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# Interview of Chelsi Arellano

**Chelsi Arellano** 00:00

The story in New England is the Massachusetts Bay, they had their own charter since 1621 that gave them a lot of different rights. They were able to have their own council. They essentially governed themselves for this entire period. And with James the Second coming into power, he wanted to kind of shore up his power in the colonies, bring them closer to England. And so, he takes away their charter, creates this Dominion of New England, which is kind of all the New England colonies put together under royal control. And the colonists, particularly in Boston, in Massachusetts Bay, are just not happy with this.

**Cassie Cloutier** 00:44

[Intro music fades in] Historians and Their Histories is a podcast by the Massachusetts Historical Society. It introduces listeners to our community of researchers. We learn about the paths they took to become a student of the past and the projects they are working on at the MHS. I am Cassie Cloutier, Associate Director of Research at the MHS. Today we are sitting down with Chelsi Arellano, Assistant Professor of History at Broward College. She is a recipient of the Samuel Victor Constant Fellowship from the Society of Colonial Wars in Massachusetts. My first question is why did you become an historian?

**Chelsi Arellano** 01:21

Well, thank you for having me on this is really exciting. My path to history, I think, was actually through English and literature. I think as a kid, I didn't realize how much I actually liked history, although, kind of looking back, I really did love it and so, but what I liked about history was the stories. And so, I would read novels. I was reading, like, all these classical novels in middle school, Alexander Dumas, Jane Austen, and so I was like, I want to be an English major. And so, I went to the University of South Florida for my Bachelor's. Started as an English major, and I just wanted more. And so, I doubled major into history. And once I started taking the history classes, I just realized this is what I wanted to do. And I minored in anthropology as well. And really kind of up until the end of my Bachelor's program, I was really unsure of what I wanted to do, and so I took a gap year between my

bachelor's and my master's, and it was really between I knew I wanted to go to grad school, but I didn't know what I wanted to do in grad school. And really the person who helped me along was Kees (Case) Boterbloem, who was a professor at the University of South Florida. Great guy. He is a professor of history, and he taught 17th and 18th century European history. That was, like the first history class I took, and it was so great. He introduced me, kind of to the topic that I'm working on now in of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and so that kind of project that I'd written just like an eight page paper on, was still in my mind, and so I knew I wanted to do history, and so I applied to do the master's program at the University of South Florida under Kees Boterbloem, and my project just continued to grow from there.

**Cassie Cloutier** 03:21

Yeah, so it sounds like the stories really drew you in to the field. Is that kind of the approach you take as you're writing history?

**Chelsi Arellano** 03:28

Definitely, it's I think it's about the stories. It's about the narrative that you're kind of building. And obviously it's a narrative based on facts, but it's also, I wanted to uncover how people actually lived and acted and just were in these periods. And I think the Glorious Revolution period is such an interesting time because for people who don't know, the Glorious Revolution is this time in which there's a revolt in England, where in James the Second is the king. He's kind of introducing these pro-Catholic policies, and people just don't like that. And so, William the Third, who is going to become the king, comes in and launches this attack, invades England, and he's invited to become the next king, along with his wife Mary the Second. And it's just kind of seen historically as this peaceful revolt, although it's not as peaceful as kind of the idea of Glorious Revolution kind of invokes, but it's just this kind of tumultuous period in which it's really early in the imperial era as well. And so, things are just changing very rapidly. And I really wanted to look at the changes, and not only kind of the big picture, but how they were affecting people across the entire entirety of the Empire.

**Cassie Cloutier** 04:55

Can you talk maybe a little bit more about your experience in grad school and how you got to your dissertation?

**Chelsi Arellano 05:02**

Yeah. So, like I said, in my undergrad, I worked on a short project. That's, it was just a term paper in a kind of upper-class history, upper-level history course, and it was about William the Third in the Glorious Revolution. It was very kind of simple. I was a baby historian. And so, like I said, that project kind of stayed in. So, when I went into the master's program, I wanted to do something with this and so the master's program, it was a terminal master so, it was just two years, and I decided to do the non-thesis track. So, I didn't write a grand thesis at the end because talking with my major professor, it was this was something that had a lot of stuff written about it. And so, my master's program was about reading the secondary sources, the literature that has already been written about in finding my own path into doing this project. And what really helped me was I decided to go to Florida State University for my PhD to write the project I was envisioning under Charles Upchurch, and he is a gender and sexuality professor of British history. So he really helped me really fulfill that angle that I was looking for, and thinking about the entirety of the Empire, thinking about what was happening in India, in the Caribbean and in New England, which is what brought me here, and also thinking about not just kind of people as this blob, but as what are the races, what are the genders, the class levels of the people who are actually involved in all these different areas and so that's kind of what my dissertation project was about. And I applied for this fellowship with the intention of using it for my dissertation. But plans never go as proposed in some ways, which in this case, was really good. So, the idea was, I got the fellowship in 2024 I was going to come here that summer right before I wrote my fifth chapter, which is about the American colonies. Instead, I got a job, and so I kind of had to push it to this summer and write my dissertation without coming to this archive, which, thankfully, the MHS has so much great material in the digital collections. So, I was able to write the chapter, and I had gone to England, to the National Archives at Kew the British Library, which had some stuff as well. And so, I was able to write it, but I was really excited to come back to this chapter, and to kind of come back to this project, and come to the MHS, so I could find kind of the people.

