One year ago, the Kenneth Burke Society postponed the Triennial Conference due to COVID-19. The conference has now been rescheduled for June 24-25, 2021, as a remote event. Although 2020 is (thankfully) in the past, the conference theme of “Kenneth Burke in 20/20: Seeing the Past, Envisioning the Future” will still guide our gathering. We envision a lively mix of synchronous and asynchronous presentations anchored by two keynote addresses from Dr. Theon Hill of Wheaton College and Dr. Kyle Jensen of Arizona State University.

Attending KBS 2020(1) will be free for all participants who are members of the KBS. Not yet a member? Student memberships are only $10 for a year, and regular memberships are only $25!

In order to check virtual conference fatigue, we plan on having a slightly truncated schedule over two days, with no concurrent sessions. Six live sessions will be complemented by asynchronous presentations that will be made accessible for all those registered for the conference.

Schedule (all times EST)

Day 1, Thursday June 24, 2021

10 am—Keynote, Dr. Theon Hill

11-12:15—Session 1

12:15-1:00—Lunch break

1-2:15—Session 2

2:15-3:30—Session 3

3:30-4:30—Social Hour

Day 2, Friday, June 25, 2021

10 am—Keynote, Dr. Kyle Jensen

11-12:15—Session 4

12:15-1:00—Lunch break

1-2:15—Session 5

2:15-3:30—Session 6

3:30-4:30—Social Hour

Submissions may be 350-word paper or panel proposals. They can be directly submitted via the following link: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeNXmsDZbM-S9URRvx7jUQy3jRF_t6EwJVxic3sLi5d8nKCag/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1&flr=0>

Proposals should be submitted by April 30, with acceptances notified by May 15.

For more information, and to join the KBS, please visit: For more information, and to join the KBS, please visit: <https://www.kbjournal.org/join_kbs>

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About the Conference Theme

In our current moment, appeals to history are commonplace—whether in slogans seeking to recapture an idyllic “America,” in news stories seeking to link current white supremacist violence to that of past decades, or in academics’ reflection upon the past practices and attitudes that continue to do consequential work in the present. As Burke would remind us, of course, these appeals are quite complex; our narratives of the past are dialectically equivalent to our assumptions about the nature of the present.

Yet, there is another complication at work here. It is the contention of this conference, and of its organizers, that Burke’s writings and thought remain vitally relevant to the analysis and navigating of the conditions of contemporary social life—here in the US and across the globe. Yet, calling us to embrace Burke for the future does require that we take stock of our past. The Kenneth Burke Society, and Burke Studies itself, are, of course, deeply implicated in the conversations started in many disciplines regarding the kinds of scholarship, and scholars, who have been traditionally valued and elevated, and the kinds of systemic inequalities that this has fostered. The Society, and the field of Burke Studies in general, has—without, to draw on a quote from Burke, deliberate intent upon the part of anyone—for too long functioned as an exclusionary space, reproducing an equation of Burke with “white” and “male.”

This has worked to denigrate and marginalize work by the many women (starting with Marie Hochmuch Nichols) who have been excellent readers and scholars of Burke. This has also worked to discourage students and faculty of color from finding a home in the Society—and has rendered illegible those scholars of color who do, and have done, excellent work with Burke’s texts.

Although the KBS is not alone in this regard, this is our past. The task, then, is to make something different for the future, to find possibilities in the past that were not seized (by Burke, or those who followed in his footsteps), possibilities that can aid in that effort. The conference theme thus calls for papers and proposals that explore the relevance of Burkean thought for collectively envisioning—and speaking into existence—a new and different kind of future. As Burke says in his afterword to Attitudes Toward History, “throughout the History (the Changing Story) of Acceptances and Rejections there broods the fantastic Maybe of the transformations.” Over the course of the convention, a combination of keynote speakers, synchronous sessions, and asynchronous presentations will engage in a collective effort to find the hopeful and just Maybes in our History of Acceptances and Rejections.