The Gettysburg Historical Journal

Volume 23 Article 2

2024

Front Matter

Front Matter

Abstract

Front Matter of the Gettysburg Historical Journal 2024

The Gettysburg Historical Journal
Volume XXIII | Spring 2024

Table of Contents

Letter from the Editors

We are proud to present the twenty-third edition of *The Gettysburg Historical Journal.* The journal embodies the History Department's dedication to diverse learning and excellence in academics. Each year, the journal publishes the top student work in a range of topics across the spectrum of academic disciplines with different methodological approaches to the study of history. This year, *The Gettysburg Historical Journal* received a plethora of submissions from both Gettysburg College students and other students around the country. The works accepted this semester focus on the diverse experiences of Americans throughout history, spanning from the American Civil War to the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Gettysburg Historical Journal is a student-run organization, providing undergraduate students with an opportunity to gain valuable experience in reviewing, editing, and organizing academic articles for publication. In all cases, authors and editors have also had the opportunity to apply these skills to their future careers, or their work as graduate students. With the assistance of The Cupola, Gettysburg College's online research repository, and the distinguished college faculty, our authors' work has received both serious scholarly and national attention. Past authors have even published follow-up work in refereed journals

and presented their work at undergraduate and professional conferences.

The following works we have selected for this year's edition of *The Gettysburg Historical Journal* demonstrate the varied interests and abilities of undergraduate historians, as well as their dedication to examining history from different perspectives:

Guillem A. Colom's "Their Defense of the "Peculiar Institution": The Influence of European Scientific Racism," aims to demonstrate the historical continuity of racist beliefs that unite actors across borders to uphold white supremacy into modern times. The paper describes how, through the antebellum period and American Civil War, American and European race theorists exchanged ideas through correspondence and scientific explorations asserting the truth of scientific racism. Scientific racist beliefs posited the natural superiority of white people and inferiority of Black people based on what these theorists claimed were innate biological characteristics, and these beliefs served as a critical linkage between Europe and the United States. Through the work of propagandist Henry Hotze, the Confederacy sought to gain support among the European public, particularly in Great Britain, by promoting scientific racist ideas justifying the Confederacy's defense of slavery. Such ideas were assimilated from American race theorists like Samuel George Morton and Samuel Cartwright, along with European race theorists like Arthur de Gobineau.

Utilizing correspondence and journal entries, this paper shows that this exchange of scientific racist ideas significantly influenced the Confederacy's political thought and policy positions, especially foreign relations, through the Civil War and into modern times.

Carly A. Jensen's paper, "What They Sang: The Religious Roots of Spirituals and Blues investigates the religious themes in spirituals, the religious songs sung by enslaved people in America, and the blues, a predominantly Black genre from the early Twentieth century. This work aims to answer if spirituals influenced the lyrics and musical structure of the blues or if the two genres developed independently. The paper covers the origins of spirituals and the blues, their appearance in the WPA Slave Narratives, and concludes with a close analysis of the religious influence on the work of famous Blues artists. Primary sources referenced in this project include the WPA Slave Narratives, famous Blues songs, Library of Congress recordings, lyrics from early spirituals, and several secondary sources. A thorough thematic investigation of these sources revealed a clear connection between the two genres, as both take a strong influence from Christianity. Additionally, spirituals and blues follow similar lyrical patterns. While spirituals emerged as a way to reckon with the horrors of slavery, the blues spoke to the reality of sharecropping and poverty. Both spirituals and blues speak to

Southern Black Americans' resistance, achievements, and spirituality.

Theodore J. Szpakowski's "The Americans with Disabilities Act in the Borderlands" examines the supposed relationship between the United States federal government and Indigenous governments. However, it neither sufficiently ensured that Indigenous people were protected to the same extent as settlers nor fully released Indigenous governments to create their own protections. The results of this dynamic can be seen through examining civil rights legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Although settler disability historians have tended to view the ADA as a unifying success, it did not legally or culturally account for disabled Indigenous people living on Indigenous land within the United States.

Carly Jensen and Emily Suter

Acknowledgments

The editors of *The Gettysburg Historical Journal* would like to thank all the professors of the History Department for encouraging our majors to produce excellent work. In particular, we would like to thank Professor Timothy J. Shannon for providing guidance to the journal staff as our faculty advisor. We also express our gratitude towards Mary Elmquist, Scholarly Communications Librarian at Musselman Library, and Kari Greenwalt, Administrative Assistant of the History Department, for helping the staff prepare this year's edition for publication. Additionally, we would like to thank Stefany Kaminski '24, who gave us permission to use her photography for our cover photo.

