

Report

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

I am pleased and honored to introduce this year's edition of *Report*. Our team has worked over breaks and through semesters of intense academic rigor to stitch together the work you are about to read. Under our Dean, Brigadier General Shane Reeves's theme "**Innovation, Technology, and the Future of National Defense**," *Report* reached out to all the military academies, as well as many other prestigious civilian academic institutions to acquire outstanding historical research.

Historiography has taken a turn to better understand not just how and why certain events occurred, but also how they are interpreted, remembered, and incorporated in a group's sense of self. As an institution dedicated to educating, training, and inspiring the next generation of our country's leaders of character, the United States Military Academy engages this important and incredibly complex direction of history with zeal. We are excited to introduce you to a wide variety of works that highlight how innovations of style, artwork, technology, and leadership contribute to society and how lessons from these important historical questions can better prepare us for the future of national defense.

Our journal consists of eight works selected for their innovation, skill in written communication, and depth of historical research. Starting with a fascinating piece on the prevalence of artificial intelligence in the history community, Connor Kaufmann takes a case study of the Mau Mau uprising and compares it to an AI generated essay, showing both creativity in method and analysis as scholars enter the next phase of the information revolution. Within the same theme, we have a submission from Lucas Schwed on historical revisionism and how it affects the dialogue of our past.

Next are two analyses of leadership and decision making. Reece Pockat explores how military and political indecision created numerous failures in Vietnam from 1958-1965. While Reece shows moments of failure, Alec Wells's analysis of George Thomas's leadership at Chickamauga highlights the exceptional leadership required for victory and provides insight for future officers who will contribute to our nations' defense. Equally important as the leadership driving the policies and strategy for conflict are the soldiers who carry it out.

Two articles then delve into symbolism and visual representation. Devon Smith introduces how the American Catholic population contributed to World War One with an in-depth analysis of newspapers and images taken of various symbols of faith in a time and place surrounded by fear and death. Angela Wang discusses the diminishing role of visual representation in the early-modern Americas and analyzes how artistic choices helped shape societal perspectives of a world many would not be able to witness.

Finally, two articles bring into focus the complex relationship between bias, memory, and action. Chloe Morton's article on antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement explores how perception shaped action against the Jewish population in the Soviet Union. Riley Neubauer then shows how a group *isn't* portrayed or remembered can also be a fascinating and intriguing historical question by exploring the memory of Seneca Village, which once stood where Central Park resides in New York City, bringing a minority group and their home back to life by following the efforts to remember and contextualize it years after its questionable removal.

These papers reiterate not only the importance, but the vastness of history. They demonstrate the beauty of asking questions, and the joys of finding answers through research. Their work allows us to ponder how innovation, leadership, identity, and memory shape our understanding of the world and invite us to pursue answers. I am extremely grateful for the support of our staff and faculty making this all possible and am excited to share these works with you!

Sapientia per Historiam!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Devon Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D' and 'S'.

CDT Devon Smith
USMA Class of 2024
Report Senior Editor

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The Shortcomings of AI: How ChatGPT is Incapable of Accurately Explaining Mau Mau

By Connor Kaufmann, Notre Dame

Historians are shaking in their boots with the invention and wide circulation of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) software named ChatGPT. ChatGPT allows users to have “human-like” conversations with its computer software based on a question-and-answer format, drawing its answers from any and all online sources. This operation is now being used by history students in the writing of their papers to scour and plagiarize internet sources almost instantly. Could this be the end of the academic discipline of history and the proper training of historians? I argue no, for contrary to what many history professors may think about ChatGPT, it is merely AI, which means that it is only as intelligent as the person who created it, and only as knowledgeable as the information already written and posted on the web. As a result, it cannot fundamentally replace historians, because at the end of the day, the discipline of history entails creative storytelling and attention to nuance and details that cannot be achieved without the creativity and innovative analysis of historians.

In order to test my hypothesis, I prompted ChatGPT to tell me about the Mau Mau uprising using this command: “Write an eight page paper explaining what the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya was.” The reason I chose the Mau Mau uprising is because it is one of the most complicated historical events in African History. To explain further, Mau Mau was a social movement in 1950s Kenya, and many historians and anthropologists have already examined it using a variety of historiographical tools. Academics have discovered a plethora of details despite there being no exact consensus of interpreting Mau Mau; it is for this reason that ChatGPT underperformed in expounding the intricate nature of Mau Mau. With that said, in this paper I will analyze ChatGPT’s Mau Mau uprising essay, both in its successes and shortcomings, subsequently providing my own interpretation of what the

Mau Mau was, using historiographical tools with which ChatGPT is not proficient.

The goal of historians, given the complex ambiguity of the Mau Mau uprising, is to construct the most holistic account of what happened by providing details, being historically accurate, and incorporating multiple perspectives. In the same way historians are judged in their level of achievement of this goal, this paper will likewise judge ChatGPT in the same three major areas. To provide a framework for this difficult task, I will describe ChatGPT's absence of important details coupled with its tendency to rush through the ones that it mentioned, its introduction of entire historical inaccuracies (many of which turned out to be quite racist and insensitive), and its failure to provide various perspectives to explain Mau Mau's multiple origins accompanied with its lack of ideological framework when describing the single major perspective it introduces.

ChatGPT provided me with this essay, formatted in the exact same way the website provided and encompassed within quotation marks and italics:

Prompt: "Write an eight page paper explaining what the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya was."

"Introduction."

"The Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, also known as the Kenya Emergency, was a nationalist revolt that occurred between 1952 and 1960. It was a response by the Kikuyu people and other ethnic groups to the British colonial rule and the economic and political injustices they experienced. This paper aims to provide a detailed analysis of the Mau Mau uprising, including its causes, nature, and consequences."

"Causes of the Mau Mau uprising."

"The Mau Mau uprising was caused by a combination of factors, including political, economic, and social grievances. At the heart of the uprising was the issue of land ownership, which had been a contentious issue for many years. In the early 1900s, the British colonial government

had seized large tracts of land from the indigenous people, which they gave to white settlers. The indigenous people were then forced to work on these farms as laborers, earning very little in wages.”

“As the population of white settlers increased, the demand for land also increased. The British colonial government responded by implementing policies that further disadvantaged the indigenous people, such as the Land Apportionment Act of 1951. This law divided the land into European, African, and Native reserves, with the European reserves occupying the most fertile land. This policy effectively locked the indigenous people out of the most productive areas and forced them to live on infertile land.”

“The indigenous people also experienced political and social injustices. The colonial government appointed white settlers to positions of power, denying the indigenous people the right to participate in the political process. The colonial government also enforced discriminatory laws that restricted the movement and freedoms of the indigenous people.”

“Nature of the Mau Mau uprising.”

“The Mau Mau uprising was characterized by violence and brutality. The Kikuyu people, who were the largest ethnic group in Kenya, formed the majority of the Mau Mau fighters. The Mau Mau fighters were organized into secret societies, with the most prominent being the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA).”

“The Mau Mau fighters used guerilla tactics to attack British colonial targets, including police stations, government offices, and white settler farms. They also targeted indigenous people who were perceived to be collaborating with the British colonial government. The Mau Mau fighters used traditional weapons such as machetes, spears, and bows and arrows, as well as firearms that they had acquired from the British colonial army.”

“The British colonial government responded to the Mau Mau uprising with brutal force. They declared a state of emergency in Kenya, which gave them sweeping powers to arrest and detain suspected Mau Mau

fighters without trial. The British colonial army was deployed to Kenya to quell the uprising, and they used brutal tactics such as torture, mass arrests, and executions.”

“Consequences of the Mau Mau uprising.”

“The Mau Mau uprising had far-reaching consequences, both for Kenya and for the British colonial government. One of the most significant consequences was the end of British colonial rule in Kenya. The Mau Mau uprising was one of the factors that led to Kenya gaining independence in 1963.”

“The Mau Mau uprising also had a significant impact on the indigenous people of Kenya. The uprising galvanized the indigenous people, giving them a sense of pride and identity. It also led to a significant shift in land ownership, with the indigenous people reclaiming some of the land that had been taken from them during the colonial era.”

“The Mau Mau uprising also had a significant impact on the British colonial government. The brutal tactics used by the British colonial army to quell the uprising attracted international attention and condemnation. The British colonial government was criticized for its human rights abuses and for its failure to address the grievances of.”

Before jumping into its shortcomings, I would like to point out that ChatGPT did succeed, even if only in part, in giving an extremely broad overview of the Mau Mau uprising. It was more or less correct in providing three broad causes for Mau Mau (“political, economic, and social grievances”), briefly describing the physical conflict between the Mau Mau forest fighters and both the British colonial government and its many supporters, and providing a broad overview of Mau Mau’s consequences. In other words, its splitting up into three main parts of causes, nature, and consequences was rather useful. Another area where it succeeded is the drawing of international attention to the brutalities undertaken by the British

colonial government during its attempts to extinguish Mau Mau.¹ It is worth noting that for the right purposes, this cursory summary may be helpful as a starting point to introduce people to Mau Mau. However, ChatGPT's failures far outweigh its successes.

With regards to the needs and wants of serious historians and students of history, ChatGPT and the information it spouts is virtually useless in both minor and major ways. Beginning with its minor and technical shortcomings, when prompted to write an eight page paper, it instead only wrote a two-page paper when copied into Google Docs. Furthermore, it also stopped writing its paper midway through its final sentence. ChatGPT's insufficient usage of historical analysis and historiographical tools resulted in its inability to provide more than just fundamental knowledge about the Mau Mau uprising. For instance, it has no mention of the well-known oaths, which were an integral part of the Mau Mau uprising. These oaths played a large role in Mau Mau's recruitment efforts and were often depicted by the British as being supernatural and primitive rituals related to witchcraft, the devil, and even hypnosis.² Contrary to this understanding, the oaths were actually used to initiate people into the Mau Mau movement and were in no way prompted by demonic or witchcraft-related motives. The oaths also proved to be key in provoking working and lower-class solidarity that led to the conflict.

The oaths were often administered during "massive oath-taking ceremonies," which members of Mau Mau would set up either by request or out of pure necessity; forcibly making everyone in the vicinity take an oath for the sake of "collaboration" and security of the Mau Mau agenda during the most trying and dangerous times.³ Sometimes there were individual, or

¹ David M. Anderson, "Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and the Discovery of Kenya's 'Migrated Archive'," *History Workshop Journal* 80, University of Warwick (2015): 142-160.

² J. C. Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau* (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1954), 15-18.

³ Waruhiu Itote (General China), "'Mau Mau' General," *The Journal of African History* Vol 9 (January 1968): 49-55.

at least smaller group oath-taking ceremonies, but they all followed a similar structure and theme.⁴ In the words of Waruhiu Itote, “the basic theme of [the] ceremonies [was]: the oath-giving, an explanation of our people’s fate under British colonialism, and a clarification of the new obligations to which the oath bound its takers... those who had taken the oath must help us in every possible way.”⁵ Lastly with respect to the oaths, there is no set number of how many oaths there were and what their names and purposes were. For example, Carothers states that there were four oaths, all of which had various meanings that misled the “bulk of the Kikuyu population,” and were often taken reluctantly.⁶ On the other hand, Itote depicts only two kinds of oaths, the general one depicted above for the majority of regular people to support Mau Mau, and the “forest or *mbatuni oath*” administered to the forest fighters so that they “would understand the responsibilities of leadership,” be well versed in “the practical skills of war,” and be molded into one group that was loyally fighting “for each other and the Mau Mau cause.”⁷ This key information was completely left out of ChatGPT’s description.

Aside from the fact there were very noticeable shortfalls in details and a few minor historical inaccuracies, ChatGPT also introduced very prominent historical and conceptual inaccuracies. One such example is ChatGPT’s claim that Mau Mau “galvanized the indigenous people, giving them a sense of pride and identity.” To really expound the deceptive nature of this claim, it is paramount to divide this quote into two parts. The first deals with the word “indigenous” because that employs an insensitive nationalist sense to Mau Mau, which was not really a nationalist conflict in the first place. This is further explained when taking into account that national sentiment has been traditionally “expressed in opposition to some other national or religious group,” which the Mau Mau uprising could be

⁴ Itote, “Mau Mau’s General,” 50-53.

⁵ Itote, “Mau Mau’s General,” 50-51.

⁶ Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, 17-18.

⁷ Itote, “Mau Mau’s General,” 49-53.

seen as from a bird's-eye view but is not quite the case.⁸ Although it does embody pieces of nationalist intent, it was instead an ethnic conflict between the Gikuyu and the British colonial government. The claim of galvanizing the indigenous people, when it was not a struggle that involved all types of indigenous people, but rather only *one* indigenous people embodies this problem. Gikuyu, Christians, the Home Guard, Loyalists, and many others found themselves caught in the middle of a conflict they wanted no part in.⁹ ChatGPT's politicization of Mau Mau's history—both in calling it a “nationalist revolt” and hinting at its supposed homogeneous ethnic nature—depicts the coupling of nationalism with “racial assumptions” including that of “naturalizing Africa as a unit, obscuring the continent's vast linguistic, religious, and cultural differences.”¹⁰ In the case of ChatGPT, the practice of using the terms “African” and “indigenous peoples” as one race interchangeably with the Gikuyu tribe is problematic because it is partly this twisted application of nationalism to an ethnic conflict that resulted in Mau Mau being considered a nationalist revolt.

The first part of ChatGPT's quote introduces its falsehood, but the second part solidifies its canon of historical inaccuracies. The second part deals with “giving [the indigenous people] a sense of pride and identity.” This whole narrative of creating unity, pride, and national identity in Kenya appears to go along with a widely spread political play put forth by the Gikuyu to boost their support both nationally and internationally once Kenya gained its freedom from British colonial rule. Aside from this, it also hints at a false assumption that there was no identity before Mau Mau. There was, in fact, a Gikuyu ethnic identity and a sense of pride in being Gikuyu even before the Mau Mau uprising. Mau Mau certainly did not make these identities, but in a way emerged out of those identities in a self-

⁸ Sarah Maza, *Thinking About History: The History of Where?* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 47.

⁹ Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 121-190, 232-274.

¹⁰ Maza, *Thinking About History*, 48.

reinforcing way. Through Mau Mau, and therefore through the already present Gikuyu identity, people found purpose in fighting against the British colonial government and more ethnic cohesion despite Mau Mau's ultimate failure as a movement. Despite the fact there was some kind of ethnic cohesion, it was not very prominent given the fact that many Gikuyus did not agree with Mau Mau in the first place. It appears that ChatGPT, by using the nationalist framework leniently and by representing the ethnicity and identity of the Gikuyu people in respect to Mau Mau in an insensitive way, has fallen into the same trap of prejudice and racism offered by some of the earliest scholars of Mau Mau, namely the very preliminary descriptions of Mau Mau by L.S.B. Leaky, and the stereotypical descriptions of Dr. J.C. Carothers' *Psychology of Mau Mau*.¹¹ Taking into account all of ChatGPT's inefficiencies, the future of ChatGPT does not look so bright.

Moving on to the third and final of the major areas where ChatGPT underperforms, it is important to point out how ChatGPT fails to provide various perspectives to explain the multiple causes for Mau Mau. One important perspective left out is that of the Marxist "people's history" perspective and its narrative of "historical materialism" that would partially explain the economic and social origins of Mau Mau.¹² To best explain this cause, it is necessary to set the framework of what Marxist history is. Marxist history, grounded in "historical materialism," is the belief "that the economic structure of a society forms the base upon which all other aspects of society rested... identifying the way in which human material needs are met as the most important influence in human history."¹³ ChatGPT states that "at the heart of the uprising was the issue of land ownership"—which is correct in the most broad sense—but lacks nuance and depth. ChatGPT

¹¹ L.S.B. Leaky, *Defeating Mau Mau* (London: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1954), 21-31, 41-52.

¹² Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The House of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-century History and Theory-Marxist Historians* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1999), 33-35.

¹³ Green and Troup, *The House of History*, 34-35.

merely provided two minor paragraphs introducing the controversy regarding land ownership since the early 1900s, the seizing of land for “white settlers,” the practically forced labor for “indigenous” people on these farms earning little wages, the demand for land, and the creation of reserves of infertile land for the “indigenous” people to live on, in turn solving the demand problem for the white settlers. A historian would have been able to apply the lens of Marxist history in ways that ChatGPT could not, which would allow for more complexity and nuance.

Before the British arrived, the Gikuyu, and arguably most of present-day Kenya, was an extremely agrarian and ‘peasant’ society, as it is often referred to in Marxist texts. Since the very beginning of the British arrival in Kenya, tracing all the way back until 1902 when “settlers had first pegged out claims [to land] in the fertile hills around Nairobi, the seizure of land by European settlers had been a bone of contention.”¹⁴ European colonizers took large plots of land away from the Gikuyu and other ethnic groups all over central Kenya, but it was not until the fluidity of these land seizures ended with the “hardening of boundaries between settler farms and African land, the building of fences around settler properties, and the drastic population increase” of Gikuyu and other ethnic groups around the early 1930s, that the issue of land first became extremely prominent.¹⁵ As a result of the end of this pseudo freedom that they still had, despite the fact their lands had been stolen for a few decades or so already, and the increase of hunger and landlessness due to the expanding population, Gikuyu began to express their social, political, and economic grievances.¹⁶

This socioeconomic land problem only continued to worsen as the grip around squatters, reservations, newly enforced “soil-conservation

¹⁴ David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire-The Hidden History of an Anti-Colonial Rebellion* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 10.

¹⁵ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 10.

