Introduction
Introduction

As of late, there has been particular focus on the targeting and increased visibility of vulnerable groups. From their racial, gender, religious, sexual, and other identities, these communities’ voices have asserted their presence and their importance. This has become increasingly clear in light of both our national and global contexts in recent months and years. Because of these dynamics, the examination of marginalized communities and issues is more important than ever. Understanding the context behind their present condition in societies here and abroad, and seeing how those histories inform the construction of our community as we know it, are both critical functions of history.

In this issue, we explore the narratives of such marginalized communities, discussing anti-Chinese and anti-indigenous attitudes, gender politics abroad in India and Mexico, Jewish exclusion in the U.S., and how sexuality helped frame public perceptions of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Finding new historical perspectives requires us to dig deeper into those stories and angles that have yet to be properly acknowledged within the dominant narrative. By analyzing the various ways in which these topics have played out over time, we hope to encourage you to continue to seek out these hidden realities.

This edition begins with an essay by Joe Curran, who explores the different reasons for anti-Chinese sentiment during the California Gold Rush. Curran takes advantage of previous literature to analyze the various bases for unfair treatment of Chinese miners, which include economic frustrations, racial prejudices, and cultural biases. His use of evolving historiography creates a clearer picture of the broader concerns over Chinese influence on white American miners and laborers. Curran challenges his readers to look deeper at historical and contemporary justifications of anti-immigrant opinions.

Victoria Juarez’s piece continues the analysis of racial discrimination in U.S. society by examining the media response to the Occupation of Alcatraz Island from 1969 to 1971, and the larger indigenous activism that surrounded it. The movement was led by activists who challenged a history of occupation and colonization by turning the notion on its head and
reclaiming a space in protest. Delving into the rhetoric used by mainstream media, Juarez emphasizes the importance of language in revealing and reiterating internalized bias, and how these choices shapes public memory.

The scholarly examination of identity and perception continues in Héctor Navarro’s essay, as he explores the roots of Mexican machismo as it relates to the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz from 1876 to 1911. As the political elite framed indigenous and lower-class men as feminine due to perceived passiveness or uncontrollable sexuality, men of lower ranking responded by criticizing the dictatorship and feminizing its culturally European identity. Navarro argues that the embodiment of hyper-masculinity in defiance of the Porfirian regime laid some of the foundations of the homophobia and machismo that influence modern conventional Mexican ideals of manhood.

Focusing on the interaction between gender, religion, and custom, Neil Datar evaluates the long-lasting impact of British rule in India. Through his exploration of British Imperialism and the eventual Partition of India, he finds three resultant flaws that continue to manifest themselves in India. These socio-political failings have particularly significant consequences for women, which Datar further illustrates with an analysis of a divisive contemporary court case. His work reveals how disagreements over state and religious power can play out in negotiations, and eventual decisions, regarding women’s rights.

In the face of a recent uptick in anti-Semitic aggressions in the United States, Michelle Runyon challenges the misperception that Washington’s letter to the Jews of Newport in 1790 marked a growing policy of religious pluralism in the U.S. Although Washington made a promise that Jews would be protected to practice their religion in the United States, the mixed legal protections prior to and following the letter counter this conception. Runyon addresses the historiographical gap in Jewish-American history by combining knowledge of early Jewish legal rights and the actions of George Washington, particularly regarding the sentiments expressed in his letter to the Jews of Newport.

Katherine Porter evaluates the disagreements within American Reform Judaism during the Progressive Era as some Jews attempted to better assimilate into mainstream American society. Her analysis of press coverage
reveals the ubiquitous, but limited nature of progressive reform. While proposing specific changes within Jewish tradition, Reform Jews were also emulating the progressive attitude that the majority of Americans felt at the time. Porter’s work reveals how the goals and ideals, as well as the division within, Reform Judaism proved to be much more American than might have been previously understood.

Amanda Dahl’s essay closes out the issue, as she follows the evolution of popular perception of HIV/AIDS from the early 1980s to the present. She investigates the impact that presidential administrations, pop culture, and evangelical Christians had on public opinion amidst the mystery surrounding the growth of this disease. Dahl criticizes the roles Ronald Reagan and evangelical Christians played in portraying HIV/AIDS, especially due to the subsequent mistreatment of gay men and others afflicted. She credits the positive shift in opinion to the pervasiveness of pop culture and efforts of George W. Bush. Dahl’s work reveals how an assortment of influences can sway public thought, taking decades for accurate information and sympathy to take hold among the greater population.