901–1968), an actor, singer, and choir director who played Bloody Mary in *South Pacific* and became the first Black woman with an enduring stage presence in New York musicals; and Trude Rittmann (1908–2005), a choreographer and composer, who worked on *West Side Story*, *The Sound of Music*, and many other well-known musicals, arranging, composing, and choreographing many of the dances.

In June, Liz began a discussion of the "Long Nineteenth Century" in European and American history, a period from approximately 1789 to 1914 that includes most of the women that WHSG members are writing about and that incorporates many important advances in women's suffrage, property rights, education, and employment. After exploring how our subjects fit into this concept, we agreed that it might provide a helpful framework for understanding each other's contributions.

**—Elizabeth Thacker-Estrada and Jody Offer**

## Jewish History Study Group

Germany offers a story of assimilation and ultimately false security for many; the Soviet Union, one of discrimination and cultural repression. In 19th-century Sonoma, California,

a merchant, endeavoring across industries and decades, becomes a pillar of the community; not far away, in Pinole, a young man, just setting out on the path of commerce, brutally meets his fate. These topics served as starting points for the May and June Zoom meetings of the Institute's Jewish History Study Group, which bode well for further lively conversations across the sweeping range of historical Jewish experience. The creation of the group was inspired by a pattern of recent Institute monthly programs on Jewish subjects.

At a meeting, one or more members each take a few minutes introducing a topic for wide-ranging discussion. At the May meeting, Peter Crane set out the mixed and shifting circumstances of German Jewry from the late 1800s to Hitler's advent. In 1893, prominent Berlin Jews proposed petitioning the Kaiser for his protection against rising anti-Semitism. But a pamphlet in reply won the well-established community's support: Jews shouldn't humble themselves this way when they had already achieved legal equality to fend for themselves. "We are not German Jews," it declared, "but German citizens of the Jewish faith."

Quite a few followed writer Heinrich Heine's example and nominally converted to Christianity; a baptism generally sufficed to ward off the religiously based antisemitism of the time. Assimilated Jews identified with their gentile neighbors considerably more than with the comparatively uneducated "Eastern Jews"—set off by their scraggly beards, 18th-century garb, Orthodox religious practice, and Yiddish language—who streamed into Germany as a haven from pogroms after the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II in Russia.

Esther Shallan discussed Soviet suppression of Jewish identity, notably through the squelching of the use of Hebrew, the language of prayer. Other repressive mechanisms, after World War II, included discrimination against Jewish university applicants and the state's refusal, in the late 1960s and early '70s, to issue birth certificates acknowledging Jewish names. The "doctors' plot"—a sensational 1952–53 scenario in which Jewish physicians were conniving to assassinate Stalin and others—was a paranoid fantasy with all-too-real consequences for the entire community.

At the June meeting, Peter Meyerhof recounted the story of Solomon Schocken, who left Prussia at age 20 and several years later, in 1873, became the first Jewish immigrant to settle in Sonoma. Overcoming antisemitic prejudice, he established a general merchandise store that thrived for 50 years. Schocken also bought real estate; supplied the city water from his artesian wells; and set up a well-drilling company, an electric railroad, a lumber yard, a bowling alley, and a saloon. He employed many Italian immigrants to quarry basalt blocks used to pave the streets of San Francisco, made donations to neighbors in need, and mentored many employees who went on to become business leaders of the next generation.

In contrast to Schocken's experience, many poor Jewish immigrant men were driven into the vulnerable solitary grind of itinerant selling. Oliver Pollak reported on a murder in the Contra Costa County town of Pinole in the 1860s. The decomposed body of a man identified in newspaper reports only as "N. Nathan," aged about 21, was found on San Pablo Road in January 1862 with a peddler's license, an empty backpack, and a gunshot to the head. Being Jewish, he was buried at Hills of Eternity Memorial Park, a Jewish cemetery in Colma. In July 1862, a "Mexican Indian" and "desperado" living in Pinole was identified as a suspect, but when confronted by two constables and several others, he threatened to kill the first man who approached him and escaped on horseback when none dared to fire at him.