¹⁶ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 10.

regulations, and communal terracing” ordinances tightened.¹⁷ This all began as early as 1918 with the settlers “attempt to ‘regulate’ squatter labor and how the squatters reacted with the help of the colonial government.”¹⁸ This attempt was known as “The 1918 Resident Native Labourers Ordinance (RNLO),” which legitimized “the institution of squatterdom and provided a legal framework for its social control.”¹⁹ Squatterdom was the alternative to the despised “waged labor,” and was a fickle category of labor-tenant/servant workers consisting of Gikuyu and other ethnic people that could work on settler farms for a better living than if they cultivated their own infertile land. Squatting offered the possibility for upward mobility, but as worsening material conditions and labor inequality became more prevalent due to the state’s attempt to protect the interest of capital owners and control the perceived “rowdiness” of the laborers, a new kind of class consciousness was born. This was followed by a class conflict and resistance provoked by the laborers (squatters) themselves.

This legal framework for the control of labor was further formalized in 1919 with the introduction of the “*kipande* system where laborers were required to carry an identification certificate (*kipande*)” in order to continue working or find a new job.²⁰ This new system was “a vicious imposition on ‘native’ labor for it kept squatters’ salaries static and turned the laborer into a virtual prisoner until such time as his contract came to an end.”²¹ The *kipande* system alongside the RNLO resulted in the end of the mutual and civil agreement of squatterdom, and made it a “publicly supervised and

¹⁷ David Throup, *Economic & Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-53* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), 140.

¹⁸ Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-63* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), 35-37.

¹⁹ Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, 36-37.

²⁰ Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, 38-39.

²¹ Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, 38-39.

enforced enterprise.”²² Furthermore, the Gikuyu peoples were “squeezed and even ‘proletarianized’ as the cost of one acre of land increased tenfold between 1939 and 1952,” while also dealing with the enforcement of newly created soil-conservation and communal terracing regulations aiming at reversing the depletion of fertile lands on Gikuyu reserves.²³ These new orders were enforced mostly by chiefs loyal to the state because they did not want to jeopardize their wealth and status.²⁴ All of these factors put together acted as catalysts in creating a proletariat class consciousness and the “popular discontent” that evolved to become the Mau Mau uprising.

Continuing with the third area of ChatGPT’s underperformance, another perspective focuses on gender roles in the uniquely blended Gikuyu and British colonial society as a major factor in the social origins of Mau Mau. Despite the fact this is a key perspective for the origins of Mau Mau, ChatGPT does not mention women, men, or the gender politics of Mau Mau at all. The notion of gender is vital in Mau Mau. Gender roles concerning what it means to be a man, what it means to regulate the role of women with regard to men, and likewise the British colonial government’s active problematizing of men were significant contributing factors. Furthermore, “Mau Mau issued many more statements about the nature and proper organization of marriage than it did about land and freedom,” which pushes the importance of gender relations for Mau Mau.²⁵ It is quite possible that gender played a role just as large—or even larger than—Marxist class conflict in the origins of Mau Mau.

This problematizing of men as the breeding grounds of revolution and criminal activities when left with too much time on their hands and without feeling “fulfilled and complacent,” prompted the British to

²² Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, 38-39.

²³ Throup, *Economic & Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 140-141.

²⁴ Throup, *Economic & Social Origins of Mau Mau*, 139-141.

²⁵ Luise White, “Separating the Men from the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality, and Terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939-1959,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 23, no. 1 (1990): 10.

essentially create “two forms of manhood deployed in urban life, possibly even two male genders.”²⁶ These were the “respectable working class and the mass of laboring poor, both of whose literacy, skills, or lack thereof, informed the ways they conducted themselves as men.”²⁷ In doing this, the British also aimed at “rewarding” the respectable working class men with the ability to have families and thus the “companionship and support” of a wife and children through marriage that would in turn supposedly keep them out of trouble.²⁸ The mass of laboring poor workers would then see the prosperity of the respectable working class, or rather what the British deemed as being prosperous, and would strive to work hard to be like them, thus also keeping them away from revolutionary mindsets. Despite the British attempt at culturally reforming marriage in Gikuyu society through the problematizing of men, reforming the role of women, and the role of the physical household, Mau Mau experimented with and reconstructed these gender relations to create the exact opposite effect.²⁹ Mau Mau, in other words, effectively embraced the British reformations of gender and used them to their advantage during the uprising.

This occurred in many ways such as the drastic switch within the forest from polygamy to monogamous marriage—and in some cases eliminating traditional marriage, effectively taking “the allocation of family life [and marriage] out of colonial hands and into African control”—and the creation of both men’s and women’s councils where both genders would contribute to the Mau Mau cause.³⁰ Other ways Mau Mau reconstructed gender was through encouraging, and often forcing, the sharing of housework chores between both men and women, the redefining of “the definition of gender” further to include men’s ability to complete traditional

²⁶ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 4-9.

²⁷ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 9.

²⁸ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 4-19.

²⁹ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 8-10.

³⁰ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 11-12.

“female tasks,” and lastly redefining of women’s roles as solely wives and not mothers, thus giving them a form of “autonomous sexuality,” who could be “warriors” alongside their “male partners.”³¹ Through this, there was a newfound partnership in arms between both Gikuyu men and women, infusing the relationship between men and women with a new power.³²

In realizing how their efforts to mold gender within the Gikuyu culture had failed miserably, the British again attempted to reconstruct gender in an extraordinarily complicated and intentional way to snuff out Mau Mau.³³ They did this through the creation of mass detention camps and pseudo-rural villages that were very different from what the Gikuyu people had lived in before (this process was known as villagization), both of which were aimed at “remaking [the Gikuyu people, but especially men’s] genders.”³⁴ In removing men from their families, “rehabilitating them,” and then returning them to their families as a “reward” for becoming virtually new people through hard work and a new sense of discipline, the British government hoped to create a vision of gender “without class division,” thus “dissolving the two [male] genders” they had created back in the 1930s.³⁵ Through the forced labor of completing tasks that were traditionally women’s, forced dormitory life away from their family, and even the continued regulation of men’s sexual lives, the British attempted to reconstruct Gikuyu manhood.³⁶ The reconstruction of gender roles was very different from what Gikuyu men and women had learned and become accustomed to in the forest and in their traditional cultures, thus “bringing new responsibilities and opportunities, and new, vigorous constraints” on top of the already traumatic reformation of their gender roles for the third

³¹ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 13-14.

³² White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 13.

³³ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 17-18.

³⁴ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 17-18.

³⁵ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 19.

³⁶ White, “Separating the Men from the Boys,” 19-22.

time since British arrival to Kenya.³⁷ Knowing all of this, it is now evident that Mau Mau situated its revolt and its politics within the boundaries of everyday private life through addressing topics such as marriage and domestic chores, and in doing so, contested all aspects of life.³⁸ Thus, aside from a class conflict, Mau Mau also began with the reconstruction of men and women into a system of domestic work that aligned with British visions of a rigid social order and the productivity and tranquility of the colonized.

While scholars are fretful that AI software like ChatGPT will one day replace us, it thankfully does not appear competent enough for that to be the case. For historians, the devil is not only in the details, but also in the new ways of thinking about the past that represent the changing priorities of the times, and the things that matter to us as a society. In using these new ways as lenses to view the past, as we simultaneously continue to move forward in the present while building our futures, we bear witness to just how quickly the field of history, and academia in general, is changing. Simply put, society, and perhaps the world, are changing too quickly for AI to keep up, and the field of history can rest assured that its role of sharing the most holistic truth of the past is not soon to be replaced by artificial intelligence.

³⁷ White, "Separating the Men from the Boys," 24-25.

³⁸ White, "Separating the Men from the Boys," 25.

The Origin and Continued Perpetration of the Myth of the Clean *Wehrmacht*

By Lucas Schwed, United States Military Academy

In August 1945, the United States, Soviet Union, and United Kingdom met at Potsdam to determine how to deal with a defeated Germany. One of the most important measures agreed upon was the elimination of the deeply entrenched National Socialist ideology, but how exactly to go about this was not agreed upon. Initially, they pursued denazification to eliminate any trace of the Nazi regime. Swastikas and other memorabilia were taken down, streets were renamed, and former National Socialist members were restricted from working certain professions. Most important, however, was the prosecution of thousands of Germans as war criminals.

While the Soviet Union was altogether diligent, the Western Allies hesitated in the full persecution of former party members. Nazi ideology had permeated German society so deeply that around 10% of Germans were full members by the end of the war.¹ Removing all former members of the party from their occupations would cripple the administration and institutions of allied-occupied Germany. By 1951, denazification had been mostly ended in the West, not because it was “complete,” but mostly out of perceived necessity due to the increasing Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union and the overtures for independence being made by the soon-to-be-established West German government. As a result, a silent permeation of Nazi rhetoric was allowed to remain throughout German society with no effective counter. Some of the propaganda narratives perpetrated throughout the Second World War were highly regarded in Germany until a more active movement to dispel them emerged in the 1990s. Some of these fictions, especially the ones concerning the conduct of the German military during the war, continue to hold considerable influence in the information space.

¹ Chris McNab, *Hitler's Masterplan: The Essential Facts and Figures for Hitler's Third Reich* (London: Amber Books, 2011), 22-23.

This is the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht*—the *Wehrmacht* being the German armed forces from 1933 to 1945. The myth’s creation shows how a lack of debate surrounding historical topics leads to the perpetration of false narratives that cover up the truth and marginalize opposing sources.

What the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* entails is different depending on what sources one consults, and its meaning has changed over time. Generally, the myth centers around the regular German military during the Second World War and its participation in the Holocaust, as well as the countless crimes against humanity committed by Nazi Germany over the course of the conflict. The narrative goes that the *Wehrmacht* did not participate in war crimes, and that the atrocities were committed by the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) along with its corresponding subunits. Overall, the myth aims to disconnect the *Wehrmacht* as much as possible from Nazi ideology, arguing that it was an apolitical organization that only conducted combat against regular military forces. The focus of this essay is not to disprove the myth, as it has already been widely debunked by historians. There are countless amounts of evidence demonstrating *Wehrmacht* participation in the Holocaust from the highest levels of command down to the enlisted soldier. Many atrocities and acts of extermination were carried out by regular army, navy, and air force units both with and without the involvement of the SS. Instead of disproving the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht*, this paper aims to explain how the myth was created and how a small number of voices being regarded with complete objectivity, while opposition was ignored, serves as a dangerous example for how history can be written and recounted.

The conditions that enabled the creation of the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* can be traced to the establishment of the West German state in 1949 and the *Bundeswehr* (West German military) in 1955. With the Cold War starting in the late 1940s, and the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, the United States and its allies were worried that their forces deployed in Europe to oppose a possible Soviet invasion of the continent were not sufficient. To supplement their numbers, the formation of a new German Army was slowly put into action. The “genesis” of the *Bundeswehr* thus began with the meeting of fifteen former high-ranking Nazi officers at

Himmerod Abbey in 1950, invited by then West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to deliberate on how to build a functional army that would complement NATO forces in Europe. Together, this group drafted and released the Himmerod Memorandum, a "...sweeping document that ranged from psychologic to political, from military to constitutional consideration" that would form the basis of the *Bundeswehr*'s formation and organization.²

The importance of the Himmerod Memorandum as it pertains to the creation of the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* has to do with its "psychological" considerations mentioned above. Hans Speidel, a former *Generalleutnant* of the German Army (the *Heer*) and future four-star General in the *Bundeswehr*, demanded in the document a "'Cessation of all defamation of the German soldier (including the *Waffen-SS*) and measures to change public opinion both at home and abroad' with regard to the military."³ Regarding demands from the West German government itself, the memorandum stipulated an immediate granting of full pension to all *Wehrmacht* veterans under the motto "Equal rights for all civil servants," as well as a "... 'full apology' to German soldiers for all defamation heaped upon them by Germans and Allies alike." Equally controversial was a proposal to release of 3,600 Germans incarcerated as war criminals and suspend any further war crimes trials to ensure the "...rehabilitation of the German soldier."⁴ These former high-ranking Nazi officers, several of whom would go on to fill critical positions in the young *Bundeswehr*, were campaigning for an erasure of the *Wehrmacht*'s "dirty" history. Not only would former *Wehrmacht* soldiers be absolved of their abhorrent past, but members of the *Waffen-SS* would as well, and the history itself would be rewritten. The release of war criminals and a dedicated government effort to influence public opinion regarding the *Wehrmacht* would mean the end, and even reversal, of denazification efforts in West Germany. The end of the

² Herwig H. Holger. "Aggression Contained? The Federal Republic of Germany and International Security," NATO, 1996, <https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/96-98/herwig.pdf>, 22.

³ Holger, "Aggression Contained," 24.

⁴ Holger, "Aggression Contained," 24.

program was deemed necessary by both West Germany and NATO to properly create a German military capable of resisting a potential invasion from its Eastern border.

The misrepresentation of the *Wehrmacht*'s conduct did not begin with the end of denazification in 1951; in fact, the establishment of its foundations started while the fighting raged on the Eastern Front. As historian David A. Harrisville puts it in his book *The Virtuous Wehrmacht*, "...the primary pillars of the myth were firmly in place long before the last shots were fired. Its original authors were not politicians or high-ranking veterans but ordinary soldiers recounting wartime events to their loved ones from bunkers and foxholes across the front."⁵ Letters from the frontlines, eventually numbering over 10 billion, portrayed the fighting in Russia and Eastern Europe to those back home as a noble fight against an otherworldly adversary, with war crimes either not mentioned or justified as necessary actions against an enemy not even regarded as human. Harrisville notes that, following the end of hostilities: "When veterans discussed their wartime service or politicians passed laws protecting former war criminals, they were simply confirming what the German public already 'knew': that 'their' men had held themselves to a high moral standard, even if others had not."⁶ To the postwar German public, the Nuremberg Trials and subsequent denazification efforts were the actual attempts to erase history, not the other way around. The end of these efforts and the release of war criminals from prison a few years after the war's end (almost entirely without serving their full sentences) served as further proof to Germans that their family members, friends, and countrymen had been "right all along" about their non-involvement with the atrocities of the Eastern Front or the necessity of these atrocities in the first place. This mentality would be further inflamed when West Germany was admitted to NATO and postured to fight against a potential Soviet attack as Germans found themselves, much like during the

⁵ David A. Harrisville, *The Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 209.

⁶ Harrisville, *The Virtuous Wehrmacht*, 210.

reign of Nazi Germany, being told that the Soviet Union and communism were the enemies of the German people.

When creating the “official history” of the Second World War, Cold War tensions severely impacted the narrative regarding the Wehrmacht. With animosity growing between the United States and the Soviet Union, American army officers directed groups of former German officers to create a comprehensive multi-volume history of the Eastern Front to garner military intelligence about the USSR. This effort was headed by *Generaloberst* Franz Halder (former chief of staff of Army High Command, *Oberkommando des Heeres*); Halder himself had helped draft the infamous Commissar Order and Barbarossa Decree that granted Wehrmacht personnel the legal ability to execute Soviet civilians and POWs at will without persecution or repercussions during the war.

The “Halder Group,” as it was named, oversaw all writings that the US Army Historical Division, as well as most Western historians at the time, would use. They vetted all texts and demanded rewrites and revisions of texts deemed too different from the agreed-upon narrative authors had to abide by. Due to the Eastern Front being almost solely between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, Wehrmacht documents were the only sources historians and Western military personnel used for their writings, whether they were official military records or more irregular historical pieces (letters, unofficial reports, etc.). Soviet sources, or documents from former German allies now part of the Communist Bloc, were not consulted as they were viewed as unreliable propaganda, given the hostile political climate of the time. Historian Bernd Wegner comments on the bias that “The writing of German history on the Second World War, and in particular on the Russian front, was for over two decades, and in part up to the present day—and to a far greater extent than most people realize—the work of the defeated,”⁷ with the eventual result that “In the work of the Historical Division the traces of the war of annihilation for which the Wehrmacht

⁷ Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 229.

leadership was responsible were covered up.”⁸ With this unprecedented and unopposed control over historical narrative, Franz Halder and his group of veterans rewrote the history of the entire Eastern Front, covering up atrocities with half-truths and lies in an attempt to shift any possible blame from the *Wehrmacht* to Hitler and the SS.

The consequences of the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* were immediate and its effects still permeate our society and information space to this day. Though the myth has been debunked in academic circles since the 1990s, the popular representation of the *Wehrmacht* is still a controversial topic online. Nowhere is this most evident in the “editing battles” that occur on online pages related to the Second World War. Wikipedia articles are allowed to be edited by a large amount of people, leading to a biased editing of pages by individuals claiming to be specialists. As one author states, “...pages reveal that some editors are too reluctant to tie any member of the *Wehrmacht*—even at times senior commanders—too closely to the Nazi regime and its criminal activities.”⁹ These editors draw the sources for their edits from the same sources once held in such high regard by Western historians: the memoirs of German generals and historical archives dating from the 1950s and 1960s. The problem that continues to fuel the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* is demonstrated by how many regarded these writings as objective. Though nearly all historians agree on the falsity of the myth, the existence of “official” sources published by accredited historians are still used by Nazi sympathizers as justification for the editing of information online. Given the trust that many place on Wikipedia, these misconceptions pushed by “amateur historians” damage common efforts to combat the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* in the modern information space.

Critical to the fabrication of the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* is what Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie calls “The Danger of a Single

⁸ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, 232.

⁹ David Stahel, “The Battle for Wikipedia: The New Age of ‘Lost Victories?’,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 31:3 (2018): 3, 396-402.

