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Letter from the Editors

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS:

Emily Kern and Alex Zhang

While professional historical journals usually confine their scope to a particular thematic or geographic area, the young editors of an undergraduate journal are blessed—or sometimes cursed—with papers that range all over the historical field. At the *Penn History Review*, we have the good fortune to read many of the best historical research papers produced by Penn’s undergraduates, and can bear testament to the diverse interests and historical insights of our fellow students. However, in the midst of these differences, similarities also emerge. In the three papers presented in the Spring 2012 issue of the *Penn History Review*, we can observe several different responses to the basic issue of state formation and the ways in which governments succeeded or failed to accommodate existing groups and institutions.

Our first paper, *In Barbarian Times: State Formation, Religion, and Land Redistribution in Ostrogothic Italy and Vandal North Africa*, by University of Pennsylvania undergraduate Taylor Williams, examines the emergence of two “barbarian” successor states founded by Germanic tribes in the lands of the former western Roman Empire. Despite the putative collapse of the Roman Empire in the west in the mid-fifth century, Roman provincials were still numerically significant in both Ostrogothic Italy and Vandal North Africa. In this piece, Williams argues that while Ostrogothic Italy was formed with imperial support and actively sought to court the Roman Senate, the Vandal invasion of the Roman province of North Africa led to a caesura in Roman-North Africa relations, resulting in a profound dislocation of the Roman elite.

While the Roman population of Ostrogothic Italy may have reached a degree of accommodation with their new rulers, the English Catholics discussed in our second paper, by Carolyn Vinnicombe, were not so fortunate. In her paper, *Recusancy and Regicide: The Flawed Strategy of the Jesuit Mission in Elizabethan England*, Vinnicombe describes the failure of English Jesuits to create a viable political and religious strategy for

Catholic conversion and co-existence in Protestant England under Elizabeth I. Although the Jesuits initially benefitted from the somewhat relaxed religious atmosphere in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, failed regicidal plots and treasonous undertakings created a toxic atmosphere that limited the growth of English Catholicism and pushed the English government to adopt a more violently anti-Catholic stance.

The third paper, *Twilight of Consensus: The American Association for Labor Legislation and Academic Public Policy Research*, by John Gee, details the growth, and eventual eclipse, of academic public policy research during the Progressive Era, focusing on the work of the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL). Despite early successes in the area of labor protection and workman's compensation, the AALL's most prominent campaign, for compulsory health insurance, was a complete failure. Gee argues that although the AALL was initially able to establish a space for academic social scientists in the public sphere, growing anti-elitism and their own inability to represent a professional consensus limited the scope of the AALL's activities, and contributed to a growing division between academic policy work and the public sphere.

In addition to these articles, the *Penn History Review* is pleased to publish abstracts for the senior honors thesis students. The honors thesis seminar students wish to extend their thanks to their seminar leaders, Professor Steve Hahn and Professor Benjamin Nathans, for their excellent support and guidance over the past year. PHR would also like to thank the many members of the Penn faculty who encouraged students to submit papers, as well as Dr. Stephanie McCurry, undergraduate chair of the History Department, and Dr. Yvonne Fabella, undergraduate coordinator extraordinaire and PHR's fairy godmother. Finally, we wish to thank the History Department and the University of Pennsylvania for their generous financial support of the *Review*, their efforts to foster undergraduate research, and commitment to cultivating future historians.

Emily Kern and Alex Zhang, editors-in-chief.