

Introduction to TAM Vault Essays

In this issue, *The Americas* presents two more curated collections and companion essays to add to our TAM Vault series: Margarita Martínez-Osorio on the histories of women and gender and Douglas McRae on Latin American cities and urban history. The TAM Vault series illuminates historiographical trends in Latin American history as well as key articles in the journal's back catalog for both a scholarly and general audience. This series was particularly designed with instructors constructing syllabi or looking for a classroom-ready article on historiographical trends in mind. These essays and curated collections on women and gender and urban history join three previous TAM Vault explorations on revolution and revolutionary movements (2016), missions and missionaries (2017), and Afro-Latin America (2018).¹

In her chronological analysis, Martínez-Osorio combines quantitative tools and text analysis methods to track the evolution of writing on the history of women and gender, finding that over *The Americas*' 80-year history, scholarship has focused on the category of "women" rather than "gender." After identifying 88 articles on women or gender in the journal's history, she maps out three distinct eras of increased publications. Even before the sustained attention on women's history emerged in the 1970s, *The Americas* in the mid-1940s–60s was offering its readers articles and primary sources on women, primarily biographical accounts of notable female figures, especially Gabriela Mistral and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. In the second era, from the 1980s to the 1990s, articles move to center on "women in historical inquiry and constructing 'her-stories' aimed at highlighting women's role as agents in broader historical processes" while also paying closer analytical attention to the intersections of female experience with class and posing critical questions about the limitations of the historical source base. In the final era she examines, from 2000s to the present, Martínez-Osorio finds more articles looking at state formation and modernity, and

1. See Erica Toffoli, "Revolution and Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: A Special Teaching and Research Collection of *The Americas*," *The Americas* 74, no. S1 (2017): S3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2016.96>; Christopher Woolley, "Missions and Missionaries in the Americas: A Special Teaching and Research Collection of *The Americas*," *The Americas* 74, no. S2 (2017): S4–13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2017.90>; and Fernanda Bretones Lane, "Afro-Latin America: A Special Teaching and Research Collection of *The Americas*," *The Americas* 75, no. S1 (2018): S6–18. <https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2017.178>.

exciting new work on masculinities and sexualities, even while, on the whole, the scholarship retains “women” as the principal category of analysis.

In his article, McRae offers a thematic instead of a chronological review of the scholarship on cities and urbanization in Latin America that has appeared in *The Americas*. He defines urban history as more than just a setting or backdrop but rather as history that happens in a city or urban space. Looking instead for an article that “always assigns a central role for the city’s inhabitants and the spaces they create and occupy,” McRae identifies over 100 engaging with urban history in the journal’s pages. His essay walks us through six thematic clusters he identifies: urbanization and city-making; urban governance, health, and reform, especially in the areas of crime and public health; urban politics and protest, especially labor politics; urban economic and material life; urban culture and power; and, finally, urban *letrados* and print media.

While these *TAM* Vault essays remain excellent resources for syllabi construction and classroom use, instructors may also find them increasingly useful as artificial intelligence, especially large language models capable of creating novel and increasingly sophisticated text, reshape history education. As with most of the humanities, our discipline is built on reading and writing, cognitive skills commercial AI products targeting students promise to “offload” for them, or as one product assures, to flip a switch to turn “school on easy mode.” Generative AI technology is changing rapidly, and social norms and expectations about how to best deploy it not just in education but in professional and work lives more broadly will take more time to stabilize. In the meantime, what can instructors do in academic disciplines where learning has been taught and assessed through reading comprehension, research skills, and writing competency?

Instructors are responding in a variety of ways—some have fully welcomed the technology into their classrooms, others have prohibited its use entirely and returned to in-class writing and other forms of assessment meant to ensure students cannot access these disruptive technologies. Many instructors are also redesigning assignments and classroom activities away from traditional finished products such as essays or research papers to instead focus on teaching—and grading—the reading, research, or writing process itself, in effect inviting students to demonstrate their mastery of a specific cognitive skill.

Building on this approach, instructors can use the *TAM* Vault essays to construct assignments that ask students to demonstrate historical thinking and research skills. Journal articles, especially back catalog articles, are well suited for this task, as they are still easily accessible online but may not be as present in large language model training data. For instance, students could use Martínez-Osorio’s chronological study to select a pair of articles from what she identifies as the early, biographical period of attention on women in the 1940s–60s and the post-2000’s period and identify or annotate key passages that demonstrate the changes in their historical methodology and use of sources. Using

McRae's more thematic than chronological essay on cities and urban history, students could select a pair of articles from a theme and analyze the source bases to help map out key differences in the context from each case. A few articles appear in both collections, allowing a class to read the article together first and then break up into two teams to annotate the approaches and sources historians use from either a gendered analysis or from an urban history perspective. In all these examples, students work with the texts themselves and "show their work," annotating and analyzing key passages and digging into footnotes. These foundational reading, research, and analytical skills are critical to how historians think and work, and demand outputs that are more difficult for large language models to replicate. We hope that the *TAM* Vault series can be useful to Latin American history instructors navigating these new trends in technology as they design assignments and approaches rooted in what we do as historians—finding and working with primary sources, close reading and analysis, and constructing contexts and historical arguments.

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