

## FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the fall 2025 edition of the New England Journal of History. Our mission is to publish historical inquiries that inform readers from novice to scholar. This goal will be met with articles that encompass the world's events and analyses that share reflections on pedagogical strategies. Our timely book reviews examine works that expand our knowledge base. First published in 1944 as the *New England Social Studies Bulletin*, this well-rounded journal will continue to provide historical analysis for educators who seek to bring history to life for future generations through thought-provoking interpretations and the best offerings of pedagogy.

I am finding this Editor's Note to be difficult. Usually, I have many thoughts to share, yet the direction in which our country is moving leaves me saddened. I am struggling to express myself with any structure. America has a long and significant history of giving to other countries and peoples around the world. On December 6, 1917, a massive explosion happened in Halifax Harbor killing over 1600 people and destroying part of this Nova Scotia community. Boston quickly organized and sent medical supplies and people to help after receiving a call for aid from Nova Scotia. Today, Nova Scotia still sends a Christmas tree to Boston as a thank you for help during their travail. Exploring further into the American past for examples of aid to others, the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) notes that Thomas Jefferson directed Meriwether Lewis to give smallpox vaccinations to Indigenous tribes while exploring the west. Alexander Hamilton established not only our nation's financial structure, but established aid to today's Haiti in the 1790s as people fled the revolution there. A few years later, President John Adams supported Haiti's revolution with military assistance and financial aid, permanently altering France's role in the western hemisphere, resulting in the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Overseas aid continued as nations on the South American continent sought independence from their colonizers modeled on America's Revolution. After an earthquake struck Venezuela in 1812, Americans sent \$50,000 worth of flour to help those harmed by the natural disaster. While motives for assisting other parts of the world combine religious and political self-serving objectives, these actions between 1810 and the 1840s provided western medicine, democratic values, economic opportunities, and educational reforms into South American nations as well as China.

The American people also sent significant relief supplies to Ireland during the Great Potato Famine. AFSA notes that numerous foreigners came to America to see how we were caring for those in prisons or insane asylums and how we were educating our children. The author of this AFSA article John Sanbrailo observed in March of 2016, “Foreign assistance is not merely a temporary aberration of a response to immediate international crises. It has been a fundamental part of U.S. engagement with the world and defines who we are as a people. If Americans stopped trying to improve and democratize the world, they would stop being American.”<sup>1</sup> Journeying past the world wars, the Council on Foreign Relations states that “Between 1946 and 2023, the United States spent an average of \$51.4 billion each year on foreign aid.” The Marshall Plan of 1947-1953 claimed the most amount of foreign aid dollars, yet it is horrifying to think what could have happened had we not sent this aid. Our fight to contain communism with the domino theory led to numerous wars with the unintended consequences of economic growth in Vietnam and South Korea. We spurred the Green Revolution, supported development to reduce poverty in Latin America with the Alliance for Progress, fought AIDS, particularly on the African continent, with PEPFAR established by President George Bush, and did our best to improve relations among nations in the Middle East.<sup>2</sup>

America’s role in the world changed over the centuries, yet the threads of generous humanitarianism, expansion of democratic ideals and striving for new scholarship echo and replicate around the world. According to Pew Research, America “accounts for more than 40% of all humanitarian aid the UN tracked in 2024.” We donate more aid than any other nation. How does this relate to our overall U.S. budget – roughly 0.7 to 1.4% of our overall budget since 2001.<sup>3</sup> History provides insight into the ways in which American’s pattern of giving has been woven throughout the life of our nation. John Sanbrailo quoted Abraham Lincoln in his AFSA article mentioned above, “We cannot escape history.” Please use history to inspire others to continue our American ideal of giving to the world.

“The Great Unnecessary Multicultural War,” by Rod Farmer first published in the Winter of 1994 reminds us that some wars replay with novel variations for new generations. Farmer’s point that explicitly defining multicultural education is a critical component of the “war.” The fluidity of this definition is as problematic today as it was

in the 1990s. Farmer's position that multicultural education must "be the study of both human commonality and human diversity" in a "two-handed" way illustrates where the problem lies – who is winning the struggle for a dominant hand? Realizing that there is a "mainstream American culture" as well as microcultures inside that overarching community can be threatening to some on both sides of this equation. We are seeing the implementation of our definition of multiculturalism today in how we treat immigrants, how we supply foreign aid and how we speak of fellow Americans. In addition, exploring the diversities in the world, our human commonalities and differences, while also evaluating how the self falls into all this enormous picture is fraught with balancing acts. Key in his essay is, "students need to understand that all humans have certain innate needs. But needs common to all members of the species are satisfied in diverse ways." How can history and social studies educators make sense of the world, explore prejudices or stereotypes, reinforce democratic values, and balance the challenges of presenting a defined multicultural vision to end this never-ending war? I look forward to your thoughts.

