

Monday, 27.03.2023; 4:15 - 6:00 pm CEST

Lara Putnam, University of Pittsburgh, USA:

Child Labor and Sexual Abuse in a Mobile World: Vexed Asymmetric Dependencies in the Post-Emancipation Greater Caribbean

Abstract:

How did children's experience of labor coercion and sexual assault relate to migration patterns in the wake of emancipation, and how should they be treated in our scholarship today? Attending to the asymmetric dependencies inside of households and communities puts these questions to the fore, and complicates our analysis of post-emancipation geographic and socio-economic mobility. Does the evidentiary base allow us to speak meaningfully about patterns of variation: do we know whether children faced greater risks of abuse at home or abroad, within kin networks or outside them? Or were risks of labor coercion and sexual victimization essentially a constant in children's lives—and if so, would that make it okay for us to leave those risks and experiences out of our narratives? Or are these issues all the more important for scholars to discuss if they were a constant component of children's experiences and concerns? This talk seeks to advance critical dialogue about historians' choices of topic, sources, and methods, asking what kinds of silences become systematic in our accounts of post-emancipation labor migration, and why. As an evidentiary base for raising these questions, the paper draws on judicial records from late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Greater Caribbean migratory destinations including Venezuela, Panama, and Costa Rica.

Bio:

Lara Putnam is UCIS Research Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh. She researches social movements and political participation in local, national, and transnational dimensions. Her articles have appeared in journals including the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, the *Journal of British Studies*, the *Journal of Sport History*, and *Modernism/Modernity*. Her sole-authored books include *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (UNC Press, 2002) and *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (UNC Press, 2013). Putnam has served as president of the Conference on Latin American History and consulting editor for digital initiatives for the *American Historical Review*. Her 2016 *AHR* article, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast," helped advance discussion of the implications of technological change for historians' research practice.

In recent years Putnam has used ethnographic and oral historical methods to explore shifts in grassroots politics in rust belt Pennsylvania and beyond. Her sole-authored and collaborative publications in this vein have appeared in public-facing and scholarly venues including the 2020 volume *Upending American Politics: Polarizing Parties, Ideological Elites, and Citizen Activists from the Tea Party to the Anti-Trump Resistance*, ed. Theda Skocpol and Caroline Tervo (Oxford University Press) as well as the *Washington Post*, *New Republic*, *Vox*, and *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*. She is currently co-lead of the Southwest PA Civic Resilience Initiative of the Pitt Disinformation Lab at Pitt's Institute for Cyber Security.