

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the spring 2024 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.

The western world appears to be increasingly aware of the impact of technology on our students in both K–12 schools and at the collegiate level. YouTube and TikTok videos on “why I quit teaching” seem to be growing. Reasons for teacher resignations focus on lack of student respect for educators and the lack of student motivation in the process of education, which many educators connect to the use of social media. Smart phone apps, gaming and texting commandeer the attention of students whether the phone is in a (shoe) caddie at school, in a backpack or in a pocket. Even if phones are *theoretically* silenced, they are pinging with notifications, ringing during class, flashing lights, vibrating, or somehow calling attention to themselves like Odysseus’ sirens. Asking a teenager to swipe right and scroll down to see how many hours s/he has been using his or her phone can be an enlightening experience. Students are often shocked to see that they have spent up to eight hours a day on their phones. Encouraging reflection on if this is how s/he really wants to spend his or her life may elicit a thoughtful comment. I listened to Jonathan Haidt’s *The Anxious Generation* which compiles extensive international data on the changes in mental health among teens due to social media use. Haidt also discusses how the impact of decreasing amounts of free play and appropriate risk-taking play among children leads to more anxiety and feelings of incompetence. Having taught for over twenty years, I have observed that smart phones do not belong in K–12 schools because, even when not on the student’s person they remain a serious distraction. The sounds and vibrations of the phone, as well as the anxieties about missing out on important messages, call our students’ minds towards their phones

and away from their studies or speaking with friends. I believe that adults must make difficult adult decisions and act in the best interests of children and adolescents by significantly restricting individual access to smart phones until their later teen years. I agree with Jonathan Haidt that smart phones should be kept out of all schools entirely. Join the conversation and send us your thoughts and experiences regarding smart phone use and the impact it is having on the daily lives of adolescents and adults.

Continuing the theme of public-school education, From the Archives focuses on “No Goal Left Behind: George W. Bush and Federal Aid to Public Schools” by Larry McAndrews. Reviewing the actions of various presidents in terms of “equity and excellence” in education, McAndrews examines Congressional attempts designed to improve the educational outcomes for children in poverty-stricken schools. In addition, the role of student testing to determine the efficacy of education and whether money should be withheld from “failing schools” leads us to where we are today. McAndrews discusses that in the early 2000s some states lowered required passing exam scores in the hopes of increasing the number of students passing state exams, rather than determining ways to help students achieve existing standards. Exploring the actions of several presidents and their attempts to improve education for all Americans provides a useful review of why we are where we are now. I chose this article for the archives because on March 16, 2024, the British journal *The Economist*, reported on the state of American education. It observed that American schools increased graduation rates yet widened the gap between higher and lower performing students. Providing information on a high school in Springfield, Massachusetts, *The Economist* reveals that while the number of students earning a diploma increased dramatically, the scores of SATs and AP exams have “tumbled.” *The Economist* also reports that 25% of students feel teachers have low expectations of them while the federal government noted that “academic standards were falling short.” In addition, a number of states have lowered the graduation bar, while other states are considering doing so. In 2008, McAndrews elucidates the debates over “the results of federal aid to public schools” through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) while *The Economist* points out that the impact of NCLB today has increased the gap “between high- and low-achieving students” as revealed in “GPAs and standardized test scores.” Graduating high school today may not mean as much as it did forty years ago. Where do these low standards leave struggling students hoping to access a college degree? *The Economist*

wraps up its report by noting that the educational system is not helping low-achieving students by decreasing academic requirements to puff up its graduation rates. Preparing students for careers, college or the military requires that we maintain high expectations, remove distractions such as smart phones from the classroom and remember that as stated in *The Economist*, “[P]eople rise to the expectations you set.”

For our Novice Corner, we are sharing an article by Ava Martin entitled, “All Offices that Require Heat: Heat and the Environment in Early Modern Homes of England and Scotland.” Historic preservation is not a common endeavor in this journal, but this intensely researched work will inspire us all to really look at the homes and buildings around us. Beginning in 1577, *A Description of England* attempted to create a summary and analysis of the buildings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and this begins Martin’s detailed article. Considerations of heating methods, internal shaping of rooms, window placement in relation to the time of year and the role of the sun in the seasons were critical to homes prior to central heating and cooling. How much money the sixteenth century homeowner had permitted these considerations to be implemented during home construction. The need for wood impacted the environment, while the use of brick or stone created improved heat retention in the home. As we move towards creating homes in greater commune with local environments to increase sustainability, it would be helpful to explore the knowledge of home construction in the past.

This spring we have been fortunate to receive two complementary pieces on college life in previous generations. Ron Bodinson explores the history of written works theoretically designed to help college students learn the “rules” about finding members of the opposite sex in the 1940s and 1960s in his article “Where the Girls Were: A Retrospective.” Inspired by his purchase and sale of a dozen copies of the booklet *Where the Girls Are: A Social Guide to Women’s Colleges in the East* during his sophomore year at Williams College, Bodinson reflects on the descriptions of colleges and women contained within the pamphlet. Further exploring other books designed to evaluate colleges and the women or men who attend them, Bodinson discusses the stereotypes, rules of conduct and voices of those writing the books to provide a snapshot of attitudes of eastern American colleges.

A less light-hearted examination of college life is found in Edward Tabor’s “A Harvard Class in World War II.” Even before Pearl

Harbor, Harvard became involved in the war effort and some of its alumni engaged in international travel and medical assistance in Europe. Changes in curricula programming as well as sporting events created a more military structure for the Harvard campus. Focusing on the class of 1937's extensive contributions to WWII as retold in autobiographical essays, Tabor shared these stories from Harvard's "Class Report" prepared for their tenth reunion in 1947. During WWII, the prestige of a Harvard education did not mean escape from military service, but rather numerous deaths and brave contributions leading to a successful outcome for the Allies. Delving into the military contributions of a small community provides a painfully authentic vision of the suffering experienced by the young servicemen and their families.

