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Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct

The historical profession is diverse, composed of people who work in a variety of institutional settings and also as independent professionals. But all historians should be guided by the same principles of conduct.

1. Scholarship

Scholarship, the uncovering and exchange of new information and the shaping of interpretations, is basic to the activities of the historical profession. The profession communicates with students in textbooks and classrooms; to other scholars and the general public in books, articles, exhibits, films, and historic sites and structures; and to decision-makers in memoranda and testimony.

Scholars must be not only competent in research and analysis but also cognizant of issues of professional conduct. *Integrity* is one of these issues. It requires an awareness of one's own bias and a readiness to follow sound method and analysis wherever they may lead. It demands disclosure of all significant qualifications of one's arguments. Historians should carefully document their findings and thereafter be prepared to make available to others their sources, evidence, and data, including the documentation they develop through interviews. Historians must not misrepresent evidence or the sources of evidence, must be free of the offense of plagiarism, and must not be indifferent to error or efforts to ignore or conceal it. They should acknowledge the receipt of any financial support, sponsorship, or unique privileges (including privileged access to research material) related to their research, and they should strive to bring the requests and demands of their employers and clients into harmony with the principles of the historical profession. They should also acknowledge assistance received from colleagues,

Students, and others.

Since historians must have *access to sources*-archival and other-in order to produce reliable history, they have a professional obligation to preserve sources and advocate free, open, equal, and nondiscriminatory access to them, and to avoid actions which might prejudice future access. Historians recognize the appropriateness of some national security and corporate and personal privacy claims but must challenge unnecessary restrictions. They must protect research collections and other historic resources and make those under their control available to other scholars as soon as possible.

Certain kinds of research and conditions attached to employment or to use of records impose obligations to maintain confidentiality, and oral historians often must make promises to interviewees as conditions for interviews. Scholars should honor any pledges made. At the same time, historians should seek definitions of conditions of confidentiality before work begins, press for redefinitions when experience demonstrates the unsatisfactory character of established regulations, and advise their readers of the conditions and rules-that govern their work. They also have the obligation to decline to make their services available when policies are unnecessarily restrictive.

As *intellectual diversity* enhances the historical imagination and contributes to the development and vitality of the study of the past, historians should welcome rather than deplore it. When applied with integrity, the political, social, and religious beliefs of historians may inform their historical practice. When historians make interpretations and judgments, they should be careful not-to present them in a way that forecloses discussion of alternative interpretations.

Historians should be free from institutional and professional penalties for their beliefs and activities, provided they do not misrepresent themselves as speaking for their institutions or their professional organizations.

The bond that grows out of lives committed to the study of history should be evident in the *standards of civility* that govern the conduct of historians in their relations with one another. The preeminent value of all intellectual communities is reasoned discourse-the continuous colloquy among historians of diverse points of view. A commitment to such discourse makes possible the fruitful exchange of views, opinions, and knowledge.

2. Teaching

Communication skills are essential to historians' efforts to disseminate their scholarship beyond the profession. Those skills are not limited to writing books and articles but also involve teaching, which takes place in many locales-museums and historic sites as well as classrooms-and involves the use of visual materials and artifacts as well as words.

Quality in teaching involves *integrity* as well as competence. Integrity requires the presentation of differing interpretations with intellectual honesty; it also requires fairness and promptness in judging students' work on merit alone and a readiness to discuss their views with an open mind.

When so applied, the *political, social, and religious beliefs* of historians may inform their teaching. The right of the teacher to hold such convictions and to express them in teaching, however, does not justify the persistent intrusion of material unrelated to the subject of the course or the intentional use of falsification, misrepresentation, or concealment.

Freedom of expression is essential to the task of communicating historical thought and learning. To this end, historians should have substantial latitude in realizing their objectives, although they are obligated to see that their courses or other presentations reasonably correspond in

3. Public Service

Historical knowledge provides a vital perspective in the analysis of contemporary social problems and political issues and at times may impose obligations on historians to enter policy arenas where difficulties abound. Oftentimes the work of historians may be used by others in ways that historians find objectionable. Some may seek to make partisan out of professionals or to discredit them by charging that

Historians entering public arenas as political advisers, expert witnesses, consultants, legislative witnesses, journalist commentators, or staff may face a *choice of priorities* between professionalism and partisanship. They may want to prepare themselves by seeking advice from other experienced professionals. As historians, they must be sensitive to the complexities of history, the diversity among, historians, and the limits as well as the strengths of their own points of view and experiences and of the discipline itself and its specialities. In such situations, historians must use sources, including the work of other scholars, with great care and should be prepared to explain the methods and assumptions in their research and the relations between evidence and interpretation and should be ready also to discuss alternative interpretations of the subjects being addressed

4. Employment

Although some historians are self-employed, working as writers or contractors, most are employed by academic institutions, corporations, government agencies, law firms, archives, historical societies, museums, historic parks, historic preservation programs, and the media.