Our first research article focuses on events during the American Revolution in "Pevbep Yqqhbwmm: Nathan Woodhull, A Forgotten Culper Spy" by William R. Patterson. Reminding us that revolutions are won and lost by those of whom we rarely become aware, Patterson demonstrates that Nathan Woodhull's life and contributions to the American Revolution provided an important link in the Culper spy chain. After establishing the Woodhull family history in colonial New England, Patterson explains George Washington's need for effective spies to obtain information on British troop actions. Creating the spy network and why people joined that network is also delineated. Exposing the complications behind supporting the rebel cause and yet not drawing attention to oneself to alarm the British was a unique and critical skill possessed by Mr. Woodhull. Sharing letters in which the actions of Nathan Woodhull showed his ability to report on British troop movements and yet have rebels still believe he supported the Crown, provides a fascinating story of how to be a great spy.

Arthur Sherr brings us forward in time with "John Quincy Adams, DeWitt Clinton, and Gilbert Horton: Politics and Anti-Slavery." Focusing on the arrest and potential enslavement of a free Black man named Gilbert Horton, Sherr argues that President Adams' lack of action to have Mr. Horton quickly released from jail demonstrates

ambivalence about abolitionism. Scherr critiques several books which laud Adams' belief in abolishing slavery in America. He incorporates further evidence of Adams' weak convictions about abolitionism by revealing his desire to achieve personal political goals while simultaneously waffling with pro-slavery groups. Scherr includes evidence from another text demonstrating the cultural impact New England and Adams' social group had on his view of various races and ethnicities. Revealing Adams' voting patterns and concerns about his national image, Sherr adds depth to our knowledge of John Quincy Adams and the varied abolitionist positions he adopted to suit the occasions.

Paul Teed brings us our final research article entitled, "Allies in Progress: Unitarians, Progressive Friends, and the Meaning of Religious Liberty in Antebellum America." Examining the commonalities and progressivism between Unitarians and Quakers in Pennsylvania establishes how little one of the basic arguments within Christianity has changed regarding the role of political engagement. The open debates between the progressive Quakers and progressive Unitarians provides insight into key arguments about the position of Christianity in what some deem politics and others regard as justice issues. Most likely their arguments prior to the Civil War spoke what was in the hearts of many Christians of the day, just as our arguments over whether it is correct to have "ICE was here" with the baby Jesus, Joseph and Mary removed from nativity scenes in front of churches. Reading the comments in connection with the "ICE was here" debate demonstrate the persistence of the role of ethical and political arguments in American Christianity. Elucidating the moral threats abolitionist positions brought to religious institutions and local communities reveals a critical thread in American society that can be overlooked at the peril of our nation.

Our pedagogy article provides our many educators in America with some uplift and joy. "Lessons in Latin: The Itinerant Scholar Who Shaped Horace Mann by Vicki Buchanio Earls reminds us that many of our best educators are nameless and often unrecognized by society. Samuel John Barrett would have been lost to history if it were not that he impacted the education of Horace Mann. Barrett's skills as an educator revealed themselves to his students through his memory and extensive knowledge of Latin, Greek, Aramaic dialects and many Romance languages. Barrett wrote his own textbook and served as an itinerant teacher, thus meeting Horace Mann as a youth. Despite

Barrett's difficulties with alcoholism and its inherent challenges to his family, his ability to recite classical works verbatim, even picking up where a student may have made mistakes, profoundly impressed his young students. When Horace Mann met Barrett, he had been primarily self-taught with little opportunities to pursue formal education. Mann deeply desired knowledge and Barrett inspired Mann to work diligently. Mann drew on how Barrett retained classical works and languages in his head, causing Mann to realize he could achieve this expertise as well. What better legacy for any educator exists?

