

# Global Histories

A Student Journal

## 10-Year Retrospective

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## 10-Year Retrospective

As the current Chief Editor of *Global Histories* it is with great pleasure that I bring to you a retrospective on *Global Histories*' 10-Year Anniversary. This collaborative effort was put together by previous Chief Editors\* to give a sense of how the journal has changed over the years and their experiences as editors. The majority of this is in their words.

For each Chief Editor, their path to the journal was different. Initially, *Global Histories* was merely an idea born from the first Global History Student Conference held in spring 2015. According to Alexandra Holms, Chief Editor from 2015-2017, "The journal came out of the first Global History Student Conference (2015). Having made this very successful first event and gathered all these scholars from around the world, the student organisers wanted to see where else they could take this potential they'd brought together. However, Alexandra in their time as Chief Editor and with a new team laid the groundwork for the future. Paul Sprute, Chief Editor after Alexandra from 2017-2018 noted, "when taking over from the first editor, appointed to consolidate the initial project, a sound structure was already in place, including a solid mission statement and an extensive mailing list as well as the journal website and the procedure of organizing the student conference." With this base *Global Histories* continued and began to attract more student volunteers. Ruby Guyot, the longest serving Chief Editor from 2020-2023 describes why she joined. "Working with *Global Histories* was something I would have done even if I did not become editor. I've always loved to write, and count my editorial skills as fairly strong. During my tenure as editor, I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to engage with other writers from around the globe." *Global Histories* was undeterred by the COVID-19 Pandemic. In fact it was during the pandemic that joined up precisely because *Global Histories* offered a means of getting to know one another. Phoebe Ka Laam Ng, Chief Editor from 2023-2024 recalls, "My journey with *Global Histories* began in the autumn of 2020, when COVID-19 struck the world. I missed human connection outside of the online classrooms. When I saw the recruitment email from the journal team, I knew it was my chance to meet other students, and I had no hesitation in joining the team, which was a decision I have never regretted." Phoebe echoed Paul in reflecting upon their time as Chief Editor, "Running both journal and conference, has not been an easy job, and I am always grateful for the precious support from our team." I myself came to *Global Histories* from my previous career in education and a desire to help others reach their potential, in addition to wanting to make friends and meet people.



Paul Sprute  
Chief Editor 2017–2018.

From the start though, *Global Histories* has been a collaborative effort. Not only between the editors and the authors but within the program itself. Alexandra said of the first conference organizers that, “I had just begun the MA, so I hadn’t been part of the journey at that point, but the conference organisers pitched the idea to us newcomers and their enthusiasm was contagious.” Overall, Alexandra said that “I learned a great deal about collaboration and collective organisation, and the value of communication and trust in the group.” Such sentiments preserved, when Paul took over as Chief Editor, he recalled that “... there was a group of very dedicated and thoughtful students running things at least as professionally as any other academic journal.” Ruby noted that, “Part of what also makes *Global Histories* so special is its ‘by students, for students’ creed. Working with a team of editors, proofreaders, and graphic designers from our program gave me the opportunity to engage with really talented classmates from across cohorts.” The ethos of “by students, for students” reflects the process of the journal. Almost all major decisions are taken collectively, either through a vote or a consensus process. Selection of articles for publication, choice of editors, as well as final copy editing are done without interference or guidance from faculty of Freie Universität Berlin or Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. These processes have been institutionalized over the course of the journal, with for example the annual meeting for selecting the attendees of the Global History Student Conference becoming an anticipated social gathering that goes an entire day, filled with debate and discussion. The process of revision of articles was also a conduit of collaboration and learning to work with others, Ruby said of the process that, “It was deeply meaningful to spend months with someone in the revision process, going back and forth to bring out the best argument possible, to receive the feedback that they had learned a lot

from the experience.” Paul concurred describing both *Global Histories* and the Global History Student Conference as “...great chances to get to know the diversity of writing and projects of students around the world and to make a few contacts.”

