



Six Degrees of Separation

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Contents

PREFACE	1
<i>Ewan Cummins</i>	
INTRODUCTION	3
<i>Dr. Leslie Lindenauer</i>	
THE CLIO STAFF	5

ARTICLES

Geisha	7
<i>Amanda Bria</i>	
Silenced in a Silent World: The Politically Active Life of Helen Keller and Why It Has Been Forgotten	36
<i>Amy Kopchik</i>	
Deep into the Historical Abyss: The Assassination of Presidents Garfield and McKinley and Why They Have Become Less Memorable in the Mind of the American Public	49
<i>Dennis Fitzgerald</i>	
Evil in the Shape of a Woman: Form and Function of Gender in the Witch Hunts of New England, 1620-1775	76
<i>Mercedes DeMasi</i>	
Result of the Bubonic Plague 1346-1350	82
<i>Jessica Gamache</i>	
Oral History: Production, Quality, and Application	91
<i>Ewan Cummins</i>	

PREFACE

Ewan Cummins

Our usual practice has been to present a broad theme for each issue. In the past, Clio has covered many themes, from war to sexuality. This year's issue of Clio is a bit different. This year, we had before us several well-written papers produced by WestConn students, as usual. The only problem was that the collection of papers was so varied in subject matter that we didn't at first know where to begin. As we looked over these seemingly unrelated works, no clear overarching theme presented itself to us.

I jokingly suggested that we could play a game like 'six degrees of separation.' Someone would write an introduction that would show how all the topics of this year's issue were related. After a little shared laughter, we all agreed that this was a good solution for our editorial dilemma.

Whoever would write the introduction would need to be a person with a deep knowledge of history and a keen eye for connections among events and persons. A good sense of humor would certainly help! We quickly agreed to enlist the services of WestConn's own Dr. Leslie Lindenauer. I'm sure that readers will enjoy reading how Dr. Lindenauer drew connections among things as oddly grouped as Helen Keller and the 14th Century Black Death. There's more here than gameplay, though. Behind the amusing exercise lies an important idea: the complex and often subtle interconnectedness of history. It seems we have a solid theme this year, after all.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Leslie Lindenauer

Accompany me, readers, as we take a journey over time and space, tracing the six degrees of separation between the papers included within *Clio*'s covers. We begin with “*wise women*,” victims of the early modern witch hunts, and end with the *wise woman* Helen Keller. Despite their knowledge, *wise women*, whose *status* challenged patriarchal power, could not cure the plague and many people died. So it was that the *status* of women shifted in post-plague Europe. GI's *memories* of their experiences with geishas in Japan shaped Americans' interpretations of the geisha's *status* and *meaning*. The *meaning* of the Civil War and slavery also was shaped by *memory*, as revealed in Southern oral histories. The *meaning* of presidential assassinations reflects American *memory* and the elements of the past privileged in American *popular culture*. *Popular culture* also shapes interpretations of Helen Keller. Helen Keller was a *wise woman* who could not cure capitalism.... And so it goes.

Six degrees of separation. A playful designation, to be sure, determined in part because the disparate group of papers chosen for *Clio* this year did not seem to lend themselves to thematic categorization. Rather, this issue of *Clio* celebrates the rich variety of work in history. The six papers in this volume are a testament to the creativity and inspired inquiry that are the hallmark of our field. They reflect the scholarly rigor that underscores work in our discipline. On any given day on our campus, student and faculty scholars engage in dynamic discussions about diverse topics. Fifty years ago, there was little chance that we would have been able to celebrate such diversity in a history journal.

The papers in *Clio* explore issues of gender, race, and class. Cultural history and explorations of popular culture take their place alongside the traditional perspectives that dominated earlier historical inquiry. *Clio* showcases our students' inclination to engage in research that extends beyond earlier disciplinary boundaries. Evidence of interdisciplinary scholarship pervades this issue of *Clio*, as do methodological and theoretical approaches often disregarded by historians two generations ago. Social psychology informs Mercedes DeMasi's analysis of the gendered meaning of witch-hunting; cultural history and anthropology infuse Amanda Bria's exploration of the contrasting interpretations of the geisha in Japan and in the United States. Jessica Gamache turns to social historical analysis in her essay on the status of women in the wake of the plague in fourteenth-century Europe. All three of these essays are anchored firmly in women's history or gender studies.

Like gender studies, the field of memory studies has garnered increasing attention among historians in recent years. The relationship between memory, culture, and history informs the essays by Dennis Fitzgerald, Amy Kopchik, and Ewan Cummins. Especially in this, the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War, when scholars acknowledge the role that memory has played in popular constructions of the past, these papers, diverse in time, space, and topic, represent some of the liveliest work in the discipline.

Six degrees of separation. Any reader might have come up with a dozen ways to link the essays in this journal. They intersect in numerous ways. Perhaps above all else, each of the essays reflects current scholarship, and demonstrates the intellectual rigor with which the authors approach their subjects. Together they yield a journal that is as diverse as the discipline for which it was written.

THE CLIO STAFF

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