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*To all lovers of history:
Laeta Lectio!*

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FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the Seventh Volume of the *Virginia Tech Undergraduate Historical Review*! Our team of undergraduate and graduate editors work to present the best available original undergraduate historical research from Virginia Tech and institutions across the East Coast. The *Review* seeks to provide undergraduate researchers with opportunities to improve their historical skills, experience the publishing process and, ultimately, to know the joy of seeing their hard work appear in print. Our board of undergraduate editors employs a blind review process, scoring each work according to a standardized rubric which emphasizes the author's engagement with the secondary literature on their topic, ability to create an argument from their primary source base and ability to clearly articulate their ideas. The excellence of the articles included in this volume stems from our author's hard work, dedication and willingness to accept and employ constructive feedback, as well as the long hours of analysis, proof-reading and effort on the part of our undergraduate, graduate and faculty editors.

For volume Seven we have expanded the scope of the *Review* in exciting new directions. This marks the first year that the *Review* will include historiographic articles in addition to pieces of original research. This represents an exciting opportunity to help undergraduates engage in and write about historical conversations. We have also included the winners of the Department's awards for Best Paper and Best Digital History Project.

Volume Seven begins with Courtney Ebersohl's "We Believed it to be honorable before God:" Religion in Enslaved Communities." Ebersohl adds to the growing body of literature on slave agency and argues that slaves used religious services and ideas to develop identities and communities that gave them a sense of value and equality. In "America Rock's Education: National Narratives and Historiographical Trends" Talia Brenner explores the connections between popular narratives, academic history and the popular children's show. Brenner argues that America Rock was largely representative of popular historical narratives of the 1970s, embracing a populist ethos but largely ignoring the perspectives of women and minorities. Genevieve Keillor adds to the conversation about representations of women in art in her article "Her beauty captivated his mind and the sword severed his neck!": The Changing Depiction of Judith Beheading Holofernes as a Reflection of the Role of Women in Society from the Pre-Renaissance to Contemporary Society." Keillor analyzes paintings of Judith Beheading Holofernes, describing the ways in which these paintings represent the gender norms of their creators and exploring how these norms and their incorporation into art changed over time. The History Department's 2017 Best Paper Award winner is Nala Chehade. In "Paint and

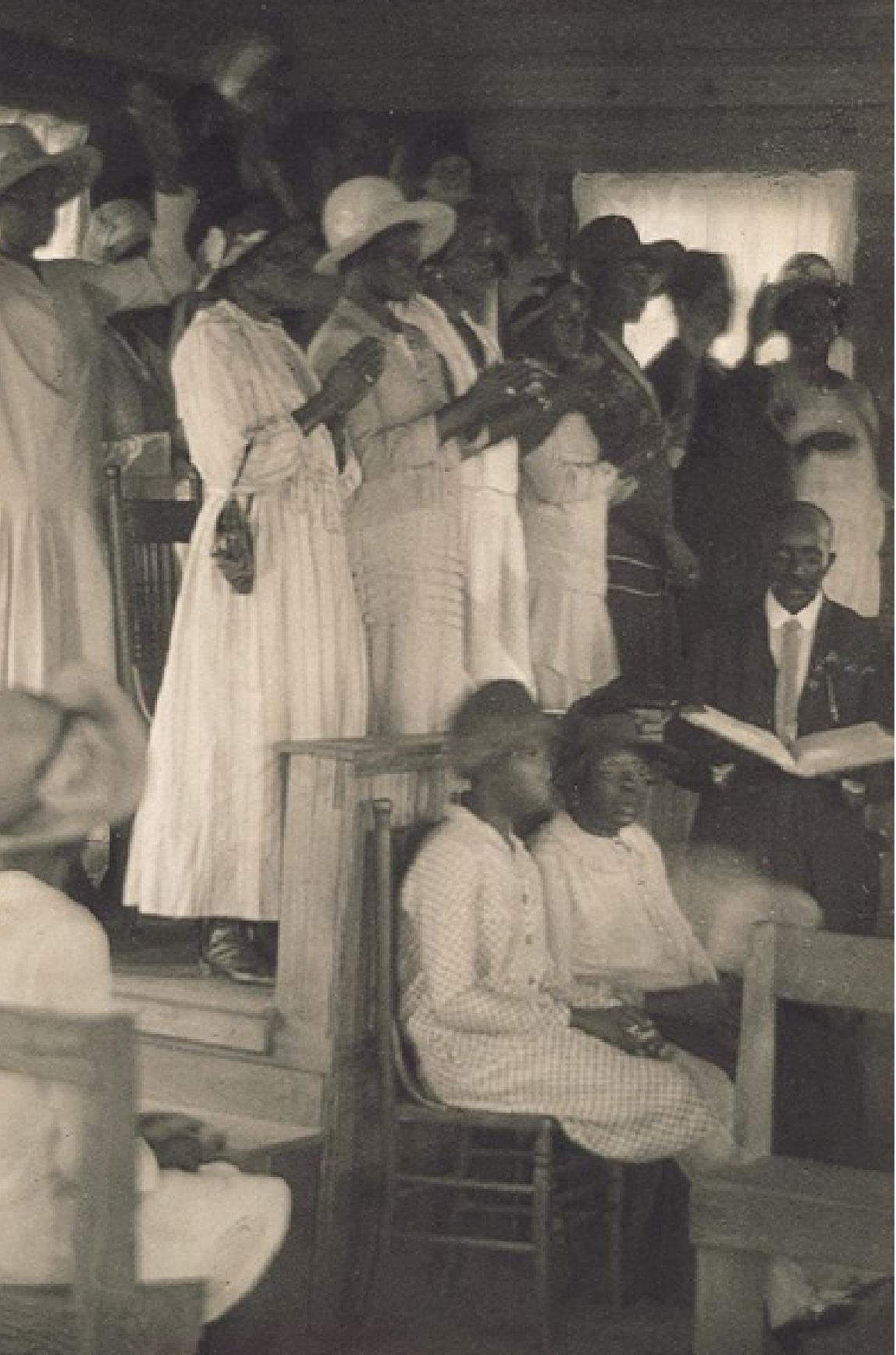
Politics: Analyzing the 2011 Egyptian Revolution through Graffiti” she explores the use of Graffiti during and after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Chehade argues that various Egyptians used the public forum of graffiti to create a plethora of alternative national narratives. The winner of the History Department’s award for the best digital history project is John Mark Mastakas. The *Review* contains a stable hyperlink to his blog, “The Kremlin Kronicle,” as well as a reflection where Mastakas discusses the ways in which a digital platform enhanced his work.

Our new historiography section features an article by Andrew Kapinos, entitled “Dismantling the Myths of the Eastern Front: The Role of the Wehrmacht in the War of Annihilation.” Kapinos notes that early historians of the Eastern Front in World War II tended to see the German Wehrmacht as separated from the atrocities associated with the war, largely because the political context of the Cold War limited the availability of non-German sources. He goes on to explore the development of a historical conversation in which more recent historians have taken advantage of an expanding source base and employed psychological and sociological concepts to understand the behavior of soldiers and demonstrated the complicity of the Wehrmacht in atrocities. Finally, the *Review* concludes with an interview that Andrew Kapinos and Grace Hemmingson conducted with renowned historian Geoffrey Megargee. Megargee was one of the scholars Kapinos mentioned in his essay for this volume, and when the opportunity came for us to interview him we could not pass it up! After a brief reflection by Kapinos, we have included the transcript of our conversation on his research on the Eastern front and war crimes, how he sees his work fitting into a larger conversation, and advice for young historians.

We wish to thank the faculty of the history department for their unwavering support, especially our faculty editor, Dr. Heather Gumbert, for her tireless work and careful eye. Thanks also go out to the chair of the department, Dr. Mark Barrow, as well as the founder of the VTUHR, Dr. Robert Stephens. This volume would not have been possible without the diligent work of our undergraduate editors and the many undergraduates who choose to submit their work to our publication. Special thanks are due to both the undergraduate editors and the faculty for sticking with us as we expand the educational mission the *Review* in exhilarating ways. Thanks also go out to you, dear reader, for without you we would be speaking to an empty room. Your support of undergraduate historical research gives us the heart to go on.

GRACE HEMMINGSON AND HEATH FURROW

Managing Editors



“WE BELIEVED IT TO BE HONORABLE BEFORE GOD”: Religion in Enslaved Communities, 1840-1860

Courtney Ebersohl,
Virginia Tech

“O, gracious Lord! when shall it be,
That we poor souls shall all be free?
Lord, break them slavery powers --
Will you go along with me?
Lord, break them slavery powers,
Go sound the jubilee!”

—Verse composed and sung by enslaved, as reported by William W. Brown ¹.

The dehumanization of African people in the United States began with their capture and the exploitation of their labor and bodies, which white people justified through the conviction of their inherent superiority. Even certain abolitionists, such as Southern unionist John Henning Woods, considered black people inferior and made the mistaken assumption that they “were contented with their

¹ William W. Brown, a prominent abolitionist, poet, and former slave from Kentucky, recalled hearing enslaved people sing this song when a slaveholder sold them to the Deep South. He believed that a slave composed the song. William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave* (Dublin: American Stereotype Plates, 1853), 51.

condition.”² However, as an Alabama slaveholder admitted in 1863, at the height of the Civil War, the idea of “the faithful slave [was] about played out.”³

Christian beliefs influenced many slave rebellions in the Antebellum South. Christianity permeated slave communities in the Deep South by the 1840s through widespread Protestant Evangelism, which emphasized individual freedom and direct communication with God. Nat Turner, an enslaved man in Virginia, believed that God had called upon him to lead a rebellion in 1831, in which enslaved and free African Americans killed sixty white people.⁴ As a consequence of the revolt, southern legislatures met to further restrict the education and freedoms of African Americans through forbidding them to read, write, and hold meetings. Southern slaveholders feared the power of religion and education, which could inspire enslaved people to resist their enslavers.

Georges Blandier, a French sociologist and anthropologist at the Sorbonne, argues in *L'Anthropologie Politique* that people cannot help attaching political significance to religion.⁵ Slaveholders and ministers used the bible to justify slavery and control enslaved people in the period between 1840 and emancipation. Despite slaveholders' efforts, African Americans used Christianity to create distinct cultural practices, beliefs, and social institutions that escaped an enslaver's control. Religious life in the enslaved community served as a defense against slavery and a source of collective strength. It is important to recognize that enslaved people nevertheless had to meet during their own time and faced severe punishment if caught. Collective religious passion was an effective defensive measure, but it did not prevent slaveholders from exploiting black labor. This paper will use testimonies and narratives to argue that religion in the South from 1840 – 1865 offered a social sphere within enslaved communities that relieved experiences of dehumanization under slavery. Although enslaved people did not always intend to challenge the institution of slavery, their actions demonstrated resistance to the objectives of slavery, especially their own dehumanization.

² John Henning Woods, a white man conscripted into the Confederate army, strongly opposed slavery and the Confederacy's decision to secede. John Henning Woods Papers, Ms2017-030, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA, vol 1b, 92.

³ David Williams, “‘The ‘Faithful Slave’ is About Played Out’: Civil War Slave Resistance in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley,” *Alabama Review* 52, no. 2 (1999): 83.

⁴ Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1969), 196 – 198.

⁵ Georges Balandier, *Anthropologie Politique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), 100-101.

Following the Civil War, historians interpreted the history of slavery in ways that justified or criticized the exclusions of Jim Crow. They developed interpretations of the enslaved person as either loyal to his master and happy with his condition, or fighting against his enslaver and for the Union.⁶ Their questions focused on whether slavery was good-natured or abusive. Ulrich B. Phillips' *American Negro Slavery* (1929) and *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929) emphasized the benevolent characteristics of slavery, which was an argument influenced by his pro-slavery apologist ideology.⁷ His writings are part of what is known as the "Lost Cause" historiography, in which slavery is understood as a positive good and the South represented as a victim of Northern aggression. Historian Kenneth Stampp focused on the same question as Phillips in his 1956 book *The Peculiar Institution*, but his argument stresses slavery's overwhelming brutality.⁸

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and a greater interest in social history and African and African American history among historians generated a more nuanced image of enslaved people and their culture. Historians relied on previously underused sources such as the WPA Federal Writers' Project interviews. During the Great Depression, the government employed writers who recorded the lives of over 2,300 former enslaved people from seventeen states. Historians of the 1960s and 1970s used these interviews as valuable sources that shed light on slave culture and way of life. For example, in 1974, Eugene Genovese discussed religious influences on slave communities in *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, in which he described the complex and autonomous nature of slave religious life that served as a source of community cohesion.⁹ Albert Raboteau and Lawrence Levine added to Genovese's argument with respect to the use of religion in slave communities. Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1977) and Raboteau's *Slave Religion* (1978) described religious practices including spirituals and dances, which served as a source of strength and community proving significant in defending against

⁶John E. Cairnes blames planters and their political leaders in the South for causing the war: "A system of society more formidable for evil, more menacing to the best interests of the human race, it is difficult to conceive." John E. Cairnes, *The Slave Power: Its Character, Career and Probable Designs* (New York: Carleton, 1862), 63. George Fitzhugh, the first sociologist in the United States, argued that slavery is a universal human condition that ensures economic security. George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South or the failure of Free Society* (Richmond: A. Morris, 1854).

⁷Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton, 1929); Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Grosset and Dunlap, 1929).

⁸Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956).

⁹Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

enslavers' attempts to disintegrate and demoralize African American communities.¹⁰

In 1977, John Blassingame wrote *Slave Testimony*, a collection of personal documents describing the life of enslaved people, in which he expressed concern over the truthfulness and accuracy of the WPA collection of slave narratives. Blassingame pioneered analysis of these interviews by bringing attention to the context in which they were written. He also warned against relying too heavily on the WPA interviews because of their limitations in representation and potential for interviewers to misreport the interview. The former enslaved people interviewed in the 1930s all experienced slavery as children or adolescents and were interviewed in their old age. As a result, they could have misremembered events because of their advanced ages, added more significance to the role of religion in their communities because older people tend to be more religious, or deliberately left out information that could have upset people in the racist atmosphere that clung to the strong "Lost Cause" ideology prevalent in the 1930s.¹¹

Historians in the last thirty years have shifted their focus from the autonomous nature of enslaved culture to the elite's methods of using enslaved people to contribute to the economic growth of the United States. Edward Baptist argues in *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* that slavery was essential to the growth of American capitalism and to funding the American Industrial Revolution.¹² Even though enslaved people valued religion, these historians emphasize that slave traders and masters ultimately controlled the enslaved person's labor and body.

I will adhere to Blassingame's warning by not only using WPA interviews to analyze enslaved peoples' religious preferences, but also examining independent interviews, antebellum narratives published in newspapers, and autobiographies to illustrate the defiant nature of religion in enslaved communities in the antebellum South. I will rely most heavily on slave testimonies from 1840 – 1865, which allow for consideration of how religion affected enslaved behavior and consciousness leading up to and during the Civil War.

The visible religious experiences of enslaved people in the South

¹⁰ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977).

¹¹ John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

¹² Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

differed according to what their enslavers allowed and the laws of their states.¹³ Although some black institutional and visible churches existed, many enslavers required African Americans to attend church with white people and preachers so that they could control their access to religion.¹⁴ Slaveholders would also hire black preachers to convey specific messages of obedience and docility. A former slave from Alabama, Charlie Van Dyke, remembered that “All that preacher talked about was for us slaves to obey our masters and not lie and steal.... The overseer stood there to see the preacher talked as he wanted him to talk.”¹⁵ In order to experience more authentic preaching, African Americans formed their own “invisible institution” in the slave quarters.¹⁶

While white people were not watching them, enslaved people preached and discussed their own interpretations of the Bible during secret services and meetings. According to Marry Gladdy, a former enslaved person in Georgia, “it was customary among slaves during the Civil War period to secretly gather in their cabins two or three nights each week and hold prayer and experience meetings.”¹⁷ During these meetings, Gladdy explained how they talked with each other about their experiences, shook hands, and chanted canticles together. Through these acts, the people on Gladdy’s plantation fostered a community. A former enslaved preacher from South Carolina also recalled groups of people meeting in “the fields and in the thickets and there, with heads together around a kettle to deaden the sound, they called on God out of heavy hearts.”¹⁸ Wash Wilson, an enslaved person from Texas, described how the enslaved people on his plantation would sing “Steal Away to Jesus” during the day to indicate that a religious meeting would occur that night. He explained that enslavers did not approve of religious meetings and that the enslaved people on his plantation would “slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night.”¹⁹ Religion

¹³ By 1860, North Carolina and virtually all other slaveholding states did not allow enslaved people to read or write or assemble without written permission. Ernet J. Clark, “Aspects of the North Carolina Slave Code, 1715 – 1860,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (1962): 163.

¹⁴ Four black Methodist churches had been founded in New Orleans before 1860. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 205.

¹⁵ George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, vol. 6, *Alabama*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1972), 398.

¹⁶ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 212.

¹⁷ Library of Congress, “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938,” vol. 4, *Georgia*, pt. 2, 17, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mesn.042/?sp=20>.

¹⁸ Enslaved preacher’s story in Rawick, ed., *The American Slave*, vol. 19, 156.

¹⁹ Library of Congress, “Born in Slavery” vol. 16, *Texas*, pt. 4, 198, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn164/>.

offered an identity that was not based on the condition of their slavery.

On plantations where enslavers forbade all forms of religion, including the white interpretation of the Bible, acts of religious expression were especially dangerous. Through individual prayer, enslaved people opposed the enslavers' religious restrictions. Celestia Avery evoked in a narrative in *American Slave* the story of her grandmother who liked to pray on a plantation run by an enslaver who forbid prayer. He beat her every day, yet she continued to practice her religion despite the consequences of terror and violence.²⁰ James Smith, formerly enslaved on a plantation in Georgia, insisted on praying and preaching to other enslaved people. His enslaver in Virginia had sold him to Georgia because he continued to pray and tried to convert other enslaved people. He ran away from Georgia because his enslaver believed in the same principles as his Virginia enslaver.²¹ Although these acts of religious expression were personal, they influenced other enslaved people who surely witnessed the abuse of their family members and friends. According to Genovese in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Christianity helped an enslaved person realize his or her individual worth and laid the foundation for black collectivity.²² Religion provided an outlet for emotional expression for individuals, which added to the collective identity of religious zeal.

The power of education threatened enslavers who feared that enslaved people would write passes that would free them or allow them to travel. Their anxiety prompted laws that prohibited the education of enslaved people in Mississippi and North Carolina and punished educators through fines in Alabama. However, enslaved people continued to teach each other how to read the Bible. W.E.B Du Bois estimated that despite prohibitions, about five percent of slaves had learned how to read by 1860.²³ Sella Martin, a prominent abolitionist and preacher in Boston and formally enslaved in Alabama and Georgia, knew how to read. Martin continued to educate other enslaved people even after his enslaver threatened to sell him or get the City Marshal to whip him if he read the bible.²⁴ A black preacher from Georgia believed he caused the death of many enslaved people after he taught them how to read and write.²⁵ The enslaved

²⁰ Rawick, *American Slave*, vol. 13, pt. 3, 187.

²¹ Henry Bibb originally published the story of James Smith in *Voice of the Fugitive* in 1852. His story is also found in Blassingame, *Slave testimony*, 712.

²² Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 283.

²³ William Edward Burghardt DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935), 638.

²⁴ Autobiography of Sella Martin found in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 712.

²⁵ Library of Congress, "Born in Slavery" vol. 4 *Georgia*, pt. 4, 214, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesno44/>.

people participating in the transfer of knowledge became more than slaves by creating identities based on teaching and learning. They became teachers and students. Teaching each other how to read the bible encouraged individual interpretation of Christianity that strengthened their collective Christian identity.

This collective Christian identity also developed in church services or meetings, where enslaved people socialized and performed similar religious activities together. When enslavers allowed enslaved people from neighboring plantations to hold these meetings, these services provided an open space for socialization. Sarah Fitzpatrick, a former enslaved person in Alabama, recalled that people often “use’ta court by tell’in riddles at church services.”²⁶ Julia Francis Daniels, enslaved on a Georgia plantation, would invite other enslaved people from neighboring plantations to the prayer meetings on her plantation and remembered that “I like meetin’ jus’ as good as I like a party.”²⁷ The social atmosphere of religious meetings was just as important as the religious teachings that occurred there. The church services and meetings offered an emotional outlet and an opportunity for socialization.