In its 10-year history, *Global Histories* evolved into an established part of the Global History MA program at the Freie Universität, to the point that now all current Chief Editors give a presentation at the welcoming lecture for each new cohort of students. In this presentation students are given a summary of *Global Histories* and the Student Conference and are invited to join the journal. However, such institutional organization did not initially exist. The first issue was published as a follow up to the first Student Conference held in 2015, with the published articles reflecting the presentations at the conference. Alexandra recalls of the early days, “The greatest challenge was getting off the ground! We had all these amazing authors from across the globe willing to write for us, but we didn’t have a shape for the vessel to put them all in. We had practical challenges as well as conceptual questions. We had to build a website and learn how to use the journal software, as well as decide what style guide we would use, how we would evaluate submissions. There were organizational matters to determine; how were we going to make decisions, who would be responsible for what? More fundamentally, what did we want the journal to look like?”



Ruby Guyot  
Chief Editor 2020–2023.

These questions to some extent have been answered. Alexandra and their class set up the ground work so that under Paul, there were very few structural changes to the journal. However, the journal continued to grow and diversify. Under both Paul and Alina Rodriguez, Chief Editor from 2018–2020, *Global Histories*, published some of its largest and most diverse issues, including two special issues; one on German Migration to North America and another on German-Latin American political and cultural relations. According

to Paul, “Both *Global Histories* and the student conference were always open to anything that was intuitively global history. This intuition was, of course, shaped through the exciting teaching of many lecturers in the Global History M.A. program but also included our very own preferences, from reviewing a book series of global histories of edibles (specifically Rice and Herring) to an Australian murder mystery in the spy milieu. Every edition was done in a different constellation and a learning experience for everyone involved. That is the perpetual potential of both projects.”

Under Phoebe’s tenure as editor there has been a move to standardize the format of the journal’s layout (font, spacing, and page order) in the name of streamlining the editing process. The separate position of Graphic Designer was created during Phoebe’s tenure as Chief Editor by Cecilia Burgos Cuevas, a volunteer and student of the program who through their own effort established this position over two years of work. This new position spoke to the continued institutionalization of *Global Histories* within the program. Additionally, Phoebe, in the spirit of the “by students, for students” ethos, organized the first Student Salon at the 2023 conference, which they described as, “...a safe space for students to address their concerns in the ‘unconventional academic’ topics: racial, gender, and social inequality and resistance in academia.” The third Student Salon will take place at the 2025 Global History Student Conference.



Phoebe Ka Laam Ng  
Chief Editor 2023–2024.

Both *Global Histories* and the conference have grown immensely over the last few years. Under both Ruby and Phoebe, social media accounts were set up to promote both events, which have boosted submissions and according to Phoebe this “...significantly boosted our team’s spirit and made us proud.” Additionally *Global Histories* has been invited to collaborate with other student journals, though the impact of this remains to be seen. At this 10-year anniversary it is important to reflect on the origins of the journal. Alexandra

described the difficulties of the first issue, “Drafting our focus, which is still in the ‘about’ section of the website today, gave us a clear shared goal to aim for. Right from the beginning, we were very clear that we didn’t want this to be a ‘one and done’ thing, but something that would last.” They also note that “I think the whole team were both proud and very relieved to get that first issue online.” Finally, Alexandra notes that without support the journal would not have gotten very far “We were very lucky to have the support of Sebastian Conrad, who saw the value of what we were doing and had the foresight to provide financial support through departmental funding of the conference and a student assistant position, right from the start. Without that support, the journal and conference teams would have faced significantly more challenges in terms of continuity and production. ”



Evan Liddle  
Chief Editor 2024 – Present.

