

2019 Graduate Student Paper Prize: Ken Corbett, University of British Columbia, "Redeeming the Time: Punctuality, Credit, & the Middling Sort"

This well-written and richly-sourced paper explores the values and ideas connected to "time-keeping" by moving away from emphasizing the mechanical clock – a la David Landes and others – and instead "focusing on the language and values of human precision and accuracy related to timekeeping." What social and cultural factors "drove people to build and buy" clocks and other mechanical tools for marking time? The answers among others: "punctuality became timeliness" and "punctuality came to be regarded as something praiseworthy and, by the mid-eighteenth century, a virtue."

The paper highlights shifts in meanings and moral codes, revisiting sources and debates concerning early modern Puritanism, capitalism, and trade. Familiar names including Richard Baxter, Adam Smith, Hannah More and Daniel Defoe are front and center, as are others probably less recognizable, but also significant. Respectability and Christian values help explain the links between individual economic behavior and general social norms in this successful revisiting of Weber and Tawney.