Story.”¹⁰ Adichie focuses on how the existence of a sole narrative about a people or event misleads an audience and pushes stereotypes forward. This could occur simply because there are no other accounts, but in our case the other accounts—i.e., Soviet and other non-German sources—are purposely ignored. Adichie asserts that, regarding stories, “How they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power,”¹¹ going on to define power as “...the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.”¹² The former German officers that created the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* possessed absolute power over the writing of the narratives that would be used by both the U.S. Army Historical Division and most historians. The lack of any opposition to the established narrative led the myth to be widely believed until the 1990s. It was only with the end of the Cold War, which helped lower the stigma surrounding Soviet sources and saw the new Russian government allowing access to many previously censored historical archives, that German sources stopped being the “single story” in the popular narrative regarding the Eastern Front.

The myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* was not created by coincidence; the use of incredibly biased sources based off the writings of former German officers, combined with the disregard of any other sources, resulted in a false narrative of the Eastern Front that was, for dozens of years, regarded as the objective truth. As a result, the war crimes Germany committed on the Eastern Front were largely ignored or blamed on paramilitary actors like the SS. The lack of debate on the veracity of these accounts until the 1990s still affects how many perceive the *Wehrmacht* to this day, with debates and “editing wars” changing its portrayal on the modern information space. This “danger of a single story,” however, is not unique to the *Wehrmacht*. American audiences would be able to find a very

¹⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” TED Conferences, LLC, Oxford, July 2009, 00:00.

¹¹ Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” 09:25.

¹² Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” 10:00.

similar example in the “Lost Cause” myth that is widely accepted in the Southern United States and seeks to portray the Confederacy as noble victims in the American Civil War. False narratives are used extensively by Russia to portray its war in Ukraine as a preemptive strike meant to cleanse apparent Nazi ideologues hidden in the government. All these false narratives gain traction due to the absence, or purposeful censorship, of opposing voices, especially online where an increasing majority of individuals get their news and information. The result is the extension of wars, the marginalization of peoples, and the continued revision of history. It is for this result that, to gain a more objective view of the world that protects groups from persecution, we should aim as much as possible to maintain a free and open information space that strives to discern the truth from a wide array of narratives.

Up the Mekong Without a Paddle: An Analysis of American Military and Political Indecision in Vietnam, 1958-1965

By Reece Pockat, University of Wisconsin – Platteville

Introduction

American involvement in Vietnam did not, as some may believe, begin with President Lyndon Johnson's decision to deploy the United States military in a non-advisor role after the Gulf of Tonkin Incident in 1964. Rather, this was the culmination of nearly two decades of American policy beginning in the waning months of the Second World War. Regardless of why Johnson committed American troops to South Vietnam, the fact remains that in both military and political affairs, the overall policy of the United States remained indecisive throughout the war and especially during the period from 1958 to 1965.

Why this Period?

To give a bit of insight into why this era deserves examination, it is important to first understand the situation on the ground in South Vietnam during the period. Politically, the Republic of Vietnam was at the height of the repressive regime of US-backed dictator Ngo Dinh Diem whose crackdown on his peoples' freedoms and civil liberties went unpunished by his benefactors in Washington.¹ By 1958, American military advisors had been on the ground for three years, having taken over from their French counterparts in 1955 after the French defeat in the First Indochina War to North Vietnam the year prior, thus marking the end of French colonization in the region.² Additionally, 1958 marks the point at which violent revolutionaries within the Indochinese Communist Party fighting against

¹ The Republic of Vietnam will henceforth be referred to as either the RVN or South Vietnam with both terms being used interchangeably.

² Russell Hunt Fifield, *Americans in Southeast Asia: The Roots of Commitment* (New York: Cromwell, 1973), 260.

the RVN became a force that the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) could not reliably or consistently contain.³ That said, 1958 was chosen as the starting point because of the marked increase in political and military tension within South Vietnam with violent Communist revolutionaries ravaging the countryside and Diem's regime cracking down on Buddhists, leftists, and non-Catholics as a whole. Two years after 1958, in late 1960, these Communist agitators would form the National Liberation Front, whose militant wing, the People's Liberation Army Front (PLAF) or Viet Cong, would continue this fight.

The end point of the period, 1965, deserves scrutiny because it marks the first full calendar year in which the United States committed ground troops in Vietnam after years of providing advisors, aircraft, and other means of military and humanitarian support to South Vietnam. While the first non-advisor troops had been sent in the wake of the Gulf of Tonkin Incident in 1964, large-scale American military strategy started to take form in 1965. However, due to the political nature of the war, American political indecision will also be analyzed as well as its impact on military policy with regards to the conduct of the Vietnam War.

Limited Intervention

Historical Context: World War Two to Eisenhower (1940-1958)

American involvement and interests in Southeast Asia did not begin with the NLF's insurgency in the late 1950s. To offer a bit of context to American affairs in the region, one needs to travel back to the waning months of the Second World War. At the time, Southeast Asia was a French colony known as French Indochina and had been caught in a delicate political balancing act for nearly the duration of the war given its proximity to Imperial Japan.

Japanese aggression during World War Two was primarily driven by the desire for natural resources and with France's capitulation to the Nazis in mid-1940, Japan stepped up to fill the void left by Paris. By September

³ Fifield, *Americans in Southeast Asia*, 262.

1940, Japan managed to secure territorial control, special resource rights, and military bases in French Indochina, leaving remaining French officials scrambling to contend with growing Japanese influence in their colony.⁴

As part of the deal made with France, Japan agreed not to invade Indochina, a provision that would be violated in March 1945 as the United States was knocking on its door in the Pacific. To give their new Indochinese puppet a veneer of legitimacy, a man named Bao Dai was installed as Emperor, though his power was largely ceremonial. As a result of the invasion, Communist rebels led by Ho Chi Minh (and supplied by American intelligence services) were, for the most part, able to push Japanese forces out of the northern portion of Vietnam by the conclusion of the war, with Ho Chi Minh setting up an independent Communist government in Hanoi at the very end of the war.⁵ Despite Minh's government only controlling the northern half of Vietnam, Communist elements in the south sought to bring the rest of the country under Minh's control, though such efforts in the 1940s and early 1950s would fail.

Understandably, the newly reinstated French government in Paris was unhappy with this development and after a period that saw the northern half of Vietnam occupied by China and the south by the United Kingdom, France quickly reasserted its claims over the whole of Indochina. The Hanoi regime, newly and functionally independent, successfully resisted France's attempt to restore national pride via armed conflict, fighting and winning the First Indochinese War from 1946 to 1954. In defeat, the French colonial hold over Southeast Asia effectively came to an end with Indochina being split into four nations: the Kingdom of Laos, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Vietnam (in the southern half of Vietnam), and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (in the northern half of Vietnam).

The United States, however, did not idly let one of its closest European allies suffer a long and humiliating defeat at the hands of Communist partisans. As the First Indochinese War progressed, the French

⁴ David Krugler, (Lecture, History 3400, UW-Platteville, Platteville, WI, January 25, 2023).

⁵ Krugler, (Lecture, January 25, 2023).

economy, still recovering after World War Two, was unable to meet the growing financial burdens of so sudden a war. As a result, the First Indochinese War became increasingly subsidized by the United States with over 80% of the French war being paid for by American taxpayers by its midway point. The French also prosecuted the war with American materiel and pilots being used by French forces.⁶ As this demonstrates, several years before American military advisors were on the ground and a decade and a half before combat troops were deployed, the United States had a vested interest in maintaining a friendly regime in some part of Vietnam, be it a French-dominated puppet or an independent state. For military involvement post-1954, American military advisors began taking over for their French counterparts one year after the Geneva Conference, continuing to train ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) in conventional warfare, the same doctrine that failed the French against the guerrilla tactics of the DRV.⁷

While it is certainly fair to question whether the failure of French forces in Indochina were in some part caused by the after effect of the Second World War, the main reason the French Republic fought so desperately to maintain their overseas empire was to restore their shattered sense of national pride. However, to have battle-hardened soldiers and commanders fail to adapt against a guerrilla-style opponent in a war that lasted eight years (1946-1954) in an attempt to restore pride to France demonstrates a continuation of the military inflexibility that allowed the Wehrmacht to defeat the French army in six weeks in 1940. To that end, it is fair to say that the French adherence to a doctrine of conventional warfare was a major failing in Indochina, due, in some part, to a desire to shake off the effects of the Second World War.

From an electoral standpoint, the policy of the United States was initially clear: install a friendly president at any cost. Conveniently, there just so happened to be a virulent anti-Communist politician who was willing

⁶ Krugler, (Lecture, February 1, 2023).

⁷ Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (New York, NY: Van Rees Press, 1969), 67.

to rule the new Republic of Vietnam with a star-spangled iron fist and that was Ngo Dinh Diem. In the election of 1955, Diem was given explicit permission from US officials to rig the vote in his favor in an election that was never truly intended to be democratic.⁸ This initial election kicked off what was perhaps the most consistent policy of the United States during its decades of involvement in Vietnam: the preservation of a non-Communist South Vietnam. While the South Vietnamese constitution under Diem was technically democratic, pro-Diem candidates managed to win 89 out of 123 seats in parliament in subsequent elections in the late 1950s.⁹ Under the Eisenhower administration, United States political and military policies in Vietnam were, at the very least, consistent.

Indecision Under Eisenhower (1958-1961)

American policy during the late Eisenhower administration was indecisive yet consistent. When, late in his administration's tenure, the Diem regime's authoritarian repressions of non-Catholics gave rise to the National Liberation Front (NLF), Eisenhower initially remained steadfast in his attitudes toward Vietnam. At first, the NLF was a mostly peaceful group of political dissidents campaigning for free elections within the RVN. However, that quickly changed when, in 1959, Diem violently cracked down on South Vietnamese Communists.¹⁰ It is at this point that Eisenhower's commitment to Vietnam started to waver, in no small part due to his not wanting to support an increasingly oppressive dictatorship. While the majority of policymakers in both Washington and Saigon believed the NLF—and all leftists in South Vietnam for that matter—to be Hanoi stooges, it did nothing to change US military strategy in 1959 other than

⁸ Howard R. Penniman, *Elections in South Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Public Policy Research, 1972), 21.

⁹ Penniman, *Elections in South Vietnam*, 24.

¹⁰ George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1986), 110.

increase the number of military advisors already present, a trend that would continue throughout the next two administrations.¹¹

Politically, however, the last years of the Eisenhower administration featured shifts in geopolitical priorities. By 1960, Eisenhower wrongfully believed Diem to have a tight grip on the NLF insurgency and as such, Laos became a more important target for American foreign policy due to an uptick in Communist activity in the country and an active civil war that sought to overthrow an American-backed government.¹² Eisenhower's approach to Laos was far more hands-off than his approach in Vietnam, as no US troops ever set foot in the country during his administration. As for Diem, his days in power were numbered due to his growing reliance on American money and complacency with his "handling" of the NLF. By the end of Eisenhower's time in office, the NLF controlled large swaths of the Vietnamese countryside, even as Diem supposedly won a large part of the vote in those very same regions.¹³ Even more disastrous for Diem was the marked uptick in political assassinations carried out by the NLF from 1959 to 1961. As US support for the RVN regime waned, assassinations rose from 239 in 1959 to over 1,400 in 1961.¹⁴ This showed that a regime propped up by American aid could do little to defend itself against an enemy it did not want to be rid of.

Taking a More Active Role

The Kennedy Years (1961-1963)

The Kennedy administration's position on Vietnam was similar to Eisenhower's, though more cracks began to show in overall commitment to

¹¹ Kahin, *Intervention*, 121; Philip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1988), 293.

¹² Kahin, *Intervention*, 122.

¹³ Penniman, *Elections in South Vietnam*, 26. The 1961 election saw Diem win 88% of the nationwide vote.

¹⁴ Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, 294.

the Diem regime. By the time of Kennedy's inauguration, so much territory had been lost to the NLF that the DRV had reversed an earlier decision to reign in the southern rebels and instead openly acknowledged their partisan comrades in late 1960.¹⁵ However, instead of giving Vietnam his full attention, Kennedy was more focused on dealing with a resurgent and belligerent Soviet Union, once again on its feet with Nikita Khrushchev at the helm and backing numerous Communist militant groups in Latin America and Africa. Despite this, Kennedy had political reasons to be involved in Vietnam, though there was clear indecision in his policymaking.

Not wanting to be seen as another Democratic president to lose a country to Communism after China fell during the Truman administration, Kennedy decided to drastically increase the amount of support given to ARVN despite a policy of "calculated escalation" so as not to provoke a response from the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China.¹⁶ This drastic change in course from simple monetary support and limited military advisors saw US manpower in Vietnam increase from 900 in 1961 to 11,326 in 1962 with crewed helicopters also being sent to support ARVN operations as well as material support, training, and intelligence for ARVN special forces operations.¹⁷

Politically, however, Kennedy did try (and fail) to do what Eisenhower could not: reign in Diem. Kennedy tried to force Diem to pass economic and social reforms as conditions of this latest aid package. Predictably, the Vietnamese autocrat scoffed at these reforms despite a rise in NLF terror attacks.¹⁸ This increased US aid did, however, see ARVN and US advisors make tangible progress in combating the NLF, so much so that Diem felt confident enough to defy Kennedy and launch an active anti-

¹⁵ Kahin, *Intervention*, 114; Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, 284.

¹⁶ Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, 297; George McT. Kahin and John Wilson Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Dell, 1979), 127; Fifield, 256.

¹⁷ Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, 300-301.

¹⁸ Kahin and Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam*, 137-140.

American media campaign designed to make him drop any pressures for reform.¹⁹

By this point in 1962, Diem's incompetence led to his downfall. While Kennedy had taken a novel military approach to combat the NLF in that he favored an actual counterinsurgency strategy instead of the conventional warfare favored by the French and US advisors on the ground. Diem only tacitly supported Kennedy's approach.²⁰ By 1963, however, it became apparent that Diem was squandering not only his financial aid, but his military aid as well, and the successes of 1962 had rather quickly faded back into the familiar defeats of the Eisenhower administration. A hands-on approach to RVN's government had clearly failed and Kennedy himself gave tacit support to a coup to overthrow Diem, a coup which would take place in the early days of November 1963 only two weeks before Kennedy himself was assassinated in Dallas.²¹

Kennedy's Indecision

It was readily apparent that President Kennedy's approach to Vietnam policy was ripe with indecision. Not only did he significantly increase U.S. presence in the country while treating it as a secondary policy concern, but he also supported the overthrow of a staunch US ally when his incompetence became apparent. There was no overreaching goal of Kennedy's Vietnam policy except that which had been standard since the First Indochinese War: to prevent Communism from taking hold in the south at any cost. Kennedy simultaneously treated South Vietnam like a client state with the sheer amount of military aid provided and a hostile power with his support of the November coup that ousted Diem and put a succession of ineffective generals into power. By all appearances, Kennedy did not know quite how to treat the issue of Vietnam other than a nail which

¹⁹ Kahin and Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam*, 137-140.

²⁰ Kahin, *Intervention*, 131-132.

²¹ Penniman, *Elections in South Vietnam*, 3.

needed the hammer of American military assistance, especially when faced with an adversary in Ho Chi Minh who would not accept anything less than a united Vietnam under Communist rule.

Johnson and Unlimited Intervention (1963-1965)

With Kennedy's murder in late 1963, the United States soon found itself operating from a position of weakness in the early weeks of the Johnson administration. However, with regards to Vietnam, there was one major holdover from Kennedy's administration that carried into Johnson's decision making: the lack of any comprehensive planning.²² In fact, it seemed as though most of Johnson's planning throughout the early months of 1964 were made by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara who greatly expanded the size and combat readiness of the army following the policy that the "...United States must be willing to stand and fight in Vietnam."²³ This policy had already been set up by Kennedy's rapid expansion of American advisors among ARVN in 1962 and increasing economic subsidization, and Americanization, of combat operations in Vietnam. Johnson, however, at first did not commit Kennedy's numbers of troops to support ARVN, instead following more limited interventionist policies by providing economic support and political legitimacy to which ever South Vietnamese general held power.²⁴ In 1964, ARVN received over \$357 million meant for the aid of 43 countries and that amount doubled in 1965.²⁵

By mid-1964, however, Johnson started gunning for a fight with DRV forces, eventually inciting the Tonkin Gulf Incident in August of that year. As a result of the perceived attack on American naval forces, Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution on August 7, 1964, which "...[approved]

²² Hoopes, *Limits of Intervention*, 1.

²³ Hoopes, *Limits of Intervention*, 19.

²⁴ Hoopes, *Limits of Intervention*, 31.

²⁵ Hoopes, *Limits of Intervention*, 38.

and [supported] the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”²⁶ Johnson now had a blank check to do whatever he felt necessary in Vietnam. One of Johnson’s first actions was to increase American manpower in Vietnam. This was primarily done at the behest of Secretary of State Walt Rostow, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and MACV commander General William Westmoreland.

However, there was not a clear understanding of how to fight the war in which the Johnson administration found itself. As part of a bulletin released by the State Department on February 27, 1965, on DRV aggression, the Johnson administration asserted that “The war in Vietnam is a new kind of war,”²⁷ despite the fact that the guerrilla war being waged by the NLF (and also the Viet Cong) had been waged against Japanese, French, and RVN forces for nearly two consecutive decades. In a memo sent to Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John McNaughton at the end of 1965, future Undersecretary of the Air Force Townsend Hoopes asserted that “The best we [the United States] could hope to gain [from increasing manpower] would be a further stalemate at a higher level of effort, human sacrifice and risk.”²⁸ Here, Hoopes called out one of the major flaws of Johnson’s policy of Americanization: the fundamental misunderstanding of the war.