**—numerous contributors**

## Writers' Group Report

In April the group discussed Chapter 3 of Liz Thacker-Estrada's biography of First Lady Abigail Fillmore. This segment covered the years from roughly 1832 to 1841 and traced Abigail's experience as the wife of a rising American politician. With Millard's election to Congress, Abigail had to confront the difficulties caused by extended separation from her husband and the tasks of raising her young children. Over time, Abigail was drawn into the world of the capital, developing social and political skills that made her an increasingly significant figure on the Washington scene.

The group was impressed by Liz's thorough research and her clear presentation of Abigail's progress and transformation. Members felt, however, that since Liz intended this work for a general audience it might be necessary to widen the focus somewhat. They suggested that she give more attention to the experiences of other congressional wives, the problems of boardinghouse living in Washington, and the political issues of the day.

At our May and June sessions, Pam Peirce gave us six short chapters of her biography of Katharine Gibson. These materials covered a number of interrelated aspects of Katharine's life: Her marriage to Frank Wicks and her continued lesbian relationship with Sybil Cox, family life with Wicks and his adoptive children, and especially Katharine developing ties to Lynton, who would become Pam's mother. Finally, and most importantly, these chapters chronicled Katherine's emergence as a successful author of both non-fiction and of works specifically for young people. All these developments were viewed in terms of Katharine's search for a "happy ending" in her dramatic life.

The group appreciated Pam's diligent research and good writing, It did, however, urge Pam to cut down some of the complex materials on the Wicks family members as well as the accounts of various travels. Members urged Pam to concentrate more on the development of Katharine's writing and to give readers more extended quotations from the works discussed.

Our group continues to flourish with a growing list of upcoming presenters including Liz Schott, Ann Harlow, Marilyn Geary, Steve Barton, and Rose Marie Cleese. But we continue to look for and welcome new members. So if you are writing something and want some thoughtful and friendly criticism, join us.

**—Rob Robbins**

## Member Honored for Book Proposal

Member Liz Schott was recently awarded the Biographers International Organization's (BIO) Hazel Rowley Prize for her book proposal for *Useful and Beautiful: The Life of Dorothy Wright Liebes*. Given to first-time biographers who are not under contract with a publisher, the Hazel Rowley Prize is named after the author of *Franklin and Eleanor: An Extraordinary Marriage* and who was "a passionate advocate for the art and craft of biography."

To be considered for the award, Schott wrote a 20-page proposal that included a synopsis of the book, chapter titles, a writing sample (she submitted a full chapter per the recommendation of the Institute's Writers' Group), comparable books, and a CV. In a congratulatory email, she was told, "We were struck by the quality of your writing, argument about why Dorothy Wright Liebes merits a biography, and organization in researching and executing the work."

The prize includes cash, a year's membership in BIO, admission to the annual conference, and—best of all—a careful reading of the proposal by an established literary agent.

# MEMBER NEWS

## Our Newest Member

Tammy Farmer, a community advocate with over a decade of experience, is studying for a BA in Leadership Studies at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt. She is the founder of the Oral History Van, her capstone project, which brings mobile oral history studios to rural elders, recording their stories and channeling their lived experiences back to the university for research and advocacy on aging and caregiving. She launched a stationary pilot, *Empowering Seniors in Humboldt County*, with Institutional Review Board approval. The long-term vision projects three trustworthy and visible rotating vans that will return to sites regularly to promote nontraditional, interdisciplinary historical study. She plans to pursue an MA in Public History.

## Book Review: Memoir of a Reluctant Debutante

After publishing ten biographies, including *The Hearsts: An American Dynasty*, longtime IHS member Judy Robinson's latest, *Memoir of a Reluctant Debutante—or, When in Danger, Breathe,* may be the most exciting life she's written up to date: her own!

How to describe this wonderful book? I opened it at random and discovered Robinson's life dovetailing with historic events. Robinson's ancestors arrived at America in the early 17th century—the Kip family was one of the first to settle in New Amsterdam; an ancestor was the first Episcopal bishop in California.

In 1949, Robinson and her brother, John Kip, both had polio. Individuals close to her came through it in leg braces or a wheelchair.

A shy teenager, she was "taller than most contemporaries, and at Miss Atkins' dancing school, where attendance was *de rigeur*. . .I much preferred sitting by the wall with boys wearing glasses, usually bright students and often Jewish…" She was "liberated in my 20s to dance without a partner to the beat and rhythms of jazz and blues. . ." While at UC, Berkeley, she spent more time at jazz clubs like the Black Hawk and Jazz Workshop. She took trips, including ones with Timothy Leary!

