

## EDITORS' NOTE

With this issue, we formally leave the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* in the hands of the impressively thoughtful and conscientious new editors, Boyd Cothran and Joe Genetin-Pilawa, along with continuing reviews editor Elaine Frantz—who herself has been a consistently valuable contributor in all realms of the journal. We have worked closely with Cothran and Genetin-Pilawa in a transition year that has delighted us as we have witnessed their energy, creativity, and imagination—as well as their commitment to the highest professional standards.

If the United States is suffering from a crisis in the humanities, you surely will not see that over the next several years at *JGAPE*. We are eager to see the new directions that Cothran and Genetin-Pilawa will take a now middle-aged journal still powerfully grounded in the exemplary stewardship of its first editors, Maureen Flanagan and Alan Lessoff.

We have had, over the last five years, a terrific time in service to the journal. We have tried our best to nurture a wide variety of scholarship, especially from graduate students and younger historians, in an increasingly fertile and boundary-breaking subfield. Our goal has been to function, at the most elemental level, as a gentle and encouraging—as well as rigorous—gateway to publication in the field's journal of record. We wish to thank the many authors who have worked so hard to continue the quality and distinctiveness of *JGAPE*.

We have also sought to change the journal in a variety of other ways. It may be difficult to tell in an age where digital downloads reign, but we have worked, in partnership with the dedicated and hard-working staff at Cambridge University Press, to create a brighter and more fluid sense of aesthetics for the journal's physical design. We have brought to our editorial board scholars from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and interests. We have reoriented the journal to include more Western and transnational topics. And in a move that we very much hope receives emulation in the rest of the world of historical journals, we have opened our pages to the serious study of pedagogical issues (especially involving K–12 teaching, and with real-life high school teachers even serving as authors).

Informing all these changes (well, perhaps not the fluid aesthetics) has been a robust sense of historiographical engagement—even adventure. Part of this commitment to historiography was formal, especially in various reflections on classic books ranging from Aileen Kraditor's *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement* to Robert Wiebe's *The Search for Order*. (Next up: an exploration of George Chauncey's *Gay New York* on the 25th anniversary of its publication.) Historiographical commitment also suffused the journal's regular research articles. Our authors graciously responded to our frequent requests to expand their engagement with different interpretations so that they could best clarify their original contributions to long-running and wide-ranging intellectual discussions.

Why such an embrace of historiography? After all, neither of us is a believer in jargon, and “historiography” is the ugliest word in the mainstream vocabulary of the discipline.

Perhaps foremost: we are firm believers in James Loewen's awesome dictum: "History is furious debate informed by evidence and reason."<sup>1</sup> The fullest intellectual engagement in our discipline comes not through a pedantic literature review, but rather through a ram-bunctiously contentious, and illuminating, conversation with scholarly colleagues and forebears. Beyond that, historiographical discussions are not just about different perspectives on how to look at The Facts, but even more are fruitful opportunities to blend our present-day moral and communal commitments with our custodial responsibilities to the past. In that way, the historiographic debates that Loewen celebrates are the primary bridge between the politics of history and the politics of democracy.

That devotion to connecting scholarly insights with the politics of the current moment is the final foundation that we have hoped to cultivate in these pages. In the so-called Second Gilded Age in which many believe we now live (the subject of a forum in an upcoming issue), public contests over the themes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have once more become common. Nativism and pluralism again contend as the percentage of the national population born abroad has reached its highest since the early twentieth century. Proposals for net neutrality revisit many of the dynamics of the state sponsorship of Gilded Age railroads. The U.S.-Mexico border is at the center of national politics in a way rarely seen since the Mexican Revolution in the 1910s. Digital giants like Amazon, Facebook, and Google make progressive debates about monopoly seem newly relevant. The #MeToo movement has pushed back against the norms and limits established by an entrenched and discriminatory male-dominated society in ways reminiscent of the women's rights campaigns of a century ago. And Black Lives Matters continues the work of Ida B. Wells, the NAACP, and all those who crusaded against the scourge of lynchings and white supremacy.