However, this is not to say that things have always been on a positive growth oriented trajectory. More recent issues of *Global Histories* have been smaller, if more closely edited than the pre-2020 issues. While *Global Histories* aims to publish twice a year, the reality is that this has become increasingly difficult to achieve over the last few years and *Global Histories* may move to a single yearly issue. The reasons for this are varied, but I believe it reflects two major changes. On the journal’s side, the increasing financial and social difficulties of living as a student in Berlin has resulted in lower turnouts in regards to university extracurriculars. A quick survey of previous issues of *Global Histories* shows a general decline in the size of the editorial teams since 2020. All of the editors of *Global Histories* are student volunteers at the Freie Universität, giving their time and effort to make this possible. The difficulties of Berlin and in a more general sense, the increasing workload being placed on university graduate students worldwide redirects the time and effort of our hardworking volunteers.

*Global Histories* has also faced its own challenges and its own limitations. There was a notable case of alleged plagiarism from a scholar in a different country, which resulted in the retraction of the article in question. This incident highlighted the limits of a student journal such as *Global Histories*, the editors are volunteers and not privy to all of the historical debates in foreign academia. Hand in hand with this, the language limits of the journal and its volunteers reflect the limits of global history as a field. While *Global Histories* has published articles not in English, namely in German and Spanish, and published reviews of materials not in English, these remain exceptions not rules. Part of the reason is the demographics of the Global History Program MA; those enrolled in the program must demonstrate English fluency, which already limits who might join the program and therefore become volunteer editors. Additionally, there is the difficulty in finding native speakers in other languages to act as editors for hypothetical pieces, but also a certain level of uncertainty from Chief Editors, myself included, who would be required to sign off on an article without being able to access it ourselves. This naturally limits the number and the nature of the articles that *Global Histories* can publish.

The position of Chief Editor has left an important imprint on those who served the role. Phoebe, in reflecting on her time as editor, indicates that, “One moment I treasured at the conference was realising how motivating it was for other international students to see my representation as a person of colour student leader, which encouraged them to open up and share their thoughts. The leadership experience at the *Global Histories* was eye-opening and a valuable reflection and recognition for myself...I would describe the job as an opportunity to discover one’s potential in professionalism, not just in academic editing but also in project management, social media promotion, and interpersonal soft skills.” Ruby comments on the responsibility that the role embodies, “As a team, we worked hard to curate articles that were truly global, insightful, and diverse. Yet there were many things that still went unsaid, particularly from the student perspective. I wanted to speak about the insecurity and uncertainty we faced during the global pandemic; the climate crisis, the ethics of academic work under global warming; and the sexual harassment, discrimination, and intimidation student researchers face in academia, especially as these occurred within our program. I wanted to speak about these things in my letters, but I did not.” It was in response to this particular incident of sexual assault committed by a professor against a student in the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin that *Global Histories* has implemented a code of conduct in 2024 with resources for those who have experienced such violence or feel unsafe within the program. Paul, in his words, contemplates the meaning of the project as a whole, “Rather than anything concise or comprehensive, *Global Histories* appeared as a forum and a platform to me. As a project, *Global Histories* was working both towards the

inside and outside. I'm still delighted whenever I come across anyone whom I met through these intense projects, be it former colleagues in the editorial team or authors and presenters, and see what they're working on now. It was a delight to do *Global Histories* and I hope it will remain one to this and future editorial teams." Alexandra remembers her time as editor in terms of the sacrifices she made, "...at the time I was living in an apartment without internet, so for me that meant many long December nights slogging away at it the Grimm Zentrum..." and, yet "I ended up becoming an editor and proofreader with a primary focus on academic history texts, so I guess it made an impact on me!" I cannot say with certainty how this position will impact me, but all I can say with certainty is that the work and effort of those that came before me serves as a point of pride to make sure that *Global Histories* remains a "by students, for students" publication, dedicated to helping budding young scholars get their foot in the door.

*\*Both another previous editor and myself reached out to Alina Rodriguez, who served as Chief Editor from 2018-2020, multiple times, but we were unable to get in touch with them. We wish to acknowledge their work as Chief Editor, even if they were unable to contribute their own perspective.*