



CLIO

2014

THE LENSES OF HISTORY



The Lenses of History

CLIO

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INTRODUCTION:
CLIO: THE LENSES OF HISTORY

Dr. Marcy May and Dr. Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox

In 2014, the world marks the centennial of the Great War, the first global experience of total warfare. As communities and nations plan commemorations, historians are re-examining the causes and consequences of what we now call the First World War. To do so they will employ a variety of approaches, drawing from the branches and subfields within the discipline that have enriched our understanding of how societies function and develop. These lenses of history allow us to focus narrowly on a particular region or population or to consider the global scope of change. Economic historians draw our attention to the conflicts of international trade, while political historians ask us to look more carefully at domestic policies and historians of foreign relations remind us of the fragility of diplomacy. Through these different viewpoints we gain a more complete and accurate picture of the past.

This edition of *Clio* utilizes the theme of the “Lenses of History” to examine moments of American history from different viewpoints. Approaching topics from the vantage points of popular culture, legal history, the study of gender, labor history, environmental history and political history, the authors offer new insights through their examination of previously underutilized materials.

By focusing on popular culture, Alicia Moniz examines the limits and biases of a popular tool for genealogical study, Ancestry.com. Moniz argues that although the availability of materials for constructing personal family histories may benefit consumers who want a quick snapshot of their family tree, Ancestry often promises more than it actually delivers. Without the benefit of a larger historical perspective, Ancestry patrons are left with only a decontextualized impression of where or how their kin fit into a changing American society.

Meagan English draws upon work from legal history and the study of gender to document the changes in divorce law in nineteenth century Connecticut. English notes a “shift in the treatment and view of American women and their roles within the home and in the community as a whole,” as she considers the complex developments that might explain liberalizing divorce law. English won the 2014

Herbert Janick Award for the best essay in history for this article.

Video games represent a new topic for historical analysis, and Leigh Scudder brings his expertise as a player to his analysis in “Between Cinematic and Simulation? Approaching Micro-History in Video Games.” Scudder examines popular games such as *L.A. Noir*, *Red Dead Redemption*, and *Brothers-in-Arms*, noting that these games use “micro-history” derived less from the works of historians than from films. A major consequence, Scudder finds, is the elevation of conflict as a major historical theme, something that may be appropriate for gaming as entertainment or business, but misleading as reliable history.

From *the West Wing* to *the American President*, the mass media has for many years presented us with a perhaps untenable view of the ideals we should expect from Presidents of the United States. Nicholle Jejer subjects the theme of the American Presidency in the mass media to critical scrutiny. She argues that the effect of the “mass media Presidency” is Janus-faced: on the one side, these shows have inspired the public to believe in the possibility of a heroic president, provoking idealistic responses; but on the other, it has exposed to a public to the seedy underside of the political process, galvanizing their cynicism.

Bernard Kokinchak also navigates through a new area of investigation for historians, combining his expertise in meteorology with environmental and military history. Kokinchak’s work on weather modification programs for military use during the Vietnam War era raises important questions about the political and environmental implications of climate manipulation. The article in *Clio* is drawn from Kokinchak’s Master’s thesis in History.

In “The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911: Resulting Labor Safety Laws and Exemplary Action to Prevent the Preventable,” Marissa O’Loughlin reconsiders the famous New York fire in light of more recent workplace tragedies. She connects labor history and political analysis to clarify how conditions in the American garment industry changed in the twentieth century, posing the question of whether such reforms are feasible protections of garment workers internationally.

Finally, Meagan English reviews two new books by members of the faculty in the History Department at Western Connecticut State University, Dr. Jennifer Duffy and Dr. Leslie Lindenauer. By combining a close reading of their texts with

interviews with the authors, English is able to produce a deeper consideration of both books.

These articles illustrate the robustness and vitality of history as a discipline, as students and scholars use traditional methods *and* new perspectives in their explorations of American society. As Gerda Lerner, a pioneer of women's history, argued in 1982, critics of history who contend that historical study is irrelevant "define history too narrowly." This year's *Clio* demonstrates the willingness of historians to use different lenses to interrogate the past.

On the Cover: American and French photographers with their cameras during World War I.

Date: ca. 1918. Harry S. Truman Library.

THE CLIO STAFF

Meagan English is a senior history major at Western and an editor of *Clio*. She is the winner of the 2014 Herbert Janick prize in History for the best paper to be published in *Clio*. In her nonexistent spare time, she enjoys photography, genealogy and throwing pottery. Many years ago, she was an art major. She had two teenagers -- Ryan and Catelyn, and due to her masochistic tendencies, she decided to take on housetraining a puppy while writing her thesis. Both need work.

Nicholle Jejer is a senior at Western who will be graduating in May 2014 with a BA in History. In addition to being an editor of CLIO, she is also a member of WCSU's branch of the National Society of Leadership and Success, as well as the National History Honor Society, Phi Alpha Theta. In her spare time Nicholle enjoys reading historical fiction and non-fiction, watching movies, and hanging out with her friends.

Sean Keenan is a senior history major at WCSU and an editor of *Clio*. He spent the fall studying abroad in China and intends to attend a PhD program in Chinese history in the near future.

Alicia Moniz is the President of *Clio* and an MA student in History at Western, having completed her BA at Western Connecticut State University in History. Her focus is in American history, primarily gender and family history. She is an artist, a genealogist, and mother to five cats.

Marissa O'Loughlin is an undergraduate History and Political Science honors student at WCSU. A majority of Marissa's studies have focused on American environmental policy and American history. She is an avid yogi when she has time to breath and fancies herself a poet when she has time to think.

Danielle Spino is a junior in History at Western and an editor of *Clio*.

Jared Stammer is a Graduate Student at WCSU. When not writing history papers, he grows a five o'clock shadow, throws on his leather jacket, dons a fedora, grabs his trusty whip, and rescues ancient artifacts from evil Nazi archaeologists seeking to make their Swastika-Heiling armies invincible.

Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox is Associate Professor and Chair of History and Non-Western Cultures and Co-Advisor of *Clio*. In his spare time, he sings with the Traveling Men quartet, enjoys jogging, and plays the piano and saxophone. Though he writes on Asian intellectual history, he is also very interested in poststructuralist philosophy, nineteenth-century American poetry, and the nineteenth-century history of Africa and Latin America.

Marcy May is Professor of History and co-Advisor to Clio. She is a historian of twentieth-century America.