**Cassie Cloutier 08:02**

That makes me wonder, what are some of the challenges that you've faced as an historian, maybe with this project, or just in general?

**Chelsi Arellano 08:11**

I mean being a historian has a lot of challenges in so many areas. Not to say that I don't live a great life, and it's exactly the life I chose. But I think some of the biggest challenges was just learning that I could write without feeling like the research was done because the research is never done. There's always something else to look at. There's probably 800 other archives I could have gone to that has something for me to look at. So many secondary sources to read through, and you think, 'oh, my argument's not going to actually be right. What if there's someone who's written this already? What if this primary source in this archive that says the exact opposite of what I'm trying to say?' But I think after doing the dissertation, which was this huge challenge at the end of the PhD, I'm sure everyone will tell you that I got to realize why you do the dissertation at the end of your PhD because you just need to learn how to write and just be done with the project to get it to the next level. And that's what I'm really looking at is getting it to that next level, trying to work my dissertation into a book project, and I knew that the first step doing that was coming here and looking at the archives and kind of shoring up that last chapter that was kind of written in this kind of a rush of the fall semester. I had to write this last chapter. I just started this new job in which I teach a five-five load. And it was, I was teaching two different classes, which I'd never taught before. It was a very hectic part of my life. Again, wouldn't trade it for anything else. We made it through. But I'm just really happy I'm here finally.

**Cassie Cloutier 10:02**

So, you've told us a little bit about this project, the dissertation, and what brings you to the MHS, but I'm wondering can you tell us a bit more about you know, it sounds like the project is kind of England based, but you also come from Florida. So how do you get to New England? How does that fit in to this project?

**Chelsi Arellano 10:20**

Yeah, so New England, it's such a kind of interesting thing that happens up here during this period. So, the project itself, again, it's kind of about England. It's about the entire British Empire. But the story in New England is the Massachusetts Bay, they had their own charter since 1621 that gave them a lot of different rights. They were able to have their own council. They essentially governed themselves for this entire period. And with James the Second coming into power, he wanted to kind of shore up his power in the colonies, bring them closer to England. And so, he takes away their charter, creates this Dominion

of New England, which is kind of all the New England colonies put together under royal control. And the colonists, particularly in Boston, in Massachusetts Bay, are just not happy with this. So, at first they send people to London to go talk to the king try to get their charter back. But after the Glorious Revolution happens in England, in which the old king is deposed, the colonists say, 'Well, why are we just waiting around when they just deposed the old king?' And so, there's the Bostonian Revolt of 1689. The Glorious Revolution happens in November of 1688. Once they get news of this, which takes a bit because of travel, in April of 1689, the Bostonian people revolt and overthrow the governor of the Dominion of New England put them in prison and say we're ruling over ourselves again. And it's the struggle for their own role, for their own right of their previous charter. And so, it's this very direct correlation with the Glorious Revolution and what's happening in the North American colonies. And it's not just Boston that revolts, that's kind of the main focus of that chapter, but you also see Leisler's Rebellion in New York. There's some things happening in New Hampshire. And so, it's this story about New England. There's this fight over Martha's Vineyard that's really funny. And so, it's a story that's kind of in New England that I really wanted to tell, particularly bringing in all classes of people. Because one of the things that brought my attention to this is while I was in the British Library, I came across a letter from Increase Mather and he's talking about the fact that the gentlemen of Boston have to revolt because the masses are rising up, and they need to stop the masses from making this a massacre and killing people, and kind of taking control of what's happening. So, I'm like, what are the masses doing here? Why are they so affected, because this isn't just a legal issue, then it's something else. And so that's why I really came here to look at and kind of the story I want to uncover at the MHS.

**Cassie Cloutier** 13:32

So, it sounds like you might be looking at papers related to Increase Mather, but can you tell us about the collections you're using?

