

Latinidad – 11/12: How to Write History that People Want to Read

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1. Saludos

History books encompass a wide and diverse range of styles, from meticulously researched tomes (1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus by Charles Mann) to delightful chronicles (Consider the Fork: A History of How We Cook and Eat by Bee Wilson) to searing graphic novels (Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History by Art Spiegelman). Good historians must master the tools of the researcher, interviewer, and storyteller. A tall task to be sure, and you can have no better guide than How to Write History that People Want to Read by Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath, an eminently readable primer which offers practical advice on how to prepare for library visits, conduct audio and video interviews, and write a compelling narrative. To learn more, read this month's Q&A with Curthoys and McGrath.

Helping Latinos get published,
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2. Q&A

Ann Curthoys completed her PhD on racism and race relations in colonial New South Wales. Since then, she has followed many intellectual passions: histories of feminism, popular culture, television and journalism, Australian politics, Chinese-Australian immigration, and especially the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. She is an Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow at the University of Sydney. Her publications include Freedom Ride: A Freedomrider Remembers; (with Ann Genovese and Alexander Reilly) Rights and Redemption: History, Law, and Indigenous People; and (with Ann McGrath) How to Write History that People Want to Read. For more information, visit <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/history/staff/profiles/curthoys.shtml>

Ann McGrath is a professor of History and Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous History at Australian National University in Canberra. After

studying at the University of Queensland and LaTrobe University in Victoria, she worked in the Northern Territory, interviewing people who had worked in the cattle industry. Her first book was *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country*. She has published various books and articles on the history of Aboriginal Australians and Colonialism, and has won various prizes for history writing. For more information, visit <http://history.cass.anu.edu.au/people/ann%20mcgrath>

Q: How did you get started as historians?

Curthoys A: I got started at school, as a History student, probably around grade 7. I went on to study history at university, and did my PhD in history. From there, I went to academic life, where I have always taught and researched history.

McGrath A: Whilst at senior school, I came to realize how the world we lived in was changing and that we could understand this better by understanding how history had made us like we were, and how there was always possibility for dramatic changes to improve society. I was also confused as a child as to what 'had happened' to Australia's Aborigines? Where had they gone? It was a great silence in the history that we learnt in schools and that my (non-Aboriginal) family passed down. I felt these silences were lies, and I was keen to know the truth of what had taken place. At University, I came to learn of a history of race bias, restriction, and regulation, and studying history seemed a method by which we could harness social reform in the future.

Q: If you knew then what you know now, what would you have done differently?

Curthoys A: If I had my time again, the main change I would make is to choose a little more carefully where I publish, to aim for high impact journals and publishers.

McGrath A: I would have bought an alarm clock so I didn't miss my boring English communication tutorials.

Q: What three mistakes should newbie history writers avoid?

Curthoys A: 1) Always make sure you know what your main argument or main story is. If you write history without knowing what you really most want to say you will get bogged down in unconnected detail.

2) Don't write without having a good idea about who you are writing for, who your audience is.

3) Don't try to include everything you know about your subject. Choose what is most important, or most revealing, and tell your story.

McGrath A: Passive voice; trying to sound serious and important, and ending up stodgy; putting the exciting or controversial bits in the footnotes.

Q: Alternatively, what are three signs of a top-notch history writer?

Curthoys A: His or her work has originality, clarity, and dramatic tension.

McGrath A: Scintillating prose that draws you in from the first sentence; a confident ability to synthesize and not waffle on; the courage to generalize from small to big but to always pay attention to the micro.

Q: Who is your agent and how did you meet him/her? If you don't have an agent, how did you come to be published by Palgrave MacMillan?

Curthoys A: The book was first published by the University of New South Wales Press, and our publisher there is Philippa McGuinness. She is an excellent publisher, helping academics write for wide audiences, and working with freelance and other authors as well. She made the arrangement with Palgrave MacMillan so that UNSW Press has the rights for Australia and New Zealand, and Palgrave MacMillan for the rest of the world.

McGrath A: I don't have an agent. I have tried to get them and they won't have me! Our original publisher was University of New South Wales Press for the Australian rights. This company is quite commercially oriented and actually contacts various overseas publishers to produce editions that can be circulated in different countries.

Q: Aside from your eminently readable guide, *How to Write History that People Want to Read*, what resources would you recommend to writers who want to learn more about writing history?

Curthoys A: Stephen Pyne, *Voice and Vision*, Harvard University Press, which came out about the same time as our book did.

Mark Tredinnick, *The Little Red Writing Book*, UNSW Press.

McGrath A: Greg Denning's *Historical Performances*; it is about passion and transcendence, about being brave and 'being there' as a historian. Also Minoru

Hokari's Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback, UNSW. His voice has such honesty and integrity and leads the reader along like a first person account. Historians tend to be afraid of revealing their intellectual journeys, yet people are fascinated by such personal quests.