According to Genovese, enslaved people preferred the Baptist and Methodist churches because these two interpretations of Christianity had a fiery style and uninhibited emotionalism.²⁸ African Americans developed their own patterns of religious expression within these churches in order to circumnavigate rules and include West African traditions. Methodists did not allow dancing because they believed it to be sinful behavior. Instead of dancing, enslaved people began “shouting.” Two or three people would clap their hands and tap their feet to a rhythm while other participants would walk single file around in a ring while singing spirituals, ensuring that they did not cross their feet.²⁹ If they did not cross their feet, they were not dancing. They shuffled around the circle in a slightly stooped position and combined movements that incorporated the entire body. This style of dancing reflected the West African belief that bended joints were indicative of energy and life.³⁰ Sarah Fitzpatrick remembered that enslaved people “lack’ta shout a whole lot an’ wid de white fo’ks al’round’em, dey couldn’t shout jes lack dey want to. My a’nt use’ta tare loose in

²⁶ Blassingame, *Slave testimony*, 643.

²⁷ Rawick, vol. 13, *Georgia Narratives*, pt. 3, 252.

²⁸ Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 233.

²⁹ Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 233 – 235; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 68 – 71.

³⁰ Peter H. Wood, “Gimme de Kneebone Bent’: African Body Language and the Evolution of American Dance Forms,” in *The Black Tradition in American Dance*, ed. Myers (Durham, N.C., 1988), 7 – 9.

dat white church an' shout, my! She sho' could shout."³¹ Fitzpatrick indicates that black services offered a refuge from the judgements of white Christian society. They shouted together in gatherings, encouraged each other, and celebrated to proclaim their humanity.

Spirituals combined African traditions and Western Christianity, which intensified emotional and transcendent outlets. Enslaved people not only sang spirituals, but also performed them in the ring shout where a leader called out a verse while the shouters responded by walking around the circle. James L. Smith, a former enslaved preacher in Virginia, described spirituals: "The singing was accompanied by a certain ecstasy of motion, clapping of hands, tossing of heads, which would continue without cessation about half an hour; one would lead off in a kind of recitative style, others joining in the chorus."³² Participating in these spirituals allowed for enslaved people to relieve stress and manage their grief by sharing experiences that inspired intrapersonal and interpersonal hope. Enslaved people reflected the hardships of slavery through spirituals that they not only performed, but also spontaneously created. A former enslaved person described the process:

I'll tell you; it's dis way. My master call me up and order me a short peck of corn and a hundred lash. My friends see it and is sorry for me. When dey come to de praise meetin' dat night dey sing about it. Some's very good singers and know how; and dey work it in you know; till dey git it right; and dat's de way.³³

This style of composition offered emotional support to members of the group and fostered empathy between people who shared common experiences.

As leaders in the emotional and spiritual support of their enslaved communities, slave preachers (with or without permission) held prayer meetings where they would promote a community and collective identity by creating a space where people could socialize and learn about Christianity. Enslaved people preferred black preachers who often preached a message of spiritual equality between white people and people of color. Anthony Dawson, enslaved in North Carolina, recalled the difference between black and white preachers by emphasizing that "mostly we had white preachers, but when we had a black preacher, that was Heaven."³⁴ Dawson, like many other enslaved

³¹ When slaveholders allowed enslaved people to have their own visible church services, they would use the white churches at different times of the day instead of building enslaved people their own churches. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 643.

³² James Lindsay Smith, *Autobiography of James L. Smith* (Norwich, CT: The Bulletin, 1881), 162 – 63.

³³ J[ames Miller] McKim, "Negro Songs," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 19 (1862): 148-49.

³⁴ Library of Congress, "Born in Slavery," vol. 13, *Oklahoma*, 69, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mesn.130/?sp=69>.

Christians, preferred black preachers because they believed that they had more authentic messages. Litt Young, enslaved in Mississippi, explained that her enslaver told the preacher to tell the other enslaved people to “obey our master and missy if we want to go to Heaven, but when she wasn’t there, he come out with straight preachin’ from the Bible.”³⁵ Young believed that the more pious sermons were the ones not influenced by white people. She believed those services were corrupted and insinuated that one did not have to obey an enslaver in order to obtain salvation.

Even though slave marriages were never recognized by law, many enslaved people regarded marriage as a permanent commitment valued through their religious beliefs. Sometimes enslavers would arrange and force marriages. However, for many enslaved people, marriage offered an opportunity to make decisions that their enslavers could not make for them. Henry Bibb married a woman named Melinda from a neighboring plantation, and recalled that “notwithstanding our marriage was without license or sanction of law, we Believed it to be honorable before God.”³⁶ They believed in their partnership and did not need white society to dictate their identity to them. An important part of the Christian wedding ceremony was the concept that only death could break the promise between two people. However, marriages between enslaved people that white people conducted omitted the phrase “Till death do you part.” As Matthew Jarrett, formerly enslaved in Virginia, recalled, “We slaves knowed that them words wasn’t bindin’. Don’t mean nothin’ lessen you say ‘What God has jined, caint no man pull asunder.’ But dey never would say dat. Jus’ say, ‘Now you married.’”³⁷ Jarrett, the Bibbs, and other antebellum enslaved people regarded marriage as established by God, not by the enslavers and white society. Marriage offered another identity not based on an enslaved person’s status.

African American women created unique identities within their religious communities. The testimonies of enslaved women suggest that women created a religious identity based on values of trustworthiness, generosity, piety, and selflessness.³⁸ This “religious womanhood” is revealed through stories of mothers who taught their children how to escape dehumanization. A former enslaved

³⁵ Library of Congress, “Born in Slavery,” vol. 16, *Texas*, pt. 4, 227, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn164/>.

³⁶ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York: 1849), 40 – 41.

³⁷ Workers of the Writers’ Program (VA) of the Works Progress Administration, *The Negro in Virginia* (New York: Hastings House, 1940), 80.

³⁸ Brenda E. Stevenson, “‘Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca down’: Enslaved Women, Religion, and Social Power in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 4 (2005): 347.

woman described the happiness and freedom of spirit experienced by her mother. In order to experience these feelings that her mother appreciated under slavery, “I went to church and tried to get a religion because I wanted to shout like Mama.”³⁹ By converting to Christianity, an enslaved woman embraced her moral worth and believed in her moral superiority, which combatted harmful stereotypes of sexual deviancy and intellectual inferiority propagated by white people. Charlotte Brooks, formally enslaved in Louisiana, compared her enslaver’s religious practices to her own by observing that her enslaver’s “religion did not make her happy like my religion did... for it was Jesus with me everywhere I went. I could never hear her talk about that heavenly journey.”⁴⁰ Brooks believed her religion to be stronger and truer than her enslaver’s. By converting to Christianity, a woman found one way to fight negative stereotypes by adopting the identity of a religious woman.

Enslaved women could sometimes find more potential for social power in religion than in other areas of life. Charlotte Brooks, an enslaved woman sold from Richmond, Virginia, to Louisiana when she was a teenager, admired a woman in her Louisiana community named Aunt Jane Lee because she led secret prayer meetings. Aunt Jane Lee read religious texts to her community and converted many enslaved people on Brooks’ plantation. When she moved with her enslaver to Texas, Brooks recalled that the enslaved Protestant community “felt lost, because we had nobody to lead us in our little meetings. After a while I begun to lead.”⁴¹ Caroline Harris, an enslaved woman from Virginia, also remembered a woman on her plantation who was respected for her spiritual leadership. When Harris and her prospective husband wanted to marry, they “didn’t have to ask Marsa or nothin.’ Just go to Ant Sue an’ tell her you want to git married. She tell us to think ‘bout it hard fo’ two days, ‘cause marryin’ was sacred in de eyes of Jesus.”⁴² Ant Sue sanctified the marriages on her plantation by officiating the couples’ ceremonies. Though a slave, she helped create this important social institution.

Enslaved people used religion as a vessel for socialization that presented them with opportunities for emotional release and for creation of alternative identities. For the average enslaved person,

³⁹ Rawick, *The American Slave*, vol. 19 *God Struck Me Dead*, 60.

⁴⁰ Octavia B. Albert, *The House of Bondage, or Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves Original and Life Like, As They Appeared in Their Old Plantation and City Slave Life: Together with Pen-Pictures of the Peculiar Institution, With Sights and Insights Into their New Relations as Freedmen, Freemen and Citizens* (New York, 1890), 34.

⁴¹ Albert, *The House of Bondage*, 19.

⁴² Perdue, et al., *Weevils in the Wheats 129; Negro in Virginia*, compiled by the Virginia Federal Writers’ Project of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Virginia (New York, 1940), 81.

religion offered comforts that the institution of slavery denied them. Slavery attempted to strip people of their humanity, as they were only valued for their labor. People who lived in fear of abuse and death typically focused more on survival than resistance to the institution of slavery as a whole. Their decisions to convert to Christianity were not determined acts of rebellion with the goal of undermining enslavers and their institution. Religion provided comfort and gave people a semblance of autonomy. Even though enslaved people did not intend to revolt, their religious practices, including the preference for black preachers, development of identities, socialization, and emotional releases opposed the objectives of slavery.

These human experiences and decisions challenged an enslaver's goal of dehumanizing African Americans. Enslaved people developed identities that did not depend on their enslavement. As Christians, Baptists, and Methodists, they chose to listen to black preachers who emphasized their spiritual value and equality. Religious women created identities that contested their stereotypes. Hidden schools allowed enslaved people to become teachers and students, participating in the exchange of knowledge. As husbands and wives, they recognized marriage as an institution ordained by God, not by the slaveholder. They created religious communities that sustained their humanity through emotional and social support. Enslaved people may have made decisions with the purpose of surviving a system that valued them as tools and machinery, but the consequences of their actions inherently challenged the objectives of the institution to which they were confined.

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America Rock's EDUCATION:

Presenting National Narratives on American Televisions

Talia Brenner,
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In 1995, *Schoolhouse Rock Live!* opened off-Broadway and went on to enjoy a successful run.¹ As a “jukebox” musical, its score comprised selections from all the classic *Schoolhouse Rock* genres, ricocheting between *Science Rock* (“Interplanet Janet”), *America Rock* (“Elbow Room”), *Math Rock* (“Three is a Magic Number”), and *Grammar Rock* (“Unpack your Adjectives”). Since then, the musical has become a popular choice for amateur theater companies around the United States.

A large factor in the musical’s success is the strong influence of nostalgia. In the case of *Schoolhouse Rock*, this nostalgia is not too surprising: the cartoons were a 1970s and ‘80s childhood classic, a family-friendly collection of songs that adult audience members can now pass on to their children. This nostalgia can reverberate generationally as a generation of children develop their own memories of their parents’ childhood television. *Schoolhouse Rock*’s status as a classic remains unclear, since the generation of children of parents born in the 1960s and ‘70s is only now developing its own culture of nostalgia. Yet *Schoolhouse Rock* remains strong for the present, in part because it is tied so deeply to the acculturation to U.S. history that has contributed to a generation’s national identity. As such, these stories often receive an uncritical reception from students and grownups remembering their childhoods.

¹Erika Engstrom, “‘Schoolhouse Rock’: Cartoons as Education,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 23 (1995): 103.

Examining these stories in relation to the historical understanding of the time may help to break down the implicit messages in these beloved cartoons. *America Rock* presents a fairly familiar story to anyone who went through the American public educational system in the late twentieth century. The story of the United States' founding and expansion in both land mass and population depicted in these videos are central to our idea of American national identity.

Educational Entertainment: Schoolhouse's Origins

Schoolhouse Rock ran from 1973 to 1985 as a series of Saturday morning musical cartoons.² It followed in the trend of "children's hour" programming, established in the early 1970s through the efforts of activist groups and, later, FCC guidelines, which were repealed under President Reagan.³ By the 1970s, educational television had gained popularity and was considered to be a wholesome alternative to other programming, often considered to be too violent or trivial for child viewers.⁴ Most educators saw television as a viable learning tool. By 1967, teachers across the country screened educational videos in their classrooms.⁵ In the 1950s and '60s, professional historians also began to connect with modern media, especially film, as a means of historical study and as a way to project information.⁶

The videos were created for Saturday morning cartoon airing, not school use, and were intended to supplement and facilitate students' classroom education. They fulfilled the educational content quota for children's programming, which were otherwise satisfied by unpopular shows.⁷ Since cartoons were the top revenue-maker for Saturday mornings, educational cartoons like *Schoolhouse Rock* allowed profitability while still adhering to standards.⁸

Schoolhouse Rock's creators were likely focused on the educational value of their cartoons as well. The idea for the series came from an executive at the McCaffrey & McCall advertising agency, who claimed to have been inspired while setting multiplication tables to music so

² Tom Russo, "Graduates Revive A Toon Tutorial," *New York Times*, April 24, 1994.

³ Engstrom, 99.

⁴ Robert A. Levin and Laurie Moses Hines, "Educational Television, Fred Rogers, and the History of Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 43 (2003): 265.

⁵ Levin and Hines, "Educational Television," 269.

⁶ Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 250.

⁷ Engstrom, 99.

⁸ Engstrom, 99.

his school-aged son could better memorize them.⁹ *Schoolhouse Rock*'s creators knew from the advertising industry about the effectiveness of jingles in enhancing potential customers' memories.¹⁰ The cartoons and lyrics relied on educational consultants' advice about tools such as repetitive melodies and short lyric phrases.¹¹ Television had the unique capability to provide succinct storylines, could proliferate widely due to new distribution technologies, and could spawn a high retention rate. The commercial potential of the series was also a strong motivation. McCaffrey & McCall sold the idea of animated educational jingles to its client ABC in order to help it compete with the popular CBS children's series *In the News*.¹²

The idea was successful: *Schoolhouse Rock* sustained high ratings throughout its run.¹³ The first series, *Math Rock* and *Grammar Rock*, were soon followed by *America Rock*, featuring lessons on U.S. history and civics. More episodes were inaugurated in 1975 and 1976 for the occasion of the U.S. bicentennial. Immensely popular, *Schoolhouse Rock*'s creators won Emmys, revived broadcasts as tape and video releases, and aired new episodes designed in the style of the original cartoons, largely at the request of grown-up former viewers.¹⁴

Considering the multitude of reports about American students' continuing disinterest in learning history, the popular yet educational *Schoolhouse Rock* videos could easily be deemed a success.¹⁵ Yet, as with much of American history education, the content of the material reveals more about the time period in which it was written than about the history it describes.

There is little remaining written material about *Schoolhouse Rock*. Many of its creators have since died, and perhaps more profoundly, the *Schoolhouse Rock* archives no longer exist.¹⁶ Analyzing a combination of history education and mainstream historical "myths," however, can help contextualize the cartoons in historiographical trends of the mid-1970s.

History textbooks are an especially apt comparison. Both textbooks

⁹ Wolfgang Saxon, "Thomas Yohe, 63, a Creator of TV's 'Schoolhouse Rock,'" *New York Times*, December 26, 2000.

¹⁰ Engstrom, 99.

¹¹ Engstrom, 101.

¹² Wolfgang Saxon, "Thomas Yohe."

¹³ Engstrom, 100.

¹⁴ Engstrom, 100.

¹⁵ Bruce VanSledright, "Narratives of Nation-State, Historical Knowledge, and School History Education," *Review of Research in Education* 32 (2008): 125.

¹⁶ Engstrom, 101.

and *Schoolhouse Rock* cartoons were produced for profit, and since they were intended for children, they shared an omnipresent, didactic narrator's voice.¹⁷ School textbooks and *America Rock* videos also had a similar amount of professional oversight in their creation; both were allegedly reviewed by professional historians, though for both, most of the creative and distributive work (cartoonists and grade-school teachers) was done by Americans who were not professionally trained in history. They also shared a similar purpose in publicly promoting a national historical narrative. History textbooks, moreover, have received considerable academic attention.

Content analyses of U.S. history textbooks from the 1970s reveal two specific trends in history education. First, there was a perceived need for patriotism resulting from threats to U.S. hegemony. Though U.S. history education has long taken a highly patriotic timbre, Cold War competition further increased the country's need to depict its history positively. The need to compete with Communist states that promised universal social equality led many Americans to paint their own national history as "virtually free of class or racial conflict."¹⁸ Second, there was a desire to represent racial and gender diversity, a shift from earlier historical narratives that resulted from civil rights-oriented social movements.

In line with these changes, the *America Rock* videos present mostly traditional narratives with limited "progressive" elements, as seen in its populist reinterpretations and celebration of some forms of diversity. This paper will analyze three of the most well-known *America Rock* history videos: "No More Kings," documenting the U.S. Revolution, "Elbow Room," about westward expansion, and "The Great American Melting Pot," depicting nineteenth-century European immigration.

A Popular Revolution: "No More Kings"

According to Melvyn Stokes in *The State of U.S. History*, the narrative of key actions and events in the history of the U.S. revolution has not changed much in two-and-a-half centuries.¹⁹ After two centuries, in 1975, the "No More Kings" video largely adhered to prominent founding legends of the U.S. Revolution, though with a more populist focus than is common in traditional narratives.

"No More Kings" depicted the U.S. colonizers as natural owners of

¹⁷ Wayne Journell, "Setting out the (Un)Welcome Mat: A Portrayal of Immigration in State Standards for American History," *The Social Studies* 100 (2009): 160.

¹⁸ Melvyn Stokes, ed., *The State of U.S. History* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2002), 28.

¹⁹ Stokes, 24.

New England land. The only Native Americans shown in the video appear for approximately two seconds, hiding behind Plymouth Rock when the colonizers arrive.²⁰ The video shows the colonizers crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a boat, whereas the British soldiers bob across the water when they come over to supposedly subjugate the American colonizers.²¹ The Americans thus appear to be the natural heirs to the land, while the British regulars are unnatural and thus seem to be invading. The Pilgrims are never seen leaving England, only journeying across the Atlantic from “over the horizon.”²² This depiction characterized the U.S. as having no real historical roots, “virtually transcending the particularities of time and place,” as is typical with U.S. historiographical exceptionalism.²³

The video depicted American colonizers as more rustic than their English counterparts, a myth that is irretrievably gendered. In the video, King George III appears effeminate, with a high-pitched laugh, rouged cheeks and pink lips, and perched on an opulent throne with crossed legs.²⁴ Moreover, the British soldiers are not redcoats but pinkcoats.²⁵ Europeans’ depictions of their aristocracies as effeminate were common even before the colonial period. Meanwhile, the American colonizers wear plain, undecorated, brown clothing to signal their masculinity and rusticity.²⁶ At first, the video depicted the American colonizers as submissive to George, bowing prostrate on the ground in a way that connotes feminine submissiveness as well as eastern or otherwise non-Christian religious traditions.²⁷ Femininity and non-Christianity were thus taken to connote un-Americanness as well as non-manliness. Therefore, the colonizers’ revolution against George III and British effeminacy appeared to be a triumph of their masculinity. The gendered depiction of the colonizers as rough-edged frontiersmen also linked to populist notes throughout the film by associating English extravagance with femininity, a duo that supposedly cannot match the Americans’ rusticity. This depiction aligned with traditional beliefs in American rusticity as compared to their European predecessors’ over-civilization.

In addition to the linkage of femininity with weakness and un-

²⁰ Lynn Ahrens and David Boroughs, “No More Kings,” September 20, 1975, 2:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvOZs3g3qIo>.

²¹ Ahrens and Boroughs, “No More Kings.”

²² Ahrens and Boroughs, “No More Kings.”

²³ Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 45.

²⁴ Ahrens and Boroughs, “No More Kings.”

²⁵ Ahrens and Boroughs, “No More Kings.”

²⁶ Ahrens and Boroughs, “No More Kings.”

²⁷ Ahrens and Boroughs, “No More Kings.”

Americanness, “No More Kings” only showed men as agents in the U.S. Revolution. The *Schoolhouse Rock* videos, in line with concurrent trends regarding gender equality, presented modern girls and boys learning equally; the historical stories, however, are very male-centered. However, “No More Kings” did not depict any colonial children learning, and there were no women depicted as historical actors. This resulted in a male-dominated historical narrative. In terms of gender, the narrative was a traditional one, with men shown as powerful and women shown as weak, or not shown at all. The American Revolution was considered to be a mostly political and military event, and these areas typically excluded women during this time. “No More Kings” did not challenge this part of the typical historical narrative.

At the same time, the video’s characterization of the U.S. revolution as an act of communal agency had populist implications that aligned more with the specific historiographical trends of the 1970s. These trends deviated somewhat from the “great men” theories of history that dominated earlier historiography about the U.S. revolution.²⁸ More historians by the 1970s had shifted to primarily studying society through a social history lens, and American colonies became “testing grounds” for scholars who used this focus.²⁹ In “No More Kings,” the American Revolution was portrayed as an act of populist unity that was specific to small Massachusetts communities. Throughout the cartoon, the Massachusetts colonists assert their right to self-sufficiency and attempt to claim the political benefits that go along with it.

