

History and Politics

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As history emerged as a distinct academic discipline in the late nineteenth century, most of its practitioners focused on the political, diplomatic and economic life of nations, the men who led and those who manipulated. Then, slowly, the realms of historical study expanded. In the 1930s, the French Annales School and historians such as Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre brought the life of ordinary citizens into view. By the 1960s, American and British historians examined the social history of workers, reformers and others previously overlooked by historians' lenses, including African Americans, immigrants, and women. A new exploration of culture and sexuality in the 1980s opened investigations into the contributions of other historical actors and actions, such as those of LGBT communities and Latinos. Political history seemingly took a back seat as historians raised important new questions about social and cultural life.

Political history never lost its importance, however, and a new generation of historians has re-energized interest in the political past. It is, as Princeton professor Julian Zelizer notes, now deeply enriched by borrowings "from social science, political science, social history. To do it right, it has to be done without any rigid disciplinary boundaries."¹ In this issue of *Clio*, authors Cody Clark,

¹Emily Aronson, "Political scholar Zelizer goes beyond disciplinary, academic boundaries," *Princeton Weekly Bulletin*, March 3, 2008, accessed April 5, 2016, <https://www.princeton.edu/pr/pwb/08/0303/political/>.

Nathan Seper, Carlos Cadena and Will Gurry demonstrate how political history comes alive with the inclusion of social and cultural history.

In "Organized Labor," Clark examines the tumultuous birth of a modern American labor movement in the 1930s. Clark argues that the political policies of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal provided an important impetus for the organization of unskilled workers in auto and other industries. Nathan Seper finds similar fruit in New Deal activism through his investigation of urban planner Robert Moses's role in constructing New York motorways. New Deal programs created the pathway for a more mobile society, Seper argues in "The New Deal and the Birth of an America Made for the Road."

In "A Turning Point in American/Vietnamese Relations," Carlos Cadena considers the international context of American actions in Vietnam after World War II. Failures of the Truman Doctrine set the stage for subsequent American actions in Asia, Cadena notes. Will Gurry looks at the failures of China's Cultural Revolution of the 1960s with an equally critical eye. In "Removing the Blame from Mao," Gurry finds that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution which began in 1966 failed because of political corruption within the People's Liberation Army. Gurry identifies how political maneuvering limited cultural shifts, even in the face of Mao's robust revolutionary ideology.

These contributions allow us to consider how political change rarely occurs in isolation from larger social shifts and pressures. As Zelizer has argued, the "dismissal of 'old-fashioned' political history" in favor of more inclusive views incorporating a recognition of change in ideas, daily living, and social structures provides us with more complete analysis of the past.² Clio's authors

² Julian Zelizer, *Governing America: A Revival of Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 6.

demonstrate the vigor of such work as historians continue to enlarge our perspectives.