

## Mechanics' Institute Public Health Measures: Then and Now



On March 15, 2020, Mechanics' Institute closed its doors in adherence to a citywide public health mandate. MI staff have been able to work almost entirely on a remote basis and continue providing members library materials and virtual programming. This is something that was not possible when the Institute closed during the 1918 Influenza Pandemic, at which time MI librarian Francis B. Graves reported a drop in circulation due to "the Library [closure] from October 18th to November 18th, on account of the epidemic of influenza prevailing at that time."

On September 24, 1918, when the first case of influenza in San Francisco was reported, many of the city's residents, survivors of the 1906 earthquake and fire, responded favorably to the mayoral mask mandate instituted on October 24, one week after

the city voted to temporarily ban social gatherings, close schools, and shut down "all places of public amusement" — including the Mechanics' Institute. San Francisco residents were cautioned to wear masks in public, practice good hygiene, avoid rush hour streetcars and other crowded spaces, and to eschew dancing in public. Theater and dance halls were closed. Streetcar conductors were admonished to keep the windows of their cars open. Schools were shuttered. Hospitals were ordered to accept only those patients who required immediate care. By the end of October, San Francisco had some 20,000 cases of influenza, with more than 1,000 resulting deaths.

San Francisco's 1918 strategy centered on early and widespread masking in all public interactions as a way to prevent spread. The *San Francisco Chronicle* described city residents wearing masks ranging from standard surgical gauze to fantastical creations resembling "nosebags." Some wore a Turkish-inspired muslin yashmak veil; others donned chiffon coverings of questionable efficacy draped across mouth and nose. Still others positioned "fearsome looking machines like extended muzzles" on their faces as they walked the streets of San Francisco.

By mid-November, it seemed that closures and the mask mandate were working, with only ten cases and no deaths reported on November 11. Ten days later, restrictions were lifted, Mechanics' re-opened its doors, and masks became voluntary. In Mechanics' Institute's 1919 Annual Report, MI President Byron Mauzy stated: "I have the pleasure to report that the Institute has progressed to a marked degree during the past year, in spite of the fact that the World War was going on and that the local epidemic required us to close our library doors for over a month."

Unfortunately, once the mask mandate was lifted and the city's gathering spaces resumed business as usual, many residents grew complacent, with tragic consequences: the city saw another 23,639 cases reported in the month of December, more than doubling the rate of infection for October and November. The mandatory mask ordinance was re-enacted on January 17, but it was too late and short-lived — ending prematurely due to political pressure from the Anti-Mask League after only two weeks of enforcement. In February 1919, San Francisco was reported as having a death rate approaching 30 deaths per 1,000 people — higher than any other large American city. San Francisco began the pandemic serving as a national role model and ended it with one of the country's highest death rates during the global influenza pandemic of 1918-1919.

Then and now, closures and mask mandates help prevent rapid spread of the respective illnesses. In 1918, San Francisco became known as the "masked city," the first American municipality to require four-layer face coverings. In 2020, the Bay Area's early and comprehensive concerted response to COVID-19 is credited with its relatively stable case rates and death toll. Avoiding a repetition of history, the City continues to put public health at the forefront, and Mechanics' Institute will continue to do our part to slow the spread of the disease.

Mechanics' Institute staff and trustees mourn the 173 San Franciscans who have, at the time of writing, lost their lives to COVID-19, and empathize with the more than 20,000 who may suffer serious health consequences after having been infected with the virus.

# Chess

## Mechanics' Online Chess Classes for Adults

Check out the wide range of classes being offered by the Mechanics' Institute. New classes are added periodically, so check the listings regularly. Class details can be found on the chess classes page of our website. Classes are 60-90 minutes long and conducted via Zoom. Details of the class are sent via email. If registering for multiple classes, registration can be used within the next two months.

### Chess Cafe

**Mondays 4:00 - 5:30 pm, weekly**

**Online; Registration required**

**MI members free; public \$5**

Join 3-time US Champion GM Nick de Firmian and FM Paul Whitehead as they give a lecture and class in a casual atmosphere where you can discuss games, learn strategy, and banter about chess current events.