In “No More Kings,” the only colonizers depicted are the New England Puritans, and the revolution itself is shown as an exclusively Massachusetts-centered movement. The video briefly depicted other North American colonies on a map, but presented them as all deriving from the Massachusetts colony.³⁰ Massachusetts itself was shown to be a state composed of small communities, symbolized by groups of wooden houses springing up to form the shape of the contemporary Massachusetts state (the video depicted it with its contemporary borders, historically inaccurate but easier for young viewers to identify as Massachusetts).³¹ The implication remained, though: Massachusetts’ Puritan origins supposedly gave rise to the entire United States. This small-town and specifically New England-centered narrative aligned with the trend of 1970s historians focusing on small New England

²⁸ Joyce Appleby, *A Restless Past: History and the American Public* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 2.

²⁹ Appleby, 47.

³⁰ Ahrens and Boroughs, “No More Kings.”

³¹ Ahrens and Boroughs, “No More Kings.”

communities in the North American colonies.³²

The video's depiction of small communities' unity also indicates its populist perspective. In "No More Kings," the members of the community are visually unified, appearing as exact visual copies of each other.³³ This depiction was not simply a stylistic choice, because other *Schoolhouse Rock* videos animated by Tom Yohe in the same time period do not share this trait. There are no Americans mentioned by name in the video. The American Revolution itself was characterized as a communal movement for sentimental independence from a controlling metropole. England's primary offense in the video is "controlling" the colonies in a way that they appear to find patronizing. Its only specific mention of economic motivations for U.S. independence is the taxation of tea products; even then, the lyric was "he even has the nerve to tax our cup of tea," and the cartoon "patriots" do not consider the expense of taxing tea, only the indignation of having to use teabags (an anachronism, but that is irrelevant here) that are marked with the Union Jack.³⁴ This symbolism allowed the viewer to perceive the Revolution as a people's revolt, rather than as a political act of elite, educated men.

Finally, the video depicted the Americans' communal self-sufficiency as empowering. In the video, the act of community-building alleviates the colonizers' initial homesickness for "Mother England" and makes them decide to revolt.³⁵ Their willingness to see King George III as over-controlling is their main act of revolution; the video allocated more time to depicting the colonizers' movement from deference to rebellion than to the actual Revolutionary War.³⁶ The video also presented the colonies as winning independence with their own military might, without the help of any other polities.³⁷ The Americans' community-building is precisely what makes them ready for independence, thus valorizing the political power of the colonies' rustic self-sufficiency.

Expanding Westward and Upward: "Elbow Room"

Similar to "No More Kings," "Elbow Room" presented white colonizers as the natural occupants of American land. The justification for U.S. settler colonialism—manifest destiny—appears with varying levels of subtlety in "Elbow Room." This depiction is evidence that the

³² Appleby, 50.

³³ Ahrens and Boroughs, "No More Kings."

³⁴ Ahrens and Boroughs, "No More Kings."

³⁵ Ahrens and Boroughs, "No More Kings."

³⁶ Ahrens and Boroughs, "No More Kings."

³⁷ Ahrens and Boroughs, "No More Kings."

influence of the Civil Rights movement on popular 1970s historical narratives did not extend to settler colonialism. Although “slavery is now taken seriously in our histories,” as a result of Civil Rights activism, James Loewen wrote in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, “conquest still is not.”³⁸ Similar to “No More Kings,” the “Elbow Room” video incorporated populist tones. However, the celebration of the rustic nineteenth-century “frontier” was a traditional narrative before the 1970s, unlike the changing view of the U.S. Revolution.³⁹

“Elbow Room” justified expanded settler colonialism with its portrayal of the legitimacy and need for U.S. ownership of the North American continent. The title alone is justification for expanded settler colonialism; east coast Americans were too cramped, the video narrates, and needed more space.⁴⁰ This justification is similar to the German concept of *Lebensraum*, however the filmmakers carefully avoid any terms similar to this, possibly due to post-WWII sentiments. In the three-minute song, there is an entire verse dedicated to detailing the Louisiana Purchase with great specificity.⁴¹ The emphasis on the purchase from Napoleon emphasizes the territory as the legitimate result of a transaction between consenting parties. If that was not convincing enough for its young viewers, the lyrics specifically mention that Napoleon sold the land “without a fuss.”⁴² The video also used the concept of manifest destiny as justification for U.S. expansion. Contrary to the 1970s trend of highlighting ideology as a factor in historical actions, “Elbow Room” claims that settler colonialism “*was* a manifest destiny” (emphasis added).⁴³ It thus depicted manifest destiny not as an ideology that influenced historical actions but as a historical truth itself.⁴⁴

The video also incorporated traditional myths about the positive influence of white colonizers on American land. The lyrics characterized land west of the Mississippi River as empty preceding colonization, a typical justification that, according to Richard White, “avoids the guilt of conquest” for white colonizers.⁴⁵ Sacagawea is the

³⁸ James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 117.

³⁹ Deborah Epstein Popper, Robert E. Lang, and Frank J. Popper, “From Maps to Myth: The Census, Turner, and the Idea of the Frontier,” *The Journal of American Culture* 23 (2000): 96-97.

⁴⁰ Lynn Ahrens and Sue Manchester, “Elbow Room,” May 22, 1976, 3:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bs2w4lwQRtc>.

⁴¹ Ahrens and Manchester, “Elbow Room.”

⁴² Ahrens and Manchester, “Elbow Room.”

⁴³ Ahrens and Manchester, “Elbow Room.”

⁴⁴ Appleby, 11.

⁴⁵ Popper, Lang, and Popper, 93.

only Native American mentioned in the lyrics or video, and she only appears briefly as a guide for Lewis and Clark, who are depicted as the first explorers in the wilderness.⁴⁶ In the video, the canoe carrying Lewis and Clark across the map leaves a trail of bright colors on a terrain previously depicted in grayscale.⁴⁷ This characterization of a positive European influence, as represented by white people bringing “color” to American land, links to the doctrine of “highest and best use,” the claim that white settlers deserved American land because of how effectively they could use and transform it.⁴⁸

“Elbow Room” also embodied myths of “geographical predestination,” which Richard T. Hughes defined as an element of manifest destiny.⁴⁹ According to this doctrine, white Americans’ right to settle the West was divinely sanctioned, so only limits set by God through nature could curb their expansion.⁵⁰ Similarly, the “Elbow Room” video showed white settlers pushing westward until they reached the Pacific Ocean, a natural boundary.⁵¹ Only then were they satisfied. The song modernizes this belief in geographical predestination, though, by suggesting that limits can change as technology does. The song suggests that if the U.S. should find itself needing “elbow room” again, they will find some more: “up on the moon!”⁵²

The ending was a modern twist, and certainly influenced by excitement about the U.S.’s space exploration program, particularly the 1969 moon landing. While this modern ending appeared to have sacrificed the religious “predestination” element of the manifest destiny ideology, it was actually quite compatible with it. Manifest destiny was believed to be divinely ordained, but also “manifest” in that Americans could dictate its direction.⁵³ The vision of American expansion being limited only by technological constraints has appeared in justifications for formal colonialism overseas and economic imperialism, in addition to the space exploration depicted in the video.

While “No More Kings” hinted at populist reasons for the American Revolution, “Elbow Room” loudly proclaimed its own populist element, through a specifically “American” mise-en-scene. In the

⁴⁶ Ahrens and Manchester, “Elbow Room.”

⁴⁷ Ahrens and Manchester, “Elbow Room.”

⁴⁸ Popper, Lang, and Popper, 93.

⁴⁹ Hughes, 113.

⁵⁰ Hughes, 113.

⁵¹ Ahrens and Manchester, “Elbow Room.”

⁵² Ahrens and Manchester, “Elbow Room.”

⁵³ Hughes, 109.

nineteenth-century frontier context, this populism was associated with rural frontier culture. The song's instrumentation included string instruments typically found in folk and bluegrass music, and singer Sue Manchester used an Appalachian accent.⁵⁴ Even the cartoon's "elbow room" dance resembled American folk dances.⁵⁵ The rough-edged frontier imagery certainly fit with the style of the song, which was, among other purposes, meant to entertain. The real populist message, however, came in the fact that the video considered all white Americans to be part of this frontier culture. The cartoon showed well-dressed men in eastern towns doing the "elbow room" dance just as enthusiastically as frontier settlers.⁵⁶ The video thus considered the frontier to be the true essence of the entire U.S., playing into older notions about a rustic "American" race.

It is true that 1970s historical narratives deviated from past historiographies by focusing on common people. While the U.S. Revolution is traditionally seen as an act of educated statesmen, narratives associated with the American West have long carried populist elements. "Elbow Room" showed a rustic frontier accessible to the common man, that was a conventional depiction of the premise of Manifest Destiny. Political trends through the nineteenth century, such as Jacksonian democracy and Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, specifically defined the rural west as a rough-edged democracy, and it is this version of history that "Elbow Room" sought to depict.⁵⁷ It is important to note, however, that, although "Elbow Room" depicted an expanded vision of participation in American democracy, this was by no means a pluralist vision. "Elbow Room" did not seek to give voice to all underrepresented groups. U.S. historiography has not always moved "forward" in the direction of inclusivity.⁵⁸

Mythmaking and National Origins: "The Great American Melting Pot"

Of the three videos, evidence of a diversifying historiography came across most strongly in "The Great American Melting Pot," through celebration of racial diversity and positive representation of immigration. Even so, this pluralism was surface-deep; the narrative remained Eurocentric and presented assimilation as the ultimate goal for immigrants.

The video's focus was undoubtedly on immigrants who by the late

⁵⁴ Ahrens and Manchester, "Elbow Room."

⁵⁵ Ahrens and Manchester, "Elbow Room."

⁵⁶ Ahrens and Manchester, "Elbow Room."

⁵⁷ Popper, Lang, and Popper, 96.

⁵⁸ Joseph Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts Over American History Textbooks From the Civil War to the Present* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 16.

twentieth century were perceived as white. The song claimed to describe “nineteenth-century immigrants,” though the immigration influxes it described continued until the U.S. instituted immigration restrictions in the early 1920s.⁵⁹ The nineteenth-century immigrants to whom the video refers were exclusively those from Europe, since Europe was the only “old world” depicted.⁶⁰ Furthermore, by presenting Ellis Island, signified by the Statue of Liberty, as the only point of entry to the United States, the video presented a narrative that was oriented primarily on the east-coast and therefore mostly isolated to immigrants from European countries.⁶¹

Unlike conventional immigration narratives that distinguish between “old” (Northern European) and “new” (Southern and Eastern European) immigrants, “Melting Pot” did not draw these distinctions.⁶² This fusion points to the assimilated status of “new” European immigrants by the late twentieth century and the subsequent shifting definition of whiteness to include all these groups. By this time, safely assimilated descendants of European immigrants could increasingly celebrate their national origins without it being a threat to their whiteness and the societal privilege it entailed. Similarly, historians in the 1960s and 1970s increasingly studied “new” European immigration, while neglecting contemporaneous Latinx and Asian immigration trends.⁶³

The video did depict people of color as American immigrants, but was so nonspecific that the depiction was tokenizing. While white immigrants’ countries of origin are clearly defined, those of immigrants of color are not. The Statue of Liberty’s “book of recipes” specifies European nationalities, for example, “English,” “Poles,” “Swedes,” but refers to “Africans” as a bloc demographic, degrading the group by failing to note its complexity.⁶⁴ Moreover, immigrants of color have a secondary status in the video, in that all the immigrant stories the video mentioned by name are European.⁶⁵ Its depiction of the European narrative as generic and different treatment of white and nonwhite immigrants reduces non-European immigrants’ narratives to a secondary status.

⁵⁹Lynn Ahrens and Lori Lieberman, “The Great American Melting Pot,” May 1, 1976, 3:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZQl6XB064M>.

⁶⁰Ahrens and Lieberman, “The Great American Melting Pot.”

⁶¹Ahrens and Lieberman, “The Great American Melting Pot.”

⁶²Journell, 160.

⁶³David Reimers, “Historiography of American Immigration,” *OAH Magazine of History* 4 (1990): 10-12.

⁶⁴Ahrens and Lieberman, “The Great American Melting Pot.”

⁶⁵Ahrens and Lieberman, “The Great American Melting Pot.”

The celebration of immigrants' diverse identities was further tempered by the fact that the theme was still pro-assimilation. Immigrants showed pride in their varied nations of origin, but only to the extent that these identities were compatible with their new Americanness. The name of the video itself, "melting pot," connotes the dissolution of differences into a homogenous collective. (Social scientists have since replaced the term with "salad bowl," which allows for individual differences among immigrants as distinct items in the "salad"). The song also presented assimilation as inevitable and necessary for becoming American, since all the newly arriving immigrants must jump into the "melting pot," which in the animation is shaped like the continental U.S.⁶⁶

The "we're all immigrants" theme of this story appears to be one of unity. Despite shifts in scholarly historiography starting in the 1960s that looked more critically at immigrants' struggles, by the 1970s textbooks began an increased trend of emphasizing ethno-racial unity above conflict.⁶⁷ *Schoolhouse Rock* very much follows in this vein. Its depiction of a unified immigrant experience also allowed for a positive representation of the U.S. by shifting focus away from discrimination against immigrant groups and the racialized challenges some immigrant groups faced. According to James Loewen, focusing on immigrants' successes confirmed the U.S.'s role as a "land of unparalleled opportunity."⁶⁸

The attention to "nineteenth-century" immigration, moreover, both through the video's specification of the nineteenth-century time period and characterization of immigration as a past event reserved for one's grandparents' generation, excluded contemporary immigrant groups and their continuing challenges by omitting them outright.⁶⁹ The video prompted all the child viewers to identify their own families' experiences, revealing that white children were the exclusive target audience. Indeed, the video could lead a young viewer to believe that immigration and its challenges no longer existed, at least legitimately, in U.S. society.

Nevertheless, the video did present a celebration of diversity as depicted visually by skin color and clothing. Immigrants in the video took pride in their national identities. The image of children swimming together in the "melting pot" used the progressive image of a racially integrated swimming pool to point toward a modern, multicultural United States. This image was visually pluralistic,

⁶⁶ Ahrens and Lieberman, "The Great American Melting Pot."

⁶⁷ VanSledright, 112-114.

⁶⁸ Loewen, 209.

⁶⁹ Journell, 164.

though not narratively so. It only deviated slightly from the “assimilation-oriented consensus historiography” that dominated the immediate post-World War II era.⁷⁰ Rather than a genuine move toward diverse representation, the tokenized portrayal of people of color may have actually allowed the video to deny its own Eurocentrism, which had become less permissible in 1970s narratives.⁷¹

The video did, however, provide a positive image of immigrants’ role in society. In the cartoon, the filmmakers claim that immigrants “helped build the USA,” contributing to economic growth and enriching American culture with their presence.⁷² Unlike the historiography that predominated before the late twentieth century, the video did not present immigrants as singularly burdensome to U.S. society.⁷³ Still, the narrow representation of immigrants—white Europeans who had immigrated several generations before—casts doubt on whether this view is supportive of all immigrants, or just nineteenth-century or “historical immigration.” Furthermore, its depiction of immigrant contributions of labor as offerings to the U.S. ignores immigrants’ individual struggles to succeed, and glorifies the U.S. with an exceptionalist characterization as the land of opportunity.⁷⁴

Who Tells the Story?

In general accordance with 1970s history education standards, the *America Rock* videos presented mostly standard narratives with some nontraditional elements: populism in “No More Kings” and “Elbow Room” and tokenized racial diversity in “The Great American Melting Pot.” Still, there were some discrepancies between the videos and 1970s historiographical trends. Shifting narratives in American history are documented in eras and centuries, not decades; indeed, many of the paradigms established in the late 1960s and early 1970s were more consistent than not with trends a hundred years prior. The late 1960s and 1970s did, however, bring more radical changes within academia than is accounted for in the videos.

To understand this discrepancy, one must view academic changes as separate from popular historical narratives. Though the *America Rock* videos were supposedly approved by a history professor, they were

⁷⁰ Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Thomas and Znaniecki and the Historiography of American Immigration,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (1996): 16-20.

⁷¹ Nathan Glazer and Reed Ueda, *Ethnic Groups in History Textbooks* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1983), 15.

⁷² Ahrens and Lieberman, “The Great American Melting Pot.”

⁷³ Journell, 162.

⁷⁴ VanSledright, 115.

created for and by people with conventional understandings of U.S. history. Neither were professional historians a monolithic group. The one history professor who supposedly approved the *America Rock* videos was not necessarily influenced by every academic trend at the time, especially considering how many changes came from younger historians.⁷⁵ The increasing presence of marginalized groups, as well, in higher education in the late twentieth century likely created further division between generations of academics.⁷⁶

The acknowledgment of this discrepancy is not merely a criticism of *America Rock*'s creators. Historians have contributed to the elitism and inaccessibility of new movements in historiography. In *Historians in Public*, Ian Tyrrell notes that the 1960s and 1970s saw historians further detaching themselves from institutions of mass culture, becoming more of "expert commentators" than producers of social narratives.⁷⁷ The *America Rock* videos showed the outlines of changes in academia, but their loose alignment with new historiographical trends is not evidence of causation. That these changes resulted from similar societal forces may sufficiently explain their similarity to each other.

There are also limits to the historical events and periods that saw a reorientation in focus. In *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, James Loewen points out that the Civil Rights Movement fundamentally changed textbooks' depiction of slavery away from the "magnolia myth" of American slavery as beneficial or at least necessary to Southern society.⁷⁸ Indeed, no *America Rock* video even mentions slavery. Although this silence is far from racially progressive, it embodies the late twentieth-century paradigm shift about slavery and marks a change from previous decades. Dominant racist narratives involving Native Americans, meanwhile, have not even seen this much change.

Shifting narratives have been influenced both by changing demographics and the persistent role of white supremacy. Starting in the 1950s, Southern and Eastern European immigrants from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had lived in the U.S. long enough to have accumulated some political power to wield with their desire to see their stories represented in their children's history narratives.⁷⁹ These immigrants were largely able to gain political power through their adoption of white American identity by the late twentieth century. Their newfound whiteness augmented "new" European immigrant groups' political power beyond what was seen by

⁷⁵ Tyrrell, 248.

⁷⁶ Appleby, 47.

⁷⁷ Tyrrell, 238-240.

⁷⁸ Loewen, 140.

⁷⁹ Kyle Ward, *History in the Making* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 230.

other nonwhite groups, many of whom had lived in the U.S. for longer but could not similarly influence historical narratives.⁸⁰

Other commentators argue that history lessons in school textbooks and mass-disseminated programs like *Schoolhouse Rock* do not ever venture to tell real history. Bruce VanSledright claims that what public schools teach students is “heritage,” which, unlike history, “primarily uses the past for celebratory purposes, cherry-picking it along the way.”⁸¹ Though this collective memory “serves often as an inaccurate synonym for history,” it is a substitute that has no actual resemblance.⁸² Kyle Ward echoes this claim in *History in the Making*: since the 1830s, he writes, history education in public schools has served to teach young Americans, especially immigrants, “what it means to be an American.”⁸³ By extension, then, the *America Rock* videos never even attempted to tell objective history. Furthermore, as with textbook writers, the videos’ creators aimed to boost ratings to create a profit. Challenging historical narratives that are deeply embedded in U.S. culture is surely not the safest choice when profits are the goal.

It is also important to identify *America Rock*’s limitations as compared to other *Schoolhouse Rock* videos. Other series, like *Math Rock*, feature comparatively more representation of girls and children of color than *America Rock* does. Even the civics videos in *America Rock*, as compared to the history ones, better depict demographic diversity. Even when the history videos do show demographically diverse characters, they would have to alter their narrative perspectives and content dramatically in order to actually represent diverse historical perspectives.

Conclusion

The *America Rock* videos presented flawed historical narratives that withheld historical agency to women and minority groups, despite emerging at a time when scholarly historiography was expanding to include both. Thus, the *America Rock* videos provide an excellent example of popular historical narratives from the 1970s, but neither did they reflect contemporary historical thinking, nor do they conform to our understanding of American history today. Treating the narratives of original *America Rock* airings and spin-offs as fact is dangerous for objective, inclusive history. Without a critical lens for these dated historical narratives, children viewing “nostalgic” history are likely to

⁸⁰ Moreau, 214.

