

## Podcasting the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

Cullinane, Michael Patrick. *The Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. Podcast. 2021. <https://shows.acast.com/gildedageandprogressiveera>.

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doi:10.1017/S1537781422000263

When Michael Patrick Cullinane began recording *The Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, a free podcast about “the seismic transitions that took place in the United States from the 1870s to 1920s,” in September of 2021, he thought he was doing so to stave off the social and intellectual isolation of the lingering Covid-19 pandemic. As of April 2022, the twenty-five posted episodes have thousands of downloads, and the series has taken on a life of its own.

Cullinane records new episodes nearly every week. Each centers around an interview with the author of a scholarly book related to major issues taking place within the history or historiography of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (terms he effectively problematizes in episode 5). Although the episodes are clearly aimed at fellow GAPE enthusiasts, Cullinane introduces each episode from scratch, making stand-alone pieces that are easy to incorporate into syllabi or follow as starting points for further reading and research (Cullinane includes specific suggestions on his website).

As a host, Cullinane is enthusiastic, personable, and relaxed. He lets scholars and writers lead discussion. Since the only parameters of the podcast are chronological, the show’s subjects range widely. In the first few episodes, Cullinane interviewed Cecelia Tichi on cocktails, Barbara Schneider on reproductive rights, Reiland Rabaka on W.E.B. DuBois, Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz on Filipino nationhood, and Christopher McKnight Nichols and Nancy Unger on historical periodization.

Cullinane, of course, holds the chronological reins loosely: he and his guests explore the reverberations and contexts that connect the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the present. The podcast nimbly walks a line between scholarly deep dives and contemporary issues. In the pilot episode, about the flu pandemic of 1918, Christopher McKnight Nichols makes explicit comparisons and conjectures to the coronavirus pandemic. Cullinane interviewed Scott Reynolds Nelson about his book *Oceans of Grain: Wheat, Russia, Ukraine, and the U.S.* on the day Russia invaded Ukraine. In episode 12, Ashleigh Lawrence-Sanders discussed the development of Confederate monuments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, starting from the context of 2020’s “racial reckoning.” She points out, however, that Confederate monument-building is not restricted to the age of Jim Crow: statues were still being raised all the way into the 1990s without extensive protest. But this kind of awareness never verges into presentism, and the podcast continues to delve into the fine points of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history for their own sake. Nor do the historians and other scholars that Cullinane

interviews deign to predict the future based on the past, no matter how similar the two may seem to be.

Still, themes do emerge. Those that thread through the episodes include: empire, power, the public vs. private, reform and corruption, and race and gender. And especially given Cullinane's areas of specialty, the show often takes an international perspective. Cullinane, professor of U.S. History at the University of Roehampton in London, specializes in international relations, the presidency, and American culture. The author, most recently, of *Remembering Theodore Roosevelt: Reminiscences of his Contemporaries* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), Cullinane's own entry point into the era is through the relationship between the United States and the world. The show therefore often looks at the international dimensions of American history. In various episodes, for instance, Andrew Priest discusses empire, Julia Irwin explores the Red Cross and "catastrophic diplomacy," and Neil Lanctot examines America's decision to enter World War I.

Cullinane does a good job varying the levels, styles, and disciplines of the scholars he interviews. His guests include not only senior academics but also bestselling popular historians like John Sedgwick, who talked about his latest book *From the River to the Sea*. Smithsonian curator Jon Grinspan is featured in an episode on voting rights centered around his book *The Age of Acrimony: How American Fought to Fix Their Democracy*. Independent scholar Brendan Goff talks about the fascinating history of the Rotary Clubs.

Most notably, episode 14 is a "Young Scholars Showcase," in which three early-career scholars discuss their work. In it, Aroop Mukharji discusses the use of social-science research methods to approach archives on presidential decision-making; Chelsea Gibson explains how studying the past is like studying a foreign language; and Alex Byrne looks at the rise of Pan-Americanism through a study of aviation. (My only complaint about this episode is that the participants could have each justified their own individual episodes.) Other formal variations include a shorter, more narrative episode produced with *Canadian History*, and a tag-team episode in which Cullinane and Benjamin Wetzel interview one another about their respective books on Theodore Roosevelt.

*The Gilded Age and Progressive Era* is at its best when the enthusiasm scholars have for their own research is most evident, such as when younger scholars talk about falling in love with the archive or when a historian "nerds out" about what it's like to write a "wandering narrative" within the normally staid genre of economic history. Cullinane, for instance, reveals a treasure from his own perusal of previously unread Roosevelt archival materials: Alice Roosevelt apparently believed there were Russian communists hiding in dentist offices. In moments such as these, the podcast not only delivers historical content relevant to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era but captures the process of historical discovery itself. *The Gilded Age and Progressive Era* is therefore highly recommended for all students and scholars of the era, especially those studying the intersections between the Gilded Age and Progressive Era and questions surrounding race, gender, and empire.