### Game Analysis for Club Players with FM Paul Whitehead

**Mondays 6:30 - 8:00 pm**

**Online; Registration required**

**MI members \$20; public \$25**

Celebrate your finest victories, and learn from your worst mistakes! The key to success in chess lies in understanding your own games. *Where did I go wrong? Was that a good move/idea? What should I have done?* By correcting mistakes and incorrect thinking, and by developing a personal style and good chess habits, we can all improve our game. Each week we will go over participants' games sent in for review, turning the microscope on, advising in all aspects of your game: from the opening choices you make, to the endgame knowledge you should have.

### Free Adult Beginner Class for Members

**Wednesdays 5:00 - 6:00 pm; January 27 - March 24**

**Online; Registration required**

**MI members only; free**

This virtual class is open to any MI member who has no knowledge of chess or who knows only the basics and wants to improve. We will walk through all the basics at a pace suitable for our class, teaching piece movement basics, checkmate patterns, the importance of development, and general strategy. We will also show students how to play online so they may practice.

### Endgame Lab with FM Paul Whitehead

**Wednesdays 6:30 - 8:00 pm; January 3 - February 17**

**Online; Registration required**

**MI members \$20; public \$25**

This class is designed to help players who are rated 1000+ in learning how to think and what to look for after the opening all the way through the endgame. Paul will use the games of students as well as current and historical games to discuss what players should be thinking about in order to get their chess to the next level. This class is dynamic and encourages student participation and discussion. The goal is for students to understand the thinking involved in chess games so they can apply what is learned to their own games.

### Free Women's Online Chess Class with FIDE trainer Sophie Adams

**Sundays 10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

**Online; Registration required**

**MI members and public free**

Coached by FIDE Trainer Sophie Adams, this class helps students develop their chess skills within a community of women. This course is free to all thanks to a grant from US Chess Women and Saint Louis Chess Club.

## Upcoming Tournaments

### 2020-21 Pan American Intercollegiate Online Championship

January 3-6

Online; Registration required

[More information](#)

### 2021 Martin Luther King Day Scholastic Online Special Event

January 16

Online; Registration required

[More information](#)

### 2021 US Amateur Team West Championship Online

January 30-31

Online; Registration required

[More information](#)

### 2021 US Amateur Team West Championship - Scholastic Side Event Online

January 31

Online; Registration required

### 2021 President's Day Camp & Scholastic Championship

February 15

Online; Registration required

[More information](#)

### 2021 San Francisco Scholastic Championship Online

March 20

Online; Registration required

# Chess



## Upcoming National Online Championships

The Mechanics' Institute has been chosen to organize two prestigious national chess championship events online. Both events bring people together not just for chess, but also for social connection through competition.

The Pan American Intercollegiate Online Chess Championship, which was established in 1946 and held every year since, is open to student teams of four (plus alternates) hailing from colleges, universities, and technical schools in North, Central, and South America, as well as the Caribbean. This event will be hosted virtually January 3 - 6, 2021 via Chess.com. Please check our website for more information and to register.

In January of 2020, Mechanics' Institute organized the US Amateur Team West Championship with

great success, and will be organizing the 2021 version online, January 30 - 31, 2021. This tournament is one in a national championship series involving a tournament from the west, north, south, and east; the winners of each region face off in a virtual playoff to determine the national champion. The tournament is composed of teams with an average rating under 2200, which means that it is open for anyone to participate. Please check our website for more information and to register. These tournaments will also be broadcast via the [MI chess Twitch channel](#).

## Virtual Scholastic Chess Classes, Clubs, Camps, and Tournaments

Students have had to adapt in many ways during the last year. Mechanics' Institute has been a leader in providing opportunities and events for scholastic players to get and stay involved, even when they can't sit across the board from one another.

Youth Outreach has continued online via virtual chess classes, as well as specialized classes offered to students at different levels. In online classes, coaches share their screens and delve into piece positions and themes on a virtual chess board. Virtual holiday chess camps have also been popular with students.

Free online tournaments are held every day. Once a week, an official US Chess Federation Online rated tournament is hosted on ChessKid, a safe and secure platform. Monthly special events are organized for the scholastic players as well. For instance, at the Halloween special event, students playing in the Saturday morning tournament were logged in to a special zoom meeting showcasing their costumes. Events such as this one foster connection among the Mechanics' chess community. For information about upcoming virtual camps and to join weekday virtual classes or weekend clubs, please visit our website.