As professionals, historians should participate in the making of decisions governing the institutions in which they work and must *share responsibility* for the ways in which their professional principles are applied. They should endeavor to establish in administrations and governing boards a full understanding of the values relevant to hiring and promotion decisions. Academic institutions, for instance, should be advised to adhere closely to the 1966 "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities," jointly formulated by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

Employment principles include *fair practice in recruitment* to ensure that all professionally qualified persons may obtain appropriate opportunities. To accomplish this goal, historical institutions should accurately list all positions of which they are recruiting in appropriate sources, such as the AHA Employment Information section of the newsletter *Perspectives*, and note any contingencies that may affect the availability of the positions. Descriptions and selection criteria should not be altered without reopening the search.

In addition, departments should acknowledge all applications, promptly notify those who are no longer under consideration, and invite finalists to visit the institution. Interviews should be marked by respect for individual dignity, and interviewers should avoid questions that may be in conflict with the letter and spirit of federal anti-discriminatory law.

Every candidate for appointment, reappointment, promotion, tenure, apprenticeship, graduate

student assistantship, award, and fellowship should be evaluated exclusively on *professional criteria*. Those employing historians should not discriminate against them on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, sexual preference, religion, ideology, political affiliation, age, physical handicap, or marital status, except in those cases in which federal law allows specific preference in hiring.

Sexual harassment is a discriminatory practice which is unethical, unprofessional, and threatening to intellectual freedom. It includes all behavior that prevents or impairs an individual's full enjoyment of educational or workplace rights, benefits, environment, or opportunities, such as generalized sexist remarks or behavior; requests for sexual favors; sexual advances; sexual assaults; and the use of professional authority to emphasize inappropriately the sexuality or sexual identity of a student or colleague.

Decisions on personnel matters should be reached in accord with *established procedures* known to all members of the institution and leading to evaluations that are truthful, comprehensive, and consistent with the standards of academic freedom and fair professional practice. Appointees should be informed of the relative weight to be attached to scholarship, teaching, and other service. Procedures should provide for professional review, appropriate notification, and appeal for reconsideration. The candidate should have ample opportunity to provide a record of activities and achievements and evidence of professional merit. The institution should notify the candidate promptly of its decision and the explanation of it, and the candidate should have an opportunity to appeal.

The *dismissal or suspension* of a historian with tenure or on special or probationary appointment must follow procedures of due process equal to those set forth in the AAUP 1940 "Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure."

Historians who work part-time should be compensated in proportion to the share of a full-time work load they carry, including a proportionate share of fringe benefits available to their full-time colleagues, and have access to institutional facilities and support systems. Those likely to remain part-time for extended periods should be offered multi-year contracts with the attendant obligation of participation in governance and administrative tasks and access to institutional appeal and grievance channels; they should also be represented on the appropriate advisory and governing bodies, such as faculty senates.

5. Credentials

Historians are obligated to present their credentials *accurately and honestly* in all contexts. For example, care must be taken not to misrepresent one's qualifications in c.v.s and in grant applications.

6. Implementation

Historians have a professional obligation to encourage the establishment of and to support guidelines and procedures concerning professionals in their employing institutions. Historians also have the responsibility to take appropriate action when confronted with violations of the profession's standards of conduct.

Initially, historians should utilize their employing institutions' grievance machinery. When this is not possible, feasible, or appropriate, alleged violations may be referred to the Professional Division of the AHA for consideration and possible resolution. The Division is not an

investigatory body, although it may solicit and receive documents on cases.

The Division may refer cases to other organizations for formal arbitration or resolution; it may make statements on cases or advise parties to the controversies to do so; and it may provide opportunities for persons to bring their views before the profession.

Addendum on Policies
and Procedures

(Adopted December 1987; amended December 1989)

The Professional Division, elected by the AHA membership, shall have primary responsibility for the interpretation of the AHA Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct and any addenda, for the investigation of complaints brought under it, and for recommendations to Council pertinent to such complaints. Review of a case by the Professional Division cannot and should not, however, be viewed as a substitute for legal action.

