



2019-2020 HISTORY AWARDS

JOHN MCCLELLAND JR. AWARD

DR. QUIN'NITA COBBINS-MODICA



The longstanding **John McClelland, Jr. Award** is presented for an article or book excerpt that most exhibits the readability and interest sought after by *COLUMBIA* magazine.

John McClelland Jr. Award



**The 2019-2020 John McClelland Jr.
Award is presented to
Dr. Quin'Nita Cobbins-Modica.**

Dr. Quin'Nita Cobbins-Modica receives the 2020 John McClelland Jr. Award for her article, *Finding Peace Across the Ocean: Daisy Tibbs Dawson and the Rebuilding of Hiroshima*, published in Washington State Historical Society's spring 2019 issue of *COLUMBIA: The Magazine for Northwest History*.

The article is a profile of Daisy Lee Tibbs Dawson, an African American woman who lived in Seattle and who traveled to Japan after World War II to assist with rebuilding efforts in Hiroshima (which had been devastated by an American atomic bomb in August 1945). Dawson was also a Head Start teacher and administrator in Seattle for many years, before passing away in 2013.

Dr. Cobbins-Modica is an historian of African American women's history in the American West and teaches courses in African American history and Civil Rights across the Pacific Northwest. Dr. Cobbins-Modica held a postdoctoral teaching position in the Department of History at Gonzaga University and in 2020, stepped into the role of executive director of BlackPast.org.

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As an educator, Dr. Quin’Nita Cobbins-Modica teaches courses in U.S. history, African American women’s history, and the Pacific Northwest that consider the intersectional ways in which race, gender, and class shape notions of freedom, resistance, and citizenship in society.

Her current research project examines the history of Black women’s politics, activism, and leadership in Seattle. In 2017, she co-authored a book, *Seattle on the Spot*, that explored photographs of Black Seattle through the lens of photographer Al Smith. She has also worked as a researcher for the Northwest African American Museum, and as an exhibition co-curator and historical consultant for the Museum of History & Industry, both located in Seattle, Washington.

Quin’Nita is executive director of [BlackPast.org](https://blackpast.org), the largest online collection of African American and

Global African history, where she has the opportunity to combine historical practice and scholarship with technology.

When asked about her goals for BlackPast.org, she replied that an important motivator in her work is “Expanding and enriching historical content on African American women—who have been pivotal in everyday struggles for political, economic, and social justice—in order to bring their stories to the forefront of a global audience.”

Dr. Cobbins-Modica shared that “I’d like to see Black women’s experiences become an integral part of United States history including the regions of the American West and Pacific Northwest. Therefore, my life-long career journey is to shatter the historical silences of Black women’s voices and advance our understanding of the Black experience through research, teaching, and digital history.”

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“Black women in the Pacific Northwest played important roles throughout history and made significant contributions to the region although they remain under studied and their labor under valued.” Dr. Cobbins-Modica’s current book project lifts this veil by examining the activism and political leadership of Black women in Seattle from the late 19th century to the present. She traces their political engagement, resistance strategies, and community-building efforts in the fight to dismantle decades of institutionalized racial and gender barriers. She seeks to underscore the many different ways they fought for social change that went beyond electoral participation by participating in and often leading social and political movements to make freedom a reality in the city. Her research offers readers new perspectives on how Black women’s activism shaped urban, Black western communities.

Outside of her busy work life she enjoys spending virtual time with her “incredibly brilliant, inquisitive, and insightful nieces” and engaging in meaningful conversation with her elders. She also loves traveling with her husband and searching for the best hamburger in the Pacific Northwest.