## ThNM: Introducing the Thursday Night Marathon

Since March 2020, the Mechanics' Institute chess department has continued the tradition of the Tuesday Night Marathon (TNM) online. The TNM was initiated in 1973, and Mechanics' now offers two TNMs during the week, with the addition of a new Thursday Night Marathon.

The Thursday Night Marathon is comprised of one game with a longer time control (G/60+5), while Tuesday Night Marathon carries on in its original form with two games playing at G/35+2. Mechanics' now offers marathon play for every type of chess player – whether you like a long time control, or an even longer time control!

# Upcoming Events

***Hellacious California!  
Tales of Rascality! Revelry! Dissipation! And  
Depravity! And the Birth of the Golden State***  
with author Gary Noy

January 7, 5:30 pm  
Online; Registration required  
MI members free; public sliding scale \$5-\$10

In 1855 an ex-miner lamented that nineteenth-century California “can and does furnish the best bad things,” including “purer liquors... finer tobacco, truer guns and pistols, larger dirks and bowie knives, and prettier courtezans [*sic*]” than anywhere else in America. Lured by boons of gold and other exploitable resources, California’s settler population mushroomed under Mexican and early American control, and this period of rapid transformation gave rise to a freewheeling culture best epitomized by its entertainments. *Hellacious California* tours the rambunctious and occasionally appalling amusements of the Golden State: gambling, gun duels, knife fights, gracious dining and gluttony, prostitution, fandangos, cigars, con artistry, and the demon drink. (photo credit Mike Price)



Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.

***Elderhood: Redefining Aging, Transforming  
Medicine, Reimagining Life***  
with author Louise Aronson

January 14, 5:30 pm  
Online; Registration required  
MI members free; public sliding scale \$5-\$10

For more than 5,000 years, "old" has been defined as beginning between the ages of 60 and 70. That means most people alive today will spend more years in elderhood than in childhood, and many will be elders for 40 years or more. Yet at the very moment that humans are living longer than ever before, we've made old age into a disease, a condition to be dreaded, denigrated, neglected, and denied. Noted Harvard-trained geriatrician Louise Aronson uses stories from her quarter century of caring for patients, and draws from history, science, literature, popular culture, and her own life to weave a vision of old age that's neither nightmare nor utopian fantasy — a vision full of joy, wonder, frustration, outrage, and hope about aging, medicine, and humanity itself. Recent Pulitzer Finalist and Northern California Book Awards Finalist, *Elderhood* is for anyone who is, in the author's own words, "an aging, i.e., still-breathing human being." (photo credit Anna Kuperberg)



Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.

# Upcoming Events

## ***San Francisco's Chinatown***

**with creators Dick Evans and Kathy Chin Leong**

**February 11, 5:30 pm**

**Online; Registration required**

**MI members free; public sliding scale \$5-\$10**

Photographer Dick Evans and award-winning journalist Kathy Chin Leong capture the diversity and humanity of San Francisco's Chinatown, the densest urban neighborhood west of Manhattan. Readers are brought behind the scenes at the Chinese New Year parade, a funeral, an intimate wedding tea ceremony, and introduced to select Chinatown residents. *San Francisco's Chinatown* tells the story of Chinatown from three perspectives: tourism, daily life, and celebration and traditions, providing a rare look into a neighborhood that harbors vast contradictions. Proceeds from sales of *San Francisco's Chinatown* will benefit collaborating non-profit organizations, including The Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco.

Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.



## ***In the Company of Men***

**with author Véronique Tadjo**

**February 25, 12:00 pm**

**Online; Registration required**

**Members of MI and MoAD free; public sliding scale \$5-\$10**

Veronique Tadjo will join us from London, in conversation with Bay Area writer Faith Adiele, to discuss her new work.

In a series of moving snapshots, Véronique Tadjo's novel illustrates the extent of the Ebola epidemic through the eyes of those affected: the doctor who tirelessly treats patients day after day; the student who volunteers to work as a gravedigger; the grandmother who agrees to take in an orphaned boy. Watching over them all is the ancient and wise Baobab tree, mourning the dire state of the earth, yet providing a sense of hope for the future. Acutely relevant to our times, *In the Company of Men* explores critical questions about how we cope with a global crisis and how we can combat fear.