⁸¹ VanSledright, 121.

⁸² VanSledright, 120.

⁸³ Ward, xxi.

internalize the historiographical errors perpetuated by their forebears.

Yet, the cartoons can still be a valuable educational tool if used in the right way. Treating the *America Rock* videos as primary sources could actually help history students learn necessary historical analysis skills, and analyzing them as such could teach students about the forces affecting popular U.S. history narratives in the 1970s. Students can learn important lessons about how historical narratives are contingent on the time period in which they are told. Perhaps most importantly, students would learn the necessity of questioning the objectivity of all sources, including—and *especially*—those presented as fact.

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“HER BEAUTY CAPTIVATED HIS MIND AND THE SWORD SEVERED HIS NECK!”:

The Changing Depiction of Judith Beheading Holofernes from the Pre-Renaissance Era to Contemporary Society

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“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

— Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In any famous art institution, we normally see images primarily celebrating the lives of men, based on their accomplishments in any field such as conquest in war, creativity or intellect. Even though portraits of women, such as wives of the elite classes of Western nations, the Virgin Mary, and mythological Venuses, are displayed in these art institutions, these female figures are depicted as delicate creatures whose fair, smooth skin mimic marble statues. This differs from the heroic caricature of the legendary men who are depicted with strong stances and surrounded by allusions or symbols that refer to their accomplishments as human beings. The difference between how women and men are depicted in art reflects how women have been viewed for centuries as lesser than men. Rather than viewing women

as people who can equally achieve the same goals and foster the same thoughts as their male counterparts, society has regarded women as containing handicaps for achieving ambitions because of their biological make-up.

Not only can this relationship between the sexes be seen from portraiture but also from the depiction of popular stories from the Bible, mythology, and history. This study examines artistic depictions of the story of Judith beheading Holofernes in the Book of Judith from different historical eras. The goal of these case studies is to bring attention to how art has reflected ideas about women in the past using sexist stereotypes. This article treats these ideas and the production of artwork as historically contingent in order to question the misogyny displayed through the history of art. Using historical research and stylistic analysis, this article will argue that Judith was portrayed differently during each era in response to how women were viewed at the time.

Feminism in Art History

The history of Western art has structured the way in which artists were trained and what was considered “good or acceptable art.” During the Renaissance, philosophers and artists referred back to classical ideals. They also embraced humanism as well as the dominance of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in the 17th century. This encouraged artists to create works of art that were reflective of the artistic skills of illusionism. They also emphasized the depictions of historical, biblical, and mythological events or stories to convey the values of the time, most of which were nationalistic. When studying artistic eras or works of art that are significant to human culture and are recognizable to most observers, one tends to notice the rarity of women artists despite the inclusion of female figures in portraiture or sculpture. This state of affairs was criticized and discussed during the Second Wave of Feminism during the 1960s and 1970s, after centuries of normative tendencies from a male-dominated artistic field.

Before discussing the importance of this movement and what it has contributed to Art History, it is vital to understand what ‘feminism’ means to society. Feminism specifically refers to the equality of women with men and the Feminist movement’s struggle to achieve this equality.¹ At the root of any advocacy for feminist movements is the idea of seeking respect and dignity between the sexes, however there are also different mindsets in regards to what methods should be used to achieve this equality. The different approaches on how to achieve

¹ Richard T. Schaefer, *Sociology Matters* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2013), 18.

this equality are reflected in how female art historians and artists utilize feminism in their critique of art history and in their approaches to art.

For art historian Linda Nochlin, pointing out the misogyny in art history was a way to shed light on the importance of gender equality. In 1972 she published “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” which was a question that exposed overlooked sexism in the history of art.² She offered several answers to the question that she posed. First, women were excluded from the higher levels of artistic training as they were unable to have access to artistic methods that were needed to create historical paintings, such as nude figures. This is because women were not allowed to attend classes with live nude models, forcing them to only be able to participate in the lower level of painting, such as still-life. This constructed certain forms of art as prestigious and reserved them for men. This meant that art created by men was more important than the art created by women. The artificiality of the enforced hierarchy of genre reinforced the belief that women artists were unable to be as great as the men who were able to paint grand historical paintings that required a specific artistic skill set.

This belief, Nochlin argues, underlies a greater sexist notion that women were expected to not let art affect their ability to be a housewife or mother. Although there have been successful female artists in the past, Nochlin points out that behind these female artists are connections to a male figure that gave them the resources and ability to practice art in more ways than others. In general, the overall argument that made her article so significant to the feminist movement during the 1960s and 1970s is that women artists were not able to have a great placement in art history due to their lack of equal opportunity in tailoring their artistic ability and access to resources, not due to inherent female characteristics or sex.³

Nochlin’s article reflects the tendency during the 1970s not only to question the past but also to seek a restructuring of the present in order for women and female artists to practice their art without restriction. Feminists in the arts strived to comment on patriarchy in two major ways. Some feminists strived to identify the essence of women, whether through biological or domestic imagery through the idea of “essentialism.”⁴ They believed that femininity is biologically determined and that embracing the “feminine” and female biology

² Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 147-158.

³ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 145-73.

⁴ Hatt and Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*, 145-73.

differentiates women's art from that of males. In doing so, women artists decided to embrace "central core" imagery that refers to female genitalia as well as to choose to work in arts that were deemed 'women's work' such as textiles or quilting. For this type of feminist, highlighting the biology of women and its essence balances the inequality of the sexes. Years later, feminists began to oppose this belief as social activists began to argue that gender is a social construct and not inherently tied to biological essentialism. In this belief, society and its institutions shape the characteristics deemed appropriate for each gender. Both approaches to dealing with feminism and the art world discern the difference between males and females but in different ways through either biology or societal construction.⁵

Overall women are taught to conduct themselves in a certain manner that is based on the expectations of those with the most influence in society, who are primarily men. This can also be seen in the idea of the 'male gaze,' which refers to the way in which women perceive themselves and how they are represented in mediums such as billboards or portraiture based on sexual objectification and societal expectations for women.⁶ The approaches of feminism, such as critiquing the patriarchal tendency to exclude women and the notion of 'male gaze,' contribute to the study of women and how they were perceived in society during different historical eras, as the depiction of women relied on male-determined societal standards. From the 1990s to the present, the reaction to the revelations made during the 1960s and 1970s shaped contemporary discussion of what it means to be a feminist and how history has shaped current conditions for women.⁷

The Story of Judith

One way to study a society's perception of women is through the lens of a particular story. The story of Judith beheading Holofernes provides a framework for studying the perception of women during different historical eras. In order to understand how this framework works, it is important to dissect what occurs during this particular story of Judith.

The Book of Judith is a deuterocanonical text excluded from the Hebrew version of the Bible since it was seen as allegorical rather than historical.⁸ The story begins in the Israelite town of Bethulia, which is under the control of General Holofernes, an Assyrian who

⁵ Hatt and Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*, 145-73.

⁶ Hatt and Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*, 145-73.

⁷ Hatt and Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*, 145-73

⁸ Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The image of the female hero in Italian Baroque art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 280.

is attempting to seize lands surrounding Jerusalem. At the Assyrian camp, Judith, a Jewish widow, tells the guards that she wants to help Holofernes and states: "I am on my way to see Holofernes the commander of your army, to give him a true report; I will show him a way by which he can go and capture all the hill country without losing one of his men, captured or slain."⁹ Her beauty overwhelmed the guards of the camp who allowed her and her maid Abra inside. Once in contact with Holofernes, Judith informs him that her people "cannot be defeated unless they sin against their God...But...they are at the point of committing the fateful sin, for in their desperation, they are about to consume the food and wine that had been consecrated for the priests. Accordingly, Judith counsels Holofernes to sustain the siege."¹⁰ Several days after entering the camp, Holofernes invites Judith to his tent for a feast. Her maid helps her to get ready in her finest clothing and they visit his tent. Holofernes drinks a large amount of wine and begins to sexually long for Judith but eventually falls asleep. As Abra stands outside Holofernes' bedchamber, Judith takes his sword and cuts off his head. Judith and Abra exit the camp and return to their town. At Bethulia, she presents to her people Holofernes' head, enabling them to defeat the shocked Assyrians.¹¹ They declared in a song of praise that "her beauty captivated his mind, and the sword severed his neck!"¹²

The heroic story of Judith slaying Holofernes to save her people provides artists with a substantial basis for composing a compelling narrative. But why this particular story? There are thousands of heroic epics such as the *Odyssey* or Biblical figures such as David or Moses whose themes could produce a great painting and works of art were made to depict those stories. Countless stories describe famous instances of men sacrificing or putting their lives at risk for their nation, which makes them usual. A story of a female conducting the same feat is unusual, providing a different avenue for artists to explore. Although the selection of a female-centered story is distinctive, it does not prevent the tendency to base the depiction on sexist stereotypes of the time.

The gender stereotypes are influenced by sexist beliefs, which leads to reductive characterizations of women. This can be seen in the depiction of another Biblical woman. The Virgin Mary is represented as a pure and delicate virgin and mother. The importance of avoiding any sign of sexuality when portraying the Virgin Mary, a figure whose

⁹ Judith 10:13 NRSV.

¹⁰ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The image of the female hero in Italian Baroque art*, 281; Judith 11:5-19 NRSV.

¹¹ Judith. 13:15 – 14:19 NRSV.

¹² Judith 16:9 NRSV.

story depends heavily on her dual virginity and motherhood, reflects the association of sex with sin and the importance of overcoming sexual desire through abstinence and virtue.¹³ The compulsion to categorize women, rather than fully presenting their complex personalities, demonstrates the sexist inclination to impose traits on women, which in turn helps to sustain male dominance in society.

The artist's interpretation determines the way in which the figures in the story are characterized. For Judith, this can mean her heroic act can be downplayed by being depicted in ways other than courageous, or based on what is appropriate for women at the time. To communicate the intended message, an artist must decide which moment of the story to depict. An artist can choose to depict moments leading up to Judith's kill, the actual moment, or the aftermath. Judith's story can easily turn into an example of a woman defying gender stereotypes in a negative way. The belief that women are deceptive in nature, which will be explored in the next section, is seen in the renderings of Judith that undermined her heroic act. At times, an artist can pick a certain situation from the story and come up with a personal interpretation that can deviate from the nominal message of the story. In all of these artistic decisions, societal expectations for women of the time shaped the depiction, even if it resulted in continuing stereotypes of commenting on women's place in society.

Pre-Renaissance and Renaissance

To provide context for the discussion of the Renaissance, it is important to understand the way in which women were viewed in the years prior to the fourteenth century. The view of women towards the end of the Middle Ages provides a source of comparison and contrast for other historical eras. Women during this time were expected to be either sinless and pure, like the Virgin Mary, or immoral and sexually promiscuous like Eve. Women were not considered to be complex beings and therefore were subject to stereotypes that flattened their complexities. Those who did not act in a way that fit into stereotypes were criticized and socially castigated. In order for people to understand how a woman did not fit the standards of this time, they would sometimes make up supernatural justifications for the woman's behavior. This was the case for women in the thirteenth century, when the search for witches by the Catholic Church became prevalent.¹⁴ Witches were women who acted strangely or did not fit the stereotypes of the day.

¹³ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: the myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

¹⁴ Heinrich Kramer, Excerpt from *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1486), in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 57.

The search for witchcraft is highlighted in the text of the *Malleus maleficarum* ('Hammer of Witches') written by Heinrich Kramer, a Dominican theologian and inquisitor, in 1486. The 'Hammer of Witches' is a vital text that demonstrates the way in which women were viewed during this time. It claims that witches were feeble, sexual, and impressionable women. Describing women as unintelligent and deviously sexual shows that women were typically regarded as simple-minded and that their sexuality should be exclusively procreative.¹⁵ Women were seen as easily susceptible to any outside influences, such as the handiwork of the Devil. These influences, it was believed, shaped women's perceptions since they were unintelligent and could fall into destructive behavior towards men.¹⁶ This is important to remember when examining the depictions of Judith during this time period.

The patriarchal view of women continued in the fourteenth century, although theologians and philosophers also introduced new developments. Scholars at this time debunked previous notions of women, such as the belief that females were the result of an unfinished process in the Creation of Man. However, the patriarchal tradition of securing men's superiority over women continued.¹⁷ The need for male dominance in society led to a paradox discussed by Renaissance theologians. This paradox lies in women's ability to be strong in their weakness, which is seen in the story of Judith. Scholastic thought also continued to associate women's sexuality and beauty with sin. Despite the slight change in the realization of a woman's value since Medieval thinking, the preconception of the interiority of women in society did not falter.¹⁸

Renaissance artists developed a new style of art that not only served narrative purposes but also demonstrated the artist's ability to create an illusion of the real world on a canvas. This was achieved using the Classical ideals of rationality, order, and realistic figures. One of the most prominent artists of this era is Florentine artist Sandro Botticelli who depicted Judith in his painting "The Return of Judith to Bethulia" in 1470-2. In this painting, Judith is with her maid Abra, who is carrying the head of Holofernes, as they are walking back to Bethulia. Their figures, which are in close proximity to each other,

¹⁵ Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1486), in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack, 60.

¹⁶ Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1486), in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, ed. Brian P. Levack, 62-63.

¹⁷ Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: a Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 2-27.

¹⁸ Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: a Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life*, 2-27.

are the primary focus of the painting. Judith's shoulders incline towards her maid, giving the appearance that they are about to enter into conversation or are listening intently to what was previously discussed. Judith's facial expression is modest as her eyes are not fixed on anything in particular and her face lacks any sign of joy. Abra appears to be keenly focused on Judith since her facial expression communicates worry and concentration. Botticelli chooses not to depict the triumphant climax of Judith's story and instead decides to reinterpret the Biblical story to fit his imagining of event.

Like women during the Renaissance, Judith's female character was restricted. Botticelli's Judith does not emphasize or convey any notion that a violent act occurred before the depicted scene. Although it was understood that her story is heroic, her accomplishment in this particular painting is not conveyed by a great sense of victory or courage. Her image to viewers is not that of committing a shocking act and its repercussions on the human psyche, but of a dreamy and subtle expression. Although her story was unconventional for a woman, rather than celebrating this fact, Botticelli decided to conform to conventions of depicting female characters.

Italian Baroque

Beyond the cultural flourishing of the Renaissance, the status of women in the seventeenth century is slightly different but generally the same. Chastity was treated as sacred but premarital sex was sometimes also considered as part of the courtship process.¹⁹ While women from previous centuries were shamed for not maintaining their virginity until marriage, women during the seventeenth century would not lose as much of their value to prospective husbands. Even non-consensual intercourse was seen as a continuation of their courtship. At the center of this view of sexuality is a sustained focus on a women's sexuality as her main feature.²⁰ This is reflected in the artistic career of Italian female painter Artemisia Gentileschi.

Unlike the other artists discussed in this paper, Artemisia Gentileschi was a woman painter. Born and trained in Rome, Gentileschi worked in the popular style of her time, which was characterized as dramatic and heavily emotional in composition and brushstroke.²¹ Gentileschi's successful career as a female artist during a time when the upper echelons of the art world were closed to women made her an important figure in feminist art history. However, there are several

¹⁹ Elizabeth S. Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 1 (2000): 47-75.

²⁰ Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," 47-75.

²¹ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The image of the female hero in Italian Baroque art*, 323.

important things to remember when discussing the work of an artist like Gentileschi. While it is significant to set Gentileschi apart for her accomplishments as a female artist of her time, she should not be critiqued separately from her male counterparts based solely on her gender. Also, despite her frequent treatments of female heroines and sexual themes, it is vital to not focus on Gentileschi's sexuality as the only driving force for her art. As previously mentioned, even though woman's sexual desire was regarded more liberally in Gentileschi's time, the tendency to view sexuality as a prominent feature of a woman remained. In general, Gentileschi should be regarded as a proficient artist who happened to be female and who utilized her own experiences of sexuality. Her art should not be interpreted only through the lens of her biography.

Gentileschi's most famous work is *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, of which she painted two versions from 1614 to 1620. This paper will focus on the second version, which is at the Uffizi in Florence, Italy. In this version, Judith is in the process of beheading Holofernes, while her maid Abra is holding his arms that are thrashing around due to the agonizing pain. The blood squirting from his head is exceptionally graphic and the dramatic light leads the viewers gaze to his head and Judith's figure. Judith's face is determined and her figure is in an active, assertive motion. The dark background brings forth all of the figures which heighten the dramatic action of the painting.²² The decision to pick this specific moment illustrates Gentileschi's intention for this work. Gentileschi decides to dramatically show the moment Judith is slaying Holofernes.

Gentileschi's depiction is inspired by the work *Judith Beheading Holofernes* by Italian painter Michelangelo Caravaggio. However, Caravaggio's Judith is tentative as she does not hold the sword straight down in a violent motion. She has a worried facial expression and is not completing the action with the same conviction as Gentileschi's Judith, who is relishing the moment. Gentileschi's Judith pushes Holofernes' head down towards her to accomplish the beheading and has a determined look in her face. In Caravaggio's work Abra is not helping Judith and stands to the side of the composition, but in Gentileschi's paintings Abra is holding Holofernes down.

Gentileschi's depiction shows the male as the victim and the female as the triumphant hero. Her Judith defies sexist stereotypes and also appears threatening, a trait that was not usually attributed to valiant women. Although her bosom is seen in the work, it is neither completely covered nor on display which makes her figure less sexualized. Where sexuality becomes the focal point is in the artist's

²² Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The image of the female hero in Italian Baroque art*, 321-323.

decision to depict this story and the particular moment.

During this time, the Catholic Church encouraged religious imagery in art as a response to the Reformation. In *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, Judith is not connected with the Virgin Mary like previous depictions since Gentileschi did not want Judith to be a passive figure. This is different from the Biblical images painted by her contemporaries who strived for viewers to feel emotion and reflect upon the portrayed stories. Although her work is inspired by Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* in artistic style, Gentileschi does not depict Judith as a delicate figure like Caravaggio's. Caravaggio's work fails to present Judith as a hero of her people who restrains the dark masculine side of Holofernes.²³ While other painters followed the mission of the Church, Gentileschi moved away from it and attempted to evoke emotion in a different way.

Gentileschi's approach to this painting can become overshadowed by the events that happened in her real life. The story of Judith as a woman successfully luring Holofernes, who sexually desired her, to his death is often paralleled with Gentileschi's experience with rape.²⁴ However, some art historians like Elizabeth Cohen believe that people should not interpret Gentileschi's decision to paint the moment Judith is killing Holofernes as the result of being raped in her own life. This is because it implies that her rape is the driving force for her art work, placing her sexuality as the main characteristic of her personality, and sexualizing her artistic career. This takes away from her artistic achievements and alienates her from the rest of her field.²⁵

In the accounts of her rape trial, Gentileschi is characterized as active and energetic and not passive and anxious.²⁶ Despite the strife of her situation, she defended herself and her reputation. She represented the bold and assertive women in her society who embraced their sexuality. However, even through Gentileschi's artistic depiction of Judith moves away from previous portrayals, sexist ideals still remained and appeared in art of the period. This is seen in the work of another Italian Baroque painter, Massimo Stanzione, titled *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*. In Stanzione's work, Judith is pictured with a clean, bloodless head of Holofernes inside of a satchel that her maid is holding. Judith's eyes are looking towards heaven which reflects the religious intention of the work and her facial expression is somewhat nonchalant. Stanzione depicts the aftermath of the killing rather than

²³ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The image of the female hero in Italian Baroque art*, 290-291.

²⁴ Cohen, *The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History*, 47-75.

²⁵ Cohen, *The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History*, 47-75.

²⁶ Cohen, *The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History*, 47-75.

the act itself and is less dramatic. Stazione's Judith exhibits the passive figure Gentileschi was attempting to avoid in her work. These two paintings indicate the reality of the time as women like Gentileschi were pushing women's role in society and the arts forward while contending with traditional notions of women and gender.

Art Nouveau and Vienna Secession Movement

The birth of Modernism and a revolution in the understanding of the human psyche shaped the turn of the 20th century. This period saw reactions against the ethics of previous centuries, especially regarding the purpose of art and the concept of gender. Art began to move against the criteria set by the Royal French Academy of Painting and Sculpture, which favored rationality and order in style, developed a hierarchy of genre, and shaped what was considered "good" art through Salons and public opinion. Some artists with more radical ideas moved away from the idea of art as being an illusion of reality and grappled with the notion of art as paint on a canvas. Artists of the Viennese Secession Movement rejected the historical approach to painting that the Royal French Academy of Painting and Sculpture championed.