As has been shown, President Johnson was incredibly indecisive on all but one issue related to Vietnam. That one issue was the decision to go to war. Otherwise, Johnson was constantly agonizing over whether to escalate further and, like Kennedy and Eisenhower, run the risk of Soviet and Chinese intervention or continue to play it safe and allow American

²⁶ Tonkin Gulf Resolution, 88th Congress, August 7, 1964.

²⁷ Department of State Bulletin, March 22, 1965, Vol. 52, No. 1343 (1965). <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/usstatedept-vietnamfeb1965.asp>.

²⁸ Townsend Hoopes, Memo to Sec. of Defense John McNaughton, December 30, 1965, in Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, 44-48.

servicemen to fight and die for unclear reasons halfway around the globe. Johnson could not decide whether to do what was necessary to enact real change in the war or save face globally by making no significant progress at great cost of life to both soldiers and civilians. Unlike his predecessors, President Johnson was clearly uncomfortable with foreign policy, though this led him being able to make one clear decision regarding Vietnam: the decision to go to war.²⁹

Conclusion

Ultimately, the administrations of Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson were indecisive. Eisenhower was content to funnel money and guns along with a token force of American advisors to a corrupt regime led by Ngo Dinh Diem. Kennedy, however, began rapidly escalating the amount of aid given, expanding the advisory mission from 900 soldiers to over 11,000, sending helicopters with crews, and increasing economic aid to Diem. Despite this, Kennedy also approved the overthrow of Diem in late 1963, showing that Kennedy really was not overly certain of how to handle RVN's situation other than to throw money and manpower at it.

Johnson, meanwhile, was perhaps the only one of the three to make a clear decision in actively seeking to provoke a war after initially following Eisenhower's policy of economic welfare and political legitimacy, ultimately provoking an incident in August of 1964 and sending American soldiers to fight a war with tactics that had failed three successive armies since the ending months of the Second World War.

In short, the indecision with which Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson handled Vietnam led to a war that would involve U.S. combat troops for nearly twenty years (1955-1973) and American taxpayer money for thirty (1945-1975). By the end of 1965, the United States was so firmly entrenched in its support of RVN that it was truly stuck up the Mekong River without a paddle to guide it back to sanity.

²⁹ Hoopes, *Limits of Intervention*, 7-8.

Cowards in the Face of Immediate Death:

The Exceptional Leadership of General George H. Thomas at Chickamauga

By Alec Wells, United States Military Academy

Americans often remember 1863 as the turning point of the Civil War; decisive victories at both Gettysburg and Vicksburg seemed to change the tide of the conflict. However, few remember the disastrous Union defeat at Chickamauga in September of the same year which nearly cost the North an entire field army. Instead of allowing a complete rout, the will, determination, and perseverance of one commanding officer and his corps preserved the Army of the Cumberland. While the Georgian forests burned around him and all seemed to collapse, the Rock of Chickamauga stood firm: George Thomas, true as steel, refused to yield. Only Clausewitz himself can explain the effects of Thomas's exceptional command:

So long as a unit fights cheerfully, with spirit and elan, great strength of will is rarely needed; but once conditions become difficult, as they must when much is at stake, things no longer run like a well-oiled machine...As each man's strength gives out, as it no longer responds to his will, the inertia of the whole gradually comes to rest on the commander's will alone...Such are the burdens in battle that the commander's courage and strength of will must overcome if he hopes to achieve outstanding success.¹

The situation by the third day of the Battle of Chickamauga was dire at best, catastrophic at worst, and most certainly disastrous. Both XX and XXI Corps under Major Generals McCook and Crittenden, respectively, had been routed from the battlefield. The overwhelming weight of the Army of Tennessee bore down on Thomas's defensive position as successive waves

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. & trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 104-105.

of rebels thrashed his lines.² Only Thomas and his corps stood between the Army of the Cumberland, the Confederates, and certain destruction. The “inertia of the whole” truly had fallen on Thomas’ will alone, but he did not waver. George Thomas’s exceptional composure and heroic leadership on the third day of the Battle of Chickamauga allowed him to inspire his troops, maintain a stout defense, and save the Army of the Cumberland from destruction. George Thomas and his actions are proof that strong character cannot be disregarded in the study of military command.

George Thomas’s humility is the bane of any scholar wishing to study the elusive American general. Thomas notoriously refused to write a memoir and shunned the limelight, leaving his wife, Frances, to preserve much of his reputation.³ Countless authors have attempted to understand the enigmatic man by combing through his few correspondences. To supplement this lack of personal testimony, scholars often rely on testimonials from a number of people who surrounded Thomas during his life such as aides, friends, and subordinates.⁴ While Thomas was as flawed as any other human being—showing a propensity to marginalize some of his fellow commanders—Thomas’s general conduct on and off the battlefield was remarkable. Synthesizing accounts from witnesses, allies, and enemies, scholars can elucidate how George Thomas was a truly exceptional man and leader who succeeded at a critical moment in American history.

Moreso than a keen understanding of tactical or operational maneuvers, Thomas’s character and experience uniquely prepared him for his stand at Chickamauga. George Henry Thomas was born into an

² Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 440.

³ Brian Steel Wills, *George Henry Thomas: As True as Steel* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 451.

⁴ Along with Frances Thomas, George Thomas’ former aide, Alfred Hough did much of the heavy lifting early on to solidify Thomas’ place in American history. He compiled Thomas’s official writings and gave them to biographer Thomas Van Horne who published the first official biography of Thomas in 1882. Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 454-458.

aristocratic, slave-owning, Virginian family. He grew up strong, smart, and fiercely independent. Most importantly, as noted by a neighbor, Thomas showed an immense deference to duty above all else.⁵ From the classrooms of West Point to the battlefields of Mexico, Thomas would hone these skills, standing out from his peers as a fearless and implacable soldier.⁶ Never, however, was this obligation to country tested more than when Virginia seceded from the Union. While Thomas deliberated for some time, he saw no other choice but to support the oath he made to the Constitution, abandoning Virginia, his home, and possible prestige in the Confederate Army.⁷ Thomas was never able to repair his relationship with his family who saw him as a traitor. Fellow Virginian J.E.B. Stuart wrote of his desire to hang Thomas as a traitor to Virginia upon hearing of Thomas's decision to remain in the Union Army.⁸ Disowned by his family and shunned by former friends, Thomas demonstrated, as he would time and time again, that duty was paramount.

Thomas's decision to maintain his position at Chickamauga was no mistake; it was the product of a repeated behavior, a tendency to place honor above self-preservation. Thomas showed flashes of this conduct during the Battle of Stones River. Serving under William Rosecrans—the man from whom he would take command of the Army of the Cumberland after Chickamauga—Thomas conducted himself with the utmost professionalism. While infuriated that he had been passed up by his junior

⁵ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 11.

⁶ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 57. These years proved to be especially foundational to Thomas as he met some lifetime friends (and rivals) who would undeniably influence him. He roomed with William Tecumseh Sherman at West Point—whom he affectionately referred to as “Cump”—and developed a close relationship with Braxton Bragg—his future adversary at Chickamauga—during the Mexican American War.

⁷ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 101.

⁸ Francis MacDonnell, “The Confederate Spin on Winfield Scott and George Thomas,” *Civil War History* 44, no. 4 (December 1998): 255, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwh.1998.0063>, 1.

(and an inferior officer), Thomas dutifully served under Rosecrans, never letting his opinions cloud the chain of command, and showing once more a proclivity to place duty above all else.⁹ Faced by overwhelming Confederate forces, General William Rosecrans considered retreating, but Thomas, “calm, stern, determined,” merely quipped, “Gentlemen, I know of no place better to die than right here,” before nonchalantly returning to his lines.¹⁰ Ever the stoic, Thomas was immutable in the face of danger. He showed an even keener understanding of motivation in the face of death during a speech at a staff meeting. Thomas noted that success on the battlefield was often a question of nerves. He told his staff that “we are all cowards in the presence of immediate death,” but that courage amongst leadership and a disregard for one’s own wellbeing could motivate any soldier to fight.¹¹ Anecdotes such as these prove that Thomas held an uncanny understanding of Clausewitz’s definition of command and that he alone was suited to save the Army of the Cumberland just a few months later.

At Chickamauga, Thomas willingly endangered his own life and the lives of his soldiers to save the Army of the Cumberland, all the while maintaining his composure as those about him lost their heads. On September 18, 1863, the Confederate Army of Tennessee clashed with the Union Army of the Cumberland just a few miles south of the critical railway junction in Chattanooga at Chickamauga Creek.¹² Thomas, commanding XIV Corps, held the left flank of the Union forces opposite of Leonidas Polk, who—under the command of Braxton Bragg—violently probed

⁹ Edwin C. Bearss, “Cavalry Operations in the Battle of Stones River: Part I,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1960): 26.

¹⁰ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 168.

¹¹ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 4.

¹² Benjamin F. Sawyer, “Chickamauga,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Volume 5*, ed. Peter Cozzens (University of Illinois Press, 2002), 422–29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1hj9xdv.39>, 73.

Thomas's lines.¹³ Fearful that Bragg would turn Thomas on the Union's left flank, General William Rosecrans, commander of the Army of the Cumberland, ordered a division of Crittenden's XXI Corps to reinforce Thomas. Fatefully, Rosecrans pulled a division from the Union's center exposing a massive gap in their line which Confederate General James Longstreet quickly exploited.¹⁴ Longstreet's soldiers crashed through this hole creating confusion and chaos amongst the Federals while making considerable gains for the Confederates.¹⁵ What began as an attempt to protect Thomas and XIV Corps from a rout instead forced both XXI and XX Corps to flee their positions, stranding Thomas and his soldiers, and exposing the entire Army of the Cumberland. Seeing the rapid degradation in the Union's lines, Thomas sprung to action employing his forces for a stout defense along the high ground of Horseshoe Ridge and Snodgrass Hill. Thomas appeared unperturbed by the situation; each soldier who saw Thomas remarked on his "electrifying" presence and calm demeanor, sowing trust in his leadership.¹⁶ His presence, above his actual orders, helped restore faith throughout his corps with one lieutenant colonel noting, "it is strange what an effect the appearance Old Pap [Thomas]...had upon

¹³ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 200.

¹⁴ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 362-365. The issuing of this order is a story in and of itself. Either erroneously or acting on poor intelligence, Rosecrans ordered General Thomas Wood's division to vacate its position at Brotherton Field. Wood should have exercised better judgement (having been under Confederate attack all day) and remained in place, but, due to two prior instances in which Rosecrans publicly humiliated Wood for failing to follow orders, Wood stubbornly withdrew ostensibly dooming the Union center which Longstreet quickly overran. The events of this day would be debated for years to come, marring both Rosecrans' and Wood's careers.

¹⁵ James Longstreet and Christian Keller, "BATTLE OF CHICKAMAUGA.," in *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America*, ed. James I. Robertson, (Indiana University Press, 2020), 445–60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvwh8dqq.50>, 450.

¹⁶ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 422.

his men...It always restored confidence.”¹⁷ It is truly telling of Thomas’s exceptional leadership that his peers, McCook and Crittenden, and their soldiers fared so poorly and were so disorganized while Thomas was able to maintain order. The Army of the Cumberland would sorely need this leadership the next day as their situation worsened.

Seeing the severity of the situation, George Thomas disregarded his own fears and acted as a stalwart in the face of danger, invigorating both his own soldiers and his fellow commanders. Thomas was a human being; he feared death as much as his soldiers, but he knew showing such fear would only weaken their resolve.¹⁸ To demonstrate this fearlessness, he consistently exposed himself to enemy fire by choosing to reconnoiter positions on his own. On one occasion, he was nearly decapitated by two successive artillery shells. Instead of running in terror, he merely joked that he might not be so lucky if they fired a third shell and calmly returned to his headquarters.¹⁹ The more soldiers Bragg, Longstreet, and Polk threw at his line, the more resolute Thomas became. His strength of will had an undeniable effect, soothing all those who laid eyes upon him and setting a firm example. Impassioned by Thomas’s stolid appearance and bravery, Brigadier General James Steedman grabbed a standard from his retreating soldiers, charged forward under intense fire, and inspired them to take up their defensive positions once more.²⁰ Another one of these soldiers was Rosecrans’s aide de camp who, upon arriving disheveled and anxious with orders for Thomas to withdraw, was instantly calmed by Thomas’s “steady

¹⁷ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 423.

¹⁸ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 206. Despite fastidious attempts to hide his fear, Thomas had a few obvious tells that he was becoming nervous. One officer noted that Thomas would ruffle his mustache whiskers when agitated causing them to become unruly. When composed, he would smoothly stroke them.

¹⁹ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 203.

²⁰ Robert W. Ikard, “Lieutenant Thompson Reports on Chickamauga: A Comparison of Immediate and Historical Perspectives of the Battle,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1985): 434.

example.”²¹ Thomas seemed to be everywhere on the battlefield always appearing calm, always appearing unshaken, and always doing more to improve the army’s chance of survival. Motivated by Thomas’s stand, General Gordon Granger, commander of the reserve corps, activated his units without the direct orders of Rosecrans.²² Thomas utilized this additional strength to fortify his center, rebuffing the waves of Confederate attacks which continued to bloody themselves upon his straining lines. By 5:00 P.M. on September 20th after conversing with Rosecrans’s aide de camp and assessing his ammunition, supplies, and position, Thomas finally decided to end his “heroic stand” and begin his withdrawal.²³ While it lasted, however, everyone from rifleman to corps commander could agree that Thomas’s strength of will was undeniable and infectious.

Considering the terrible conditions and chaos at Chickamauga, that George Thomas could have orchestrated a successful withdrawal and preserved his forces should merit studying his command alone. After the vigorous fighting on September 20th in which Thomas barely held the Union position, he facilitated a timely and orderly withdrawal without Bragg even realizing Thomas had left completely and prevented the maneuver from becoming a rout.²⁴ The 16,179 Union casualties could very well have increased immeasurably.²⁵ Beyond any of Thomas’s tactical prowess or defensive genius, however, the remarkable power of his character stands out. From Rosecrans (who dubbed Thomas the “Rock of Chickamauga”) to Granger to ordinary soldiers on both sides, almost every participant at Chickamauga reveled in Thomas’s courage, bravery, and strength. His command at Chickamauga transcends his orders, movements, and decisions.

²¹ Wills, *George Henry Thomas*, 209. This aide happened to be future president James Garfield.

²² Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 440.

²³ Sawyer, “Chickamauga,” 428.

²⁴ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 513.

²⁵ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 534.

It enters the realm of leadership intangibles all commanders wish to possess, but few ever will. His courage mattered. His will mattered. His sense of duty mattered. Truly, the “well-oiled machine” of the Army of the Cumberland broke down and each man’s strength gave way during those three bloody September days. When the fate of the army fell on Thomas’s shoulders, he not only rose to the challenge, but he willfully embraced it. When studying commanders, scholars can become overburdened by the minutiae of decision-making. They can focus too much on the technical details and disregard the humanity of these leaders. Especially at a tactical level, they should not discount the effect a commander’s demeanor and presence has on his or her soldiers. Thomas is proof that the “commander’s courage and strength of will” alone may be the difference between stunning success or crushing defeat. Thomas is proof that character matters.

American Catholic Motivations and Contributions to World War One

By Devon Smith, United States Military Academy

“And now, before we rush into battle, I pray to God if I be mortally struck, mutilation will leave me a hand to bless myself, and lips untouched so as again to say a prayer before the end comes.”

-The Prayer of a Catholic Soldier¹

Though often brushed aside in most historical dialogues, religion plays a vital role in war, and American Catholicism is no exception. The United States entered the Great War on April 6, 1917, mobilizing nearly 5 million people before the war ended.² As one historian has noted, “After Congress declared war on Germany, the US archbishops informed President Woodrow Wilson: ‘We are all true Americans, ready as our age, our ability, and our conditions will permit, to do whatsoever is in us to do, for the preservation, the progress, and the triumph of our beloved country.’”³ The war would also be the first time that Catholics provided support on such a large, national scale. The archbishops’ promise would be fulfilled as the American Catholic contribution to the war effort helped to ensure victory and recovery. Though the Vatican was strongly opposed to war, the church’s members used their faith to justify entering and supporting it on and off the battlefield. Many Catholics were motivated to fight for equal

¹ “The Prayer of a Catholic Soldier,” *Catholic Columbian*, May 11, 1917, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=CC19170511-01.2.18&e=-1917---1925--en-20--1--txt-txIN-war----->.

² Leonard P. Ayres, *The War with Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), 13.

³ “Background: American Catholics and World War One, American Catholic Women’s Participation in 20th Century World Wars,” *American Catholic History Classroom*, <https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/exhibits/show/american-catholic-participatio/catholics-wwi>. (accessed February 23, 2023).

status in American society and used their faith as the moral justification to join the conflict. Through their faith, American Catholics were able to significantly contribute to making an end to the Great War a reality, creating cohesion with international and domestic allies through shared values, performing acts of valor and courage, and ministering to all who needed it.

Catholics in a Protestant-dominated America were excluded from social circles and political power and were often the subject of persecution. Even in institutions like West Point, issues of religious discrimination were prominent. Catholic cadets were forced to walk miles off post to get to church and that was only after 1877, when John Schofield relaxed chapel standards to accommodate denominational differences. The Catholics at West Point covered 40% of the cost to have a chapel built in Highland Falls just so they could practice their faith. Later, 500 people (1/3 of the population at West Point at the time) petitioned to Superintendent Oswald Ernst to have a Catholic chapel on post, which was approved, if it was not paid for by the institution or the government, nor would the chaplain have a salary (both of which, their Protestant counterparts had).⁴ West Point, a collection of the country's future military leaders, reflected the persecutions against Catholics that persisted throughout the nation. That persecution ramped up especially for the German-American population as World War One drew on and created a stronger desire for acceptance.

