Review: Erika Bsumek, Matt O'Hair, Ian Diaz, Braeden Kennedy. *ClioVis*.

Lindsey Passenger Wieck
St. Mary's University

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ClioVis is online software that provides a multi-visualization tool for creating digital mindmaps, timelines, and presentations in the classroom. University of Texas-Austin historian Erika Bsumek created *ClioVis* to be used across academic disciplines, but its use as a timeline tool lends itself well to engaging students in the history classroom. *ClioVis* is designed to be collaborative, allowing students to edit and contribute to a timeline simultaneously. There is a no-cost basic version, while other versions are available with flexible paid subscription options. Instructors can embed *ClioVis* in Canvas or other LMSs (typically in the paid version), but instructors can reach out to the Bsumek and her team and discuss different use cases that can be made available through free-to fee-based options.

I have used *ClioVis* several times in my own undergraduate teaching, and I have found it to be an effective and engaging tool that enhances the student learning experience. It pushes my students to explore historical content, synthesize big themes of history, and engage in low-stakes historical research and analysis.

The timeline tool provides multiple ways to teach with chronology and deepen students' historical knowledge. On a basic level, students create timelines with event nodes. Each node can be titled, with a place for students to describe the item, along with a date (or date range). They can include an image (with caption), video, audio, and add sources to the node. From there, students can also create connections between nodes and add eras and color-coded categories to produce additional layers of depth to the content displayed (see figure 1). The *ClioVis* timeline tool also prompts students to include references, which can be helpful for ensuring they get into the habit of properly citing their sources.

ClioVis is simple to use, and within a couple of weeks of receiving coaching and feedback, students are able to produce good timelines on a regular basis. The number of options and fields presented is limited enough that students are not overwhelmed by these choices. In addition to a traditional timeline view, there is a simplified view which shows the events in a more linear way, in a vertically scrolling format. (I often prefer this simplified view for grading, since it is less visually overwhelming and easier to make sure that I see all of the timeline elements). It can also be used to facilitate greater accessibility. The linear format works better for screen readers and keyboard-only webpage navigation. It is also easier to zoom in and adjust browser font size in the linear view. One missing feature is that there is not a "username" associated with items added to the timeline—the tool does not indicate who contributed each piece. An easy workaround to this is to have students add their name or initials to the text they include in each event and connection they make.

ClioVis is effective at empowering students to become "experts" on themes over the course of a semester. In a small course (15-25 students, majors and non-majors) I teach on 20th-century U.S. history, students work in groups of 3-4 to create a single timeline each week based on a theme they have chosen for the semester: Race, Citizenship, & Migration; US & the World; Class, Gender, & Identity; Culture, Media, & Religion; Capitalism, Business, & Labor; and Politics, Law, & Activism. As homework, I task students with using a chapter from *The American Yawp*, a collaborative open U.S. history textbook, to identify three events they each want to add to the group's timeline. For each event, students also choose an artifact (any primary source) to spotlight, which provides an opportunity to practice contextualizing and analyzing primary sources.