With a wealth of diverse research articles for the spring, Ezekiel Haradji exposes the ugly side of disability history in the state of Massachusetts through his article "Bonding Alien Passengers: The Relationship Between Perceptions of Disability and Massachusetts Immigration Law, 1848–1852." Haradji's article reveals a eugenics style of judging through the bonding system used primarily against the Irish who were attempting to immigrate to Massachusetts. During the time studied, states determined who was fit for entry into America or into that particular state. The Massachusetts superintendent who determined the need for a financial bond to care for these potentially "disabled" or "feeble" or "lying" individuals impacted the lives of thousands of individuals. Haradji's discussion about the visual inspections and personal biases at the Boston port reveal more about the superintendent than his immigrants.

Moving to another group traditionally seen as second class, Kelly Marino discloses the life of the New Haven teacher "Augusta Lewis Troup, Labor, and Women's Rights in the Nineteenth Century." Less known to history are contributions to the women's rights movement from working women and/or women who had a Catholic education during the earliest decades of the women's movement. Marino uncovers how August Lewis Troup's drive to help women and those in the lower classes was a direct result of her Catholic education. That education in turn permitted Troup to support herself as a typesetter and learn about the injustices experienced by women and workers. Troup's actions as a union organizer, activist for the lower class and later as an educator demonstrate the interwoven needs of women's suffrage, women's rights and women's employment opportunities.

“Newton Voters Cannot Be Disenfranchised’: The Jenks v. Roy Election Dispute of 1936–1937 in New Hampshire” highlights the historical occurrence of election disputes and the difficulty of accurately recounting paper ballots. Tyler Wolanin reveals the intense battle over contested ballots for the First Congressional District seat in New Hampshire. The counting and recounting of ballots, accusations of disappearing ballots and the argument that burden of proof should be on someone to prove the outcome wrong rather than the winner to prove it right reminds us that when the vote is close, Americans will go to any length to maintain the integrity and accuracy of the election process.

Chuckling to myself while realizing that we literally have reviewers from A to Z, Ruby Archbold reviews *Dublin and the Great Irish Famine* edited by Emily Mark-FitzGerald, Ciarán McCabe and Ciarán Reilly, which contains a collection of essays assessing the impact of the famine on the life of Irish city dwellers as well as the countryside. In addition, historians explore the intersections of medicine, families, prisons, infrastructure, cultural memory and philanthropy during the painful years of famine. Fitting a specific event into a wider context, *Mutiny on the Rising Sun: A Tragic Tale of Slavery, Smuggling, and Chocolate* focuses on the events on the Rising Sun to shed light on smuggling, slavery, a church in Boston and the chocolate trade. According to reviewer Christopher Blakeley, Jared Hardesty provides teachers and scholars with outstanding transcriptions and primary documents while incorporating a tangible example of racial capitalism. Continuing a eugenic theme, Kyra Dezjot reviews Daniel Okrent’s *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics, and the Law that Kept Two Generations of Jewish, Italian and other European Immigrants Out of America*. Focusing on the Immigration Act of 1924, as well the eugenics movement, Okrent explains the political situations and legal developments that occurred during this period leading to such a hateful time. Sharing a most difficult stage of the Civil Rights Movement, *No Small Thing: The 1963 Mississippi Freedom Vote* by William Lawson reveals the battle for access to voting for Black Mississippians as evidenced through a fake gubernatorial campaign whose role will be to influence the victory of the Voting Rights Act of 1964. Reviewer Francis Kyle values the level of detail and the significant contribution of the author’s rhetorical analysis in this interdisciplinary text.

How did FDR become the person he was? Written by Jonathan Darman, *Becoming FDR: The Personal Crisis that Made a President*

explains how Franklin D. Roosevelt's battle with polio changed not only Franklin's life, but that of his wife Eleanor. Reviewed by William Leeman, Darman successfully argues how polio transformed Franklin and Eleanor in ways that enabled them better able to cope with the hardships of Great Depression and WWII while inspiring hope and confidence in the American people. Returning to early American history, *Every Day Crimes: Social Violence and Civil Rights in Early America* focuses on the role of force and violence used against those who were considered "dependent peoples" by the white male leaders of society. Of particular interest, states reviewer Benjamin Remillard, is the discussion of the strategies dependent peoples used to stop the violence against them. Following the tolerance and evolution of violence towards different groups over time, Remillard believes author Kelly Ryan has provided detailed material that discusses a painful part of America's past. *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination, and Faith during the First World War* by Owen Davies explores without denigrating the drive of human beings to explain their world through finding answers in the supernatural. Reviewer Ian Wilson found this engaging book to contradict Max Weber's hypothesis of disenchantment and explore how Western European soldiers and their families struggled to make sense of a terrifying war and how the use of magic and superstition allowed them to experience some solace. Having arrived at the reviewer Zhihui Zou's evaluation of *Paper Trails: The US Post and the Making of the American West* author Cameron Blevins demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary historical work. Instead of just delivering mail, Blevins realizes the postal network aids in the ability of the United States to claim western lands, support American settlements as they displace indigenous populations and further allows the federal government to maintain control over new, small communities in the West.

For details on submitting your articles and book reviews, please check out our manuscript submission policy found at 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. Also, please submit any comments you may have on our articles to 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 also been activists, shaping movements and writing books that changed society. We hope our publication will inspire readers to engage in their communities and follow the timeless words of Abraham Lincoln to “strive on to finish the work we are in.”

Linda Morse
Chief Editor
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