Indeed, politicians and pundits from across the ideological spectrum battle not just over those same themes of a century ago, but over the very essence of the Gilded Age and (especially) the Progressive Era—and what we as citizens might make of these periods today. The most recent visceral example that we can think of: before his recent transformation into an advocate of civility and even Black Lives Matter, Glenn Beck each year ecstatically danced on Woodrow Wilson's grave in celebration of the anniversary of his death. Wilson is, for Beck, the Dark Prince of Progressivism and thus the progenitor of all modern peril to the republic. In contrast, Barack Obama visited Osawatomie, Kansas, in 2011 to deliver the most important economic address of his reelection campaign. Following in the footsteps of Teddy Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" speech there, Obama hoped to birth a new Progressive Era by directly channeling the spirit of the old one.<sup>2</sup>

Or take the debate, to which historians have contributed plenty, over who and what constitutes modern-day "populism" in our rancorous age of resurgent nationalism across the globe. Does Donald Trump, with his angry mobilization of the embittered white masses against liberal elites, constitute the most accurate embodiment of that term and analytical category? Or, in contrast, does the Eugene Debs-loving self-described socialist Bernie Sanders better deserve that label?<sup>3</sup>

So: our little corner of history continues to matter. In fact it matters quite a bit—even if there are unfortunately plenty of obstacles to the serious consideration of the past in our overheated civic moment.

We know, and deeply appreciate, that our colleagues and successors Cothran and Genetin-Pilawa share these understandings and commitments. We especially look forward to seeing how the collective endeavor of connecting history to our own day will continue to unfold in the pages of the journal, enlivening and enriching our understandings of the past as well as helping in some small ways to forge a more just present.

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Of course, in addition to saying farewell, we also have an issue to put out. We have been particularly proud of our various themed issues and forums, ranging from the history of capitalism to indigenous histories of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. In the current issue, ably curated by guest editors Manfred Berg and Axel Jansen, we consider aspects of World War I: of course an enormously consequential conflict, but one also too frequently neglected by scholars and the public alike. The eight essays include analyses of topics such as preparedness, party politics, and diplomacy typically associated with the studies of war, as well as themes such as childhood, academic freedom, and “voluntarism.” Our hope is that this special issue presents a view of the war’s historiography, including extensive discussion of scholarship in German; new methodological approaches; and suggestions for new lines of inquiry. With November 11, 2018, marking the centennial of the end of World War I, we hope this special issue will be of use to specialists as well as those drawn by the centenary to discuss, in their courses and with a broader public, the conflict and its enduring legacy for the United States and the world.

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A final word of appreciation:

In all our work these past five years, we have benefited mightily from the superb organization, excellent editing, and cheerful collegiality of the journal’s wonderful graduate assistants: first, Luke Staszak; and, for the last four years, the exceptional left-handed shortstop, and historian, Tim Herbert. Thank you. The next several beers at Haymarket Pub and Brewery on Randolph Street are on us.

Robert D. Johnston and Benjamin H. Johnson

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: The New Press, 2007 [1995]), 8. And historiography is not just for The Experts. Elsewhere, Loewen compellingly argues that “understanding historiography is one of the great gifts a history course can impart to its students.” See *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of the Textbook and Get Students Excited About Doing History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009), 211.

<sup>2</sup>On Beck and Obama, see Robert D. Johnston, “Long Live Teddy/Death to Woodrow: The Polarized Politics of The Progressive Era in the 2012 Election,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 13(July 2014): 411–43. A good portion of Obama’s interest in the reformers of a century ago likely came via his counselor, John Podesta, who wrote a fairly learned book about the Progressive Era and its legacy for progressivism today. See Podesta, *The Power of Progress: How America’s Progressives Can (Once Again) Save Our Economy, Our Climate, and Our Country* (New York: Crown, 2008). Of course, as Hillary Clinton’s campaign manager, Podesta was one of the chief targets of WikiLeaks; in the process, the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* actually got swept up in Julian Assange’s muckraking net; John Halpin to John

Podesta, "The Power of Progress rises again!," email, Feb. 18, 2015, *Wikileaks*, <https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/20436>.

<sup>3</sup>For dueling perspectives, see Charles Postel, "If Trump and Sanders are Both Populist, Then What Does Populist Mean?," *The American Historian*, Feb. 2016); and Michael Kazin, "How Can Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders Both Be 'Populist'?", *New York Times*, Mar. 22, 2016. See also Postel's illuminating "What We Talk About When We Talk About Populism," *Raritan* 37 (Fall 2017): 133–55.