All complaints of violation(s) of the AHA Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct should be directed in writing to the Executive Director of the Association, who shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint, send a copy of the Statement and these procedures, and, where necessary, advise the complainant that a formal complaint must include specification of the time, place, persons, and events constituting the alleged violation and cite the section(s) of the Statement alleged to be violated. The Executive Director shall communicate the entire complaint to the other party or parties, together with a copy of the Statement and these procedures (by registered mail with return receipt requested) and request a response within ninety days.

After acknowledgement of the complaint and the receipt of a response from the accused or after the lapse of ninety days without response, the Executive Director shall send copies of the complaint, responses, and supporting documents to all members of the Professional Division and to the complainant and the other party or parties involved. While a case is being considered, the Division shall treat it with confidentiality.

After reviewing materials submitted by the parties involved, the Division shall decide by majority vote whether:

- 1) the case should not be pursued further,
- 2) further information is needed,
- 3) the case should be referred to other organizations for formal arbitration or resolution,
- 4) mediation should be attempted,
- 5) final disposition should be made,

- 6) an advisory opinion should be issued, or
- 7) other action should be recommended to the Council.

If the Division:

1) *decides there should be no further pursuit of the case*, the Vice-President shall communicate the decision and the reasons therefor to the Executive Director, who shall notify all parties. The Division will not normally pursue a case if the dispute has been submitted to litigation in the courts.

2) *decides that further investigation of the case is necessary*, it may direct inquiries through the Executive Director to either the complainant or the other party, with copies of the request and responses thereto in every instance to the other party. All parties involved are under an obligation to respond to such requests. The Division may also secure the services of independent experts.

3) *decides to refer the case to another organization*, the Vice-President shall communicate the decision to the Executive Director, who shall notify all parties and, with the consent of the complainant, forward to the appropriate organization copies of the complaint, responses, and supporting documents together with a request for arbitration or resolution.

4) *decides to attempt mediation*, it shall appoint a mediator from among members of the Association, acceptable to both parties. The mediator shall in due course notify the Division that the matter has been resolved by written agreement of the parties, or if no such resolution has been achieved, the mediator may a) recommend that the matter

5) *makes a final disposition of a case*, it shall convey its findings to all parties involved. be dropped, or b) recommend further action.

6) *decides that an individual case is indicative of a larger problem*, it may issue an advisory opinion or guideline, which shall be published in *Perspectives* and become an addendum to the Statement.

7) *decides that other action is needed such as full public disclosure of an individual case*, it may direct the Vice-President to seek approval for that action from the Council. The Executive Director shall notify all parties of the Division's

recommendation, and the subject of the complaint shall have thirty days to comment in writing before the recommendation is forwarded to the Council. The Council, after examination of the Division's recommendation and comments thereto, shall make a final determination of the case on behalf of the Association, and either dismiss the case or take the recommended action. The Executive Director shall notify all parties of the Council's action.

Inasmuch as the Division is a part of the constitutional structure of the Association, appeals from or criticism of its action should go before the Council.

Statement on Plagiarism

(Adopted May 1986; amended May 1990)

Editor's Note: This statement was prepared by John

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I. Identifying Plagiarism

The word *plagiarism* can be traced to its Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor or plunderer, and *plagiare*, to steal. The expropriation of another author's findings, interpretation, or text, presented thereafter as one's own creation without proper attribution to its actual source, is a cardinal violation of the ethics of scholarship. The plagiarist undermines the credibility of historical inquiry and betrays the code of the entire scholarly community.

In 1956 J. Bronowski, in his book *Science and Human*

Values (Julian Messner, Inc.), declared that:

... [A] II our knowledge has been built up communally.... It follows that we must be able to rely on other people; we must be able to trust their word. That is, it follows that there is a principle which binds society together, because without it the individual would be helpless to tell the true from false. This principle is truthfulness. If we accept truth as an individual criterion, then we have also to make it the cement to hold society together.

Bronowski's injunction applied to the historical profession with special force, since a critical knowledge of the source of everything we examine is so central to our craft. Accordingly,

historians place a high value on procedures for continually weighing the origin and reliability of their work. Book reviews serve this purpose. We expect a bibliography to mark out the range of an author's investigation and to aid the research of others. We require the approval of doctoral dissertations by several well-qualified readers and a further evaluation of manuscripts by expert referees prior to publication. Most especially, we depend on footnotes to validate evidence. By

these measures we declare our commitment to accuracy, responsible judgment, and probity, and thereby affirm our disavowal of shoddy endeavors whether born of haste, inadequate research, faulty calculations, or misrepresentation.