Featured Piece

This year's featured piece was written by Hannah Greenwald, an assistant professor in the History department. Professor Greenwald teaches classes on Latin American history, Atlantic history, and borderlands history. Her research focuses on Indigenous resistance, settler colonialism and nation-state formation.

The Historians of TikTok

Thank you to the editors of the Gettysburg Historical Journal for inviting me to write this year's featured piece. It is an honor to be asked! During my time at Gettysburg, I have been consistently impressed with students' historical research. In my classes, I have noted the thoughtfulness, rigor, creativity, and compassion that inform my students' research projects. The essays in this year's issue are certainly no exception.

--

During the spring of 2020, during the height of COVID lockdown, I made a decision that may feel familiar to many readers: I downloaded TikTok. (And, in doing so, sacrificed countless hours of my free time for years to come.) Because I am a historian and an all-around nerd, it didn't take long for TikTok's algorithm to start filling my feed with history-related content. This content takes a myriad of forms. Sometimes it's absurd: for

example, comedy shorts about peasants partying during the Black Plague. Sometimes it's heartfelt: for example, imagined conversations between modern-day and ancient women commiserating over shared experiences. And sometimes it's purely informative: for example, deep dives into understudied figures in American history. I watch it all with interest and enjoyment. It genuinely warms my heart to see people engaging with history in creative ways, infusing it with feeling, humor, and present-day relevance.

At the same time, I have noticed a fascinating trend in the way that some history is narrated online—not just on TikTok, but also on YouTube, in podcasts, in blog posts, on Twitter, and elsewhere. Online content thrives on engagement: views, clicks, shares, comments, likes, retweets, and so on. In order to generate this engagement, content creators must present their narratives as sensationally as possible. And in the interest of obtaining and maintaining a loyal following, creators must position themselves as unique voices, able to impart exclusive knowledge that's unavailable elsewhere.

Recent studies have shown that negative emotions drive engagement more effectively than positive emotions, and so TikTokers and Youtubers have an incentive to share historical insights with an antagonistic edge. This often manifests in phrases like: "Why is nobody else talking about this?" or "I can't believe

nobody ever taught us this." What's more, content creators need to manage the short attention spans of online audiences, and thus might feel compelled to fall back on sensationalized twists to keep people engaged. ("You won't believe what happened next—keep reading for the shocking truth!") Frequently, all of this is positioned in direct opposition to an abstracted historical establishment. See, for example: "This is what the textbooks get wrong!" or "This is the stuff they don't want you to learn in history class!"

To be clear, my point here is not to roll my eyes at amateur historians, or to gripe about young people on the internet. The drive to democratize historical knowledge is highly important. The willingness to challenge received wisdom is a fundamental strength of historical thinking. I am glad that a wide variety of folks—trained historians and otherwise—are putting history content out there on the internet, and I hope that they keep doing so.

Rather, my concern lies with a media landscape that demands antagonism over collaboration, and sensationalism over nuance. The social media cliché of "Why is nobody else talking about this?" often silences conversations that are, indeed, already happening. The drive to be the first or only voice to weigh in on a particular topic compels content creators to reinvent the wheel rather than building upon what's already out there. And those

clickbait-y collections of “mind-blowing historical facts” often rely on a lack of context to make history seem as shocking as possible—but a key goal of historical study is to understand past events by contextualizing them. In other words, the fundamentals of online content creation seem to run counter to the fundamentals of history scholarship.

So, what do we do about this? Academic research is, of course, never going to stand in for punchy online content. (I could try uploading my conference presentations to TikTok, but something tells me they wouldn’t get a ton of views.) But nor should “TikTok history” stand in for measured, nuanced historical research. Each offers its own strengths, and each has a place and time. Certainly, historical researchers and history content creators can learn something from one another. Perhaps this new generation of history students—well-versed as they are in the ways of social media—can find a way to harness the best of both worlds, to everyone’s benefit.

In this regard, the articles in this year’s issue of the Gettysburg Historical Journal provide a great deal of promise. All three articles shift focus away from tired tropes of American history, directing our attention instead to understudied aspects of the nation’s past. Szpakowski uses the lens of Disability Studies to provide new insights on the crucial topic of state-Indigenous relations in modern U.S. history. Colom highlights transatlantic

exchanges in scientific knowledge to deepen our understanding of Confederate politics. And Jensen explores the influences of slavery and spirituals on the blues, thereby centering Africans and African Americans in the story of a quintessentially American genre of music. All three authors enter into existing conversations, listen closely, and emerge with new insights that reframe dominant narratives of American history. They embody the ethos of upending a traditional canon, as well as the spirit of careful historical analysis. The historians of TikTok and those of the academe should take note.