By 1916, Catholic persecution had taken multiple forms and had even intensified against the German-American Catholic demographic. Several times, the loyalties of German-Americans were questioned to the extent that Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels said, "I am getting a little tired and very much disgusted at this un-American and indecent effort to attribute disloyalty to men in the navy who bear German names."⁵ Not

⁴ Arthur T. Coumbe and William C. Taylor, *Should American Soldiers be Religious: Political History of Chaplains Job at West Point* (Edwin Mellen Press: 2019) 41-100.

⁵ "American Soldiers," *Catholic Columbian*, June 8, 1917, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=CC19170608-01.2.13&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-world+war+one----1917--->. Though Secretary Daniels was talking specifically about

only were these doubts so frequent that they had become irritating to the secretary of war of the United States, but also they revealed both the discrimination against the German population in America during the war, and an underlying religious tension between the Protestant American and the Catholic German. Though Germany is and was predominantly Protestant, “the majority of immigrants who passed through Ellis Island starting in 1892 were Catholic or Jewish,” rather unpopular faiths in Protestant America.⁶ As immigrants from a country America was at war with, and a faith that most were raised to hate, Catholic German-Americans were faced with suspicion and discrimination that they had to overcome.

On August 23, 1916, thousands of Catholics met for the German Roman Catholic Central Verein, a conference for many German-Catholics to come together and discuss their population’s ability to integrate and move forward in American society. In its closing session, Colonel Patrick Henry Callahan from Louisville, Kentucky said that the 5/6ths of the non-Catholic population in America “has been very tolerant of us and permitted us to build up our institutions.” He was immediately countered by Joseph T. Brennan from Boston who said: “With all due respect to this prominent gentleman, what he says is silly. That talk of tolerance is soft soap.” He went on to show the desire for something more than just tolerance, but legitimate acceptance: “And why tolerance? We are Americans with the right to be here and need no tolerance and accept none.”⁷ After nearly 150

the members of the U.S. Navy, the entire German-American population was under suspicion. More than 1,000,000 German American men were eligible for conscription and their labor would be extremely beneficial to the war effort. These immigrants had adopted their new country not only as their new home but also as a part of their identities, their loyalty was to America and its allies.

⁶ “Ethnic Minorities at War (USA),” *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, October 8, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/ethnic_minorities_at_war_usa (accessed April 8, 2014).

⁷ “Tolerance Tribute Arouses Catholic,” *The New York Times*, August 24, 1916. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1916/08/24/104688061.html?pageNumber=4>.

years of persecution within the United States, many Catholics who had immigrated to the United States had earned their citizenship and believed that they deserved to be recognized as truly American.

Despite the persecution they faced, German-American Catholics allowed their values to transcend their faith boundaries. Assimilation became a paramount priority, especially as America began to shut down schools, language practice, and even the musical expression of German culture.⁸ A wide display of patriotism rose among the American Catholic population as an effort to prove themselves loyal. Patriotic organizations were created, American flags were flown over German shops with names changed to sound more “American, purely democratic, and patriotic.”⁹ Just as Brennan said that they have “the right to be here,” they also believed that being American meant they were loyal to the nation. In December 1917, the *Catholic Columbian* explained what war meant to the American Catholic:

The United States is at war with Germany. That means that every person, whether native or foreign born, who claims the protection of the American flag, is at war with Germany. War is more than fighting. War is service. War is sacrifice. War is the elimination of self. War is country first and individual last. This war will directly or indirectly affect every person living in the United States. This war will not be won unless every person does his or her part, gives his or her service, makes his or her sacrifice, places self behind the need of the nation. The flag means freedom for us all, but the flag, in time of war, does not mean freedom of action for the individual. The flag means restraint, co-operation, obedience, recognition of authority, preservation of law and order. Most of all it means economy. It means loyalty in little daily things as well as loyalty to the great

⁸ Katja Wüstenbecker, “German-Americans during World War I,” *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-americans-during-world-war-i/> (accessed April 8, 2024).

⁹ Katja Wüstenbecker, “German-Americans during World War I.”

principles of our Government. It means the conduct of our lives so that the nation may be hourly strengthened. It means the giving of our best effort for the universal good. It means careful living. It means stopping of waste. It means the uttermost use of our resources, our abilities and our strength for the great cause. It means guarding our talk and avoiding useless discussion. It means that the United States is first, paramount, supreme, and that the want or pleasure or action of each individual must be subordinated to that fact.¹⁰

1 million out of 17 million Catholics in the U.S. served in the armed forces. Roughly 6% of the entire Catholic population did their part, serving as soldiers, medics, volunteers, war stamp sellers, and more.¹¹ They would participate in all of these roles, and would contribute significantly in the National Guard. The *Catholic Columbian* posted: “Of [the projected forces to be in France at the end of 1917], approximately 140,000 will be members of the National Guard. There will be nine regiments of engineers, a force of marines, 6,000 aviators, a destroyer flotilla, 10,000 doctors, and thousands of nurses, etc. General John J. Pershing will command.”¹² Pershing, a devout Christian himself, called for America “to rest the brunt of the terrible burdens to come...the more she [France] is weakened in her power to fight...it is the United States upon which the burden falls to meet all the deficiencies caused through this drain.”¹³

¹⁰ “What This War Means,” *Catholic Columbian*, December 28, 1917, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=CC19171228-01.2.41&srpos=6&e=-1917---1925--en-20--1--txt-txIN-war-----> (accessed April 12, 2024).

¹¹ “Background: American Catholics and World War One · American Catholic Women’s Participation in 20th Century World Wars · American Catholic History Classroom,” accessed February 23, 2023, <https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/exhibits/show/american-catholic-participatio/catholics-wwi>.

¹² “American Soldiers” *Catholic Columbian*, June 8, 1917.

¹³ “American Soldiers” *Catholic Columbian*, June 8, 1917.

Since Britain and France had been locked in devastating combat with Germany since 1914, the primary deficiency for America to remedy was manpower. American industrial mobilization was incomplete, and soldiers were forced to wear hodge-podge mixes of European and American uniform pieces and weapons. The most valuable resource that America provided was manpower. After some training with French and British forces, American units could fill gaps in the lines, and fight in major offensives including the Aisne-Marne, Oisne-Marne, and Meuse-Argonne campaigns, helping to break through the German defenses and end the war.¹⁴

The First World War, starting merely as a small regional conflict, quickly expanded to a global war. The integration of the values of cooperation, justice, shared responsibility, and self-determinism of America and its allies not only enabled it to eventually win the war operationally, but also complemented the principles of those who practiced the Catholic faith in war. It also created a belief that the war was inherently defensive, as France was invaded through the neutral country of Belgium in 1914 and under direct threat of subjugation of the resurgent Prussian authoritarian lifestyle. Paired with the submarine attack on the *Lusitania*, and thus the attack on American entrepreneurship, the German attacks provided enough justification for Catholics to join in the defense of national sovereignty, even changing their formerly pro-German or pro-neutrality views.

Catholic just war doctrine requires that moral legitimacy for war is dependent on the factors that the damages inflicted on a nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain, that all other means of ending the conflict are impractical or ineffective, that there is a serious chance of success, and that the use of arms will not produce evils worse than the those sought to be eliminated.¹⁵ The Entente was at a

¹⁴ For a general overview, see David R. Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 554-559.

breaking point, the damages done on all sides of the conflict would last for decades. Even now, over 100 years later, France is still littered with millions of rounds of unexploded ordinance, barbed wire, bunkers, and the scars of trench warfare.¹⁶ The war was a grim deadlock that left both sides a reasonable chance of success, and so long as soldiers were disciplined and morally guided by their chaplains, no evil worse than the war itself would arise from entering the conflict. Despite constant pleas by the Church to end the war, many were using its principles as justification for continuing to fight it.¹⁷

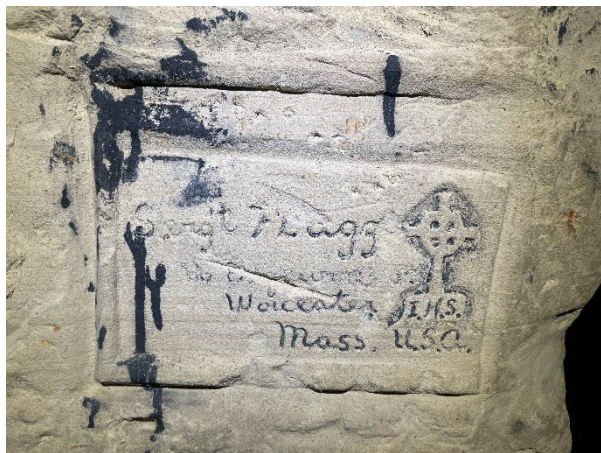
Furthermore, “Catholic” means universal, and the Catholic faith is meant to be just that. With France being a Catholic country, the shared understanding of the mass would have helped foster cohesion between the French and Catholic-American soldiers. A shared faith would make a more cohesive team. Though they were learning quickly from their French and British partners, they had one lesson that could only truly be taught through experience. War was ugly. The offensives that the Americans took part in were some of the bloodiest that Americans had ever faced. The conditions of trench warfare were horrendous, and the losses of life were staggering. The shocking number of American casualties quickly forced the members of the AEF to come to terms with the harsh reality of death and many would turn to their faith for the support to press on.

Christian, and specifically Catholic beliefs provided comfort in how soldiers confronted death. Alan Seeger, a Calvinist, expressed that death was “neither tragic nor to be feared,” and that it “could be both an object of

¹⁶ On a spring break trip (March 4-10, 2023) to France with the United States Military Academy History Department, a group of cadets including myself were able to walk the ground of the Meuse-Argonne Campaign. found several issued wine ration bottles, the remnants of a fortified bunker position, an unexploded 105mm Howitzer shell, copious amounts of barbed wire, and more, within only a few hours of being there.

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XV, “Meeting with the Children of Rome, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XV, July 30, 1916,” https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/it/homilies/documents/hf_ben-xv_hom_19160730_bambini-roma.html (accessed April 9, 2024).

love and a way to new life” in his poetry.¹⁸ “Those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ,” and see God “face to face.”¹⁹ Many Americans, fighting for the values and principles of their faith simultaneously displayed in the ideologies of the countries they fought for would not only live and fight for their faith, but in death were honored for it as well. Unit markers, names of beloved friends, and the constant symbols of faith filled the walls of former quarries, converted into underground caverns for American soldiers to stay when off the front lines. These symbols were used to support and reassure soldiers as a means of passing the time while shells boomed overhead as well as to honor those lost as grave markers that some soldiers would never receive.



¹⁸ Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 81.

¹⁹ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference), 267.

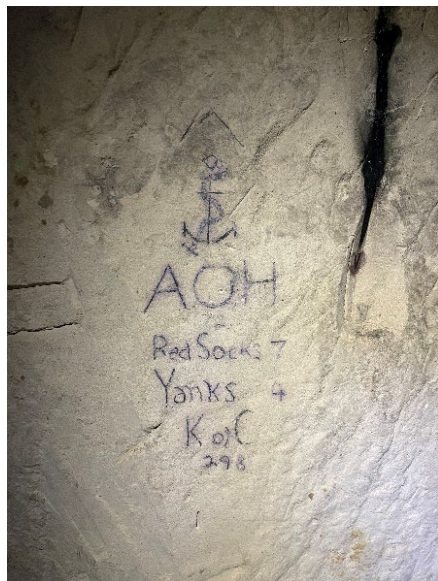
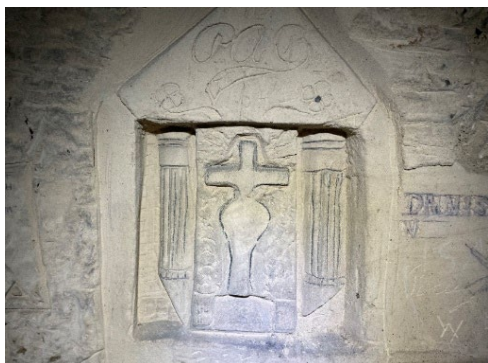


Figure 1: Collective images taken by the author on a Spring Break AIAD to World War I battlefields (March 4-10, 2023). There are dozens more photos of this very same nature, but these highlight the Catholic determination and influence most strongly, as well as the integrated nature of Catholicism with the ordinary American cultural experience, like that of keeping track of baseball games back home.

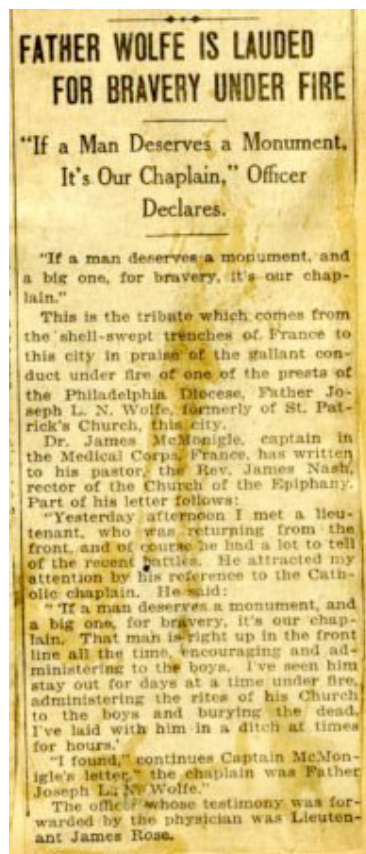
Inside these caverns, many Catholics would find ways to pass the time through carving art that best represented themselves and what was important to them. Carvings of altars for mass, saints, Knights of Columbus icons, and even the scores of baseball games back home have been preserved for over 100 years. What was an artistic pastime was now a window into the faith and spirituality of the American soldiers who served in the war. The amount of time and dedication spent on the artwork carved into these walls varied, but its presence and sheer quantity alone signified the value of the Catholic faith to a significant number of American soldiers. Though the evidence presented here comes from a National Guard division from New England, there was a wider Catholic influence on the American war effort from across the country, in the forms of funding, services, and the chaplaincy.

Paramount to the mission of spiritual support was the army chaplain. There were only a handful of Catholic chaplains in 1917 when America first joined the Great War, as they were not even allowed in the army until the Mexican-American War in 1846. By the end of the war however, that number had grown to over 1,000.²⁰ The efforts of these chaplains provided soldiers with the necessary spiritual guidance and direction through every stage of their time as soldiers, from basic training to the caverns and to the graves themselves. One chaplain, Father Joseph L. N. Wolfe followed his men and was often found saying mass in particularly dangerous places. Wolfe's exploits as a chaplain would gain him the respect and admiration of the 28th Infantry Division. Captain James McMonigle, a soldier in the 28th said, "I've seen him stay out for days at a time under fire, administering the rites of his Church to the boys and burying the dead. I've laid with him in a ditch at times for hours. If a man deserves a monument, and a big one, for

²⁰ Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. "World War One Army Chaplains," November 5, 2018. <https://chrc-philadelphia.org/world-war-one-army-chaplains/>.

bravery, it is our chaplain.”²¹ His actions “right up in the front line . . . encouraging and administering to the boys” would merit him a citation star from General Pershing himself.²² Catholic chaplains like Father Wolfe administered last rites, confessions, and services for Catholics all throughout the war, evidenced by the personal testimony of soldiers that bore witness to it, and images taken of them doing so. Not only did these Catholic chaplains perform their duties with excellence and extreme displays of courage and valor, but they ministered freely to all the soldiers, as evidenced by Captain McMonigle’s use of “his Church,” demonstrating a growing admiration and respect for the Catholic American through the shared hardship of war and the excellence displayed in those fighting and supporting it.

Figure 2: A newspaper headline featuring a Catholic chaplain, Father Joseph Wolfe. “World War One Army Chaplains,” *Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia*, November 5, 2018. <https://chrc-philadelphia.org/world-war-one-army-chaplains/> (accessed April 12, 2024).



²¹ “A Phila. Chaplain’s Heroic WWI Acts,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 1, 2017, https://www.inquirer.com/philly/opinion/20170101_A_Philadelphia_chaplain_s_heroic_WWIActs.html.

²² “A Phila. Chaplain’s Heroic WWI Acts.”



Figure 3: Chaplain Joseph Wolfe saying mass near a World War I battlefield. “World War One Army Chaplains,” *Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia*, November 5, 2018. <https://chrc-phila.org/world-war-one-army-chaplains/> (accessed April 12, 2024).

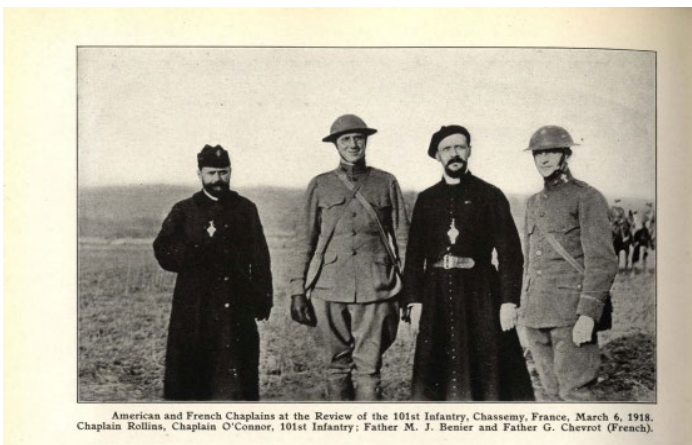


Figure 4: American and French Chaplains at the review of the 101st Infantry, Chassemy, France, March 6, 1918. Albert E. George, Edwin H. Cooper, *Pictorial History of the Twenty-Sixth Division, United States Army, with Official Government Pictures Made by United States Signal Corps Unit Under Command of Captain Edwin H. Cooper* (The Ball Publishing Company: 1920). <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/428856>.



