

'A worthwhile trace of myself': The Autobiographical Essays of World Youth Forum Delegates 1947-1972



Australian
National
University

BIOGRAPHY WORKSHOP
SERIES 2023



Between 1947 and 1972 nearly 800 teenagers aged 17-19 were selected to represent their countries at a World Youth Forum in New York, run for most of that time by the New York Herald Tribune.

In addition to writing an essay, usually on the topic 'The World We Want', and being interviewed by a panel, generally of US government officials and local education authorities, participants were asked to write a short autobiography. Unlike the essays, which sadly have not survived, 665 biographies survive, and provide a fascinating insight into the ways teenagers from multiple cultures across a period of 25 years chose to describe their lives to their fellow delegates, their host families, US forum organisers and, ultimately the world.

This paper reflects on these biographies, discussing why existing scholarship on life-writing and youth self-presentation is surprisingly unhelpful when dealing with this extraordinary archive. The biographies vary considerably in length, detail and style; by identifying common threads along with significant differences, this paper hopes to draw some conclusions about the ways young people from different cultural backgrounds, in different decades and of both sexes expressed themselves on the world stage.



Dr Catherine Bishop holds a DECRA postdoctoral fellowship at Macquarie University, researching a history of Australian businesswomen since 1880. Her first book, *Minding Her Own Business: Colonial Businesswomen in Sydney* (NewSouth, 2015), won the 2016 Ashurst Business Literature Prize. She is also the author of *Women Mean Business: Colonial Businesswomen in New Zealand* (Otago University Press, 2019) and *Too Much Cabbage and Jesus Christ: Australia's 'Mission Girl' Annie Lock* (Wakefield, 2021). With Jennifer Aston, she co-edited *Female Entrepreneurs in the Long Nineteenth Century: A Global Perspective* (Palgrave, 2020). She is currently writing a history of the *New York Herald Tribune* World Youth Forum and a short book provisionally titled *Blackmail, Bigamy and Bedhopping*.

Biography Workshop National
Centre of Biography (ANU)

Time:

Thursday 30 March
2023, 11:00am-12.30pm

In Person:

Seminar Room 6.71
Level 6 RSSS Building
146 Ellery Crescent

Zoom option:

Meeting ID:
849 0058 9945

Password: 630803

Join Zoom Meeting:
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