

# Editor's Note

The articles in this issue are wide-ranging, highlighting federal government history from the Early National period to the Cold War era. They also delve into some key aspects of the broad reach of government—in the areas of education, imperialism, international economic policies, and the subtleties of diplomacy in the nuclear age.

We start with some revolutionary changes during the Civil War. In recent years, historians have offered valuable new insights into the development of the federal government in the Early National and antebellum periods. We have come to see a stronger, more active national government than previously thought: in taxation, internal improvements, expanding bureaucratic autonomy, tariffs, merchant marine welfare, Indian policies, fugitive slave laws, and interstate commerce.<sup>1</sup> Yet, many responsibilities and powers of local and state governance that were rooted in English and Colonial American practices persisted in the pre-Civil War decades. This was true, for example, in matters of police powers and control of migration and citizenship. Writing of the northern states, Kate Masur states that “free state residents regularly demanded recognition of the states’ powers to regulate people thought likely to be disruptive—whether free African Americans, poor immigrants, slavecatchers, liquor dealers, or Native Americans.”<sup>2</sup> These continued divisions in governmental powers suggest that, as Jack Furniss writes, “the most fruitful avenue may be to examine how different levels of government interact, overlap, and split functions as part of a cooperative but contested federalism.”<sup>3</sup> With the onset of the war, the Union and Confederate governments suddenly needed wider, centralized powers to manage and steer the war effort, forcing revolutionary changes in the general patterns of federalism. How did those shifts in authorities take place? Were they incremental or abrupt, and what stresses or local conflicts resulted?

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<sup>1</sup> James T. Sparrow, William J. Novak, and Stephen W Sawyer, eds., *Boundaries of the State in US History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); William J. Novak, “The Myth of the American State,” *American Historical Review* 113 (June 2008): 752–72; Stephen J. Rockwell, “Henry Knox and the Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy,” *Federal History* Issue 10 (April 2018): 41–60. Rockwell stresses the initiative and innovative autonomy of executive branch officers in exercising federal authorities.

<sup>2</sup> Kate Masur, “State Sovereignty and Migration before Reconstruction,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 9, No. 4, (December 2019): 598.

<sup>3</sup> Jack Furniss, “Devolved Democracy: Federalism and the Party Politics of the Late Antebellum North,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 9, No. 4, (December 2019): 547.

We see a detailed example of those transitions and areas of cooperation in this issue in the work of **Wyatt Evans**. He explains that the Union government was unprepared in the area of law enforcement for the sudden emergence of new challenges to its national authority, such as treason; spying; contraband, especially arms shipments to the Confederacy; draft resistance; desertion; and counterfeiting. The federal government lacked “the organization and statutory power,” and manpower, to pursue and prosecute the new crimes that were not encoded in federal law. While the Lincoln administration organized special provost marshals to pursue violators, it had to rely on and cooperate with established local police forces to investigate and prosecute such crimes. Using the 1862 New York City prosecution of Mrs. Isabella Brinsmade for spying, Evans details the federal government’s reliance on local detectives and prosecutors, and the use of local prisons. The urgent wartime need for federal-local cooperation resulted in awkward communications from Washington, some errors in judgment, and often serious public opposition. With Congress and the administration unable to establish new authorities for a wartime civil criminal system, the government had to rely on military justice. Evans’s investigation provides a revealing look into both the rush to prosecute wartime justice and the intergovernmental cooperation during that transitional wartime period as the Union government began to fashion the foundations for a nation-state. In that process, he writes, full-time uniformed local police forces that had been professionalizing in the previous decades throughout the North “served the national interest when the federal government struggled to do so.”

In this year’s Roger R. Trask Lecture, **Marian Smith** provides a compelling case for the indispensable and unique value of the federal historian. In her over 30-year career as a senior historian at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), she has served her agency, historians, and the public. She explains that her core challenge was to preserve and make available her agency’s records: both administrative and immigration. They existed in the Federal Records Center but were poorly labeled and described, and thus practically unknown and inaccessible. Thus, she undertook a thorough inventory of immigration records in the effort to make descriptions relevant and to educate archivists and researchers in preservation and the records’ value. She also addressed changing societal needs for immigration resources, from immigrants’ need for documentation to the rising interest in genealogy in the 1980s and beyond. She demonstrated the importance of the records through her official testimony at Supreme Court cases and Justice Department programs investigating Nazi war crimes and redress for World War II internment of Japanese Americans.

Through her career as a public servant and historian, she has demonstrated the importance of preserving and making accessible critical documentation to further public education and social justice. Her work is a testimony to the value of federal historical work.