With this new concept of art came new ideas from neurologist Sigmund Freud. Freud argued that the human psyche contained a conscious and unconscious mind. The unconscious mind was understood to contain repressed thoughts, memories, and dreams.²⁷ This influenced the art world as it brought forth a different understanding of reality and acknowledged art as a vessel for artists to communicate deep levels of their mind. These developments, as well as the transformation of society from an agrarian to industrial civilization, informed the way in which people approached their lives.

In this transformative time, patriarchal attitudes remained. While the men in this changing society were at the front of revolutionary movements, women were left behind and regarded as threatening to their agenda.²⁸ These movements brought radical possibilities for certain men while women were not given the same opportunities. Women in this period were able to participate in certain male dominated jobs but they were seen as rivals. Women also fought for voting rights and criticized the patriarchy for not allowing them to be seen as equals. Women, especially in the class-driven society of Vienna, Austria, were seen as "sweet young things," "poor creatures"

²⁷ Catherine Dean, *Klimt* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 5.

²⁸ Tobias Natter, Gerbert G.Frodl, and Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, *Klimt's Women* (New Haven: DuMont, 2000), 14-17.

or “worthless females.”²⁹ These perceptions were connected to the idea that a woman’s purpose in life was to marry well not for herself, but for her family’s societal status.³⁰ A woman’s sexuality was at the center of her worth and she was not allowed to be alone in social gatherings. If a female were to make a mistake, such as having an affair or seducing men, she was seen as a whore. In retaliation, women began to embrace eroticism and their freedom to express their sexuality as they please, whether they decided to be chaste or sexually active. This shows the emerging idea of the “modern woman” which would develop further in the following centuries. However, men viewed these “modern women” as a threat which influenced their erotic characterization in art.³¹

Viennese artist Gustav Klimt embraced this view of female eroticism in his art work. His artistic catalog consists of portraits of women who were either his models or members of the Viennese upper class. He embraced the contemporary ideas of art to depict women two-dimensionally and as references of nature.³² Klimt refers to his psyche to communicate the idea of his art rather than solely focusing on historical source material. Klimt achieves this in his work *Judith I* which was painted in 1901. Unlike previous art works depicting the story of Judith, Klimt models Judith after a contemporary, social elite Viennese woman named Adele Bloch-Bauer. In this painting, Judith’s facial expression is sensual as her mouth is half-open and her gaze is erotic due to her half-closed eyelids and the tilt of her head. Klimt’s Judith takes pleasure in holding the head of Holofernes which is different from the pious Biblical Judith. She is wearing an ornate garment that reveals parts of her torso and breasts, strikingly unlike previous depictions of Judith as maiden-like and less sexual. There is no religious imagery besides the Biblical source of the story and the primary focus of the work is to show Judith as a sensual figure who is comfortable with her sexuality.

Klimt objectifies women in his work. Even though he departs from the habit of showing women as idealized Venuses, feeble creatures, or prostitutes. Klimt reflects the way in which women were treated in his society since he relied on them for his artistic success. In his depiction of females like Judith, the ornamentation and sensual forms of his work camouflage the true character of his subject. As he celebrates the freedom of female eroticism, he still reduces women to their sexuality. His eager female models are left behind in the praise of his artistry. Klimt’s traditional tendencies in this regard contradict his achievement in leading a group of artists called the Viennese Secession who revolted against the

²⁹ Natter, Frodl, and Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, *Klimt’s Women*, 29-30.

³⁰ Natter, Frodl, and Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, *Klimt’s Women*, 29-30.

³¹ Natter, Frodl, and Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, *Klimt’s Women*, 36-37.

³² Natter, Frodl, and Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, *Klimt’s Women*, 26-27.

artistic norms of their culture. He mirrors the modern male members of his society who accepted certain changes but did not want to solve issues like women's rights.³³ Women were seen as a threat to men's control because of the ownership of their sexuality. Klimt showed female sexuality in his work not for the benefit of women but for the male gaze and sensual fantasy.

Contemporary Art

From the 1960s to present day, postmodernism has driven the issues surrounding contemporary art. Postmodernism reacted against the criteria set by Modernism, such as the rejection of illusionism and the focus on artistic process. The need for an avant-garde style of art to dominate ended and pluralism in medium and subject matter was embraced. Pluralistic art strives to reflect society's globalism by depicting different cultures in various mediums, including the cultures of previously ignored groups like African Americans and Chicanos.

As this paper has explored, for centuries women have been treated as lesser in society. However, female minorities are further marginalized because of racism and are seldom represented in art. It is easy for feminists and art institutions to seek gender equality while excluding the conditions of women of color.³⁴ At the same time, the contemporary notions of gender are shaped by institutions and society. The experience of women of color, the new ideas surrounding gender, and the constant development of "what is art?" forms the way in which today's artists, female or male, create art work. People today are seen as contingent beings who are influenced by their environment.³⁵ The role of perception is brought forth as artists strive to make viewers question their own life experience and their perception of others. By calling into question the role of perception, people can think about the conditions of society, such as the lack of representation of women, specifically of minorities.

African American artist Kehinde Wiley explores these themes in his work by creating monumental portraits of African American people whose poses reference previous paintings in art history. Wiley critiques the Western tradition of portraiture for its tendency to represent individuals of higher social status. He works primarily with oil on canvas and in doing so he draws attention to the traditional practice of portrait painting and provides a contrast between his work and what has been done before. By using poses

³³ Natter, Frodl, and Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, *Klimt's Women*, 14-17.

³⁴ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 316-354.

³⁵ Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 378-422.

from previous paintings, he forces viewers to reconsider the Western artistic convention of depicting male subjects as superior. Not only is he depicting a figure based on his own perception through an investigation of culture, real-life experience, and study of art history, he is also asking viewers to bring into discussion the role of their own perception in shaping the way in which they view the work. He comments on the absence of people of color in art galleries and disproves the notion that Caucasian and African American people exist in different realms of reality.³⁶

Wiley's examination of race, culture, and art come to fruition in his work *Judith and Holofernes* (2012). His depiction of Judith is vastly different than those previously discussed. In this work, Judith is represented as an African American female who is holding the head of Holofernes. Judith's body is twisted in an active pose and her gaze, mouth, and jaw are firm. She is wearing a contemporary dress and is set against a floral background, which fights for the viewer's attention and causes tension. Judith as an African American woman deviates from other depictions and comments on the racial inequality of the art world and society. This is because of the rarity of viewing this specific depiction of Judith. Wiley is affirming the identity of women of color while calling into question the racism in Art History. *Judith and Holofernes* creates a perplexing experience that makes the viewer uncomfortable, bringing attention to how the figure is depicted and the viewer's own perception.

Conclusion

Contemporary artists and art historians who focus on gender issues contribute to the dialogue on contemporary notions of gender and patterns of inequality. Examining how gender is understood by society through art allows for the societal expectations of each gender to be contested. It is critical to constantly analyze how women like Judith are being depicted in art. By doing so, the status of women in society is revealed, which provides a means of self-scrutiny. The status of women has changed since the Renaissance as women are less likely to be seen as helpless muses and completely reliant on men. Many depictions of Judith have devalued women by focusing exclusively on her sexuality, whether that is by emphasizing her chastity and emotionless reaction to the killing of Holofernes or by emphasizing her erotic pleasure at his death.

Art has the potential to change the conversation about the current state of gender relations and race relations. Expression of traditional stories like Judith's in a new way can help to point out that there are

³⁶ Kehinde Wiley and Thelma Golden. *Kehinde Wiley*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2012), 21.

many different perspectives on her story. Using something familiar can also allow artists to question and denormalize stereotypes about women or about different cultures. Allowing for pluralism of ideas and gender expressions can help people move past two-dimensional ways of approaching conflicts. Nonetheless, traditional stereotypes of women exist and it is a mission for artists today to continue to comment on sexism and react against the misogyny of the art world.

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PAIN AND POLITICS

Analyzing the 2011 Egyptian Revolution through Graffiti

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Best Paper Prize Winner 2017

Although the historical roots of the Arab Spring can easily be traced as far back as the eighteenth century, scholars often conflate the regional movement with recent political failure. However, the Arab Spring's occurrence at a particular time suggests that years of tension between authorities and citizens led to the breaking point in 2011.¹ In addition to politics, the breaking point stemmed from the culmination of factors such as the rise of pan-Arab media and social media, the "youth bulge," and the global economic downturn of 2008.² Accordingly, participants in the revolution represent a myriad of perspectives extending beyond political critique. But political dissidents of all stripes, including Marxists, secularists, feminists, Islamists, and anarchists shared public spaces, such as Egypt's Tahrir Square, Bahrain's Pearl Roundabout, Tunisia's Bourguiba Avenue, and Syria's Clock Tower Square, during the Arab Spring.

With a population of over ninety million people, scholars consider Egypt the Arab world's cultural, political, economic, and military leader. Since Egypt's shift from a constitutional monarchy to a republic in 1952, mass numbers of people have converged on Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo to demand change several times. Originally called Ismailia Square after the 19th century Khedive and commissioner of downtown Cairo Ismail the Magnificent, President

¹ Rashid Khalidi, "Reflections on the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt," *Foreign Policy*, February 24, 2011.

² Dafna Hochman Rand, *Roots of the Arab Spring: Contested Authority and Political Change in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 10.

Gamal Abdel Nasser renamed it *Midan Tahrir*, or Liberation Square, in 1954 to commemorate Egyptian independence from occupying British forces.³ Nasser and his successor President Anwar Sadat transformed Tahrir Square into the center of life in Cairo by installing circular gardens, an underground metro system, international hotels, and several municipal buildings including the Ministry of the Interior and Arab League Headquarters.⁴ The square remained central to the tradition of political protest. For example, in the 1970s Sadat's policy of *infitah*, or opening to private investment, included an end to state-sponsored food subsidies. The policy intensified class divides and left many families hungry. Indeed, the opposition culminated in 1977 when thousands of lower and middle-class citizens protested the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund's involvement in Tahrir Square.⁵ Again, Tahrir Square became the center of protest in 2003 under President Hosni Mubarak as thousands of university students demonstrated against the war in Iraq.

Although Egyptians have used protests to provoke political change since the 1950s, the presidents of the Egyptian Revolution experienced an unprecedented number of demonstrations in Tahrir Square. On January 25th, 2011, a national day of commemoration for Egyptian police forces, six million Egyptians gathered in Tahrir Square to voice dissent, resistance, anger, and solidarity against increasing police brutality associated with Hosni Mubarak's presidency. Two weeks later, President Hosni Mubarak resigned, ending his thirty-year rule as the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) assumed power. However, protests continued as SCAF constricted the democratic process. In June 2012, Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi was sworn in as President and with him came a yearlong battle over the position of parliament between Morsi and the SCAF. Protests subsided in 2014 when Morsi's appointed Defense Minister, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, stepped in as President. The frequency and size of protests during the Arab Spring suggested a rift between citizens and politicians regarding the future of Egyptian political identity.

This paper will explore this rift by analyzing the works of street artists Ganzeer, Zeft, and Ammar Abo Bakr during the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. It will argue that alternative media affected social change more efficiently than traditional digital and print media. Each section will analyze graffiti pieces as belonging to one of three categories: social

³ "Tahrir Square's historic past," *al-Jazeera*, February 1, 2011, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/201121103522508343.html>; "Tahrir Square's place in Egypt's history," *BBC*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12332601>.

⁴ Nezar Al Sayyad, "A History of Tahrir Square," *Midan Masr*, <http://www.midan-masr.com/en/printerfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=140>.

⁵ "Tahrir Square's place in Egypt place in Egypt's history," *BBC*, November 22, 2011.

movements aimed at mobilizing citizens towards a common goal, visions of alternate futures aimed at remedying present problems, or memorials aimed at honoring victims and documenting administrative crimes. Additionally, each section will examine the production and preservation of specific pieces, including audience interaction and distribution, as a factor in the changing perception of national identity during the Arab Spring. The multitude of graffiti pieces complicate the construction of a single narrative by suggesting diversity in political leaders and historical narratives. The graffiti pieces reflect the diversity of citizens and present an acceptance of the multiplicity of national narratives as a solution to the causes of the Egyptian Revolution and wider Arab Spring.

History, Identity and the Importance of Graffiti

Since declaring independence from the British Empire in 1922, Egyptian leaders have sought to develop differing conceptions of Egyptian history and national identity. President Gamal Abdel Nasser founded the Ministry of Culture in 1958 to “give personal definition of Egyptian history and maintain capabilities of [national] heritage.”⁶ The program initially fulfilled its mission statement by funding formal theater troupes that adapted traditional Egyptian texts to address contemporary issues. Unfortunately, the program’s funding decreased in the 1970s under President Anwar Sadat’s program of Corrective Revolution. Sadat sought to replace Nasser’s pan-Arab socialist policies with liberal economics; therefore the program linked a change in policy with a contested attempt to rewrite history. Although Sadat himself participated in the 1952 Revolution, he sought to present his reversal of Nasser’s policies as an extension of the favorable 1952 Revolution. In other words, Sadat set himself up to succeed where Nasser had failed.⁷ Furthermore, then Vice President Hosni Mubarak led a committee in searching for the “historical truth” behind the 1952 Revolution.⁸ The committee’s sole historian, Izzat Abd al-Karim, believed the newly proposed history better suited Sadat’s “new liberal economics.”⁹ However, as a consequence of decreased funding for the arts and the government controlled narrative, independent acting troupes could not apply for state funding. Therefore, playwrights described the “ironies of contemporary life and social tensions” in a manner that appealed to the identity of an ordinary citizen as opposed

⁶ “About the Ministry,” Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Culture, <http://www.moc.gov.eg/en/ministry/about-ministry/>.

⁷ Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 15-16.

⁸ Yoav Di-Caupa, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 324.

⁹ Nariman Yousef, *Summer of Unrest: Tahrir - 18 Days of Grace* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

to a formally trained performer.¹⁰

Due to state attempts to control narratives about national identity, Egyptian citizens have recently engaged in the preservation and creation of alternative national identity, historic memory, and collective consciousness.¹¹ Like many Arab countries, access to official information in Egypt is difficult to obtain. For example, researchers must overcome security restrictions and interrogations at the Ministry of Defense. Even with these precautions, the government maintains a “deeply entrenched culture of destroying or hiding” potentially awkward information.¹² Such difficulties strain the relationship between Egyptians and the state. Historian Khaled Fahmy believes a fundamental change in the creation and preservation of history may improve the deteriorating relationship between Egyptian citizens and their state. With the help of activists, bloggers, and analysts, Fahmy formed the Committee to Document the 25th January Revolution in 2011 to begin archiving primary source data so that “Egyptians now and in the future can construct their own narratives about this pivotal period.”¹³ In addition to official records, the group collected sources of alternative media including insurrectionary pamphlets, oral testimonies, multimedia footage, and social media posts.¹⁴

Many of these collected sources were created in public spaces that Egyptians utilized to create social campaigns, imagine alternate realities, and memorialize victims. Sociologist Saskia Sassen notes that urban spaces allow seemingly powerless actors to create history and engage politically, thereby acknowledging that powerlessness is not an absolute condition.¹⁵ The simple act of civic engagement, such as participating in a protest, consuming news, or creating graffiti, is a shared creative process. Philosopher Michel Foucault notes there is no space that is “dead, fixed, undialectical or immobile,” meaning

¹⁰ Sonali Pahwa and Jessica Winegar, “Culture, State, and Revolution,” *Middle East Report* 263 (2012): 5.

¹¹ Judy Barsalou, “Post-Mubarak Egypt: History, Collective Memory and Memorialization,” *Middle East Policy Council* 19, no. 2 (2012).

¹² Jack Shenker, “The Struggle to Document Egypt’s Revolution,” *The Guardian*, July 15, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/15/struggle-to-document-egypt-revolution>.

¹³ Roberta L. Dougherty, “Documenting Revolution in the Middle East,” *Center for Research Libraries* 31, no. 1 (2011): 5.

¹⁴ Shenker, “The Struggle to Document Egypt’s Revolution.”

¹⁵ Saskia Sassen, “The Global Street: Making the Political,” *Globalizations* 8, no. 5 (2011): 574.

the simple act of civic engagement “is to resist.”¹⁶ While activities in urban spaces can transmit information that mirrors the opinions of local inhabitants and “delivers a collective learning about diversity, [urban spaces can also] become sites of murderous attacks.”¹⁷ The experiential difference stems from the socioeconomic, gender, and sexual positionality of actors, including politicians, protestors, and citizens, therefore creating contested displays of power through urban space. In addition to the “people versus the state” narrative that is typical of revolutions, Egyptian society additionally fragmented along traditional, modernist, secularist and statist camps. The resulting multilayered messages of protestors can complement, interrupt, and compete with one another.

Although the specific objectives of various protest groups may differ, the shared resistive expressions of graffiti disseminated by protest groups emerges from the intersection of the local and global. Specifically, graffiti creates a “fluid civic community that is materially based in particular city streets but conceptually linked to other streets throughout the region and the world.”¹⁸ Graffiti also bolsters the existing fluid nature of communities during revolutions by allowing graffiti writers to “connect themselves to all the possible reactions the city can muster with respect to a particular image produced over time.”¹⁹ While this paper will explore a number of purposes and consequences of graffiti, street art functions most clearly as a form of mass communication and dialogue.²⁰ Graffiti is inclusive because it can be easily accessed and understood by most people, regardless of literacy levels or regional demographics.²¹ Graffiti is also democratic in that artists strategically place images in high-traffic areas, making it difficult for passersby to ignore and easy for others to share their

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 70-71. Michel Foucault, “Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1967), 168.

¹⁷ Saskia Sassen, “The Global Street: Making the Political,” *Globalizations* 8, no. 5 (2011): 577.

¹⁸ Sammy Zeyad Badran, “The Contentious Roots of the Egyptian Revolution,” *Globalizations* 11, no. 2 (2014): 276; Noha Mellor, “Who Represents the Revolutionaries? Examples from the Egyptian Revolution 2011,” *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 1 (2014): 85.

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²¹ Hassnaa K. Hassan, “Graffiti as a Communication Medium During the Arab Spring,” The Proceedings of the Laurel Highlands Communications Conference. (2014).

responses.²²

I use several graffiti pieces created in response to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution by three graffiti artists in Cairo to show how this process worked in the context of the Arab Spring. The first, Mohamed Fahmy, founded his own graphic design studio in 2005 under the pseudonym Ganzeer, the Arabic word for chain.²³ He chose the term seeing that his art freed him from the oppressive chains of government restrictions and societal limitations.²⁴ His pieces often explore themes of working class resistance; hence they appear in public spaces as opposed to private art galleries. He gained fame for his street art in 2011, when his pieces became centers of dialogue. However, Ganzeer does not label himself a street artist, but rather a “multidisciplinary maker of things, be it installations, prints, traditional paintings, videos, objects, guerilla actions in public spaces, and even comics” at different periods of time and in different locations.²⁵

The street artist Zeft felt moved to participate in political protests after watching a video of police brutality in January 2011.²⁶ After meeting fellow street artist Ganzeer in Tahrir Square, Zeft felt drawn to the open nature of graffiti.²⁷ The Arabic term *zeft* translates to asphalt, but refers to a derogatory term in colloquial Arabic. Similar to Chinua Achebe’s willingness to use English as a vehicle for African self-expression, Zeft’s decision to use the term as his pseudonym may reflect a desire to reclaim corrupted spaces as his own. His art usually addresses feminist and religious themes by putting strong historical figures in conversation with modern events.

While Ganzeer and Zeft took up graffiti and assumed pseudonyms as a result of the revolution, the third artist, Ammar Abo Bakr, created

²² Hassnaa K. Hassan, “Graffiti as a Communication Medium During the Arab Spring,” *The Proceedings of the Laurel Highlands Communications Conference* (2014).

²³ Ieva Zakareviciute, “Reading Revolution on the Walls: Cairo Graffiti as an Emerging Public Sphere,” *Hemispheres* 29, no. 2 (2014): 18.

²⁴ Lois Parshley, “For Graffiti Artists, Revolution Brings Inspiration and Uncertainty,” *The Atlantic*, October 3, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/10/for-egypts-graffiti-artists-revolution-brings-inspiration-and-uncertainty/245941/>.

²⁵ Randa el-Banna, “Graffiti, an art that changed Egypt - in focus with Ganzeer,” *Cairo Post*, February 11, 2014, <http://thecairopost.youm7.com/news/87270/arts-and-culture/graffiti-an-art-that-changed-egypt-in-focus-with-ganzeer>; “Ganzeer,” European Culture Congress, September 2011, <http://www.culturecongress.eu/en/people/ganzeer>.