Figure 5: Chaplain Rollins administering baptism to Americans near the front. Albert E. George and Edwin H. Cooper, *Pictorial History of the Twenty-Sixth Division, United States Army*.



Figure 6: Chaplain O'Connor of 101st Infantry saying Mass at Neufchateau, France, before the men started for the Trenches. Albert E. George and Edwin H. Cooper, *Pictorial History of the Twenty-Sixth Division, United States Army*.

Finally, the Knights of Columbus (KoC), an organization founded first as a Catholic insurance organization to assist families who lost their income to tragic work accidents or war, became a national support organization, bringing events, supplies, and anything required of either the soldiers or the citizens of France. Raising money, organizing the sale of war bonds, and even paying for the reconstruction of prominent areas after the end of the war were all vital efforts done by the Knights between 1917-1919. They offered rest and recreational activities to service members with the motto, “Everybody Welcome, Everything Free.”²³ Everybody actually meant *everybody* in this case, including African American soldiers also stationed in France and men of other faiths. Supreme Knight Flaherty even wrote to President Wilson that “regardless of creed,” centers for recreational and spiritual comfort would be provided.²⁴ Nearly 400,000 men would join the Knights between 1917-1923 and in 1917 the KoC independent fund raised nearly \$30 million to finance its efforts to support soldiers abroad.²⁵ American soldiers would be able to recover, relax, and practice their faith with their brothers in faith and arms there, further bringing American forces together, and breaking down the religious differences between them.

²³ “1910-1918 Everybody Welcome,” *Knights of Columbus*, <https://www.kofc.org/en/who-we-are/our-history/everybody-welcome.html> (accessed April 9, 2023).

²⁴ Albert E. George, Edwin H. Cooper, *Pictorial History of the Twenty-Sixth Division, United States Army, with Official Government Pictures Made by United States Signal Corps Unit Under Command of Captain Edwin H. Cooper* (The Ball Publishing Company: 1920). <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/428856>.

²⁵ That would be the equivalent of \$649,920,438 in 2023. The contributions were not limited to the war, but also in the financial support of those at home. Catholic Women were also being recruited to work hard in their stead and to buy and sell war bonds. See “Background: American Catholics and World War One, American Catholic Women’s Participation in 20th Century World Wars, American Catholic History Classroom,” Accessed February 23, 2023. <https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/exhibits/show/american-catholic-participatio/catholics-wwi> for more details.

Acting to justify both going to war and comforting those enduring war, the Catholic faith provided inspiration and hope to many Catholic soldiers. The evidence of unit history books including images of Catholic mass and Knights of Columbus groups sheds light on the value and contribution of American-Catholic soldiers to the war. Furthermore, the unifying nature of the faith allowed for the expedient integration of the AEF and brought about an end to the war faster than most had planned for. It also helped to erode biases against Catholics, unifying Americans under the country's values rather than dividing them over faith. With so many Catholics serving in the conflict, their contributions ought not to be understated. Religion is deeply rooted in the motivation and conduct of people, and to study major conflicts without considering its influence does that history a disservice, as it removes a vital perspective on who is fighting and why they decided to do so. Simply in fighting to be recognized as truly American, many Catholics embraced their nation and its values, and through their many contributions, they were able to greatly influence the conduct and outcome of the war.

Merian and the Pineapple: The Diminishing Role of Visual Representation in the Early Modern Americas

By Angela Wang, Columbia University

Since the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment in the mid-eighteenth century, the West has put sight upon a pedestal. Technological advancements, including television, radio, print, and urbanization not only precipitated visual consumerism, but also equated visuality with modernity and progress. Hearing, olfaction, and gustation posed a threat to the clear-sightedness of reason, because they represented gullibility, animal tendencies, and feminine vulnerabilities. While many historians have commented on the early modern sensory hierarchy, they focused on its development in Europe, but not in farther reaches of European empires. The historiography of the senses has largely overlooked colonial sensorium as the cornerstone of European imperialism. Various travelogues since the early eighteenth century have demonstrated how European travelers, in making sense of the New World and its unfamiliar physical stimuli, created new categories out of the old framework. These travelers blended indigenous sensory experiences with their cultural perceptions in the hope of reasserting Europe's visual hegemony across spatial and cognitive boundaries. However, they often revealed their limitations in both communicating foreign knowledge and understanding their social dynamics.

This essay explores the transformation of the European sensory experience in South America through the lens of a female naturalist, Maria Sibylla Merian. Born in Germany, Merian traveled to the Dutch colony of Surinam in 1699 to study tropical insects. She later recorded their characteristics and evolutions in *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* in 1705. I will trace how colonial encounters reinforced, transformed, and undermined visuality by analyzing her private correspondence and four plates from *Metamorphosis* depicting an unripe pineapple (Exhibit A), a ripe pineapple (Exhibit C), a cassava (Exhibit D) and a watermelon (Exhibit

E). On the one hand, Merian exploited Europe's visual supremacy. Her successful career as a scholar-entrepreneur challenged the objective sight and its underlying assumption of women's natural proclivity for emotion, not intelligence. On the other hand, her writing demonstrated that accurate "experiences" required lowly senses, thus, questioning the ocular-centric Western culture and suggesting a flat, intersectional sensory model when perceiving the world.

Merian's apparent adherence to Europe's visual hegemony subverted it. She provided partially fictitious information about Surinam in *Metamorphosis* while emphasizing its credibility and rarity. She catered to the West's appreciation for the exotic nature and its sense of cultural superiority to enhance the book's market value, recruit potential buyers, and minimize her financial losses. As visuality became unreliable in transmitting colonial knowledge across the Atlantic, Merian displayed superb intellectual and entrepreneurial skills against the contemporary assumption of women's heightened sensibilities.

In eighteenth-century Europe, an increasing association between visuality and enlightenment thinking precipitated the need to devalue other senses. While sight started to overpower hearing, olfaction, and gustation, the bourgeois class also constructed a cultural hierarchy based on European sensorium to interpret other non-western cosmologies, and in the meantime, to solidify their own sense of epistemic superiority. For example, they considered the tribal people of Africa primitive because they lived in the magical world of the ear.¹ That is to say, since most Westerners could not experience the New World in person, yet nevertheless expected its barbarity, sight enabled the maximum enjoyment of a Eurocentric transcription, thus, laying the groundwork for commercializing colonial information through the print industry.

Merian acutely understood her contemporaries' recreational interest in exoticism, so she marketed two features of its visual representation—credibility and rarity. Credibility, in this case, appearing to denote accuracy,

¹ Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Hearing Loss," in *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 20.

signified a close adherence to Western culture. In other words, a close adherence to what the West believed to be a credible description of South America. In the preface of *Metamorphosis*, Merian hoped the masterly engraved plates “would please both the connoisseurs of art and the amateur naturalists.”² The inclusion of the connoisseurs of art and the prefix “amateur” indicated that Merian did not perceive her work as a profuse scholarly treatise but intended it to serve the general reading public. To establish the trustworthiness of the information in *Metamorphosis*, she introduced her drawings as “painted on vellum directly from life,” “I myself sketched and observed from life,” and guaranteed her readers that the original specimens “may be seen at my house.”³

Despite her claim of credibility, Merian modified her work to satisfy her audience’s expectation of an alluring yet decadent New World. On the one hand, she openly admitted some of the artistic adjustments. For instance, she included a “naturally twisted and curiously speckled” snake to “complete the decoration of” the cassava.⁴ Coiling around the stem, the snake lifted its head and protruded its forked tongue as if it was ready to attack the beetle in the lower left corner. What’s more, the snake’s bloated stomach suggested that it still hadn’t finished digesting its last prey. Merian also added a beetle to the image of a ripe pineapple “merely to decorate the plate” even though it was “not specifically American species.”⁵ Lastly, she chose to show the “very beautiful” butterfly twice on the same plate, both “resting and in flight.”⁶ The snake, the non-native beetle and the replicated

² Maria Sibylla Merian, “From *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium (Or, Transformations of Surinamese Insects)*, Trans. Sarah O'Brien-Twohig, *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 84, vol. 45, no. 1, (2012): 22, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08905762.2012.670451>.

³ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 22-23.

⁴ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 26.

⁵ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 24.

⁶ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 24.

butterfly in bright colors and curious shapes affirmed the Western imagination of the Americas as full of perils and wonders. More importantly, the bold confession of these deliberate creativities illuminated Merian's business insight. She was well aware that such "extravagant" changes would not compromise the "credibility" of her work but enhance it by accurately upholding her readers' understanding of the New World. On the other hand, Merian concealed other modifications. The first plate of *Metamorphosis* displayed an unripe pineapple. The fruit only occupied the upper part of the image. In fact, viewers were immediately drawn to the sharp leaves in exuberant colors, their sinuous movements, as well as the cockroach resting on top of the leaves. However, the leaves underneath the pineapple before maturity are not bright red with yellow dots. As illustrated by Exhibit B, they are dull maroon with ashy brown tips and without any dots. Furthermore, the insects were life-size, yet the fruit was not, rendering the former disproportional to the latter. Such a misaligned scale could easily mislead readers who had never seen a pineapple into perceiving it to be much smaller than reality. In the meantime, cockroaches prefer decaying or fermenting fruits and rarely turn to fresh fruits. Hence, it is hardly convincing that they would perch on an unripe pineapple in the lush forest of Surinam where there must have been sufficient rotten fruits for consumption. That is to say, the first plate incorporated fictitious features of a pineapple, so it was not as credible as Merian advertised. Again, the pineapple was ideologically credible. Rich colors, serrated leaves and a corrupt insect stood in stark contrast with the prickly young fruit. In combination, they formed an enticing, yet unsettling invitation of entry into Surinam's natural world. The juxtaposition of blooming livelihood and its surrounding threats allowed the more vulgar public to overcome the obstacle of distance, so they may directly "interact" with America's thrilling luxuries and dangers.

Exhibit A



Figure 1: Unripe Pineapple, Megan Baumhammer et al., “Merian and the Pineapple: Visual Representation of the Senses,” in *Empire of the Senses: Sensory Practices of Colonialism in Early America*, ed. Daniela Hacke et al. (Leiden, South Holland: Brill, 2018), 192.

Exhibit B



Figure 2: “Pineapple,” *Wikipedia*, March 10, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pineapple#/media/File:Ananas_01.JPG.

To conclude, Merian's artistic creativity satisfied the Western fantasy about the New World as primitive, perilous, and full of readily exploitable marvels. While her contemporaries transported the indigenous to London for tours and exhibitions, she relied on visuality to construct a replicable, portable museum, so people could observe the beautiful exoticism and then condescendingly comment on its inferior barbarity. By appealing to correct cultural preconceptions, she attracted subscribers and patrons who valued the sensorial access her work gave them to the "expected" unknowns. As a result, even though Merian's drawings appeared to endorse the ocular-centric Western hegemony, that she was able to manipulate visual representations to advance her own interests cast doubt on its objective rationalism and illuminated incredible business genius "unfit" for a woman. In a word, Merian used biases to combat biases.

In addition to propagating credibility, Merian tried to acquire recognition of rarity from other authoritative figures in science to increase the value of her work and secure more readership. Among them were German physician and botanist J. G. Volkamer II and British pharmacist and naturalist James Petiver, both of whom initially approached her to purchase natural specimens. Upon receiving their requests, Merian seized the opportunity to introduce her study, insisting that it was not just rare, but would remain so. Merian asserted that *Metamorphosis* contained "many wondrous, true things, who have never come to the light."⁷ She subsequently complained about the horrendous environment she had worked in, "it is also very hot...so that nothing can be done except with great difficulty...all people surprised I'm still alive from it, since most people would have died of heat."⁸ Hence, besides its academic, aesthetic and homogenic contributions, Merian's heavy investment in the trip, the dangers she survived, and her identity as a female naturalist all bestowed to

⁷Maria Sibylla Merian, "Letters by Maria Sibylla Merian," trans. Google Translate, The Maria Sibylla Merian Society, (2014).
<https://www.themariasibyllameriansociety.humanities.uva.nl/sources/letters/>.

⁸ Merian, "Letters."

her research a sense of rarity. What's more, she compared *Metamorphosis* with another natural history book by Jan and Casper Commelin, "it is even larger than the Work in the *Hori Medici Amstelodamensis Rariorum*."⁹ Elevating her incomplete work to a higher standing than that of a renowned, male-authored publication not only bolstered its value to gain recognition but also unveiled Merian's unfeminine confidence in her intellectual and artistic skills. After establishing the worth of *Metamorphosis*, she comfortably demanded assistance from Volkamer and Petiver, "ask other sensible lovers to think about it" and "advise me What the Lovers of it share shall my friendship be."¹⁰

While both were impressed by her work and responded with more questions and advice, Merian did not solely count on others' kind words to promote her publication. She advertised *Metamorphosis* in *The Amsterdamse Courant* in 1703 and 1704. One of the posts read, "Maria Sibylla Merian presents to all curious enthusiasts her unusual Surinam Insect Work, ..., by her self-observed in America, ..., how these in night and day...change, each on its own food, such as Herbs, Flowers, Fruits."¹¹ Phrases like "curious enthusiasts," "unusual," "by her self-observed" "night and day" and "each on its own food," appealed to her potential readers by articulating the challenges inherent in the research process and underscoring the authenticity and rarity of her results. To sum up, Merian was a cunning culture manipulator who successfully exploited Europe's visual supremacy. Her academic and business achievements thus challenged both the notion of the objective eyes and its gendered assumption of women's ignorant sensibilities.

⁹ Merian, "Letters."

¹⁰ Merian, "Letters."

¹¹ Maria Sibylla Merian, "Archivalia and Advertisements," *The Maria Sibylla Merian Society*, (2014).

<https://www.themariasibyllameriansociety.humanities.uva.nl/sources/advertisements/>.

In the meantime, as an extremely visual book, *Metamorphosis* did not just question sight's ability to convey foreign knowledge. The complementary written descriptions of each picture prioritized lowly senses, such as taste and smell. Hence, a comprehensive communication of natural experiences across spatial and cognitive boundaries required more than the eyes, but an interplay of all senses. The following section will scrutinize three different plates in *Metamorphosis* to explicate how Europe's ocular-centric culture failed to conquer the Americas.

The first plate was a ripe pineapple. In the painting, the pineapple exuded a golden, luxurious glory. A crown of spiky leaves added to its regal appearance. In combination with the preceding plate of an unripe pineapple, readers were able to directly visualize an exotic fruit and through visualization, imagined the riches and seductions of the New World. Yet sight alone fell short in reconstructing a pineapple. In fact, Merian's subsequent explanation started not with how the fruit looked nor with the insects on top of it, but with its gustatory characteristics. She cautioned her readers that "if [the pineapple] is not peeled, enough sharp hairs remain on the flesh which prick one's tongue while eating and cause great pain."¹² After verbally "revealing" the inner flesh, she introduced its taste as resembling "mixed grapes, apricots, red currants, apples and pears."¹³

¹² Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 23.

¹³ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 23.

Exhibit C



Figure 3: Ripe Pineapple, Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 24.

Merian then brought attention to its attractive, strong smell—“when the fruit is cut open the whole room smells of it,”—and ended the first paragraph with its culinary potentials, “[pineapples] are eaten both raw and cooked, and one can also make wine or distill brandy from them; both taste delicious and have an unsurpassable flavor.”¹⁴ Her prioritization of the pineapple’s gustatory delight over its visual appeal diminished the importance of the picture. In other words, the exuberant drawing no longer served as an end, but became a means of inviting the appetite, so readers would then proceed into the imaginative process of smelling, touching, and peeling the ornamental rind. What’s more, eating the pineapple came to symbolize the enjoyment of fresh delicacy after avoiding the exterior spikes and constituted a better illustration of the allures and dangers in Surinam. Megan Baumhammer and Claire Kennedy in their essay, “Merian and the Pineapple: Visual Representation of the Senses,” has made a similar remark, “the taste, or the idea of the taste of a pineapple, is what is important.”¹⁵ They further argue that even the image itself transmitted smell—the twice portrayal of a beautiful butterfly in luminous green flecks suggested the pineapple’s heavenly scent.¹⁶ After all, butterflies often linger around fragrant plants.

The second plate portrayed a tropical root vegetable, the cassava. The top right section featured a large caterpillar with a blood-red head and striped body feeding on the leaves. The bottom left presented the fruit—a long, tuberous root that was brown on the outside and white on the inside. Finally, the larvae of the caterpillar were nesting in the half-eaten fruit on the bottom right corner. Without proceeding into its complementary text, the drawing itself had already transcended the visual sense, for the inside of the cassava fruit implied edibility. After identifying the plant, “this root is known as the *Cassava*,” Merian immediately turned to its culinary value, “from it is baked the bread usually eaten by Indians and Europeans in

¹⁴ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 23.

¹⁵ Baumhammer et al., “Merian and the Pineapple,” 199.

¹⁶ Baumhammer et al., “Merian and the Pineapple,” 200.