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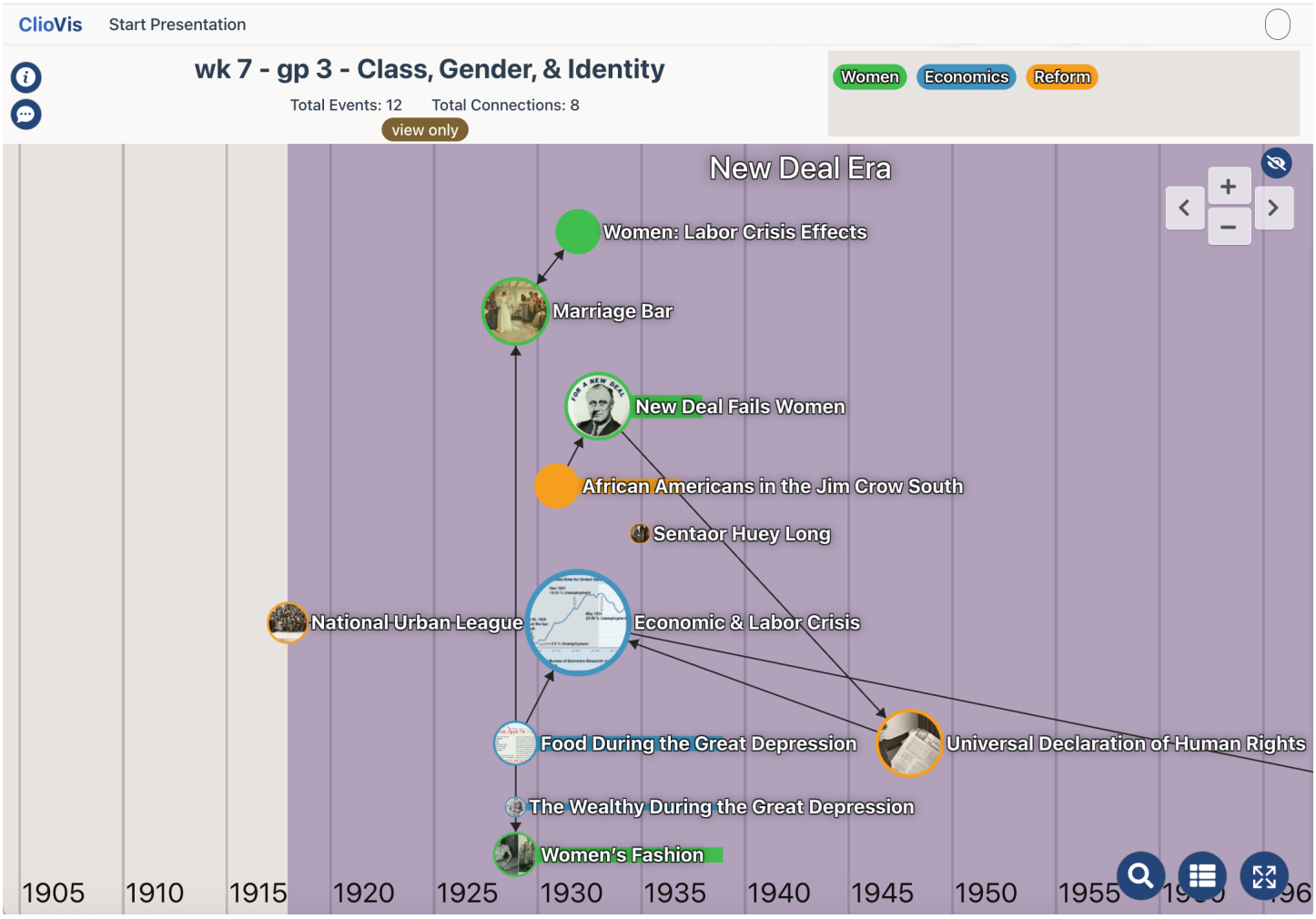

Figure 1. Timeline on "New Deal Era" created by students. Each event node includes a title and is plotted by date; some also show a thumbnail image. Students can also color-code event nodes by categories to identify themes. In this figure, students color-coded nodes by "women," "economics," and "reform." (Image courtesy of Annabelle Rodriguez, Kaylee Bryant, Tate Waller, and Vanessa Treviño).

One of my favorite ways to use the timeline is to have students use the connections feature to analyze the relationship between events. For example, a student could create a connection between events like "bloomers" and "women's bicycles" to show that clothing innovations made bicycling possible for women (see "Cycling to Suffrage" example on *ClioVis* website: https://cliovis.com/examples/). This feature is a straightforward one – students click and drag a connection between the events, and then determine if they want the connection to appear on the timeline as an arrow (forward, backward, or bidirectional) or just a straight line. Then they analyze the connection. While simple, this creates an opportunity for students to extend the preliminary work they did in considering chronology to engaging in more complex thinking about relationships between items on the timeline. In addition, the instructor could add in-class assignments to deepen students' analysis of these connections by asking them to choose one to elaborate upon through further research or by providing all students with a pair of events to brainstorm multiple connections.