**Simone Selva** explores international diplomatic efforts to restructure a weakening U.S.-led world financial order that had been in place since the end of World War II. The crisis began in the 1960s with “the combined rise of OPEC dollar-denominated revenues and international assets, a corresponding decline of the value of the dollar in exchange markets, and the beginning of an oil shock-induced recession across the advanced industrial economies.” U.S. planners were deeply concerned with restoring the “equilibrium” in the U.S. balance of payments position. They could ease the strain on the dollar by incorporating or “recycling” OPEC petrodollars into the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other banks for international lending while maintaining the financial viability of the Least Developed Nations as trading partners. Selva states that while others have investigated the various actors and events in this critical era separately, there is “a fundamental lack of analysis” that links them, especially to U.S. policies. He investigates the efforts in “reflowing” OPEC funds in the context of U.S. and IMF policies and OPEC’s financial activities, all “around the pillar of the U.S. dollar.” He capably navigates the complexities of those economic and diplomatic endeavors through extensive use of U.S. and European archival materials. OPEC generally resisted U.S. plans and continued to invest in higher-yield European funds and to lend money internationally, but selectively, on their own. The result was a steady movement to a “new multipolar world,” with increased OPEC influence, that no longer revolved entirely around the U.S. economy. Selva’s narrative offers a revealing look at the complex interdependence in the international economic order, at the consequential shifts in financial resources and needs, and at the actions of policy makers. The 1970s witnessed a fundamental restructuring in the world’s economic order, and Selva’s integrated analysis helps us understand it.

**Emily K. Gibson** states that her history of the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) science education programs during the early Cold War period, 1950–1960, “adds a new dimension of analysis to studies that highlight the racial inequality and deep-rooted structural barriers that such federal programs often perpetuated.” The NSF was born in 1950 from postwar concerns for expanded scientific training and personnel, trends that the Soviet Union’s 1957 launch of *Sputnik* accelerated. The subsequent National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 bolstered funding

for both NSF and the Office of Education for science education. That demand for improved technical education arose in the era of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the modern civil rights movement. Thus, the story examines how NSF administrators were compelled to ease their requirements for desegregated training at southern universities in the 1950s at the direction of the Eisenhower administration, a practice that was reversed in the John Kennedy administration. Gibson's story suggests larger insights. First, we see how executive authority and policy priorities can guide and temper federal agency decision making and performance. Second, social equity—meaning racial equality and inclusion—are essential to the full efficacy and efficiency of social programs in a democracy. That is, while the NSF training programs succeeded at producing more qualified teachers and ultimately more scientists, they remained, to some extent, exclusionary and divisive.

**Kenneth C. Wenzer's** extensive research in naval records led him to a fuller review of the sinking of the USB *Maine* in Havana Harbor on February 15, 1898. Official naval and Senate inquiries in 1898 determined that the cause was a Spanish mine. Yet, a comprehensive reassessment of the sinking by a team led by Adm. Hyman G. Rickover in 1976 concluded that the cause was an internal explosion in the coal bunker. Using a wide range of records, Wenzer revisits the official investigations, reevaluates their fairness and integrity, and concludes that “hastily conducted proceedings” exhibited “exceptionally poor legal and evidentiary standards in order to promote a predetermined conclusion and rationale for armed force.” In fact, he argues, the *Maine's* captain, the U.S. consul in Havana, and the naval corps colluded through the hearings in order to exonerate the Navy and provide the basis for a long-planned war with Spain. The author suggests that President William McKinley undoubtedly knew of the official, but secret, naval war plans, felt the public pressure for war, and also desired the military conquest of Cuba. Wenzer's detailed account supports the view that a calculated U.S. strategy welcomed war as a chance to expel Spain from the Western hemisphere and build its own hegemony in the region.

**John Krige** urges diplomatic historians to appreciate more fully the role of technology as a tool in foreign relations, a practice identified as “technodiplomacy.” While other historians have emphasized the transfer of technical hardware (e.g., missiles and weapons) and systems (e.g., computer networks), especially in the Cold War era, Krige makes a convincing case for studying the transfer or denial of technical knowledge as part of “the exercise of political power.” Technical knowledge, he notes, can be “disaggregated” into components to enable specific and strategic transfers. In his careful analysis of a test case of technical knowledge

transfer between the United States and France in the early 1970s, he shows how such assistance was meticulously circumscribed and negotiated to protect and advance both nations' strategic positions and security, but yet not threaten existing international alliances and treaties. The United States could bolster France's defenses and the Atlantic alliance, and France could significantly update its defenses. Overall, such diplomacy during the Cold War served the larger strategy of building "an integrated 'free world' under U.S. leadership." Krige argues that the value of technodiplomacy continues beyond the tense, competitive maneuvering of the Cold War as the United States "attempts to stabilize the world order" amid challenges from such powers as Japan and, more recently, China.

We also thank **Daniel Immerwahr** for an interview focusing on his recent book *How to Hide an Empire*. His fresh perspective on U.S. imperialism highlights not only its long and changing history but also the myriad consequences it has had, both internationally and domestically.

I thank Assistant Editor **Judson MacLaury** for his close reading of all texts and our anonymous reviewers for their insights and contributions. Thanks also to Book Review Editor **Terence Christian** for his work in compiling and editing our reviews.

We hope that you find these studies enlightening and that you will support the Society for History in the Federal Government ([www.shfg.org](http://www.shfg.org)) with a membership, if you have not already done so.

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