²⁶ Mohamed Fahmy, “Concept Pop,” *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, Summer 2014, <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/concept-pop/>.

²⁷ Timmy Mowafi, “Egypt’s Forgotten Graffiti and The Revolution That Came to Zeft,” *CairoScene*, March 20, 2015, <http://www.cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/El-Zeft-Revolution>.

art long before 2011. He studied painting at the Luxor Institute of Fine Arts at the turn of the century, where he also served as a professor with research interests in Islamic culture, Egyptian history, and political change.²⁸ He views wall art as the “newspaper of the revolution,” and has covered walls around the Middle East and Europe.²⁹ After hearing about the first protests in January 2011, Abo Bakr left his position in Luxor and moved to Cairo.³⁰ Since then, he has created several murals and collaborative projects around the city.

Tank Versus Bike

“Tank Versus Bike” by Ganzeer, completed shortly after the resignation of Mubarak in 2011, shows a large military tank pointed directly at a young man riding a bike and carrying a tray of bread atop his head. Despite the comparatively threatening degree of power posed by the tank, the biker continues his journey. This painting references the resilience and willingness of the Egyptian youth to strive towards social change, even in the face of physical military threats and uneven distribution of power. The image feels reminiscent of the unknown man who stood in front of a tank in China’s Tiananmen Square or Rachel Corrie’s fateful attempt to block an Israeli Defense Forces’ bulldozer in the Gaza Strip. Thus, this image warns about the possible dangers of opposing authority, while also connecting the events in Egypt with revolutions in other places and times.

As the history of “Tank Versus Bike” illustrates, street art is uniquely collaborative and ephemeral. A few hours after Ganzeer’s completion of the image, fellow street artist Sad Panda added his signature panda to the work. The animal nonchalantly walks behind the biker and watches as the ominous tank approaches. The animal’s symbolism can be understood through several layers. Firstly, pandas are foreign to Egypt and hence represent the international community. Secondly, the panda’s upright stance signifies the international community’s solidarity and support for progress in Egypt, while the panda’s secondary position symbolizes the international community’s general failure to prevent violence in the Middle East.

Egyptian-British journalist and writer Soraya Morayef notes that the self-evident symbolism of the piece is so powerful that the piece

²⁸ Timmy Mowafi, “Egypt’s Forgotten Graffiti and The Revolution That Came to Zeft,” *CairoScene*, March 20, 2015.

²⁹ Giuseppe Acconcia, “Ammar Amo Bakr, Graffiti Artist,” *Slow Words*, September 18, 2014, <http://www.slow-words.com/ammam-abo-bakr-graffiti-artist/>.

³⁰ Acconcia, “Ammar Amo Bakr, Graffiti Artist.”

has not been defaced for a remarkably long period of time.³¹ Rather, citizens joined the conversation by continuing to add on to the work. In January 2012 figures of anonymous individuals being violently crushed to death by the tank appeared. This addition likely references the Maspero Massacre of October 2011, when military tanks massacred twenty-eight Coptic Christians in peaceful protest outside the Egyptian Radio and Television Union.³² Again, efforts to stand up against authority – no matter how small – risk deadly consequences.

In an attempt to change the narrative, a pro-SCAF group known as the Badr Battalion erased the images of the bicyclist, the panda, and the dead protestors, leaving only the tank and a fresh inscription of “The Army and the Police and the People Are One in Hand.”³³ By erasing select images, the pro-SCAF group attempted to whitewash SCAF actions as murderers of their own citizens and instead assert the importance of positive relations between citizens and authority. Later, a newly formed group of witty street artists known as the Mona Lisa Battalion added a few quirky characters.³⁴ Most notably, former SCAF Chairman Mohamed Hussein Tantawi appears to be chewing a victim to death.³⁵ Reminiscent of Francisco Goya’s *Saturno Devorando a Su Hijo*, the addition suggests that much of Egypt’s political oppression stems from fear of being overthrown by youth movements.

Likewise, Ganzeer’s “Mask of Freedom” quickly created much social unrest in Cairo. Described as both “superhero-style” and “Satan-like,” the cartoon shows a blindfolded and gagged bust with the phrase “New: Mask of Freedom. Salute from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to sons of the beloved nation. Now available for an unlimited period of time.”³⁶ The advertisement’s text suggests that the SCAF is giving out masks that promote a sense of freedom, but

³¹ Sarah Mousa, “Ammar Abo Bakr: Committing Murder, then Marching in the Funeral Procession,” *Jadaliyya*, January 27, 2014, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/16192/ammara-bo-bakr-committing-murder-then-marching-in-?fb_comment_id=3453387889389931653145.

³² “Cairo clashes leave 24 dead after Coptic church protest,” *BBC News*, October 10, 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15235212>.

³³ Soraya Morayef, “War on Graffiti – SCAF Vandalists Versus Graffiti Artists,” *Suzee in the City*, February 6, 2012, <https://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2012/02/06/war-on-graffiti-scaf-vandalists-versus-graffiti-artists/>.

³⁴ James D. Hoff, “Revolutionary Graffiti in Egypt,” *Warscapes*, December 12, 2013.

³⁵ Soraya Morayef, “War on Graffiti – SCAF Vandalists Versus Graffiti Artists,” *Suzee in the City*, February 6, 2012.

³⁶ Barbara Pollack, “Hieroglyphics That Won’t Be Silenced: Ganzeer Takes Protest Art Beyond Egypt,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 2014. Frida Boeke, “Ganzeer, politics and art in the public space,” *PoliticsMediaArt*, May 6, 2013.

the accompanying image reveals the true irony.³⁷ The masks serve the opposite purpose of blinding people and restricting free expression. Ganzeer experienced the effects of the mask of freedom firsthand when the SCAF detained him for circulating the image.

Ganzeer originally released the image online on May 19, 2011 and posted physical stickers around Cairo on May 26. While posting stickers around downtown, two civilians stopped Ganzeer to share their discomfort with the image. The three-person debate became a big scene within minutes as passersby stopped to share their opinions, some even accusing Ganzeer of being a foreign spy. Thus, the SCAF arrived and arrested Ganzeer. While in detention, authorities searched for a link between Ganzeer and anti-government forces. Despite the controversial nature of his graffiti, authorities failed to find evidence of political threats against the regime.³⁸ Authorities released Ganzeer a few hours later. While confiscating Ganzeer's remaining stickers, the interrogating officer pocketed a few and laughed. Additionally, the arresting officer asked, "What's the big deal? Freedom" after reviewing the scene.³⁹

As a result of the arrest, three conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between people and government during the Egyptian Revolution. The early attempts to restrict expressive freedoms generated a demand in and increased the use of expressive freedoms. For instance, the image "garnered even more exposure [via Al-Ahram Online, Al-Shorouk News, the Daily News Egypt, the Christian Science Monitor, and CNN] only because [the two civilians] stopped [Ganzeer]."⁴⁰ Second, the Egyptian military allowed institutions to continue "regardless of their inefficiency as long as things work."⁴¹ Instead of fixing the underlying problems that have caused tensions since 1952, the Egyptian government addresses the symptoms of unrest such as mass protests, street art, and revolution. Third, the spread of physical ideas was more effective than the spread of digital ideas in seeking attention for the issue. The "Mask of Freedom" garnered a significant amount of international attention after being shared via stickers in late May when compared with the humble impact

³⁷ Danna Lorch, "Walls of Freedom Documents the Art of the Egyptian Revolution," *Art Slant Magazine*, December 15, 2014.

³⁸ Wendell Steavenson, "Revolution in Cairo: A Graffiti Story," *The New Yorker*, July 17, 2014.

³⁹ Mohamed Fahmy, "7 Things I Have Learned From the Mask of Freedom," Ganzeer, June 2011, <http://www.ganzeer.com/post/158072880804/7-things-i-have-learned-from-the-mask-of-freedom>.

⁴⁰ Mohamed Fahmy, "7 Things I Have Learned From the Mask of Freedom," Ganzeer, June 2011.

⁴¹ Mohamed Fahmy, "7 Things I Have Learned From the Mask of Freedom," Ganzeer, June 2011.

of the initial, digital release.

Nefertiti in a Gas Mask

In addition to freedom masks, gas masks became a symbol of revolutionary resistance. Zeft's image titled "Nefertiti in a Gas Mask" shows the ancient Queen wearing a tear gas mask with the phrase "the woman's voice is a revolution." The image appeared in September 2012 on the popular Mohammed Mahmoud Street, which became a strategic meeting point for protestors, riot police, and politicians at the Ministry of the Interior. Zeft also shared the image on the Op Anti-Sexual Harassment Facebook page, a group that aims "to combat sexual harassment incidents and collective sexual assaults that women face in squares during sit-ins, protests, and clashes in the perimeter of Tahrir Square."⁴² Zeft included a caption saying, "A tribute to all women in our beloved Revolution. Without you we wouldn't have gotten this far. Thank you."⁴³

Queen Nefertiti, one of most powerful and beautiful women in Egyptian history, ruled as joint-pharaoh beside her husband. Artists usually depict most ancient Egyptian queens standing behind their husbands, whereas artists draw Nefertiti beside Pharaoh Akhenaten. The couple reoriented the country's political structure around religious worship of the sun god Aten. Additionally, she worked to shape Egyptian identity as inclusive of women in various spheres. In addition to her significant cultural upheaval, Nefertiti's role as co-regent and her daughters' roles as religious advisors created her legacy as a symbol of female power and beauty. Thus, it is ironic that someone as renowned as Nefertiti would be depicted wearing a tear gas mask. Military violence often stems from royal authority, yet the image instead suggests that Zeft understands Nefertiti as standing with Egyptian women in spite of her high socioeconomic class. Zeft thereby uses Queen Nefertiti's strong legacy to remind Egyptian women of their roots in female political leaders, to advocate towards a multifaceted revolution, and to recognize the significance of female contributions during the revolution.⁴⁴

Tomorrow

Zeft's "Tomorrow" emerged as a reaction to the February 2012 Port Said Stadium riots and subsequently erected military barricades that

⁴² Op Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault's Facebook page, founded December 2012.

⁴³ Christiane Gruber, "Nefertiti in a Gas Mask," *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 3, 2015.

⁴⁴ Orlando Reade, "Egyptian Graffiti and Gender Politics: An Interview with Soraya Morayef," *Africa Is A Country*, April 13, 2015.

prevented access to Tahrir Square. The soccer match ended with fans happily swarming the field, but the event quickly turned violent as pro-SCAF and anti-SCAF fans attacked one another with stones, fireworks, and bottles.⁴⁵ As news spread and riots escalated, protestors blamed the seventy-nine deaths on the lack of police presence at the match.⁴⁶ In an attempt to protect themselves from the rock-throwing crowds and limit protestors' access to Tahrir Square, the SCAF erected seven barriers on the streets leading into downtown Cairo. These walls became artists' canvases: graffiti artists sought to make the new walls disappear using the collaborative "No Walls Campaign."⁴⁷

Zeft chose the new barricade outside of the Ministry of the Interior, an organization responsible for handling national security, emergency management, and local elections, as the site for his mural "Tomorrow" in March 2012.⁴⁸ Zeft initially drew a girl and her dog sitting on a bench underneath a rainbow, while later additions by others include a mother pushing a stroller, a girl purchasing balloons from a street merchant, birds in flight, and children holding hands while walking. The mural's idealistic and playful display of the future starkly contrasted with the violent massacres occurring on the street.⁴⁹ Zeft drew the mural at a moment when he "really lost hope" and wished that viewers would use that desperation as fuel for a better future.⁵⁰

In addition to mobilizing citizens towards a common goal or imagining an idealized reality, graffiti also provided citizens with information that traditional, print media sources failed to report. By sharing information about atrocities that had been covered up by the SCAF, artists also memorialized victims of military brutality. One such image told the story of nineteen-year old engineering student Belal Abi Saber.⁵¹ Military forces shot and executed Abi Saber as he participated in a daytime protest in Tahrir Square in October 2013. The SCAF

⁴⁵ Mohamed Fadel Fahmy and Ian Lee, "Anger flares in Egypt after 79 die in soccer riot," *CNN*, February 2, 2012.

⁴⁶ "The Seven Wonders of the Revolution: Cubic Street Art Against SCAF," *Mashallah News*, March 26, 2012.

⁴⁷ John Lennon, "Assembling a Revolution Graffiti, Cairo and the Arab Spring," *Cultural Studies Review* 20, no. 1 (March 2014): 262. Marwan M. Kreidy, "The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World," (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 98.

⁴⁸ Soraya Morayef, "For the Love of Graffiti: Cairo's Walls Trace History of Colorful Revolution," *Suzee in the City*, September 20, 2012.

⁴⁹ Yahya Bedair, "Graffiti and Political Polarization in Egypt: From Optimism to Silence," *Egyptian Streets*, April 18, 2015.

⁵⁰ Mowafi, "Egypt's Forgotten Graffiti and The Revolution That Came to Zeft," 2015.

⁵¹ Soraya Morayef, "Belal Abi Saber: Graffiti by Ammar Abo Bakr and El Zeft," *Suzee in the City*, October 16, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/oct/12/world/la-fg-wn-egypt-student-death-20131012>.

sought to prevent the “student’s death from becoming a rally cause for the backers of Egypt’s recently deposed Islamist president;” they wanted the fight against terrorists and Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers to preoccupy the country.⁵² No traditional Egyptian media sources reported on his murder, but by seeing the street art dedicated to his story, artists could bring his story to the people’s attention and help shape the narrative of the revolution.

Instead of leaving flowers at the scene of the crime, artists Ammar Abo Bakr and Zeft created a mural that commemorated Ali Saber’s life and exposed the officer who killed him. Although Ali Saber’s body appears lifeless, the angel wings growing from his back and colorful flowers sprouting from his bloody wound suggest otherwise. Morayef compares the poet Pablo Neruda’s quote “you can step on the flowers but you can’t prevent the spring” to the mural. Young Czech reformists used the quote in their fight against crushing restrictions on personal freedoms during the Prague Spring in 1968.⁵³ Likewise, the mural’s flowery imagery suggests that attempts to limit freedoms can only increase revolutionary spirit. After all, cutting flowers spreads more seeds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Egyptian citizens used creative activism to mobilize social change in Cairo’s public spaces during the Arab Spring. During times of revolution, public spaces become contested spaces of power in that their potential experiences differ based on individual positionality. Citizens used public spaces, whether old walls or newly erected barriers, for resistance in response to governmental efforts to censor traditional media, limit expressive freedoms, and homogenize Egyptian identity. The resulting images captured current events, explored national identity, and imagined the development of future Egyptian life, while representing myriad goals including gender equality, religious freedom, economic stability, and political change.

Likewise, images created by Ganzeer, Zeft, and Ammar Abo Bakr, among other artists and activists, depicted the array of experiences held by Egyptians during the Arab Spring. The three artists suggested plurality as a solution to conflict. The multitude of available graffiti makes it impossible for a single narrative to encompass the vast array of revolutionary demands. Thus, graffiti places plurality at the forefront of the discussion. Therefore, the aforementioned artists

⁵² Laura King, “Egyptian student’s death at protest to be probed,” *LA Times*, October 12, 2013.

⁵³ Rebecca Solnit, “You Can Crush the Flowers, But You Can’t Stop the Spring,” *Common Dreams*, November 22, 2011, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2011/11/22/you-can-crush-flowers-you-cant-stop-spring>.

and examined works are important contributions to Egypt as they demonstrated the contested nature of national identity, future, and visions of Egyptian history. The artists depicted current events, but as their art was augmented, amended or even erased, they provided a forum for organic, dynamic and active participation in dialogues about the future of Egypt. Since the Arab Spring, the international community has experienced an increase in tumultuous global politics and a diminution in the line between persona and political. Indeed, creative activism magnifies the role of individuals from all backgrounds as active participants, not passive spectators, in the creation of their future and sources of critically engaged media. After all, cultural historian Joe Austin writes, “A revolution that does not allow citizens to write on the city walls can be no revolution at all.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Joe Austin, “More to See Than a Canvas in White Cube: For an Art in the Streets,” *City* 14, no. 1-2 (2012): 33-44.

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Nala Chehade is a senior at Virginia Tech pursuing dual degrees in International Studies & History with minors in Middle East Studies, War & Society, and Spanish. Her research explores questions of identity, displacement, cultural politics, and alternative media in the Middle East. During summer 2017, she researched the history of refugee civic engagement in southwest Virginia. She currently serves as an intern with the State Department's Office of Near Eastern Affairs & Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. After graduation, Nala hopes to pursue a graduate degree in Middle East Studies.



THE KREMLIN KRONICLE:

A Short Reflection

John Mark Mastakas, Virginia Tech
Digital History Prize Winner 2017

Every year, the Virginia Tech History Department gives out an award for outstanding work in digital history. The 2017 Winner of this award was John Mark Mastakas for his blog The Kremlin Kronicle. In Volume 7 of the VTUHR, we wanted to give our readers a chance to learn about opportunities for research outside of the standard research article. Digital formats for presenting historical research are one possible route to take when deciding how to present a work of original research. To give the reader an idea of the kinds of topics he researched and how he sees digital history contributing to his research, we asked John Mark to write a brief reflection on his experience.

—the Editors

The *Kremlin Kronicle* is a blog that was created for the History of Soviet Culture course offered at Virginia Tech in the fall of 2015. The forum explores various cultural topics throughout the Soviet Union's history and draws conclusions about the role culture played in social and political change. The blog looks specifically at the impact of the Orthodox Church, alcohol consumption amongst Soviets, literacy across the country, and other subjects to examine the role that various social norms played throughout the country's history.

Though the Soviet Union lasted for less than one hundred years, it has an incredibly dense and complex history. Through *The Kremlin Kronicle*, I was able to dive into a variety of topics of interest to me and expand my general understanding of the country. As Americans perceiving the world through the lens of American history, we tend to look at the Soviet Union and its people as an enemy, but through the course of working on this blog I was able to see the number of people

in that country who were taken advantage of by their government. After learning about their poor treatment at the hands of their government, the blog gave me the medium to better understand the common people of the Soviet Union and develop empathy for them and an appreciation for their culture.

Using a digital format for this assignment opened a number of doors for me that the conventional pen and paper would have otherwise not allowed me to utilize. First, the format of the blog makes it easy for the general public to access. The blog displays all of my posts on one page with large thumbnails that truly captured the essence of my articles in order to catch people's attention. The blog also gave me the ability to add artwork, videos and other media directly into the article. These multimedia options gave the blog more character, and helps the reader get a more visual understanding of the topic they are reading. Along the same lines, the additional sensory descriptors were useful in that they provided a more hands-on and informal way of conveying information about Soviet culture and history. One of the unique characteristics of writing on an electronic format is the ability to hyperlink articles directly into the body of your writing. This is extremely useful when writing for an audience that is not well-versed in the field in which you are writing. For example, when I referenced a concept or historical event on my blog, I could directly link the source into the key work or concept I was describing to give the reader something that they could read more about, rather than using more words to summarize a source.

In all, writing *The Kremlin Kronicle* was a fantastic experience that helped me simultaneously learn about the culture of the Soviet Union while also learning how to best integrate technology with my historical analysis in a format that is easier on the senses and more engaging to a modern audience, while also maintaining academic integrity.

Permalink to blog site:

Full Site:

The Kremlin Kronicle (live site): <https://jmm12blog.wordpress.com/>
(perma link record): <https://perma.cc/U8L5-K9PJ>

Articles:

Who is Katerina Lvovna Izmailova?: <https://perma.cc/48LQ-652D>

Holy Russia and her Tribulations: <https://perma.cc/3PKZ-XSFZ>

The Adventures of the Little Red Devils: <https://perma.cc/E44T-QDUQ>

Don't Steal From Stalin: <https://perma.cc/BX7V-92JE>

Flying High (Stalinism): <https://perma.cc/9XU5-FEBX>

Tanks, Tractors, and Soviet Russia: <https://perma.cc/K8LB-VCXQ>

Protecting Mother Russia Through the Church: <https://perma.cc/ACE4-3AX6>

Food (or the Lack Thereof) for Thought: <https://perma.cc/ACE4-3AX6>

Let's Throw a Party: <https://perma.cc/BV8X-H8CD>

Progressing the Soviet Union One Word at a Time: <https://perma.cc/VN43-TFM7>

One More Drink?: <https://perma.cc/7A5W-2JJE>



About the Author:

John Mark Mastakas is a senior History major, with two minors in Science, Technology, and Law (STL) and Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE). He will be graduating in the spring of 2018 with an Honors Baccalaureate degree that is highlighted by his thesis, “Nuclear Radiation and the Environment: Analyzing Fallout Countermeasures through the Scope of Reindeer and Sheep.” During his time at Virginia Tech, John Mark was involved in a number of organizations including as President of Beta Theta Pi, Member at Large in the Student Government Association, and Vice President of Membership for Omicron Delta Kappa. Next year John Mark will be attending William and Mary Law School.