In addition to the harm that plagiarism does to the pursuit of truth, it is also an offense against the literary rights of the original author and the property rights of the copyright owner. Detection can therefore result not only in academic sanctions (such as dismissal from a graduate program, termination of a faculty contract, denial of promotion or tenure) but also civil or criminal prosecution. Civil action depends on the willingness of the injured author or publisher to sue. Criminal cases arise only if the authorities decide to enforce such applicable statutes as the New York State education law (213-b, from *McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York Annotated*, Book 16 [West Publishing, 1984]) against the sale of dissertations, theses, or term papers by commercial entrepreneurs. As a practical matter, plagiarism between scholars rarely gets into court. Publishers are eager to avoid adverse publicity, and an injured scholar is unlikely to seek material compensation for misappropriation of what he or she gave gladly to the world. The real penalty for plagiarism is the abhorrence of the community of scholars.

Plagiarism tests our powers of discrimination because it takes many forms and appears in varying degrees. Most transparently, it involves the use of another person's language and sources without citation. More subtle is the unacknowledged appropriation of concepts, data, and footnotes, all disguised in paraphrased or newly crafted sentences. Alternatively, an artful historian can minimize a significant obligation by casually mentioning that work in an early footnote and thereafter regularly using its analysis without further attribution. What is demonstrably plagiaristic shades off into an unworthy disregard for the contributions of others.

Some types of historical writing, such as textbooks, encyclopedia articles, and popular syntheses, do not require a conscientious display of sources. As knowledge is disseminated to a wide public, it loses some of its personal reference. What belongs to whom necessarily becomes less distinct. But the prohibition against reproducing the sentences of others without quotation or acknowledgment applies just as strongly here as it does in academic discourse.

The threat of plagiarism is always present. The struggle for tenured positions is intense, while the moral responsibilities of individuals to one another are greatly unsettled. The temptation to gain unearned advantage becomes greater now that there are so many publishing outlets for highly specialized research, which very few readers can trace to an unacknowledged source. All those factors are commonly cited in accounting for the astonishingly widespread instances of fraud and plagiarism that have come to light in recent years in the natural sciences. The same factors affect historians.

11. Resisting Plagiarism

All who participate in the community of inquiry, as amateurs or as professionals, as students or as established historians, have an obligation to oppose deception actively in themselves and in others. This obligation bears with special weight on the directors of graduate seminars. They are critical in shaping a young historian's perception of the ethics of scholarship. It is therefore incumbent on graduate teachers to seek opportunities for making the seminar also a workshop in scholarly integrity. After leaving graduate school, every historian will have to depend primarily on vigilant self-criticism. Throughout our lives none of us can cease to question the claims our work makes and the sort of credit it grants to others.

But just as important as the self-criticism that guards us from self-deception is the formation of work habits that automatically protect a scholar from plagiarism. The plagiarist's standard defense—that he or she was misled by hastily taken and imperfect notes—is plausible only in the context of a wider tolerance of shoddy work. A basic rule of good note taking requires every researcher to distinguish scrupulously between exact quotation and paraphrase. A basic rule of good writing warns us against following our own paraphrased notes slavishly. When a historian simply links one paraphrase to the next, even if the sources are cited, a kind of structural plagiarism takes place; the writer is implicitly claiming a shaping intelligence that actually belonged to the sources. Faced with charges of failing to acknowledge dependence on certain sources, a historian usually pleads that the lapse was inadvertent. This excuse will be easily disposed of if scholars take seriously the injunction to check their manuscripts against the underlying texts prior to publication. Historians have a right to expect of one another a standard of workmanship that deprives plagiarism of its usual extenuations.

The second line of defense against plagiarism is organized and punitive. Every institution that includes or represents a body of scholars has an obligation to establish procedures designed to clarify and uphold their ethical standards. Every institution that employs historians bears an especially critical responsibility to maintain the integrity and reputation of its staff. This applies to government agencies, corporations, publishing firms, and public service organizations like museums and archives, as surely it does to educational facilities. Usually, it is the employing institution that is expected to investigate charges of plagiarism (or related offenses) promptly and impartially and to invoke appropriate sanctions when the charges are sustained.

Many learned professions are just beginning to think seriously about the need for general policies on fraudulent research and writing. Usually, employing institutions tend to respond to each case in an ad hoc manner, with responses ranging from extreme indulgence to uncompromising severity. Students are often dealt with more harshly than colleagues. One university recently revoked a Ph.D. awarded seven years earlier on discovering that the dissertation author had plagiarized a research paper written by another scholar. In another recent instance, however, a student found to have misused the work of others was merely required by his doctoral committee to rewrite the offending passages. In one case a full professor was forced to resign for closely paraphrasing or copying passages from other historians without proper acknowledgment. But there is also a strong tendency to hush up lurid charges, and to rest content with a quiet, equivocal apology because of sympathy for a popular colleague assailed by a remote and seemingly meanspirited rival.

