

Editor's Note

Welcome to our 2022 issue of *Federal History*. This edition has a wide range of articles and features that include the topics of abolitionists and the First Federal Congress, humanitarian aid, profound changes in the historical profession over the past five decades, government involvement in World War I-era aviation, the President's Environmental Merit Awards program, and human rights activism and diplomacy.

Our cover article focuses on an early congressional debate on slavery that demonstrated the depth of sectional divisions at the start of the republic. **Paul J. Polgar** reevaluates the meaning and implications of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society's antislavery petition to the First Federal Congress in February 1790. He argues that the resulting first congressional debates on slavery, were not, as others have concluded, merely about whether the federal government had the power to end and abolish slavery. The petition boldly proclaimed the humanity and equality of Blacks, and "embodied a complete assault on the institution of slavery," forcing a discussion on deeply held and divergent beliefs about race relations. Those first congressional debates on slavery thus drew out stark and entrenched racial arguments about Black inferiority, "the sanctity of property rights in people," separation of the races, and the right to citizenship that found expression in later debates and crises in the decades before the Civil War, such as in the Missouri Crisis and the Dred Scott decision. The debates, Polgar writes, "ground an enduring dialectic on slavery and race into the marrow of American national political discourse." The divisive positions on slavery (and thus the meaning of freedom), so carefully patched over in the compromise of the Constitution, emerged in explicit terms at the very start of the republic.

We congratulate **Arnita Jones** on receiving the Roger R. Trask Award for 2022. How fascinating and riveting it is to follow her account of a career so centered on the tumultuous and turbulent changes in the historical profession over the past 50 years. Those decades were indeed revolutionary, witnessing an expansion of the historical profession beyond academia, opening public history careers for history graduates; the arrival of the internet, allowing faster and fuller communication; the rise of public interest in history with the resulting disputes over history curricula and culture wars; increased attention to federal history work and records preservation; increased international collaboration in public history; and substantial progress toward gender equality in the historical profession. Jones held leadership roles in the most prominent historical organizations, where she

witnessed, charted, and impacted the direction and character of those changes. One lesson is clear. Amid expanding popular interest in history that often distorts facts, she cautions us to guard and protect historical standards—to promote “the value and integrity of historical research.”

Sean Seyer capably explores the early years of federal promotion of aviation during and after World War I. The war was a catalyst for innovation and state-of-the-art engineering in aircraft that would advance national security. The federal government’s procurement procedures pooled aircraft patents and made them readily available to qualified manufacturers. The process thus extended the concept of eminent domain to patents and left nonparticipating, independent inventors to sue the government in the “notoriously slow Court of Claims.” Seyer provides an insightful story of aviation inventor James V. Martin’s long legal and political campaign against those perceived monopolistic practices, which resulted in the Lampert Committee’s investigation and the 1926 Air Commerce Act. While the new law did not end the government’s procurement practices, it did establish federal oversight in air travel and promoted safety, and it “laid the groundwork for America’s 20th-century aerial preeminence.” Seyer’s account not only sheds light on the momentous transition to federal regulation of aviation, but immerses us in a key developmental moment for the modernizing state, one in which government needs in the promotion of technological advancement circumscribed the long-standing norms of inventors’ rights.

Neil Buffett explores the President’s Environmental Merit Awards Program from its creation in October 1971 to its enhancement in the Carter administration. His study is the first to examine the program, although historians have long recognized the enthusiastic involvement of American youth in environmental issues from the time of the first Earth Day in April 1970. President Richard Nixon sought to gain the youth vote by establishing the program in the EPA; his motivations were largely political. The program recognized and awarded students involved in school-sponsored clean-up and recycling projects, field research, and even letter-writing campaigns. First, the article shines light on the merit awards program—its failures and successes, and student achievements. Second, it uncovers clear, firsthand documentation of White House planning and motivations for the awards program, from the cynical opportunism of the Nixon years to the more idealistic and nurturing goals of the Carter years.