DISMANTLING THE MYTHS OF THE EASTERN FRONT: The Role of the Wehrmacht in the War of Annihilation

Andrew Kapinos, Virginia Tech

The English-language historiography of the Eastern Front of World War II is notably sparse until the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the first couple of post-war decades, memoirs written by former generals in the Wehrmacht, the armed forces of the Third Reich, dominated the historical conversation. These memoirs created the myth of the clean and apolitical Wehrmacht, where military operations and genocidal policy were separate. According to this narrative, it was the Nazi leadership and the SS that committed large-scale atrocities on the Eastern Front while the Wehrmacht focused only on winning the war. Anglo-American historians largely accepted these accounts, mainly because of Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union. The experiences of German generals were invaluable insights into Soviet doctrine, and therefore the generals' tendency to downplay their own complicity in Nazi war crimes was largely accepted. Increasing access to German and later Soviet archives in the 1980s and 1990s revealed that this was far from the truth. Recent historical works have demonstrated that genocidal policy and war strategy were inextricably linked. The question of why the Wehrmacht accepted Nazi ideology is more difficult to answer. Historians have applied this question to both the High Command and to the everyday soldiers, with differing conclusions.

The war on the Eastern Front started with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, codenamed Operation Barbarossa, in June 1941. The Nazis enjoyed early success, pushing deep into Soviet territory throughout the summer. However, they encountered far more resistance than was initially expected. The Wehrmacht suffered high rates of attrition against fierce Soviet resistance around Smolensk, Minsk, and Kiev. Though they were ultimately victorious in all

of those cities, they failed to break the back of the Red Army. Additionally, their logistical situation was dismal, leading to massive supply shortages. Nazi hopes for a quick victory evaporated as their advance eventually stalled outside of Moscow in the center and Leningrad in the North. When it became clear that the Wehrmacht did not have the ability to take Moscow, they attempted further advances through Ukraine and Southern Russia in 1942. Crucial Soviet victories at Stalingrad and Kursk in 1943 ended any chance of a stalemate. The Wehrmacht would not launch any further massive offensives after Kursk. Throughout 1944 the Red Army pushed the Wehrmacht back through Ukraine and Belarus, recapturing the Baltic States and Poland. They pushed into Germany in 1945, capturing Berlin in April and May.

Throughout the war, atrocities and war crimes were frighteningly rampant. Soldiers and civilians alike died in almost inconceivably high numbers. The sheer scale of the battles, widespread hunger, disease, and outright massacres killed between 25-30 million Soviet soldiers and civilians.¹ Prisoners of war on both sides were subjected to harsh treatment and few survived. The killing was so intense that the Eastern Front frequently seemed to be “more murder than war.”² However, popular memory of the war, at least for the first few decades after, viewed the genocidal aspects and the military aspects of the conflict as separate.

The authors represented here have challenged this myth and put the war in a context more representative of reality. Some scholars in the 1990s addressed why “ordinary” Germans who were not ardent Nazis participated in criminal activity on the Eastern Front, and in their analyses recognized a link between criminal activity and official policy.³ Later scholars further explored this link, with Geoffrey Megargee arguing in 2007 that military policy and criminal policy were not separate from each other at all; rather, the Wehrmacht planned and executed the war in the East as a criminal “war of annihilation” from the beginning.⁴ Since then, scholars have examined specific military

¹ Geoffrey Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), xi.

² Stephen Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler's War of Extermination in the East* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), xxii.

³ Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and the War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).

⁴ Megargee, *War of Annihilation*, xii.

orders and detailed the radicalizing effect that the war had on policy.⁵ Today, the myth of the clean and apolitical Wehrmacht has mostly disappeared from scholarly debates concerning the Eastern Front and has been replaced by acceptance of an inescapable link between military operations and Nazi criminal policy.⁶

Hitler's Army directly confronts the myth of the “clean” and “apolitical” Wehrmacht and examines its connection to German society. Instead of accepting the Wehrmacht as separate from Nazi ideology, Bartov examines to what extent the Wehrmacht, both the senior members and the soldiers, were an “integral part of state and society.”⁷ To do this, Bartov examines why the soldier continued to fight even when the war appeared hopeless. Bartov determines that the Nazis created a “distorted perception of reality” among the soldiers through indoctrination that thoroughly demonized the Soviets, making the soldiers believe that they were “defending humanity against a demonic invasion.”⁸ He notes that most soldiers had been workers in the Third Reich who were subjected to years of Nazi propaganda and ideology before joining the army. They likely internalized certain moral stances against communism and the East that made it easier to commit atrocities, especially when those atrocities were legalized.⁹ Bartov makes it very clear that the Wehrmacht was not separate from society or from the Nazi leadership, but “was the army of the people and the willing tool of the regime.”¹⁰ In other words, Wehrmacht policy was reflective of Nazi ideology.

Bartov extends this analytical lens to examine memory of the war in postwar Germany. He argues that postwar interpretations reflect the same ‘distorted perception of reality’ that was a defense mechanism for dealing with the horror of the war and operated to

⁵ David Stahel, “Radicalizing Warfare: The German Command and the Failure of Operation Barbarossa,” in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*, eds. Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012); Felix Römer, “The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies: The Army and Hitler’s Criminal Orders on the Eastern Front,” in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*, eds. Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 73-100; Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel, “Conclusion: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization,” in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*, eds. Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 314-319.

⁶ This view can be seen in: Fritz, *Ostkrieg*; Megargee, *War of Annihilation*.

⁷ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 3.

⁸ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 10.

⁹ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 7-8.

¹⁰ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 10.

normalize atrocities.¹¹ According to this assertion, Germans viewed themselves as victims in defeat, with soldiers remembering only their own suffering and not that of their victims. On a scholarly level, this connection is particularly visible in the events of the West German *Historikerstreit* of the late 1980s. In a very public debate, conservative historians attempted to relativize Nazi Germany and play down the atrocities committed by the regime by comparing them to the Soviet Union under Stalin. The themes mobilized by these historians, that Operation Barbarossa was a defensive strike against Jewish-Bolshevism, that the Wehrmacht was carrying out a noble duty to prevent the spread of communism, and the notion that Germany had a historical mission to guard against the East, were all themes used by the Nazi leadership to justify their brutal policies during the war.¹² These justifications formed the basis for immediate German memory of the war, which spread to Anglo-American historians through the accounts of German generals. The political climate of the Cold War made it even easier to accept the demonized image of the Soviet Union. This all combined to create a highly distorted picture of the war that persisted for decades.

Bartov's claims of a distorted perception of reality fits well with Christopher Browning's interpretation of why men with no previous indications of murderous tendencies participated in atrocities on the Eastern Front. In *Ordinary Men*, Browning seeks to explain war atrocities by evaluating the role of military indoctrination and by utilizing social psychology. He focuses on the records and accounts of Reserve Police Battalion 101, which was not part of the Wehrmacht, but rather the *Ordnungspolizei* (Order Police); but his insights into their behavior can be applied to drafted and enlisted soldiers as well. He demonstrates that these men were not victims who were forced through terror to comply with criminal policy. As Browning notes, none of the men in Reserve Police Battalion 101 were ever forced to shoot civilians, nor did they face penalties if they did not.¹³ Nonetheless, many did choose to participate in atrocities. Browning concludes that a combination of factors, including indoctrination, deference to authority, and conformity are to blame for this behavior. Of these, conformity appears to be the most important. The soldiers were far from home in hostile territory; their unit was their only source of support. Refusing to participate on moral grounds could be potentially seen as passing judgement on those who did, which

¹¹ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 183.

¹² For more information on the *Historikerstreit*, see Geoff Eley's summary of the event in "Nazism, Politics, and the Image of the Past: Thoughts on the West German *Historikerstreit* 1986-1987," *Past & Present* 121 (1988): 171-208.

¹³ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 171.

could have alienated them from the group.¹⁴ Deference to authority and legitimation are very important as well. In the Wehrmacht, especially in the East, atrocity was a part of official policy. When criminal activity is normalized in such a way, it makes it even easier to participate.¹⁵ This explanation is very well reasoned, and is chilling for how understandable it is. For the soldiers on the front lines in the East, facing some of the most brutal fighting ever seen, it is not hard to imagine how important the support of the unit was to them. Both Browning and Bartov's works have been incredibly influential in providing an explanation for how otherwise "normal" soldiers were able to commit horrible atrocities during the war with the Soviet Union.

From there, historians have shown that atrocities were more than a consequence of the brutal conditions experienced during the war; atrocities were a strategic goal of the war that were planned from the beginning. Geoffrey Megargee argues in *War of Annihilation* that the enormous death toll, both military and civilian, was a result of "deliberate policies" designed to transform the Soviet Union into Lebensraum, or living space, for the German people. Further, he demonstrates that the senior members of the Wehrmacht were not only aware of these policies, but actively participated in their design and implementation.¹⁶ Stephen Fritz agrees, stating in *Ostkrieg* that Hitler always considered the war against the Soviets as the "right" war; that is, the war that was most important to Nazi ideology and goals.¹⁷ He also agrees that the war was planned from the beginning as a war of annihilation "with the full knowledge and complicity" of the senior members of the Wehrmacht.¹⁸ Fritz further stresses that acquiring Lebensraum was about acquiring resources, especially food.¹⁹ Fritz elaborates further on the Nazi plans for the East. He argues that they were not about typical colonization, but about a "complete agricultural and demographic restructuring" of the East that would require the deaths of over 30 million Soviet civilians.²⁰ Wehrmacht policies were designed to achieve this goal not only through conquering the necessary territory, but through implementing criminal policies and exploiting natural resources.

The differences in the two author's interpretations have more to do with the differing scope of their works; Megargee focuses only on

¹⁴ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 185.

¹⁵ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 161.

¹⁶ Megargee, *War of Annihilation*, xi.

¹⁷ Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, xx.

¹⁸ Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, xxii.

¹⁹ Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 476.

²⁰ Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 477-478.

the planning and implementation of Operation Barbarossa, whereas Fritz examines the entire war from 1941 to 1945. Megargee identifies Lebensraum as the goal of the invasion, but does not go into detail on any further goals. Fritz, however, stresses the concept of Lebensraum as part of the preparations for an eventual conflict with the United States that Hitler thought was inevitable.²¹ The vast spaces of the Soviet Union would be needed to provide food and other resources to support this eventual conflict. Additionally, Fritz posits that while the war was always planned as a war of annihilation, the full scale was not anticipated at the beginning.²² As the military situation began to deteriorate in late 1941, the Nazis responded with increasingly harsh policies in an attempt to break down Soviet resistance. When the resistance only increased, military strategy radicalized in turn. The two analyses do not truly conflict with each other; Fritz simply examines a wider timeframe and, therefore, comes to a more complete and detailed conclusion.

David Stahel details the failure of Operation Barbarossa and radicalization of military and annihilation policy in “Radicalizing Warfare: The German Command and the Failure of Operation Barbarossa.” Stahel argues that Operation Barbarossa was poorly planned and based on major misconceptions of both Soviet strength and the nature warfare in Eastern Europe. The Wehrmacht had always relied upon quick, overwhelming victories achieved through blitzkrieg. The success of this tactic in Western Europe gave them false confidence.²³ In reality, the sheer size of the Soviet Union made reliance on a quick victory very risky. Further, Stahel stresses that the Nazis massively underestimated the Soviets’ ability to mobilize and their defense in depth. Early victories gave even more false confidence that the Soviets had been defeated and would not put up significant resistance.²⁴ The Soviets did put up significant resistance, which became more determined the farther the Germans advanced. After the initial blitzkrieg ground to a halt outside of Moscow, the war devolved into a war of attrition that Germany was not prepared to win. They simply did not have the resources or the logistical apparatus to outlast

²¹ Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 476; Megargee also acknowledges Hitler’s belief that a conflict with the USA was inevitable, though he does not place as much emphasis on this as Fritz; Megargee, *War of Annihilation*, 150.

²² Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, xx.

²³ Stahel, “Radicalizing Warfare,” 19-21.

²⁴ Stahel, “Radicalizing Warfare,” 21-23, 25-26. Stahel also details the constant disagreements between Hitler and the Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH) or High Command on strategy that contributed to its inefficiency.

the Soviets.²⁵ The ferocity of the war and increasing desperation on the part of the Wehrmacht forced “cycles of radicalization” that led to “ever bolder initiatives and a general escalation of violence.”²⁶ What started as a brutal war provoked an equally fierce response, producing conditions that led to further brutalization.

The implementation of a set of military directives known as the Criminal Orders is particularly damning to the idea of a ‘clean’ Wehrmacht, as Felix Römer demonstrates in “The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies: The Army and Hitler’s Criminal Orders on the Eastern Front.” The Criminal orders were two military directives issued by Hitler in 1941, the Military Jurisdiction Order and the Commissar Order. The Military Jurisdiction Order bypassed typical justice systems for dealing with civilian resistance and instead authorized “collective violent measures” in response.²⁷ The Commissar Order demanded summary executions of Soviet political commissars.²⁸ Overwhelming evidence contained in Wehrmacht records shows that a clear majority of units complied with the orders. Around eighty percent of German divisions in the East carried out executions of commissars for certain.²⁹ The Military Jurisdiction Order was also extensively implemented, with at least half a million Soviet civilians being executed for supposed partisan activities.³⁰ Together, the execution of these two orders demonstrates that the senior members of the Wehrmacht accepted mass atrocity as an official policy. The fact that the orders were issued so early in the war further proves that the war was planned as a war of annihilation. Römer argues that the smaller unit leaders and soldiers complied with the orders not only because they were seen as legitimate, having come from the High Command, but because of defensiveness and conformity. Being deep in the territory of such a thoroughly demonized enemy led to a widespread feeling among the soldiers that they needed to constantly defend themselves. Nearly any resistance, violent or not, was seen as partisan activity that had to be stamped out. Additionally, that paranoia made the support of the unit even more important, leading

²⁵ Stahel, “Radicalizing Warfare,” 29, 39. Especially important was the attrition rate of German panzers, which were vital to blitzkrieg. This loss was a major reason for the loss of momentum that forced the war to devolve into a war of attrition. As Soviet industrial capacity increased, they were able to field more and more tanks, while the Germans could not replace their own tanks.

²⁶ Stahel, “Radicalizing Warfare,” 40; Kay, Rutherford, and Stahel, “Conclusion: Total War Genocide, and Radicalization,” 314.

²⁷ Römer, “The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies,” 75.

²⁸ Römer, “The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies,” 76.

²⁹ Römer, “The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies,” 88.

³⁰ Römer, “The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies,” 93.

most soldiers to conform.³¹ These reasons- conformity and deference to authority- are nearly identical to those given by Christopher Browning to explain the actions of Reserve Police Battalion 101. Browning's observation that some individuals found ways to mitigate or circumvent the annihilation policies holds true for the Wehrmacht and the Criminal Orders as well, though outright noncompliance with either order was very rare.

The war was waged on such an immense scale that the reasons for it and the events that occurred within it are astoundingly complex. Anglo-American understanding of the war was additionally hindered by the political necessities of the Cold War that that did not allow for positive views of the Soviets. The experiences of German generals were accepted because they were invaluable insights to Soviet doctrine. However, with time and new information available after the fall of the Iron Curtain, historians have reached a consensus that Hitler's racial war of annihilation and the Wehrmacht's military operations against the Soviet Union were far from separate. The 'clean' Wehrmacht never existed. Senior members of the Wehrmacht were complicit in the planning and the implementation of the war of annihilation. Even though the Wehrmacht was not directly involved in the most notorious aspects of Nazi genocidal policy, namely the death camps, they committed their own share of atrocities. The Criminal Orders show that the Wehrmacht leadership embraced atrocity as a way of establishing German control over conquered territory. The "war of ideologies" demanded solutions that produced "maximum benefit with minimum effort," and to the Nazis this meant terrorizing the Soviets into submission through brutal and murderous policies.³² Why individual soldiers participated in atrocities is harder to determine. Browning himself acknowledges that the rationale undoubtedly varied from person to person.³³ The explanation of conformity makes a lot of sense, especially when the atrocities were justified by insidious propaganda that made the thought of defeat "seem equivalent to a universal apocalypse," as Bartov put it.³⁴

The feedback loop observed by Kay, Rutherford, and Stahel, where insufficient planning faced with unexpectedly fierce resistance led to spiraling radicalization of policy, is the key to understanding the war in the East. The war was always going to be brutal; Nazi racial ideology adopted by the Wehrmacht demanded that. But fierce Soviet resistance forced the Wehrmacht to take that doctrine even further. Once the war had devolved into a war of attrition, the Nazis were at a

³¹ Römer, "The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies," 87

³² Römer, "The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies," 77.

³³ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 188.

³⁴ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 7.

major disadvantage due to their deficit of resources and numbers. The Soviets proved to be far more determined and capable than the Nazis had anticipated. They had already committed mass atrocity during the invasion; they had nowhere to hide. Thus, the Nazis resorted to ever-harsher policy, both military and genocidal, to try and break the Soviet resistance. Unfortunately for them, this only made the Soviets more determined to beat them back, forcing even further radicalization of policy. Far from occurring in separate spheres, the operational war and the war of annihilation were one and the same.

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MEGARREE

Geoffrey P. Megargee

WAR OF ANNIHILATION
INSIDE HITLER'S HIGH COM...

HITLER'S EMPIRE
THE WAGES OF CONSTRUCTION

MARK
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MEETING A HISTORIAN: A Short Reflection

Andrew Kapinos, Virginia Tech

I have been familiar with the concept of historiography since I began studying history at the university level, but “Dismantling the Myths of the Eastern Front” was the first purely historiographical paper that I wrote. Using Geoffrey Megargee’s 2004 work *War of Annihilation* as a starting point, I traced the debate over the German *Wehrmacht*’s complicity in war crimes on the Eastern Front during World War II. After completing the paper, I felt that I had a good understanding of historiography and how to go about historiographical writing. In December 2017, Megargee visited Virginia Tech to give a lecture on the *Wehrmacht*’s complicity in war crimes, and agreed to an interview with me and VTUHR Editor Grace Hemmingson. I used the opportunity to ask him how he sees himself in the historiography of the Eastern Front and how he approaches historical research. The conversation I had with him both confirmed and clarified aspects of historiography, and left me with a better understanding of the discipline as a whole.

One thing about this interview that I found gave me a better understanding of historiographical writing was that Megargee only specifically mentioned one scholar by name that I read for my paper. I had heard historiography defined as the “history of history,” but this interview gave me a better understanding of the symmetry between primary research and historiography. When historians analyze the past, we look at sources and draw connections between them to map out change over time. Historians may draw drastically different conclusions about the same events, depending on what sources they used or even their own background. Historiography is much the same way: the conversation that a researcher may see a given scholar as being a part of is not necessarily the same one that the scholar sees himself in. Thinking about historiography like this makes it seem less like a completely different thing than doing original research, and makes it easier to incorporate one into the other.

War of Annihilation was groundbreaking in that it examined Nazi racial policy and Nazi military strategy as inextricably linked, where they had previously been studied separately. This speaks to a general tendency among historians to keep their fields separate—here military historians studied the military strategy and genocide scholars

studied the racial policies. *War of Annihilation* shows that combining fields or specialties can lead to fresh perspectives on a topic that give a better understanding of it. In my own paper, I considered Christopher Browning and Omer Bartov's works to be speaking to the same question as Megargee, though they may not immediately appear to be doing so. Browning and Bartov examined why individual soldiers would have engaged in war crimes, and both noted that a military culture encouraging racial hatred of Slavs played a role. That observation leads to the question of why that culture existed, and Megargee offers an answer: military strategy was planned according to Nazi racial policies. All three examined the question of why the *Wehrmacht* engaged in war crimes, but at different levels.