It is right that penalties for scholarly misconduct should vary according to the seriousness of the offense. A persistent pattern of deception justifies termination of an academic career; some scattered misappropriations may warrant only a public disclosure. What is troubling is not the variation in responses but rather the reluctance of many scholars to speak out about the possible offenses that come to their notice. No one advocates hasty or ill-founded accusations, and the protections of due process should always apply. If, however, charges of plagiarism or gross impropriety are sustained by an investigating committee, its findings should ordinarily be made public. When appraising manuscripts for publication, reviewing books, or evaluating peers for placement, promotion, and tenure, the trustworthiness of the historian should never be overlooked. After all, scholarship flourishes in an atmosphere of openness and candor, which should, in our opinion, include the scrutiny and discussion of academic deception.

**Advisory opinion Regarding
the Harassment of job Candidates**

(Adopted May 1989)

Several disturbing instances of "academic mugging" have recently come to the attention of the AHA Professional Division. The Division means by this term the practice of individuals attempting to influence the appointment process by, for example, refusing to cooperate with a candidate if he or she is appointed; circulating rumors or other unsubstantiated derogatory information; and pressuring a candidate by phone or mail. The Division finds such actions inappropriate and counter to professional standards of conduct that should at all times govern historians in their relations with one another.

**Statement on Interviewing
for Historical Documentation**

(Adopted May 1989)

Interviewing has become commonplace in historical research focusing on the twentieth century, but unfortunately it is often done and used without proper attention to professional obligations. When they conduct interviews, individual historians too often fail to adhere to the standards now well-established in more formal oral history programs and projects. Historians should recognize that in interviewing they are creating historical documents, and that entails special responsibilities to ensure future access for both verification and research by others. The AHA's Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct establishes basic obligations for historians who engage in interviewing:

Historians should carefully document their findings and thereafter be prepared to make available to others their sources, evidence, and data, including the documentation they develop through interviews

Since historians must have access to sources-archival and other-in order to produce reliable history, they have a professional obligation to preserve sources and advocate free, open, equal, and nondiscriminatory access to them, and to avoid actions which might prejudice future access. Historians recognize the appropriateness of some national security and corporate and personal privacy claims but must protect research collections and other historic resources and make those under their control available to other scholars as soon as possible.

Certain kinds of research and conditions attached to employment or to use of records impose obligations to maintain confidentiality, and oral historians often must make promises to interviewees as conditions for interviews. Scholars should honor any pledges made. At the same time historians should seek definitions of confidentiality before work begins, press for redefinitions when experience demonstrates the unsatisfactory character of established regulations, and advise their readers of the conditions and rules that govern their work. They also have the obligation to decline to make their services available when policies are unnecessarily restrictive.

Recognizing the need for more specific guidelines, the Association's Professional Division consulted with representatives of the Oral History Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Society of American Archivists. The following guidelines resulted from that discussion and are drawn from statements adopted by the Oral History Association and the Society for History in the Federal Government:

1. Interviews should be recorded on tape but only after the person to be interviewed has been informed of the mutual rights and responsibilities involved in oral history, such as editing, confidentiality, disposition, and dissemination of all forms of the record. Interviewers should obtain legal releases and document any agreements with interviewees.
2. The interviewer should strive to prompt informative dialogue through challenging and perceptive inquiry, should be grounded in the background and experiences of the person being interviewed, and, if possible, should review the sources relating to the interviewee before conducting the interview.
3. To the extent practicable, interviewers should extend the inquiry beyond their immediate needs to make each interview as complete as possible for the benefit of others.
4. The interviewer should guard against possible social injury to or exploitation of interviewees and should conduct interviews with respect for human dignity.
5. Interviewers should be responsible for proper citation of oral history sources in creative works, including permanent location.
6. Interviewers should arrange to deposit their interviews in an archival repository that is capable of both preserving the interviews and making them available for general research. Additionally, the interviewer should work with the repository in determining the necessary legal arrangements.
7. As teachers, historians are obligated to inform students of their responsibilities in regard to interviewing and to encourage adherence to the guidelines set forth here.

See also the *Oral History Evaluation Guidelines*, published by the Oral History Association, and John Neuenschwander's *Oral History and the Law* (Oral History Association Pamphlet No. 1, 1985), which provides sample release forms.

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