Moving to our book reviews, Ruby Archbold discusses *Undesirable: Passionate Mobility and Women's Defiance of French Colonial Policing 1919-1952* by Jennifer Anne Boittin. Exploring the role of race, gender, class, and nationality of women under surveillance, Boittin describes how women challenged these definitions using their passions and emotional responses through the lives and travels of women in the colonies. Exploring another theme of oppression, Courtney Garrity reviewed CJ Martin's *The Precious Birthright: Black Leaders and the Fight to Vote in Antebellum Rhode Island*. Reminding us that Black men could vote in Rhode Island prior to the 1820s, Martin explores Black history in Providence, focusing on community engagement and resistance to oppression within the Black community while fighting to regain the right to vote. Jumping far ahead in time, Max Boot's *Reagan: His Life and Legend* is reviewed by Bob Maloy, a member of the New England History Teachers Association board. Boot details Reagan's childhood, acting career, political pursuits and finally his presidency to reveal Reagan's conservative legacy and pragmatic responses to challenges, providing deep insight into a critical time in the American presidency.

Returning to a theme focused on women's agency, Arya Martinez reviews *In Dependence: Women and the Patriarchal State in Revolutionary America* by Jacqueline Beatty. Using women's stories and legal documents from early America, Beatty notes how women appeared to submit to patriarchal expectations and yet utilized the law to petition and claim rights legitimately belonging to them. *Let Only Red Flowers Bloom: Identity and Belonging in Xi Jinping's China* written by Emily Feng emotionally portrayed life for any "nail that sticks out" in Xi's China today. I heard Emily Feng speaking about her book on NPR and wanted to include this revealing book in our reviews. As I was reexamining my review, I immediately felt again the power of her

examples and the heartbreaking situations in which China's human rights believers find themselves in today's China. William R. Patterson reviews a critical examination of *Bayard Rustin: A Legacy of Protest and Politics* edited by Michael G. Long. So often Bayard Rustin's significant contributions to the Civil Rights Movement are hidden due to the attitudes toward Black gay men in 1960s America. This collection of essays exploring Rustin's life reminds us of his impact on Martin Luther King, Jr., his living into approach towards pacifism and his critical organizational talents for the March on Washington. Hopefully this new examination of Rustin will lead us into actions for freedom, justice and equality. Our last book review is by Erin Redihan explores *Brooklynites: The Remarkable Story of the Free Black Communities that Shaped a Borough*, by Prithi Kanakamedala. Focusing on a small Black community and four families in what is known today as Brooklyn, Kanakamedala begins with the existence of slavery in Brooklyn and the simultaneous fight for racial equality. Introducing various families in this community provides a focus for how events impact individuals while revealing an active depth of social activism previously not revealed.

For details on submitting your articles and book reviews, please check our manuscript submission policy at [www.nejh.org/general-guidelines](http://www.nejh.org/general-guidelines). We welcome all historical topics, pedagogical articles on the teaching of history or social studies and reviews of books and permanent museum exhibits. In addition, we offer a local documentary film series entitled "History in Your Backyard." This project allows those who love local history to create a video and submit it to our editors for potential publication. We also launched an open access primary source reader on our website called "Citizen Historian Sourcebook." Students, under the guidance of faculty and with feedback from our editors, publish edited primary source excerpts for other students and teachers to use in the classroom. Also, please submit any comments you may have on our articles to [editors@nejh.org](mailto:editors@nejh.org).

As we continue to study the past, let us remember the importance of historians. Their research and analysis of events and persons inform the policy and decision-making of presidents and leaders around the world. Historians form think-tanks that influence public opinion, and encourage us to engage in discussions of ethics, morals and truth. Their indispensable contributions provide context for understanding current events and allow us to observe our common flaws, our universal

strengths and our shared humanity. Historians have been, and continue to be, activists, shaping movements and writing books that changed society. We hope our publication will inspire readers to engage in their communities and to follow the timeless words of Abraham Lincoln and “strive on to finish the work we are in.” Educating about the past and how it relates to the future is our superpower.

Linda Morse  
Editor  
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#### Notes

1. John Sanbrailo, “Extending the American Revolution Overseas: Foreign Aid, 1789–1850,” *The Foreign Service Journal* (March 1916) <https://afsa.org/extending-american-revolution-overseas-foreign-aid-1789-1850>.
2. “A Brief History of U.S. Foreign Aid,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 31, 2023. <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/brief-history-us-foreign-aid>.
3. Learn more about how and where our aid money was spent in 2023 at the Pew Research site: Drew DeSilver, “What the Data Says about U.S. Foreign Aid,” Pew Research Center, February 6, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/02/06/what-the-data-says-about-us-foreign-aid/>.