Many of the issues that Megargee talked about in the interview will be familiar to students. He talked about issues pertaining to researching and writing history, such as problematic sources, a total lack of sources, and even historical circumstances affecting how and what we can write about. Many of these are matters that history students may have wrestled with at some point. His perspective on problematic sources is particularly instructive, as I think there is a tendency to want to just ignore them. Dr. Megargee's discussion of these problems gives valuable insight into how a professional historian deals with these problems. It is also simply comforting to know that these are not problems that only students face. My discussion with Dr. Megargee gave me new insights into how a professional historian carries out the same tasks that undergraduates do in their classes, including researching, writing, and interpreting other historians' work. I highly recommend that anyone who gets the chance to interview a historian should take it.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. GEOFFREY MEGARGEE

Interview Conducted on December 7, 2017 by
Andrew Kapinos and Grace Hemmingson

Dr. Geoffrey Megargee received his M.A. in History from San Jose State University and his Ph.D. in Military History from Ohio State University. He currently works for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. His current project is compiling an encyclopedia of Nazi camps and ghettos, which currently number around 44,000 sites. Megargee is the author of Inside Hitler's High Command and War of Annihilation, which both deal with Germany's role in World War II.

— The Editors

Kapinos: The paper that I was working on was about the Eastern Front of World War II, and ended up being mainly about the Wehrmacht's complicity in war crimes. How would you place yourself in the historiography of that debate?

Megargee: Well, I'm certainly not going to say that I was the first, there were historians, especially in Germany, back in the 60s and 70s who were well aware of what the Wehrmacht did in the East. It came up in the Nuremberg trials; this shouldn't have been news for anybody. Of course, the Germans were very successful at planting this myth that actually the army hadn't done anything wrong. They were busy fighting a war while the SS was doing all this nasty stuff, and that myth caught on. So I think that I was one of the first [historians] in the United States, not necessarily to address that fact, but to really combine it with the military operations. The two subjects have tended to be treated separately. The crimes on the one hand, and then especially the non-army crimes, and then the war on the other. Military historians weren't terribly interested in the crimes, Holocaust historians weren't terribly knowledgeable about the military. I came to Holocaust studies with a background in military history, so it was a natural fit for me. Now, there have been some other folks who have done work along those lines, although still I don't see a whole lot of strong crossover, in understanding the basics of military tactics, the operations, and how the crimes affected all of those things, and vice-versa.

Hemmingson: Which scholars particularly do you think [your work is] most in conversation with? Was it with the military side of it or were there particular scholars that helped you come across this topic? Or more broadly, how did you come to this topic?

Megargee: My dissertation was on the German High Command in World War II, and really almost nothing about the crimes. I was only vaguely aware of the military's involvement in the crimes, or the details of the crimes themselves. Then, in 2000 I started working at the Holocaust Memorial Museum and when the opportunity came up, the way that second book came about, was the editors approached me, and asked me to write a book about the German High Command and the invasion of the Soviet Union. I said "that's fine, but I would really like to work the crimes into this since I'm working in this place." So Peter Black, I remember, was the one who sort of outlined for me what the Wehrmacht had done; as I say, I knew very little about it. Peter Black was the senior historian at the museum at the time, and he gave me some bullet points and I started doing some reading. Jürgen Förster was actually someone who had helped me with the dissertation and he also had written a lot about the crimes, so I read a lot of his work and talked to him about it. But for the purposes of that book, I don't recall that there were too many scholars who I actually had to talk to, I obviously did a good deal of reading. And I ran the manuscript by a couple of people.

Hemmingson: Did you attend conferences during the writing of the book?

Megargee: Oh yes, sure. I'm trying to remember if I ever presented, I mean, I presented about the Wehrmacht's crimes at the Society for Military History, at the German Studies Association, there's also something called the international Commission on Military History that has a conference every year and I presented there.

Hemmingson: Did you get helpful questions or ideas from the conference situation that helped you develop your arguments?

Megargee: I believe I did, but it's all kind of a blur. The book was finished in 2006, so we're talking almost fifteen years ago that all of this took place.

Kapinos: You talked a little about the accounts of the German generals in both *War of Annihilation* and *Inside Hitler's High Command*, mentioning that they did a really good job of painting their role in the war as having just been military. Do you think that there's any value to those accounts in scholarly debates now, or does the deliberate or unintentional misleading information in there make them completely unusable?

Megargee: Oh, I think they're useful. I think just about anything is usable if you go at it with the right attitude. How does that joke go – “everyone has a use in life, you can always be a bad example.” The generals give away – they can be very good if you read Manstein or Guderian or something like that, they can be very good [for finding out] the details of operations. If that's what you're looking for, then that's certainly a good source to go to. Frankly, there isn't a whole lot in there on the crimes, it's not even so much in their memoirs that they said, “we had nothing to do with this,” in places they do, the Commissar Order, for example, Guderian talks about that one and lies through his teeth. But for the most part they just sort of leave it out. But there are times when they give things away without meaning to, and I'm thinking more of the military side at this point. [...] I remember Guderian talks about the July 20th assassination attempt, and it's clear, even though he's not coming out and saying “boy, I'm glad they failed,” he does say something to the effect of “if these men had succeeded in killing the Führer, they simply would have stained the German officer corps with this crime for the rest of its history.” Okay, would that have been so awful?

Hemmingson: Do you ever run into Holocaust deniers?

Megargee: Very rarely, fortunately. I can remember one or two times in lectures when I'm talking about the crimes of the Wehrmacht, I remember there was one guy who was trying to say “oh well, weren't they just following orders?” and things of that nature. Even then, he wasn't really denying anything. So no, I've never run into a David Irving or anybody of that ilk who tries to stand up and say “this was all lies and it never happened.” And I'm thankful for that. My name appears on some right-wing German website somewhere, or used to, this was about eight years ago...aside from that, I've stayed below the radar.

Kapinos: Probably good.

Megargee: I don't mind the fight if it comes to me, but I'm not looking for it. I'm perfectly happy to, if somebody does come to me and say “this isn't true,” well, okay, I'll be happy to sit down with you for as long as you want and take you through all the records, show you exactly what this is all based on. We have, and to the extent that I have seen questions connected with my project, it's been about the numbers of camps. There are some people who simply refuse to believe the numbers we're coming up with. We're up to about 44,000 camps that we're covering in the Encyclopedia. If you count all the ones that we are either unable to cover, or that don't fit within the rubric of this project, I'm not sure what the total would be; close to 100,000, I suspect. Because the Germans, they used camps for everything.

Kapinos: I studied abroad in Latvia last summer, and we went to a couple of different camps that were there, that I had never heard of; I don't think anyone there had ever heard of, at least not in our group. They had them everywhere. They weren't the same big complexes, but still a camp. This is another [question] relating to historiography, at what point would you say that a historical work, a book or a journal article or whatever, goes out of date and isn't really usable anymore? Are there some that have more staying power than others?

Megargee: Oh, I think there are definitely some that have more staying power than others; I mean, there are some that are no good right from the start. There are some that they simply get supplanted by more recent research. I can think of my own example, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, when I first stumbled across that topic, when it was suggested to me, I was a brand-new history student. I really knew nothing about the field, being a historian, or anything. I was put in touch with this retired historian who gave me a list of possible master's thesis topics. I said "oh, German High Command, no one's ever done that? I'll do that," – little knowing what I was getting into. But there had been, I can think of at least two works that addressed that directly, but in both cases, they relied almost completely on the memoir literature. They were not exactly putting forward the myth, but, in some respects, they really were. Especially the part of the myth that said that Hitler was to blame for everything; that came through pretty strongly. One of those was Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff*, which was pretty much hagiography. The other was Cooper, it was called *German Army, 1933-1945*, which wasn't quite as bad, but still, he hadn't really done his homework. He hadn't gotten into the primary records very much. At some point someone will probably come along and expand on what I did. I hope they won't find too much that's wrong with it, but... I figure that if a book or an article is fundamentally correct, then it will remain useful even if people expand upon it or explain what was going on in greater detail, whatever it might be.

Kapinos: I ask the question because I find that in undergraduate work a lot of my professors keep us to things written in the last twenty years, or the last twenty-five years. In terms of historiography, I think it is to keep us more up-to-date with what's going on, so that we're not dealing with something that has already been covered.

Megargee: I think that makes sense. In a way...when I started my master's work, the professor I was working with had me reading stuff that had been written back in the '60s and '50s, pretty much to see what had been written. Not that I was going to depend on it all that much, but I think there's value in understanding the progression of thought on a particular subject. But, if you have a limited amount of

time, and assuming that you are able to stay away from the current things that aren't any good, I think it's worthwhile to [limit yourself to recent books and articles] ...I know of some books written in the last twenty, twenty-five years that I just wouldn't recommend to anybody. That said, it's probably a good approach.

Kapinos: For the historiography class, we did look a little farther back. I was looking at Browning, Bartov, Peukert...

Megargee: I don't think of those as being that far back! (Laughter) Now, Bartov is an interesting case. I know Omer, he's a great guy, he's extremely intelligent [...] definitely worth reading.

Hemmingson: How would you say, when you're approaching different types of sources, what kind of conclusions can you build and what would be considered reaching?

Megargee: It's so hard to speak generally about that.

Hemmingson: That's true.

Megargee: I'm thinking for example of one particular – I don't know if this is going to fit, but just let me think out loud for a moment – in the latter half of 1940, the Germans obviously faced a strategic question: they've just beaten France – which floored them; they didn't see that coming – and they had to figure out what to do next. Are we going to invade Britain? Are we just going to attack Britain from the air? Are we going to go into the Mediterranean? Are we going to form alliances with France, or Spain, or Italy – what are we going to do now? Most of the works that I read would focus on one thing or another, according to the topic that the author was covering, or their own predilections. So somebody would say, "oh, he was focusing on the Mediterranean, let's look at all of the things he was looking at there; he was looking at Gibraltar, he was looking at Suez..." and somebody else would say, "oh, he was focusing right from the start on the Soviet Union," "No, he was going after Britain..." I saw all of those things as I looked at the sources. Trying to step back and put myself in his position, what was he going to do next...and I know that there have been definite improvements made on my interpretation. Adam Tooze, for example, he's fantastic; he's written an economic history – and I wonder how many people have looked at the title and go, "uh, economic history, I don't know about that..." – but he understands the strategy, he got it better than I did. But I think it was a period of strategic confusion, and I think the other people who looked at one particular issue or another were, in essence, stretching the evidence beyond what... it wasn't so much stretching the evidence, so much as ignoring some of it. If you say that he's going after Russia exclusively, then you have to figure out how to explain the fact that for months they bombed Britain,

and built up an invasion force, and all of that, and did things in the Mediterranean. It didn't fit together well. So I think that's one way in which evidence can be...misused is too strong a term, but everyone has their particular topic. I hardly said anything about the crimes [in *Inside Hitler's High Command*], and that was a very important strategic issue. It wasn't that I was leaving aside this separate topic. I didn't understand at the time the influence that the crimes had on strategy; the influence that German ideas about race and space had on what they were trying to do, or I would have at least made it clear that this was something that should be addressed more directly.

Kapinos: What do you think about the value of oral histories?

Megargee: I think they are very valuable. I don't reject any particular kind of source, but you have to understand its limits. I did a paper years ago, that I still have not gotten around to expanding for publication, on the psychology of memory. How we form the memories, how we recall the memories. And how that fit with the statements that the German generals made after the war. It's tempting to say that oral histories really aren't worth very much, because it's clear that our ways of perceiving things are flawed to begin with; everybody knows this from all kind of examples, you get five different people seeing the same event and you get six different accounts. So right from the start, there's a problem with perception, and then memories get overlaid on things, people hear other people's stories and incorporate those into their own, it's a very, very tricky kind of evidence to use. But really what that means, I think... I mean, for one thing, there are some kinds of events, some things that you just can't find any other kind of evidence for. I interviewed a couple of, well, they weren't generals at the time, they had been relatively junior officers in the High Command, and used their accounts for things like: "what kind of exercise did you get? What was your day-to-day life like? How much sleep did you get?" that sort of thing, you're just not going to find that in any other source. You do what you can to find corroborating evidence, documentary evidence, but documents are flawed, too. And I think the key is, and this is what I tell contributors to the Encyclopedia or to my researchers, who will come to me and say, "well, we just have this one source for this, and I think it might be flawed. Should I use it?" and I say, "Absolutely use it, but in the footnote, make sure you point out that this is your only source, and that it's flawed, and that there might be other interpretations." As long as you're honest about it; as long as people can look at what you're doing and say, "okay, that's the best they could do with that," there shouldn't be a problem. Now, if you come out and say "this is absolutely how it was" and your source is either hidden or you just have this one source, then people are going to have a problem with it.

Hemmingson: To switch gears a little bit, I wanted to ask you [how you

became a historian]?

Megargee: I had my undergraduate degree in history, in '81, but I was going into the Army. And as far as I was concerned at that point, I was going to be an army officer as a career, and that was that. After four years of active duty, I decided "no, I'm really not suited to be a great military commander, so I'm going to try something else." So after I got out, I was in sales for a while, and I really was awful at that. And then for about a year I was in property management, and that wasn't working out either, and a friend of mine said "well, if you had to pick – irrespective of how practical it is – if you had to pick, what would you like to do?" and I said "history." I knew that I liked history, and this was at a point, this would have been in '87, when the newspapers were filled with these stories of "oh, there's going to be this great demand for professors; we've got floods of new students coming in, a lot of people retiring, there's going to be positions opening up all over the place," so I thought "okay, great." And I was in California at the time, and the only school still accepting applications was San Jose State. This is where the serendipity started to work in. I went to San Jose State, I enrolled there – of course, all of those newspaper articles were wrong, that disappeared very quickly. But I got in there, I was fortunate enough to be in a seminar with a professor – it was a very small department, there were only about seven or eight of us in this seminar with all different kinds of subjects – but she sat down with each one of us and said, "you are not going to spend seven years getting your master's; you're going to get out of here in two. So what you're going to do right now is identify a topic and start planning to work on it."

She asked me what kind of history I wanted to study, and I really didn't have a clue, except military history. I'd always liked military history, so I said, "military history." She put me in touch with another professor, Charles Burdick, he was the one who gave me that list of master's thesis topics, and I went "oh, German High Command, okay." That served me for the master's thesis, and I was able to continue it – I enrolled at Ohio State and did that for the dissertation. I was really, really nervous as graduation was approaching, because basically I had studied military history and European history, and the job market was not good then, I'm not sure that it's even as good now, but it was not looking good. And I just had some lucky breaks: my advisor got me a job with a commission in Washington – that was temporary, but it got me to Washington, and then about a year later the job opened up at the museum; they liked me and they hired me. I never had to go through the meat market at the AHA. And I've been there ever since. So, it was sort of a combination of the right skills, right time, right place. The museum didn't even say what the job was when they advertised it, they just said they were looking for someone who knew European history and was fluent in German. That was as much as they said until the

interview, where they said “we’ve got this encyclopedia project that we want somebody to do.”

Hemmingson: And that’s turned into a big project.

Megargee: Yes. When we started, I was told by the senior historian at the museum that we would be looking for somewhere around 5,000 or 7,000 sites. We started to dig and the more we dug, the more we found, and it kept growing. For a while, we were at 20,000 and it seemed to be holding there for a while, and then we got into another category and it blew through the roof. I think we’re at about the max now.

Kapinos: When did you learn German?

Megargee: I took introductory German about three times; I took it in junior high school, in college, and then as a grad student, and by the time I was a grad student I knew that I was doing German history so I continued with it, went through intermediate German. But the thing that really made a difference was living for two years in Germany, in a student dorm where I had to speak German all the time. And doing research in German language documents and that sort of thing, so that was what really solidified it.

Kapinos: I would think that opens a lot of doors to sources.

Megargee: Oh yes, absolutely. I think anyone who is not doing a strictly American subject [needs to know a foreign language]...I know that at Ohio State, the diplomatic history branch of the department did not require its graduate students to have a foreign language, and all of us in military history – who had to have two – thought that this was insane. I mean, you can read the American diplomatic cables, but it usually involves other countries. It seems to me it would be good to read what they’re saying, too. I think knowing a foreign language is a big plus, and heck, it got me my job. That was one of the things they said later really impressed them, was my ability to translate documents. They gave me a test: they gave me this SS Einsatzgruppe report and said “translate this.” I did better than anyone else in the pool, so that helped.

Kapinos: You talked a lot in your book about how the circumstances of the Cold War shaped the narrative of events on the Eastern Front. With historical events impacting the sources available, how do you think that impacts historiography?

Megargee: If I understand your question, it has a very basic effect. If events are such that documents get destroyed – for instance, you can contrast the German and Japanese cases at the end of World War II. Germany: we and the Soviets overran the place and captured millions

and millions of documents, which we shipped back to our respective archives. Now, what went into the Soviet Union largely disappeared for a long time, we only had access to our own – and only a few historians had access to it here – but still, it was there. Now with the Japanese, the Japanese surrendered when we were still hundreds or thousands of miles away from their shores. And we told them “don’t destroy any of your documents” – that worked well [said sarcastically]. I’m not a specialist in the Japanese case, so I don’t know what might be missing, but my understanding is that a lot of it was destroyed. Anything that was, for instance, related to the Emperor’s involvement with crimes, that all went bye-bye.

Kapinos: How do you work around that in scholarship? If you know that that kind of thing just isn’t available?

Megargee: Sometimes you can’t. There are subjects that you can’t do, because there are no sources; fascinating questions that will forever remain unanswered, unless something turns up. A lot turned up when the Soviet Union collapsed, at least temporarily, but there are things that we will never know. And that gets at fundamental questions of what is history? The simple answer is everything that happened in the past. Well, in a sense, no, it’s not. It’s everything that we can understand and analyze about what happened in the past. Even then, one could argue that it’s the important stuff that happened in the past. What Benjamin Franklin had for breakfast on June 30th, 1776: probably not that important.

Hemmingson: Maybe a related question is how can you use secondary sources? For instance, a scholar’s background influences the type of history that they write. So how can you turn secondary sources into primary sources that can tell you something about how historians approach history differently?

Megargee: Well, if you’re doing a study of a particular scholar or school of scholarship, then the secondary sources become primary sources in that sense. I think it’s very important to understand where that scholar is coming from, and the times in which he or she lived. There was a big change in our approach to the American Revolution, for example, during and after the Vietnam War because historians began to look at it as a counterinsurgency, or insurgency and counterinsurgency, rather than as a conventional war. They were shaped by what was going on in their own time, and wanted to answer those same sorts of questions for an earlier period. So in that sense I think it’s crucial. It can be hard to dig that kind of information out sometimes; some of it is conjecture. And it obviously involves another layer of work that you have to do. But to understand who the major authors were that wrote on the subject that you’re writing on, it’s very important. Where they came from, what they studied – and this applies even to extreme cases, like

David Irving for example. A lot of people up until the Irving-Lipstadt trial, said “well, it’s too bad that he’s gone off on this Holocaust denial thing, because he’s really a very good historian.” And then in the course of the Irving-Lipstadt Trial, they had a team of expert historians go through all of the histories that he had written and discovered just how seriously he had distorted, and deliberately misused, sources. He ignored sources, or used parts of sources out of context to back up the point that he was making. If you ever want a lesson in the misuse of history, read the trial record of the decision in the Irving case, because it was pretty blatant. After that, serious historians really didn’t take him seriously anymore. He had said for example, that 100,000 people had died in the bombing of Dresden, and a lot of people took that as gospel for many years. But no, not anywhere near that, far less than half of that. He got this figure that somebody had pulled out of the air and decided, because he was sympathetic to Germans, and somewhat hostile to what the allies had done, that’s what he used.

Kapinos: We talked a lot about using sources that disagree with us in our classes. You have to either change your thought or argue which evidence is more important to account for it as an exception. But you can’t just omit.

Megargee: You have to account for it somehow, no doubt about it. To the extent – I don’t know if you’ve ever read *The Landscape of History*, I highly recommend that. It’s a fairly quick read; it deals with how historians go about their craft, and one of the subjects that the author addresses is whether or not history is a science. And of course, a lot of people will say “no, it’s not a science because you can’t do experiments, you can’t replicate anything, it doesn’t deal with chemicals or things of that nature.” His argument is that it is a science, in the same way that astronomy or paleontology or geology are sciences. We can’t run an experiment to see what happens when a black hole collapses or something like that, we have to run thought experiments. We have to look at the evidence we have and in our own minds come up with a plausible explanation based on what we have. As long as that explanation is plausible, and you make clear what sources you’re using to come up with it, then yes, this is a scientific endeavor. Other scholars can look at what you did and say “well, here’s his or her conclusion, and here are the sources they used and yes I think that makes sense” or “no, it doesn’t.” [...] I think we all do our best. There is no absolute objectivity in history; we are all shaped by who we are, and the times we live in. History starts with questions, and there are some questions we just don’t think to ask.

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