**Cosponsored by MoAD (Museum of the African Diaspora)**

Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.



# Upcoming Events

## **A Matter of Character: How To Create Enduring Fictional Characters** *with Sheryl Bize-Boutte, author of [Betrayal on the Bayou](#)*

January 8, 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm

Online; Registration required

MI members \$19; public \$29

A fiction writer's characters need to come alive for their readers. A good character is integral to the story – whether they are the protagonist, antagonist, or part of the supporting cast. In this workshop, you will discover what makes an interesting character, learn where to start in creating them, and begin to develop a character in real-time.

Pushcart Prize nominee Sheryl J. Bize-Boutte is an Oakland-based multidisciplinary writer whose autobiographical and fiction short story collections, along with her lyrical and stunning poetry, artfully succeed in conveying deeper meanings about the politics of race and economics without breaking out of the narrative. .

Learn how to create compelling characters that drive your stories. Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.

**Produced in partnership with the San Francisco Writers Conference.**



## **Stories From the Pandemic: A Storytelling Workshop in Two Parts** *with Kate Farrell, author of [Story Power](#)*

Part One: February 27, 10:30 am - 12:00 pm

Part Two: March 6, 10:30 am - 12:00 pm

Online; Registration required

MI members \$49; public \$59

It's been a full year since the start of Shelter-in-Place in San Francisco. So much of what we've experienced during the social isolation of the pandemic, secluded inside, has been the sameness. Hours turned into days; days into weeks; weeks into months in a blur. Yet we were ever aware of the health dangers, the political turmoil, the unusual, up-side-down routines—our fears of the unknown and the unseen.

However, some days were more memorable because something happened that was out of the "new normal." As time goes on, we may forget those days or incidents. Certainly, we all have extraordinary stories to tell from the pandemic. By sharing them, we are able to document this historic period. Each authentic experience can provide insight and a lasting impression through a well-crafted personal narrative.

Learn how to tell an unforgettable story from the pandemic and record it for the MI archives. Please check the [event link](#) for additional details and to register.

**Produced in partnership with the San Francisco Writers Conference.**



**Did you miss any MI programs? Many of our event recordings are available online. Please visit the Mechanics' Institute's [YouTube channel](#) to enjoy some of our recent events!**

# CinemaLit

## January: Golden Silents

Join us for a month of epic and comic silents, from Fritz Lang to Charlie Chaplin.

January 8

***Dr. Mabuse the Gambler (1922)***

January 15

***Sherlock, Jr. (1924)***

January 22

***La Roue (1923)***

January 29

***Modern Times (1936)***

## February: Black Lives on Film 2

In February, we host a second celebration of Black filmmakers, including both documentaries and features.

February 5

***Lorraine Hansberry, Sighted Eyes/Feeling Heart (2017)***

February 12

***Anita: Speaking Truth to Power (2013)***

February 19

***Moonlight (2016)***

February 26

***Miss Juneteenth (2020)***

## March: Literary Adaptations of Merchant-Ivory

Welcoming Spring, March will be devoted to the films of Merchant-Ivory.

March 5

***Heat and Dust (1983)***

March 12

***The Bostonians (1984)***

March 19

***Maurice (1987)***

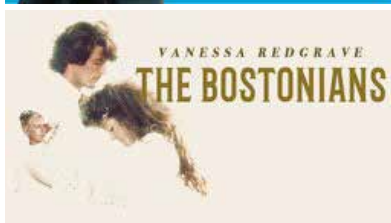
March 26

***Howards End (1992)***

Programs begin at 6:00 pm

MI members free; public sliding scale \$0-\$10

Registration required



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# Recent Major Gifts

We are grateful for the support we receive from the following individuals and foundations, who make our continued growth possible. Thank you! The following contributions were received between September 1 and November 30, 2020.