America.”¹⁷ The following passage appeared more like a recipe in a cookbook than an encyclopedia entry, “the root is grated, then one presses out the juice, which is very poisonous; then the pressed-out root is laid on an iron plate... it is then baked like a rusk and has the same taste as a Dutch rusk.”¹⁸ To introduce the cassava to her audience, Merian first established its popularity as a food among indigenous and European travelers, then detailed the process of cooking it before comparing its taste with that of a well-known dish from the Netherlands. In doing so, she chose to highlight cassava’s practical importance in human agricultural society as a food crop, rather than its scientific or artistic properties.

Likewise, Merian observed that caterpillars would cause “a great deal of damage to this plant.”¹⁹ “Damage,” in this case, did not denote the aesthetic deformation of the leaves. Instead, it referred to the destruction of the cassava fields “planted for human consumption.”²⁰ Again, although Merian proclaimed to document the unembellished nature of Surinam, she illuminated the “human” side of the cassava—it was planted by human for human uses. Furthermore, while pineapples served as occasional refreshments whose consumption simply required peeling off the rind, cassava was an originally toxic staple food. That means the indigenous tribes must possess advanced agricultural skills to figure out how to process the raw root and promote its mass production, which contradicted their Western depictions as ignorant and uncivilized. Therefore, visuality alone could neither account for exotic sensorium nor substantiate Europe’s cultural superiority.

¹⁷ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 25.

¹⁸ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 25.

¹⁹ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 25.

²⁰ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 26.

Exhibit D



Figure 4: Cassava, Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 25.

The third plate showed the life cycle of a watermelon—it started as small yellow flowers in the upper right corner and then grew into a fruit in the lower middle. The melon’s cross-sectional portrayal indeed provided some information about its biological features and level of maturity. To be more precise, the gradient color of the rind, from green on the exterior to softer white on the interior, suggested that the “hard skin” became “less hard towards the inside of the fruit.”²¹ In the meantime, the dark, scattered seeds implied its full ripeness, for “the seeds [were] red and turn[ed] black when the fruit [was] over-ripe.”²² These visual elements, however, were insufficient, as Merian once again began her written description with the watermelon’s gustatory characteristics, “the flesh is shiny and melts in the mouth like sugar.”²³ She not only fostered imaginations of juicy flesh bursting on the tip of one’s tongue but also established the melon’s high commercial value by comparing its taste with that of sugar, another precious commodity in eighteenth-century Europe. That watermelon’s economic potential in transatlantic commerce was in its taste, not in its appearance further suggested the diminishing role of visuality in colonial exploitation.

²¹ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 27.

²² Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 27.

²³ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 27.

Exhibit E



Figure 5: Watermelon, Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 26.

Meanwhile, not only did Merian not mention the yellow blossoms until the end of the text, but she also even characterized them as “small and insignificant.”²⁴ That is to say, even though her European audience tended to find flowers more aesthetically appealing, Merian, having personally “interacted” with the watermelon, prioritized the dull-looking fruit. This choice, like her presentation of the cassava, reflected practical considerations—while the beautiful flowers signified the melon's early growth stage, the fruit, particularly the flavor of the fruit provided greater insights into its edibility, the most important characteristic of any food. To note, I am not suggesting that taste simply superseded sight in explaining exotic articles. Despite its rising predominance in the New World, it still had to work with sight to produce a more comprehensive narrative.

Moreover, Merian did not just present watermelon as a dispensable delicacy for an occasional indulgence. Instead, she accentuated its high nutritious value against the medical theory of humourism which had long prevailed in Europe until the advent of germ theory in the 1850s. According to Merian, the watermelon with “a pleasant taste” was “healthy” and “very refreshing for the sick.”²⁵ Humourism, on the other hand, believed that human bodies consisted of four humors—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile—whose imbalance led to sickness. Under this theory, different foods and drinks had distinctive properties that would affect the balance of humors. For instance, hot or dry foods increased the level of yellow bile, while cold or wet ones precipitated phlegm production. In this case, watermelon was regarded as a cold food capable of disrupting one's bodily equilibrium. In short, Merian asserted that a fruit thought to cause illness actually cured it. This observation, despite containing some exaggerations, more closely aligned with the present-day perception of watermelons as a summertime refreshment, revealing the limit of sight in describing natural curiosities. After all, she likely relished a juicy melon after one of the arduous excursions in the horrendous heat. In addition, Merian's rejection of a well-established medical convention demonstrated her intellectual

²⁴ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 27.

²⁵ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 27.

ethics. Although she had to make some compromises to “please” her readers as illustrated in the previous section, Merian was able to preserve the essential integrity of her work— she truthfully reported the watermelon even if doing so might alienate some readers. In essence, Merian was not meek nor sensitive, for she fearlessly defended her academic stance when necessary.

Metamorphosis, a highly visual work whose publicity relied on Europe’s visual supremacy, unveiled visuality’s inadequacy in communicating colonial knowledge across the Atlantic. Understanding the pineapple, the cassava and the watermelon demanded an intersection of all senses, especially the inferior and animalistic ones. Therefore, imperialism did not reinforce ocular dominance, but alluded to inevitable sensual interplays when exploring the world. What’s more, Merian discerned visual deficiencies and incorporated other senses into her book illuminating her scholarly genius against the contemporary denial of female intellectuality because they could not “see” the truth.

Yet the non-ocular centric *Metamorphosis* still failed to overcome the constraints of visuality, because accessing it required sight. In other words, even though Merian endeavored to recreate Surinam’s nature through lowly senses, reading only allowed its superficial understanding. After all, most passages employed vague analogies. Taking the pineapple as an example, European readers had to imagine its “unsurpassable flavor” by making habitual associations with that of “mixed grapes, apricots, red currants, apples and pears.”²⁶ Even if they had tasted all these fruits, it was unlikely they did so in a mixed manner. Moreover, Merian did not mention the ways in which the indigenous people of Surinam consumed a pineapple. Instead, she detailed its culinary contribution to two traditional Western cuisines, wine and brandy. Since early modern Europeans made wine mainly from grapes, knowing pineapple could produce “delicious” wine and brandy only created misleading gustatory expectations.²⁷ Put simply,

²⁶ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 23.

²⁷ Merian, *Metamorphosis*, 23.

through reading, subscribers of *Metamorphosis* gained “knowledge of the pineapple,” not “knowledge about the pineapple.”²⁸

To conclude, while Merian prioritized smell and taste in her writing, mere words failed to accurately communicate a completely alien land with completely alien physical stimuli to those back in Europe. However, since many of her readers did not have the opportunity to immerse into the natural world of Surinam at the time she published *Metamorphosis*, words illuminating an interplay of senses remained the most effective way of exploring the unknowns. As the amateur masses curiously imagined the pineapple wine, the cultural elites with a “discerning” taste condescendingly commented on the vulgar natives who made wine out of pineapples.

Maria Sibylla Merian wrote *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* in the hope of recreating the natural history of Surinam to interested people. This was an extremely difficult task because of the gap between experiencing the overwhelmingly sensuous exoticism and describing this experience to those with an already well-developed expectation of what it should look like. Under Merian’s careful visual manipulation, her readers were able to relish the rich natural depictions and through envisioning the European empire, celebrated its hegemonic expansion into the new territories. However, as an entrepreneur-naturalist whose achievement relied on the Western sensorium, Merian not only challenged sight’s presumed objectivity but also undermined its underlying cultural and gender superiorities. In the meantime, by fostering imagined taste, touch, and smell of the indigenous plants, *Metamorphosis* questioned the ocular-centric hierarchy and suggested a flat, intersectional sensory model in perceiving the New World.

²⁸ Baumhammer et al., “Merian and the Pineapple,” 199-200.

**Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement:
An Institutional and Individual Approach
By Chloe Morton, Northwestern University**

Hitler's Operation Barbarossa in June of 1941 brought the war with Germany to the Soviet home front.¹ The rapid advance of the German army and the ill-preparedness of the Soviet government caused factions of Soviets to form small militias and take up arms against the invading forces in what would become known as the Soviet partisan movement.² In the beginning, the partisans consisted primarily of Soviet party members, stray Red Army soldiers, and members of the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs—a secret police agency). But as the war progressed, the partisan movement expanded to encompass former Soviet POWs and refugees.³ It gained government recognition in Stalin's first official address to the USSR after the invasion began in which he urged civilians to take up arms against the Nazis and form partisan groups.⁴ The original goal of the partisan movement was to maintain an ideological grip on the isolated, rural areas of the Soviet Union that government officials were concerned would adopt fascist ideals.⁵ However, as the war progressed, the Soviet government created offices to directly supervise and organize the partisans

¹ Edgar M. Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement 1941-1944* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1956), 9, 26.

² Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement*, 15, 42.

³ Alexander Statiev, "Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians: Targeting Their Own," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol 66, no 9, (2014), 1537, <https://web-s-ebsohost-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=875751a5-8947-4c31-9b52-0c080d0c5012%40redis>. See also Howell, *The Soviet Partisans Movement*, 42.

⁴ Howell, *The Soviet Partisans Movement*, 45-46.

⁵ Howell, *The Soviet Partisans Movement* 46.

into a cohesive military faction.⁶ The partisans then engaged in activities like intelligence gathering and attacking key German transportation and communication lines, while still maintaining their ideological function.⁷

It is undeniable that the Soviet partisan movement emerged as a direct result of Nazi activity.⁸ However, it is unclear if and to what extent the partisans opposed Nazi ideals, in particular antisemitism. In investigating the presence of antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement, it is important to consider two distinct levels: institutional and individual antisemitism. This paper begins by exploring institutional antisemitism within partisan policy to show that while antisemitism was present, it was not the driving force behind most partisan policies. Then, this paper will examine antisemitism within individual partisan groups with the intent of showing that no sweeping generalizations can be made about the presence, or lack thereof, of antisemitism on the individual level; each individual's story is unique with its own experiences that cannot be summed up in a definitive statement. This paper comments on the ambiguity in interpretation and the importance of acknowledging individual experiences.

Antisemitism at the Institutional Level

There is minimal contention over the fact that the Soviet government did little to acknowledge Jews as the primary victims of Nazi atrocities and did nothing to offer them aid.⁹ Official statements regarding Nazi crimes focused on Slavic citizens as the primary targets.¹⁰ However, there is debate on whether this neutrality proves the presence of

⁶ Howell, *The Soviet Partisans Movement*, 47, 65, 137.

⁷ Howell, *The Soviet Partisans Movement*, 79-80, 141-142.

⁸ Howell, *The Soviet Partisans Movement*, 42.

⁹ Leonid Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944: The Case of Belorussia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 20, Issue 2, (2006), 208-210, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcl002>.

¹⁰ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 208-210.

antisemitism in the Soviet government or if this neutrality was a byproduct of a greater policy. By examining—primarily through the use of works by Leonid Smilovitsky and Alexander Statiev—the official stances of the government, the officially sanctioned response of partisan groups to Jewish refugees, government response to antisemitism within the partisans, and the composition of partisan groups, I aim to show that while antisemitism was present in the Soviet partisan movement, both independently and by virtue of its association with the government, the main factor that contributed to Jewish suffering at the hands of partisan groups was the fact that the Soviet government made little to no effort to save the lives of any citizens, including Jewish Soviets.

Discussing antisemitism at the institutional level of the Soviet partisan movement would be incomplete without acknowledging the government's stance on Nazi atrocities since the partisan movement was brought under the control of the central government.¹¹ As mentioned above, the government rarely acknowledged the unique suffering of Jewish Soviets under Nazi occupation.¹² There are three unique cases in which Jewish suffering was acknowledged, all taking place in 1942: a statement by the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Viacheslav Molotov where he acknowledged the massacre of Jews at Babi Yar, a joint statement with the other Allies that acknowledged German crimes against Jews, and a Soviet statement acknowledging Nazi crimes against Jews (this statement was issued two days after the initial joint statement from the Allies).¹³ Notably, all of these acknowledgments came approximately a year after the initial invasion, despite the fact that statements from Stalin in particular imply that the government understood the scale of the violence as early as November of 1941.¹⁴ It could be argued that the Soviet government's erasure of Jewish

¹¹ Howell, *The Soviet Partisans Movement*, 47.

¹² Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 208-210.

¹³ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 208-210.

¹⁴ Howell, *The Soviet Partisans Movement*, 9, 26; Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 208-210.

victims is due to the fact that communism itself does not acknowledge religion; a fundamental aspect of communism is the erasure of divisions like religion.¹⁵ However, even if the Soviet government did not acknowledge Judaism as a defining characteristic of a group of people, they were still aware that it was a criterion the Nazis were using to eradicate Soviet citizens.¹⁶ At the very least, this shows a lack of care for the lives of Soviet citizens in the name of ideology. This disregard was proof of antisemitism within the government since this lack of acknowledgment made it more difficult for Jewish refugees to receive priority aid.¹⁷

When focusing on the Soviet partisan movement in particular, it should be noted that the movement itself never made an official acknowledgment of Nazi antisemitism, and combatting that antisemitism was not mentioned in the movement's goals.¹⁸ Because of this, the partisans rarely made an effort to aid Jewish refugees unless those refugees were capable of fighting or aiding the partisans in some capacity. Often, Jewish families would escape into the woods in hopes of finding safety with the partisans only for the men to be accepted by the partisans while the elderly, women, and children were turned away and left to their fate at the hands of the Nazis.¹⁹ These families were generally not turned away because they were Jewish, they were turned away because it was believed that they could not contribute to the movement. For example, Slavic women and children were often left to the same fate as their Jewish counterparts when they tried

¹⁵ Karl Marx; et al. *Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 51, https://heinonline-org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/HOL/Page?collection=cow&handle=hein.cow/comanif0001&id=63&men_tab=srchresults.

¹⁶ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 208-210.

¹⁷ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 208.

¹⁸ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 211.

¹⁹ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 213.

to seek refuge with the partisans.²⁰ Therefore, the driving force behind this specific policy does not imply overt antisemitism, but rather just a general disregard for civilian lives.

Another aspect of partisan policy that was often associated with antisemitism was the execution of refugees, often Jewish, on the grounds that they were German spies. For example, a Jewish family of three that escaped the Orsha ghetto in 1941 was nearly executed by the partisan “saviors” after joining the group because of the fear of German spies.²¹ While this fear of German spies could be seen as a thinly veiled excuse for antisemitism, Jews were not the only targets of this policy. Non-Jewish POWs who tried to join the partisans were often accused of the same crime, thus implying that proximity to Germans was a greater driving force behind who was accused of being a spy than religion.²² This policy of execution was not entirely rooted in paranoia, even if German spies were not as common as the partisans feared; the partisans had found concrete evidence of German spies among refugees trying to join partisan groups.²³ Overall, overarching partisan policies that harmed Jewish refugees seem to be more directly related to the prioritization of partisan offense over the lives of civilians than antisemitism.

While there were no laws within the partisan movement that legalized antisemitism in any form since the government did not acknowledge its Jewish citizens, there were cases of both antisemitism going unpunished and being punished as harshly as any other crime.²⁴ One instance of antisemitism that was justly punished was when Semen Rudnev, commissar of the Kovpak partisan brigade, publicly punished a partisan for

²⁰ Statiev, “Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians,” 1538.

²¹ Smilovitsky, “Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement,” 213.

²² Statiev, “Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians,” 1537.

²³ Statiev, “Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians,” 1537.

²⁴ Statiev, “Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians,” 1539-1540; Smilovitsky, “Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement,” 213-215.

calling a Jewish woman a slur.²⁵ Additionally, there were several executions on partisan records for antisemitic crimes.²⁶ However, there were just as many stories of antisemitism going unpunished. For example, partisan groups often robbed Jewish refugees of all of their valuables before abandoning them in the woods.²⁷ Jewish refugees aiming to join the partisans would often be met with antisemitic remarks and general hostility from other partisans that would go unpunished.²⁸ Overall, the institutional response to antisemitism within the movement was unreliable; it was highly dependent on the individual groups rather than being a universally enforced policy.

There was significant Jewish participation in the partisan movement. Exact numbers are difficult to find because not all of the information has been declassified, but, from what is available, it is clear that there was significant Jewish participation in the movement. 10% of the partisan unit commanders and commissars in Ukraine were Jewish.²⁹ In Belorussia, it is estimated that 15,000 Jews were members of partisan movements.³⁰ Not only were Jewish citizens a prominent force among the partisans, but their contributions were also recognized by the government. Government medals were often awarded to Jewish partisans for their contributions to the war effort.³¹ While the struggle of Jewish Soviets was not often recognized, the efforts of individual Jewish partisans were recognized and rewarded. The fact that Jewish partisans were such a prominent part of the movement and

²⁵ Statiev, "Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians," 1539.

²⁶ Statiev, "Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians," 1539.

²⁷ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 213-214.

²⁸ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 214.

²⁹ Statiev, "Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians," 1539.

³⁰ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement," 217.

³¹ Statiev, "Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians," 1539.

honored for their involvement implies that, at the very least, antisemitism was not profound at the institutional level.

Through close examination of institutional aspects of the Soviet Partisan Movement, from refugee policies to the makeup of the partisans, it is difficult to say definitively whether the policies that directly harmed Jews were driven by antisemitism. It is undeniable that the movement's general refusal to aid refugees and its hostility towards potential members hurt Jews. However, they were not the only group on the receiving end of the partisans' maltreatment. The partisans denied aid to all groups they deemed unfit to aid the movement, regardless of who they were. Additionally, all groups that encountered Germans tended to be treated with suspicion, regardless of their identity. Overall, these aspects of the movement imply that a general disregard for civilian life was the more likely explanation for partisan policies than antisemitism. However, it is also important to note how antisemitism within the movement was punished sporadically; the allowance of acts of antisemitism implies, at least in part, the acceptance of such actions. Overall, the evidence suggests that antisemitism was not a driving force behind partisan policies at the institutional level, but it still existed to a significant extent.