Military historian **Bradley Lynn Coleman** sheds new light on U.S. relief efforts after the devastating 7.0 Mw earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010. Coleman’s research

contributes to our understanding of military assistance on two levels. First, he uses oral histories to capture the critical, previously undocumented efforts of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (USMAAG) in the neighboring Dominican Republic to coordinate early relief activities. With the damage to Haitian airfields, the USMAAG quickly developed and executed plans, supported by the Dominican government, to use airports on the eastern side of Hispaniola to evacuate U.S. citizens from Haiti and deliver first responders to affected areas around Port-au-Prince. The USMAAG's small staff of 10 servicemembers also "moved relief workers and supplies across the border; and enabled the deployment of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets." Second, Coleman credits the mission's overall success to the coordinated work of the "country team" in the Dominican Republic, comprised of military, State Department, and USAID staff who worked together efficiently to provide a coordinated and rapid response to the unanticipated humanitarian crisis. And we learn that such integrated civilian-military structures form the basis of U.S. missions in many foreign countries. More broadly, longstanding U.S. efforts to promote a military partnership with the Dominican Republic included "technical assistance for Dominican counter-illicit trafficking operations" and "medical readiness training exercises to improve the Dominican healthcare system." That preexisting U.S.-Dominican military-to-military relationship proved critical for Haitian relief. Not incidentally, we gain appreciation for the importance and special skills of the military historian. In the frantic execution of its mission, the USMAAG, part of U.S. Southern Command, operated largely through verbal commands and left few written records. As the U.S. Southern Command historian, Coleman subsequently conducted numerous oral interviews to capture this story.

We are pleased to include an interview with **Kelly J. Shannon** on her book *U.S. Foreign Policy and Muslim Women's Human Rights* (2018). Shannon's responses reveal an in-depth and nuanced analysis of how expanding campaigns for Muslim women's rights influenced U.S. foreign policies after the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979. Increased transnational communication between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1970s, including at world conferences during the UN Decade for Women, enabled the groups' successes in influencing American foreign policies. But these NGOs diverged in their understandings and goals. While U.S.-based groups assumed an "imperialist" stance, promoting the kinds of rights valued by Americans, foreign-based groups were sensitive to the particular human rights needs of their own populations. Also, the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations differed fundamentally in their pursuit of women's rights. The former "avoided taking a colonial feminist approach in its women's rights policies, while the latter's administration's approach was openly colonialist," to be enforced by military intervention. Clinton's efforts were

consequently perceived as more “authentic.” The lessons are clear: U.S. leadership is essential, Shannon argues, for the promotion of economic and political equity, but it must be based on understanding of the needs and “agendas” of local populations. Our thanks to Alexander Poster for conducting the interview.

I thank **Sarah Snyder** for agreeing to participate in our roundtable on her book *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (2018). I also thank **Paul Adler** for his insightful introduction, and reviewers **Theresa Keeley**, **Robert Rakove**, and **Matthew K. Shannon** for their wide-ranging and perceptive comments. All reviewers appreciated the value of Snyder’s exploration and highlighting of human rights activism in the “long 1960s” as a critical precursor of official human rights diplomacy in the mid-1970s. The panel raised several questions that included Snyder’s choices of international crises to investigate, the impact of the Vietnam War, and role of the State Department and United Nations. As Snyder explains her choices of five international case studies—on abuses in the Soviet Union, Rhodesia, Greece, South Korea, and Chile—we gain an appreciation of some decisions the historian must make: on the availability of evidence, the diversity and relative impact of various international crises, and the importance of key individuals who championed human rights. We also gain deeper appreciation of the international turmoil and disruption of the 1960s that, in Snyder’s words, “corroded the Cold War consensus,” fundamentally challenging U.S. policies and enabling “new ideas and actors to shape U.S. foreign policy going forward.” Alarmed by the U.S. conduct of the war in Vietnam, the mistreatment of Jews in the Soviet Union, the atrocities in Rhodesia, and the civil rights movement at home, “new voices” outside and inside government urged changes in the direction of U.S. foreign policy. The discussion helps greatly to refine our understanding of the boundaries and impact of the long 1960s and the historical background of human rights diplomacy.

Many thanks to senior assistant editor **Judson MacLaury** for his review of all articles. Thanks also to assistant editor **Reid Arno** for his editorial help. I appreciate the contributions of our anonymous reviewers for helping to refine these articles.

We thank our readers for their support of *Federal History* and the Society for History in the Federal Government (www.shfg.org), and hope you have found these works useful and interesting.

Benjamin Guterman
Editor
federalhistory@gmail.com