Q: Do you have upcoming projects that my readers should have on their radar?

Curthoys A: Not really. I plan to write a memoir about being a historian but that is a few years off, I think. I am also writing a book with Jessie Mitchell with the provisional title Taking Liberty: How Settlers in Australia gained Self-Government and Indigenous Peoples Lost It.

McGrath A: Heaps. One is a downloadable multi-media history based on Australian national parks called Deepening Histories of Place. Our website should be live soon. Another is on intermarriage in Australia and North America and this is to be published by University of Nebraska Press, hopefully in 2013.

3. Resources

HOW EDITORS THINK

"I read How Editors Think in one sitting and was engaged from beginning to end. It is well written, highly informative, and humorous—I found myself laughing out-loud in a few spots! Thanks for sharing the secrets of the trade."
—Mayra Lazara Dole, author of Down to the Bone

Inspired by my experience as a former Simon & Schuster editor, How Editors Think: The Real Reason They Rejected You reveals what it really takes to get published. For more information, visit:

<http://www.marcelalandres.com/E-book.html>

\$10,000 POETRY PRIZE

Deadline -November 30

The University of North Texas offers the Rilke Prize of \$10,000 to a published book that demonstrates exceptional artistry and vision written by a poet who has published at least two books of poetry. For more information, visit <http://english.unt.edu/creative-writing/poetryprize>

ONLINE CLASSES FOR SCI-FI/FANTASY/HORROR WRITERS

Application Deadline: December 7

Class Dates: January 7 - 30

The Odyssey Writing Workshops Charitable Trust is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping writers of fantasy, science fiction, and horror improve their work. Director Jeanne Cavelos, who was a senior editor at Bantam Doubleday Dell and is a published author, will teach the online course Three-Act Structure in Fantastic Fiction. For more information, visit <http://www.sff.net/odyssey/>

PRISM REVIEW POETRY AND FICTION CONTEST

Deadline: December 15

Poetry and fiction winners will receive \$200 and publication in the Prism Review's 2013 issue. All contest entries will be considered for honorable mention prizes (includes publication) as well. For full details, visit <http://sites.laverne.edu/prism-review/>

COLORADO PRIZE FOR POETRY

Deadline: January 14

An honorarium of \$2000 and publication by the Center for Literary Publishing is given to the writer of a book-length poetry manuscript. For more information, visit

<http://coloradoreview.colostate.edu/colorado-prize-for-poetry/>

SEEKING ESSAYS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Deadline: January 15

Creative Nonfiction Journal seeks essays that illuminate environmental, economic, ethical, and/or social challenges related to the state of the planet and our future. Whether you're deciding it's not worth the trouble to recycle or living off the grid; torn between driving your car, taking public transportation, or riding your bike; or just grappling with which apples to buy (organic? local? the red ones?), they want to hear about it. For more information, visit

<https://www.creativenonfiction.org/submissions/sustainability>

MACDOWELL COLONY

Deadline: January 15

Offers residencies to writers of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. Past attendees have included Pulitzer and National Book Award winners. Some writers who have worked at the Colony are Oscar Hijuelos, Angie Cruz, and Alice Walker. For more information, visit

<http://www.macdowellcolony.org/>

MAYBORN NATIONAL HISTORY WRITING CONTEST

Deadline: May 31

Ten high school and community college students and their teachers/mentors win a free trip to the 2013 Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference, including hotel and meals, to hang out with Pulitzer Prize winners and learn more from the master of the craft, Ron Powers. For more information, visit <http://journalism.unt.edu/maybornconference/student-biography-contest>.

SEEKING BILINGUAL MAGAZINE WRITERS

Skyword in collaboration with Vista (<http://www.vistamagazine.com/>), a bilingual online magazine for Latinas, seeks Spanish/bilingual writers for 300-500 word articles in the categories of Beauty, Style, Home, and Family.

Writers will be paid. To apply, visit:

English: <https://write.skyword.com/join.action?programId=48>

Spanish: <https://write.skyword.com/join.action?programId=39>

JUST PUBLISHED: THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

The Business of Writing: Professional Advice on Proposals, Publishers, Contracts, and More for the Aspiring Writer by literary agent Jennifer Lyons demystifies the publishing industry. Including a foreword by Oscar Hijuelos and contributors offering advice from query letters to children's picture books to self-publishing, The Business of Writing empowers writers to start or continue their careers. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/bz346y2>

JUST PUBLISHED: 8 WAYS TO SAY I LOVE MY LIFE

8 Ways to Say I Love My Life is an anthology by eight accomplished professional Latinas who are trailblazers in their respective fields, with a foreword by singer Vikki Carr, written to inspire Latina and other female readers as well as fortify their spirit by addressing subjects close to their heart. For more information, visit <http://8waystosay.com/>

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“Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunters.”

--African Proverb

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