Tony Adessa  
Nicholas M. Baran\*\*  
Joel Bauman  
Bruce D. Celebrezze  
Robert J. Eldred  
Doug S. Huestis  
L. Daniela Kirshenbaum\*\*  
Frank L. Leeds\*\*  
David J. Madson  
Bobbie McChristy\*\*  
Donald R.\*\* and Virginia L. Meyer  
Charles G. Stephenson  
US Chess Federation

\* James Lick Legacy Society Member  
\*\*Life Member

## Membership Benefits for New Member Referrals

Members can support Mechanics' Institute by referring friends and family to join. If someone joins MI as a new member and names a current member as their referral source on the application, the referring member will receive an additional three months of membership, and can earn up to six months of membership at no additional cost. More reason to tell family, friends, and acquaintances about the perks of Mechanics' Institute membership!

## Donate to MI via Amazon Smile

If you shop at Amazon via smile.amazon.com, a portion of every purchase goes to a charity of your choice. Here's how to benefit Mechanics' Institute with your purchases:

- Go to smile.amazon.com.
- Log in to your account and select Mechanics Institute.
- Every time you shop, go through smile.amazon.com instead of using the primary site.

To turn on Amazon Smile for your smartphone, open the app; then select AmazonSmile from the settings menu, and follow the onscreen instructions.

Thank you for making MI your choice.

# Mechanics' Adapts: Remote Gatherings and Services



57 Post Street  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
[www.milibrary.org](http://www.milibrary.org)

## Holiday Gathering: Happy Hour Online

On December 10, members and guests enjoyed a virtual gathering to celebrate the winter holidays. Guests were encouraged to dress up and write six word memoirs about life in the time of COVID. Niki Selken of Unattainable Landscapes created a beautiful virtual party backdrop for attendees.

In a typical year, volunteers serve up libations from the circulation desk as members, staff and board gather on the 2nd floor of the library for lively conversation, appetizers, and the much-anticipated banquet table amid holiday inspired decor. This year, adapting an online party required some creativity. The event opened with greetings from CEO Kimberly Scrafano and Board President Lindsey Crittenden. To kick off the festivities, master bartender Will Herrera demonstrated how to make the signature High Horse Cocktail from his historic landmark bar. Party participants enjoyed the musical offerings of DJ Henri Perrier who, for several years, has been spinning music from his masterful collection of records. This year, our maestro created a jazz playlist featuring big band swing and Klezmer. Special guest Bruce Bierman, dance leader and theater director, led dance moves to get everyone in motion. Guests enjoyed engaging conversation and activities in three breakout rooms, and won prizes from the gift drawing, including cocktail delivery, a Brian Stokle-designed California Fog & Gold flag, baked goods from Genie Mosey's Sweet Relish Catering, and a selection of natural wines from Sara Gilford's NATI.

## Online Events, Digital Resources, and "To-Go" Service in Full Swing

Members love using the library's highly successful "To Go" service to pick up books, CDs, and DVDs by appointment. Launched in July 2020, library staff have filled nearly 1,500 title requests, scheduled nearly 700 contactless appointments, and checked out more than 1,300 titles from the 57 Post Street building. Library staff have also fielded more than 1,000 telephone and email queries from MI members.

Each month, the demand for library materials and programs increases. Since the city-mandated March closure, more than 3,000 individuals have attended 194 virtual programs at MI. During the coronavirus pandemic, reference librarians have continued to provide assistance with research, reader's advisory, and technical issues through email and phone contact.

MI's virtual programs run the gamut from classes to panel discussions to author interviews. MI continues to engage members with robust offerings such as book groups, online knitting, virtual tours, and writing events. See the full line-up [here](#).

### Library Questions?

Call:  
415.393.0101  
E-mail:  
[reference@milibrary.org](mailto:reference@milibrary.org)

### Membership Questions?

Call:  
415.393.0105  
E-mail:  
[membership@milibrary.org](mailto:membership@milibrary.org)

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Donate: [milibrary.org/give](http://milibrary.org/give)  
Join: [milibrary.org/join](http://milibrary.org/join)  
Renew: [milibrary.org/renew](http://milibrary.org/renew)

### Library Hours

Please see our website for details.

### Closures

**January 1**  
New Year's Day

**January 18**  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

**February 15**  
President's Day

*Due to San Francisco public health requirements, 57 Post Street has been closed to the public since March 15, 2020, with the exception of pre-arranged appointments to pick up materials reserved via the library's To Go library service. Please check [milibrary.org](http://milibrary.org) for updates.*