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# Editor's Note

Brian M. Ingrassia

Lately, I have been having many conversations with colleagues and students, especially in my introductory historical methods course, about why we study history. Many students come to the field with a love of learning about the past, yet they quickly discover that there is a certain power that comes from understanding the choices that people who came before us made—why they acted the way they did, or thought the way they thought. It may or may not be true that those of us who do not study the past are bound to repeat it, yet it is certainly true that human actions and interactions do echo and rhyme. The better we comprehend the past, the better we can comprehend our own times and our own futures. We seek to understand past events and decisions—even irrational or disgraceful ones—so that we can craft rational interpretations of what happened and use them to inform our own humanity.

Perhaps because I spend so much time thinking about these issues, I have been distraught recently to see the damage our political leaders are doing to history. In some states, professors live in fear of termination simply because they teach that which research shows to be true. The federal government, meanwhile, is attempting to rewrite history at National Park Service sites and even to control content at the Smithsonian Institution. It may seem appealing to construct a narrative that portrays a simplified or grandiose idea of what our nation has been or could be, but that is not good history. I am horrified at recent events and policies, but I am also heartened when I see so many historians and students pushing back against our nation's worst impulses. It is our duty to understand the past on its own terms, to be honest about what happened before us, and to use our understandings of the past to shape our lives and our society for the better.

We kick off this issue of *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* with Wendy Gamber's SHGAPE Presidential Address, "A Seven-Year-Old Murderer and the Crimes of Gilded Age Childhood." This address was originally delivered at our society's annual luncheon at the Organization of American Historians conference in Chicago last April. Gamber shows that in the Gilded Age, some children were killing other children—to a point at which these so-called "baby murderers" warranted significant legal and media attention. Sometimes, it seems, the murders were intentional, while in other cases they appeared to be accidental. Either way, this phenomenon tells us a great deal about how turn-of-the-century Americans thought about childhood and families, as well as about mortality itself.

In "Protectionism versus the Self-Made Man: Gender and the Demise of the Child Labor Amendment," Jonah Berger continues our examination of the history of childhood. By the 1910s, some Americans were trying to abolish child labor, either via federal legislation or constitutional amendment. A close reading of the debates, however, shows that *how* proponents or opponents of child labor regulation interpreted such labor depended on the youths' gender, as well as their race. While strenuous labor might help a young man become a valuable citizen, said some in the Progressive Era, similar labor

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might destroy young women's ability to procreate. It was a complex legal and political moment, with each side taking a different tack. As Berger shows, the side that ultimately won was the side that was able to control the terms of the debate.

There is a great deal of power in the way we tell stories, as Margaret Platt shows in the aptly titled "'How to kick a lady downstairs like perfect gentlemen': Frances Kellor in the Masculine Realm, 1903–1920." Frances Kellor was a significant Progressive Era social scientist who was eventually forced out of her role in the Progressive Service, the policy and educational wing of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party. One way to tell this story is to see Kellor as a nitpicky micromanager who created enemies and had to be let go. But another way is to see Kellor as having been forced out by junior male colleagues because they could not stand to be in roles subordinate to a woman. This article tells us much about the difficult place of women who tried to navigate early twentieth-century American politics.

The final article in this issue is a local case study that provides a fine-grained interpretation of Civil War memory in a border state. St. Louis, Missouri, is a city poised between North and South, East and West, and therefore was a complex place to commemorate the Civil War. As Kristen Anderson illustrates in "Lofty Purposes and Clear Aims: Civil War Commemoration in St. Louis, Missouri, 1862–1900," collective memory was a veritable tug-of-war in that Mississippi River city during the nineteenth century's latter decades. Unionists and Confederates in St. Louis jockeyed for control over how to memorialize the war dead, especially as national and local political contexts shifted during the 1870s and 1880s.

We include our usual slate of book reviews, on compelling and timely topics like the Latina South, the transformation of the coal industry, hair culture, American imperialism in nineteenth-century art, and the stories that workers told about the construction of the Panama Canal. The journal also inaugurates a new feature herein, the museum review. In this issue, we get a critical and incisive assessment of the recently reopened Frick Collection in New York City, alongside a review of a book about that famous art collection and the Gilded Age industrialist who assembled it. Please join us in our continuing conversation about the meanings and interpretations of Gilded Age and Progressive Era history.

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