As a group, students work toward developing an argument for the timeline. First they create categories, eras, and a description of the timeline, synthesizing and analyzing all of the timeline elements. I encourage them to start the conversation around the bigger themes of the week and to communicate with each other regularly to avoid duplication. In a "timeline description" field, students collectively write a thesis statement that captures the work they did on the timeline for that single week. This thesis statement often provides an analytical pay-off, moving

them from synthesis to argument and critical analysis. While the assignment is to create a timeline, building a chronology is really just the first step in encourging students to advance their thinking with my assignments using *ClioVis*.

Using the *ClioVis* timeline tool in this way empowers students because it gives them the freedom to explore each week's *The American Yawp* chapter through the lens of their group's theme. Instead of reading an entire chapter with no clear direction, students instead can read with purpose toward building their knowledge in their

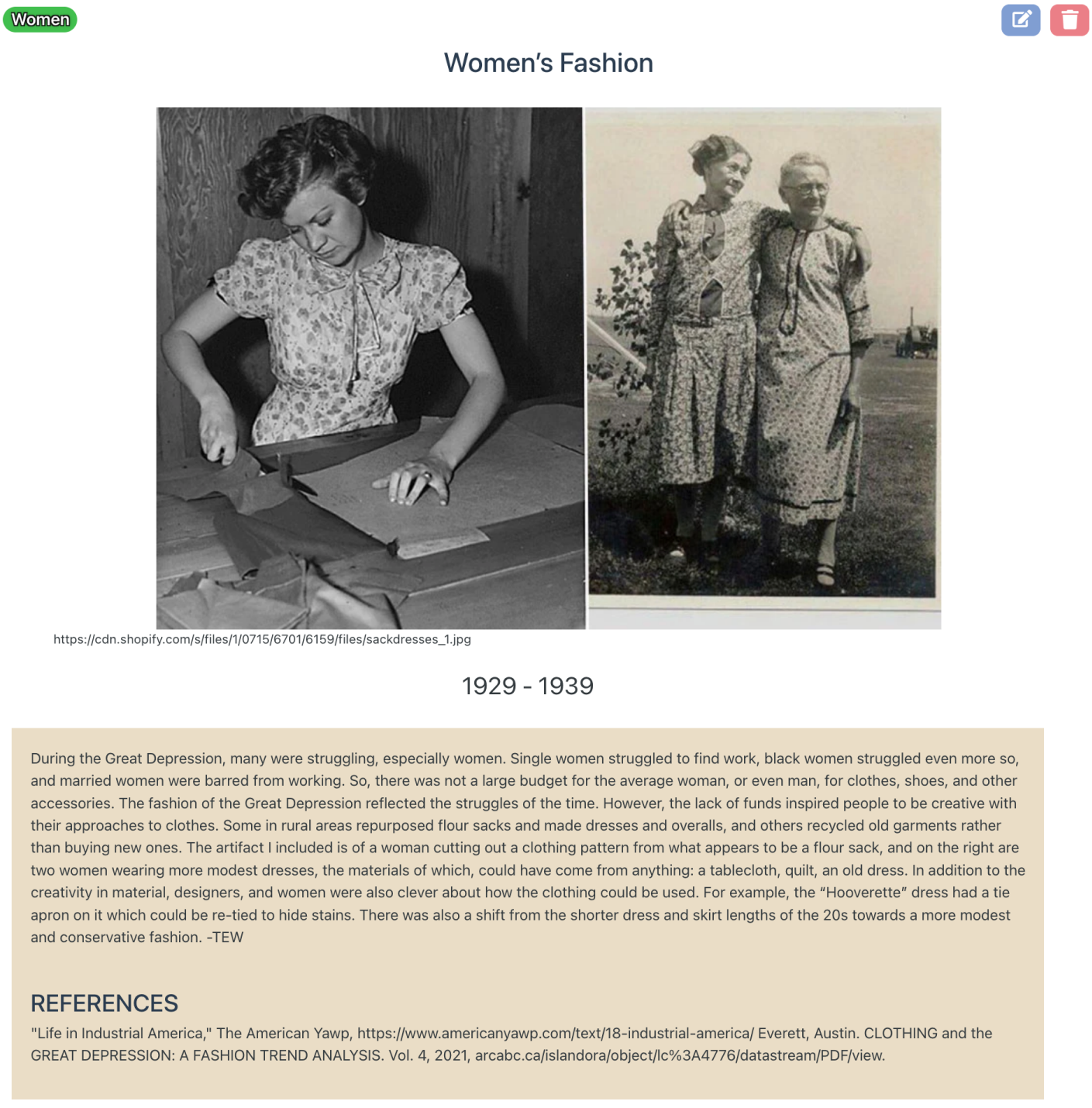

Figure 2: Clicking on an event node in the timeline opens the full text description, media, and reference students included in the node. The simplified view, like the one pictured here on "Women's Fashion," shows the events on the full screen. (Image courtesy of Tate Waller).

thematic area. Once they finish their group processing for the week, we do a variety of discussion-based activities where groups can share their expertise with their classmates. For example, we do a "speed scholar" activity where students each have one minute to share their thesis and a key event from the group timeline that week with a student from a different group; then they switch and talk to a student from another group. We also have full class discussions where they share examples from their timelines that week, exposing students to a wider breadth of content beyond their group's dedicated theme.

With a group's sustained focus on a specific theme, we can have thoughtful and precise discussions about continuity and change over time. We also think critically about the pros and cons of timelines, and how they influence the way we interpret and share historical narratives. My students also appreciate that they can do "deep-dives" into topics that interest them: they use *The American Yawp* as their starting point, but they can explore additional sources to find their artifacts or do additional research into a topic.