**Chelsi Arellano** 13:39

So many things. Yes, certainly Increase Mather, Cotton Mather's papers, Samuel Sewall, some of the big figures here that you have some digital collections of, and also actual collections to see, the pre-revolutionary diaries that you have on microfilm. Great. I spend the mornings in the reading room, the afternoons on the computer looking at microfilm, and I'm really looking mostly at kind of these personal diaries and kind of personal letters because the nature of kind of what I do is looking for maybe women,

maybe the enslaved or free African Americans and poor, lower class people who were part of these masses. And so, these aren't things you're going to find necessarily in these official records. It's what people write about in their diaries, in the journals or in the letters, talking to different people about what's actually happening. And so, there's been a lot of really good things, I think, particularly looking at the papers of John Usher, who was the treasurer to the government under Governor [Edmund] Andros, who was the governor who was overthrown, you see a lot of kind of receipts from the government. And in those receipts, you'll see names of people who are trading with the government with these different entities. And in these receipts, you see women trading different goods. So like, you'll see, I think, a Mary Cotton, who was trading for rum from Barbados. And so, you also see the connection to other colonies. And so that's kind of one of the ways you can kind of see how women are involved.

**Cassie Cloutier** 15:21

So that's a really interesting use of sources. So, you're using like these receipts and like these diaries, can you tell us a little bit about how or what that is showing about these diverse groups of people in during this time period?

**Chelsi Arellano** 15:37

Yeah. So, I think one thing that I think every historian wants to find, but kind of never finds is like the document. And I found the document. It was a letter from [William] Blathwayt to [Edward] Randolph who were two kind of governmental figures, in which he says, you know, and I'm going to paraphrase, he's not using the nicest language, but there are women, people of color, and the poor, running through the streets during this revolt. And I'm like, yes, that's exactly what I want to find just the people and kind of descriptions. That's not just these upper class, middle class merchant men, but just women and people of color going through the streets and so kind of showing that they are involved in this and involved in ways that are kind of unexpected and kind of expected, that women do trade and are part of, kind of some of these markets. Also in John Usher's letters as he gets older as you get into the 1700s you see letters directed to John Usher mentioning his wife. And so why was his wife more involved in kind of the business as he's getting older? She's a bit younger. And I get more questions coming up than kind of results, but these questions are really important, and so I think I've really uncovered a lot of what I wanted to in really just showing how popular this revolt was, how involved that people of different identities cared about the state of that colony.

**Cassie Cloutier** 17:20

Well, I'm really glad that the fellowship has proven so successful and that you've found what you're looking for. You had mentioned some different regions that this involves. So, what other archives have you looked at in the States for this project?

**Chelsi Arellano** 17:35

This is actually my first stateside archive. Yeah, because again, I kind of I had applied to the MHS, and I think I got the acceptance that I had won this fellowship, and then a week later, I got the news that I'd gotten a job. And so, I was just like, there's so much to juggle again, finishing my dissertation. So I was like, I think what I was thinking was I'm just going to do this one fellowship that I have, and I'm going to take the time to think about where I'm going to find the time to do these other kind of archival digs I really want to do. And so, I think coming to the MHS first was definitely what I wanted to do, because Massachusetts is really the anchor of that chapter, because it is the closest kind of revolt to the Glorious Revolution and these kind of other areas I definitely want to go to the New York Historical Society, to different archives, and I know y'all offer a regional consortium that I am definitely going to put my name in for eventually.

**Cassie Cloutier** 18:49

So, with the time that you have remaining at the MHS, is there anything else that you hope to uncover?

**Chelsi Arellano** 18:56

I've feel like I've been so lucky and great with kind of getting so much from the MHS, like, what even is there to uncover? But there's so much to uncover. I mean, you have such great staff. Talking to the reference librarians and everyone has been so helpful. I remember I went to ask I was like, hey, is there kind of a list or something, of all the churches in Boston kind of during this period. And they're like, oh, actually, we have this on CD ROM. Just get on one of computers, and there is a list of churches in Boston. And I'm like, that is great. And so even things that I was I didn't know I would find, I found, and I am coming kind of to the end of it, and so, like I said, there's like, so many things to find, and so many things I have found. The research is never done. So, I definitely want to come back and look at other things later down the road, particularly in kind of these church records, kind of another kind of

unexpected find was looking at security bonds of people that aren't kind of allowed or kicked out of Boston in the lower classes. Another great kind of suggestion from a reference librarian. And so much to look at so little time, but so much time also.

**Cassie Cloutier** 20:23

How do you think your research will help audiences better understand the past?

**Chelsi Arellano** 20:29

I mean, I look into revolutions, revolts, rebellions, all these different things. I think the past and kind of the present are really connected. And this is a story about a colony that was under tyranny in which they were trying legal routes to fix this tyranny, and when those legal routes didn't work, they decided to rise up and fight against that tyranny. And so, I think that's a story that kind of transcends time of kind of trying to do what is right through legal routes, through kind of the right way. And then when that right way doesn't work, you kind of have to turn to what it might be considered the wrong way of rebellion, of revolution, revolt, which is also just the American story is definitely connected to kind of the story of the American Revolution as well.

**Cassie Cloutier** 21:25

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