She became Associated Press' Girl Friday: "I loved being in the newsroom, the center of a worldwide wire service—watching grainy photographs emerge on paper that rolled out of a machine. . ." A newsman suggested she could write for AP Newsfeatures, but what did she know? She blurted out, "I know a lot about sports cars!" Her press pass let her meet drivers, "heroes to me." AP published articles with her byline for three years at Daytona time. She got paid $25 per article. So what was she offered? The research library, a dead end. She went down the street to United Press International (UPI).

UPI sent her to Maine. She covered a visit from President and Mrs. Johnson, Sen. Margaret Chase Smith, a boxing champ from Maine, the governor of Maine and his wife, a gas pipeline failure in weeks-long sub-zero temperatures.

She was a legislative aide for two Wisconsin congressmen and was "particularly instrumental in getting a number of harmful food additives removed from the food supply." She became an editorial writer for the *San Francisco Examiner*.

Robinson's personal and professional lives make an extraordinary book. I could not put it down. (Published by Telegraph Hill Press, July 2023; soft cover, 6x9, 704 pages)

**—Leslie Friedman**

**…continued from outside front cover**

**Postwar Cool.** After WWII, words like "hip," born in Black communities, defined the Beat Generation, then the counterculture. The year 1954 marked two cultural turning points: 1.) Brown v. Board of Education ruled segregation unconstitutional, and 2.) Ray Charles' #1 hit, "I've Got a Woman," a gospel-infused, sensual song, once labeled "race music," was now crossing racial lines—"cat music for the bobby soxers." The sacred blurred into the secular. "My Lord" became "My Baby." Raucous R&B became soul music, a societal touchstone.

**The Radio Revolution Was Color-Blind.** In the 1950s and '60s, DJs developed a new electrified voice. They drew on jazz patter and street idioms to connect and cross over with urban youth. "Wolfman Jack's" racial masquerading (whites sounding black) was unclear to listeners—his voice built bridges. Jocko Henderson brought his *Rocket Ship Show* from Philly to New York City, blending rhyme, rhythm, and swagger—early hip-hop in orbit. DJs didn't just play records, they created a cachet of cultural momentum, breaking artists and breaking barriers.

**Soul, Political Pride, and Protest.** The Civil Rights era gave us more than legislation—it gave us new language. Soul meant authenticity, Black identity, and excellence. "Power to the people" was more than a chant, it was a call to redefine citizenship, a communal declaration.

Muhammad Ali, then Cassius Clay, howled, "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee"—part poet, part prophet. In 1964, he became world heavyweight champion; by 1968, James Brown was shouting, "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud." The groove was tight, the message unapologetic. Marvin Gaye's "Dancing in the Street" was no longer just a party song—it was a protest, mixed with joy. The anthem was taken from the church and theater to the public square.

**Echoes of the Bronx.** By 1974, Nixon was out, and breakdancing was in. Breakbeats, echo boxes, and sonic spoken verse in the Bronx reshaped the microphone. In 1975, the Bee Gees' "Jive Talkin'" #1 hit from the movie *Saturday Night Fever* followed, with disco grooves rooted in Black tempo and cadence. By 1980, black "jive talk" reached the mainstream in a scene from the hit film, *Airplane I*, during which a passenger translates the speech of a sick Black passenger that the stewardess is trying to help—the rhythm and soul of his language was conveyed.

**Rap and the Hip-Hop Parlance Lifestyle.** Vocabulary evolved: "cool" displaced "swell" as a superlative, becoming solid, lit, Gucci, dope, and da bomb. The rise of rap music in the 1970s cemented African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) as a cornerstone of cultural voicing, with sample layers of wordplay, tone, and measure. Rap's lyricism introduced idioms like "bling" (luxury) and "crib" (home) into the mainstream, often as contronyms—words with double meanings that would flip to opposite ones, e.g., "bad" could mean "good."

**Black Speech Is Everywhere—**on the dance floor, in the streets, and on the web. The phrase "jive talk" has made its mark on the English language to this day, even though the term itself has fallen out of favor. There's no doubt the Black way of life has shaped American (and global) identity, bypassing corporate media with cyber-communications and globalization. African Americans are "punching above their weight" with the pervasive presence of Black Speech.