The *ClioVis* timeline tool could also be adapted for use in a large lecture class to provide smaller groups of students opportunities to engage with the material and discuss content. In a thesis or capstone course, students could use it to collect and annotate their primary sources or create an initial timeline for a larger historical research project. Students can also use audio or video narration in their timeline to create a different type of engagement with their thesis or capstone project. Lastly, while not discussed here, students can also use *ClioVis*'s mind-mapping feature for brainstorming, studying, and note-taking.

There are many ways to export and share *ClioVis* timelines for instructor grading and student presentations. Students can export timelines as URLs so they can turn them in as assignments on Canvas or Blackboard. *ClioVis* also includes a presentation mode that is akin to presentation mode in PowerPoint, allowing students to share their presentations in class or in other public settings. Presentation and export options also provide students opportunities to produce more polished products, and the timelines can also be embedded on websites or shared publicly online, which could be used to create public-facing projects.

Though *ClioVis* has thus far proven reliable and fairly easy to troubleshoot, there is a wealth of support available for instructors adopting this tool, including a thorough page of video tutorials (https://cliovis.com/tutorials-and-instructions/) and instructions for both students and teachers. Additionally, Bsumek and her team are readily available for consultations. The *ClioVis* team has helped me solve minor problems that have arisen (and which were the result of user error on my end). The best way to get a feel for what *ClioVis* has to offer is to visit the "Examples" page (https://cliovis.com/examples/), which allows for exploration and interaction with sample projects. The website also includes student-produced videos, featuring timelines on the *ClioVis* YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/@cliovis9344).

Overall, I have found *ClioVis* to be an incredible addition to the classroom in offering students frequent low-stakes opportunities to practice analyzing primary sources, understanding chronology, contextualizing historical events and exploring big themes in history, collaborating with classmates, and practicing other historical skills. Students often report that creating timelines with *ClioVis* is one of their favorite history class activities because it allows them to explore topics of interest and engage with content more deeply. Moreover, the online software is relatively easy to use, with a low learning curve, and flexible pricing options that make this accessible to instructors and students across a range of institutions. More than just about building chronologies, *ClioVis* offers an accessible tool with numerous possibilities for use that can help challenge students to practice deeper historical analysis in the products they create.

Author ORCID iD

Lindsey Passenger Wieck 0000-0002-3436-318X