# The Use of Petition • by John Hyde Barnard

The use of petition as a guarantee of public expression on issues facing Congress is an established Constitutional right, as stated in the first Amendment of the Bill of Rights.

> "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Yet, very few people today are aware of what a petition is or how to effectively use and present petitions for "…a redress of grievances."

The use of petition evolved from English common law jurisprudence. It was formalized in 1215 in the Magna Carta, which laid the foundation for the right of petition, as well as habeas corpus and the concept of due process. The right of petition was further strengthened in 1628 when the English Parliament petitioned King Charles I with the Petition of Rights. The Petition of Rights reaffirmed habeas corpus and due process; taxation only with consent of Parliament; no quartering of soldiers in homes; and the denial of martial law in times of peace. The failure of the Crown to comply with these demands eventually led to civil war and the regicide of King Charles I. The use of petition as a means for a redress of grievances was so important that the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia gave it prominence by stating its guarantee in the Bill of Rights' very first amendment in the new Constitution, of the new United States.

During America's Antebellum period, the right of petition played a significant role in the growing demand for the abolition of slavery. Anti-slavery societies throughout the north flooded Congress with petitions praying for the abolition of slavery's existence in the District of Columbia. It wasn't just the subject matter of the petitions, but the sheer volume of the petitions being presented that became an irritant to the body politic. It's been estimated that over 130,000 petitions, praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, were presented to Congress in 1837 alone. This flood of petitions led to a Constitutional crisis with the passage of the infamous Gag Rule that attempted to deny citizens the Constitutional right of petition. The outcome resulted in the eventual demise of slavery with the passage of the 13th Amendment.

With the advent of technologies of the industrial revolution after the Civil War, the changing practices of Congress, the evolving abilities to directly communicate with members of Congress coupled with a lack of civic and political education, there has been a decline in the use of the petition over time. However, it is a tool worthy of attention and worthy of a resurrection.

The present actions in all three branches of government—the judicial, the legislative, and the executive branch—have created a perceived threat to democracy. This perception is based on the following: the use of the military as police; the threat and outright denial of due process by the executive branch; the ignoring of court orders by the present administration; the reckless dismantling of the federal workforce based on a perceived threat of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that threatens to unravel decades of progress on racial equality and civil rights; the relentless attacks on education, the press, law firms; the use of masked ICE agents to arbitrarily pick up and disappear people off the streets; coupled with an acquiescence on the part of Congress and the Supreme Court that negates their role of a check and balance, strongly supports a conclusion that our democracy is, indeed, threatened.

The use of petition is an added tool to impede and correct these violations of Constitutional democracy. A petition goes beyond the right to assemble or to contact individual congressmen or senators. Its function allows multiple voices to speak as one, directly to the body political, both in the House and the Senate.

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A petition can be presented on the floor of either House by a chosen member, read into the record, and, if not tabled or laid aside without further consideration, is assigned to a committee for further consideration. Also, the ability to petition cannot be ignored as it is a Constitutional right guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Further, it can be reintroduced to the point of *ad nauseam*. The best example of the use of petition to agitate for redress of grievances is presented in the following books: *Arguing About Slavery*, William Lee Miller (Vintage Books), and *The Creole Incident*, John Hyde Barnard (Coldwell & Hyde).

The practical application for the use of petitions is not all that complicated. It is important to state a clear purpose. For example, a petition might pray for the cessation of the administration's attacks on universities and colleges who fail to comply with the administration's executive order and interpretation of restrictions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Also, actions that would rectify the problem should be made clear. One should adequately provide for the signatures on the petition and take the time to research whom to target— either a House member sympathetic to one's prayer or a Senator willing to introduce the petition. Lastly, the continuous presentation of petitions, a Constitutional guarantee, to the point of an irritant to the body political, is a very effective means to achieve the attention of those whom one is addressing.

The use of the petition is an effective tool to seek redress and in our present situation is a clear path to the very ear of those who either support or deny a petitions prayer, and is a right guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States of America. It is a powerful tool that needs to be dusted off and applied to answer and rectify the threat to our democracy. It is our way of informing those who represent us that we are watching and aware—again and again and again—*ad nauseam*.

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