Antisemitism at the Individual Level: The Stories of Sara Weis, Sonia Orbuch, and Shalom Yoran

Exploring antisemitism at the individual level presents unique difficulties that the institutional level does not. The institutional level had general policies and actions, while the individual level was highly dependent on personal factors, location, and various other circumstances. Through the evaluation of personal accounts, this section will show that it is impossible to make a sweeping generalization about the antisemitism within every individual group of partisans. However, by examining the testimonies of Jewish partisans in various areas of the Soviet Union, we can gain a better understanding of how different circumstances could be for partisans and what kinds of issues and events occurred in the daily lives of Jewish partisans. Therefore, the next section of this paper will examine interviews

with Jewish partisans from the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive to examine antisemitism at the individual level.

The first testimony comes from Sara Weis. Sara Weis was a Jewish woman who joined a Soviet partisan group in Belarus in 1942 after escaping German-occupied territory; she was a member of the partisan group for approximately 2 years.³² She joined a fairly large partisan group (over 100 members) that had no association with any of the all-Jewish partisan groups that formed.³³ Despite the fact that they had no Jewish association, Weis did not hide her identity; she said that the group was fully aware that she was Jewish when she joined.³⁴ The fact that the group let her join, knowing fully well that she was Jewish, disputes the idea that every partisan group was overrun with antisemitism.

As mentioned previously, partisan groups tended to only allow people to join if they could contribute to the group.³⁵ During her time with the group, Weis worked with the group's doctor to treat wounded partisans and later worked in the kitchen before returning to medicine.³⁶ Weis was never asked or pressured to take a combat position within the group.³⁷

Because Weis was one of few women in a large group of men, she found refuge with the other women in the partisan group.³⁸ She was the only Jewish woman in the group, yet she recalled feeling completely welcomed by the Russian women; they protected each other from the men's

³² Sara Weis, "Interview 19447," Interview by Anna Epstein. *Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation*, (1996) Accessed June 1, 2023. <https://vha-usc-edu.turing.library.northwestern.edu/testimony/19447>.

³³ Weis, "Interview 19447."

³⁴ Weis, "Interview 19447."

³⁵ Statiev, "Soviet Partisan Violence against Soviet Civilians," 1538.

³⁶ Weis, "Interview 19447."

³⁷ Weis, "Interview 19447."

³⁸ Weis, "Interview 19447."

advances.³⁹ This further emphasized the lack of tension between Jewish and non-Jewish partisans; Weis was not made to feel isolated from the other women just because she was Jewish. Again, while this does not prove the complete absence of antisemitism in every partisan group, it does show that it was not a universal phenomenon.

In her interview, Weis was asked specifically if she ever had any issues with antisemitism.⁴⁰ While she said it was not usually a problem in her group, she did recall one instance of severe antisemitism that she was victim to.⁴¹ Once, the commander of the partisan group Weis was a part of, Yezhov, tried to force all of the Jews, women, and “unfit” partisans to leave the group.⁴² Yezhov forced them to march through the forest for days before abandoning them.⁴³ However, this act did not go unnoticed by the Soviet government; once the head of the partisans found out about the incident, Yezhov was sent back to Soviet Russia and Weis’ group was reunited with the rest of the partisans.⁴⁴ It was unclear if Yezhov would have been punished meaningfully for the incident because his plane crashed before it could ever make it to its destination.⁴⁵ However, the mere fact that he was removed from his post for his antisemitic actions implies a certain level of intolerance for antisemitism by the partisan movement.

Towards the end of her time with the partisan group, Weis swam across the River Pripyat to escape Nazi-occupied territory.⁴⁶ It was a

³⁹ Weis, “Interview 19447.”

⁴⁰ Weis, “Interview 19447.”

⁴¹ Weis, “Interview 19447.”

⁴² Weis, “Interview 19447.”

⁴³ Weis, “Interview 19447.”

⁴⁴ Weis, “Interview 19447.”

⁴⁵ Weis, “Interview 19447.”

⁴⁶ Weis, “Interview 19447.”

dangerous feat due to bombardment from German planes.⁴⁷ Weis and the rest of the partisans were awarded medals by the Soviet government for their bravery.⁴⁸ Weis was not excluded from this reward for being Jewish (or for being a noncombatant for that matter). This further emphasizes the lack of overt antisemitism on the institution's part.

Overall, this piece of Weis's story highlights a fairly accepting group of partisans. There were clear points of struggle, but, for the most part, Weis did not face many problems because she was Jewish. However, this was the story of one individual; it cannot speak for every Jewish partisan. Current literature tends to collect thematically similar testimonies to take polarized stances on the issue of antisemitism in the Partisan Movement, so it is important to look at several unique perspectives, like this testimony and the ones to follow, to avoid making overgeneralizations.⁴⁹

The second testimony comes from Sonia Orbuch, a Jewish woman who joined a partisan group in Ukraine in 1943 with several of her family members after escaping a ghetto together and hiding in the countryside.⁵⁰ Orbuch recalled the uncertainty of whether or not the partisan group would accept Jews; their guide, a man named Tikhon, said he could not tell if the group was one that was friendly to Jews or killed them.⁵¹ The fact that being killed automatically for being Jewish was even an option implies at least a level of antisemitism within the individual partisan groups. Eventually, the family was interviewed by the partisans.⁵² Orbuch recalled that they had nothing to offer the partisan group, no weapons, no money, and no

⁴⁷ Weis, "Interview 19447."

⁴⁸ Weis, "Interview 19447."

⁴⁹ Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement."

⁵⁰ Sonia Orbuch, "Interview 41647," Interview by Yvonne Walter. *Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation*, (1998), Accessed June 1, 2023. <https://vha-usc-edu.turing.library.northwestern.edu/testimony/41647/>.

⁵¹ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁵² Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

experience, except for her uncle's scouting knowledge.⁵³ Despite this, the partisans allowed them to join and kept the family together.⁵⁴

Each family member had their own job amongst the partisans. Orbuch herself helped take care of sick partisans, while her mother cooked food for the sick, her uncle went with the commanders to perform scouting duties, and her father went to local villages to collect food for the group.⁵⁵

Orbuch recalled life with the partisans as great.⁵⁶ She remembered how good it felt to be treated as an equal and not as a Jew.⁵⁷ She found joy in her partisan identity, particularly the fact that now she would be killed for being a partisan rather than for being Jewish.⁵⁸ She also found many friends with the partisans, notably a Jewish man named Piotr Menaker, with whom she found time to connect with and share their stories openly.⁵⁹ The fact that Orbuch felt so safe within the group and that she was not treated any differently because she was Jewish shows that the antisemitism within this particular partisan group was minimal to nonexistent.

Orbuch's uncle would later be killed fighting with the partisans.⁶⁰ Although her uncle was the main reason the family was initially allowed with the partisans, they were not made to leave after his death.⁶¹ Instead, the commander comforted the grieving family and assured them that he died an

⁵³ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁵⁴ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁵⁵ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁵⁶ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁵⁷ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁵⁸ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁵⁹ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁶⁰ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁶¹ Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

honorable death as a partisan.⁶² This treatment further refutes the idea that partisan groups were rampant with antisemitism (additionally, it refutes the idea that partisan groups were generally uncaring towards people).

Thus far, the available testimonies have shown the partisan groups in a favorable light. However, this should not be taken as proof that every partisan group was accepting of Jews. There were several potential reasons that it is easier to find testimonies in favor of the partisan groups. One notable reason being that only people who survived the war could give testimonies after the fact; some Jews who encountered antisemitic partisan groups most likely did not live to tell the tale. Despite the lack of long testimonies, it was not difficult to find isolated incidents of antisemitism within the groups, like the one mentioned by Sara Weis. An additional example of isolated antisemitism comes from the testimony of Shalom Yoran, who spoke about how difficult it was to find a partisan group to join, despite being relatively capable of fighting, simply because he was Jewish; several groups turned him away, citing that having Jewish members was undesirable.⁶³ This shows that, despite the generally favorable testimonies examined in this paper, not every partisan group was welcoming towards Jewish people.

Examining the testimonies of Jewish partisans offers invaluable insight into antisemitism within the Soviet partisan movement at the individual level. Weis's testimony of isolated incidents of antisemitism reveals that her partisan group did not have high levels of antisemitism on the whole. On the other hand, the testimony of Sonia Orbuch demonstrated how welcoming the partisans could be; they did not care who joined the group as long as they were willing to live and die for the movement. Despite these favorable views on the partisans, Shalom Yoran's story showed that antisemitism had the potential to be prominent in the selection process of certain partisan groups. No overarching statement can be made

⁶² Orbuch, "Interview 41647."

⁶³ Shalom Yoran, "Interview 5154," Interview by Larry Rosenberg. *Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation*, (2001), Accessed June 1, 2023. <https://vha-usc-edu.turing.library.northwestern.edu/testimony/51545>.

about antisemitism at the individual partisan group level because each group was unique; whether or not Jewish partisans experienced antisemitism was highly dependent on the groups they encountered. Overall, this highlights the importance of examining individual stories and not generalizing about large groups in vastly different circumstances.

While antisemitism was present in many underlying actions of the Soviet partisan movement, the main reason Jewish refugees suffered under the movement was because of its general lack of regard for civilians. However, this is not meant to be taken as definitive proof that antisemitism was absent from the movement entirely, as seen by the experiences of individual Jewish partisans. By examining the testimonies of Sara Weis, Sonia Orbuch, and Shalom Yoran, it is clear to see that no generalization can be made about antisemitism on the individual level; each person's experience is unique, and the level of antisemitism they experienced was highly dependent on their individual circumstances. Overall, while this paper was not able to make a definitive statement regarding the presence of antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement, it highlights the importance of interpretation and considering individual circumstances when conducting research and making claims about large groups of people.

Beneath Central Park: The Preservation of Seneca Village

By Riley Neubauer, William & Mary University

Introduction and Context

Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in 1857, Central Park is a natural alcove amid the urban landscape of New York City (NYC). It became a National Historic Landscape almost a century later in 1963 and continues to be a cornerstone of NYC culture and community. However, what few New Yorkers—let alone the general public—know, is that before the construction of Central Park, the land from West 82nd to West 89th street was home to a well-established African American community called Seneca Village (the detailed map is pictured below).

Seneca Village provided residents not only an escape from the densely populated downtown Manhattan but also an enclave safe from the extreme racism of NYC. The area created the opportunity to establish African American schools, churches, businesses, and a way of life where Black culture could be celebrated and not hidden. However, in 1857, the NYC Government requisitioned the land that was Seneca Village through eminent domain, displacing its approximately 250 residents.¹ For the next hundred and fifty years, Seneca Village was seemingly forgotten.² These are stories of individual people that were removed from their homes and whose existence in Seneca Village was erased. Whose stories are we promoting when we study and share NYC history, and who are we forgetting?

¹ Though these residents made up less than 1% of the NYC population, the establishment of an entirely African American neighborhood in NYC was incredibly culturally significant.

² Wayback Machine, Seneca Village Project, last modified July 18, 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20160506153141/http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/seneca_village/.

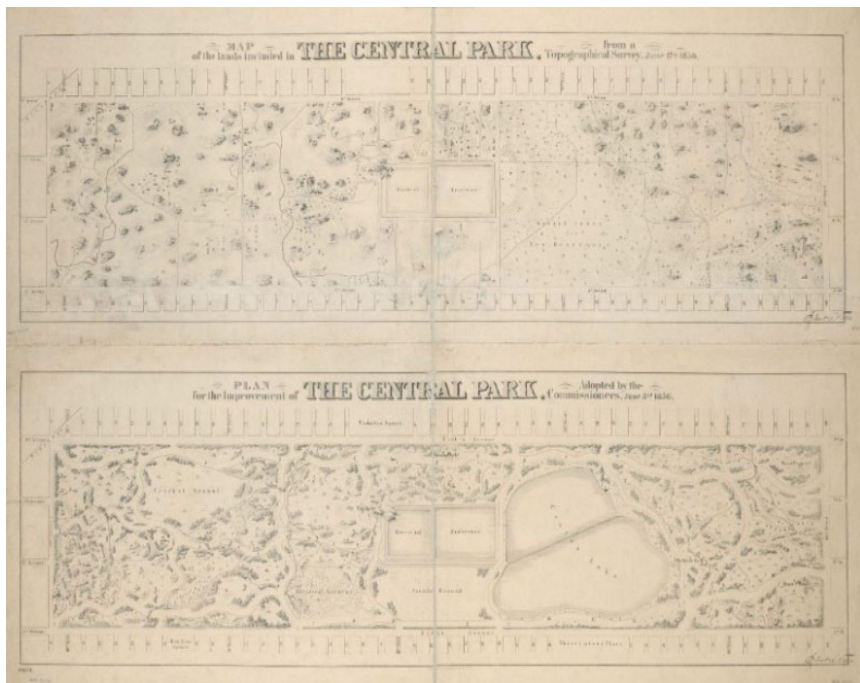


Figure 1: Egbert Ludovicus Viele, “Map of the lands included in the Central Park, from a topographical survey, June 17, 1856; [Also:] Plan for the improvement of the Central Park, adopted by the Commissioners, June 3, 1856.,” map, 1856, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/6850fc74-5e61-8806-e040-e00a18067a2c>.

In the late 1990s, historians rediscovered Seneca Village and vowed to conduct new archaeological and historical research into this seemingly forgotten community. Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar’s 1992 book *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* reminded the NYC community of the lost history of Seneca Village. The Seneca Village project was established shortly thereafter, and in 2011 archaeologist and historian Cyntia Copeland led an excavation of the land. Copeland, along with Diana DiZerega Wall, Nan Rothschild, and Meredith Linn, published

their archaeological findings in 2018 in a report titled “Seneca Village, A Forgotten Community: Report on the 2011 Excavations.” To truly understand the realities of history, it is often helpful to physically see the past—to place yourself in the shoes of those who lived before. The Seneca Village Project unearths artifacts, objects, and even the lives of those who have come before us to help us better understand our history.

When Central Park was created, NYC officials purported the myth that Seneca Village was an impermanent residence, full of people who did not live up to the standard that white New Yorker’s wanted for their new park. In creating a permanent memorial to Seneca Village, archaeologist Cynthia Copeland wanted to reinforce the idea that Seneca Village needs a commemoration that represents its true history and connects seamlessly with the Central Park landscape, because the two can coexist together. She wants a contemplative space, one where you can both celebrate the achievements of the Black community and wonder what would have been if the almost overwhelmingly white New Yorkers in power had not forced the immigrant communities to leave. “Seneca Village is important because its history and its residents do not conform to the conventional historical narrative of Central Park, New York City, or even the United States,” the 2011 report begins. “Most Americans...are unaware of the existence of middle-class African Americans in New York in the 19th century. This project helps to expand the American narrative so that it is both more accurate and more inclusive. It challenges current misperceptions by calling attention to the presence of a Black, middle-class community in the heart of today’s New York City.”³ While most Americans today are unaware of Seneca Village’s existence, the work of prominent NYC archaeologists, historians, and educators, are finally telling its story.

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) is the largest preservation agency in any city in the United States. The LPC protects NYC’s architecture, history, and culture, through creating historic

³ Diana DiZerega Wall et al., *Seneca Village, A Forgotten Community: Report on the 2011 Excavations* (Institute for the Exploration of Seneca Village History, 2018), 4, http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/arch_reports/1828.pdf.

districts or landmark designations. The LPC was created in 1965 by Mayor Robert F. Wagner in response to the “losses of historically significant buildings in New York City, most notably, Pennsylvania Station.”⁴ The Archaeology Department of the LPC that opened in 2014 is responsible for regulating archeological studies throughout NYC. However, since it opened after the Seneca Village excavation, the LPC and Central Park Conservatory supervised the 2011 Seneca Village dig. The New York City Administrative Code’s Title 25 Chapter 3 called “Landmarks Preservation and Historical Districts” describes the criteria for creating and maintaining a historic district or landmark when “distinct areas may be similarly uprooted or may have their distinctiveness destroyed,” which perfectly describes Seneca Village since the community there was “uprooted,” and the “distinctiveness” of the village was destroyed by the creation of Central Park.⁵

Publicizing the history of Seneca Village provides an ideal opportunity for NYC to improve its displays of public history. With a local acknowledgement of the existence of Seneca Village in Central Park—whether by the establishment of an official landmark or signage at recently-excavated locations—New Yorkers will become more aware of the challenging history of their beloved park.

The History of Central Park

Seneca Village is neither recognized as a historic landmark by the LPC nor by the National Parks Service. Central Park, however, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 15, 1966, and then designated as a National Historic Landmark on May 23, 1963.⁶ On the

⁴ City of New York, “About LPC,” NYC.gov, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/lpc/about/about-lpc.page>.

⁵ “Chapter 3: Landmarks Preservation and Historic Districts,” New York City Administrative Code, <https://nycadmincode.readthedocs.io/t25/c03/>.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, “Seneca Village, New York City,” National Parks Service, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/seneca-village-new-york-city.htm>.

nomination form for Central Park’s National Historic Register status, no mention of Seneca Village exists aside from a short sentence description of the conditions of Central Park’s land upon the arrival of architects. The nomination form describes how Olmstead and Vaux were “confronted with a squatters’ town of some three hundred hovels set in an open plain interspersed with outcroppings of rock, swamps and meandering waterways.” The report then goes on to describe the dramatic “embellishments” that were made to the park to turn the scene into a “romantic and picturesque” landscape.⁷ The 1965 report capitalizes on dehumanizing language, such as referring to Seneca Village inhabitants as “squatters,” that was used throughout the 1850s in order to justify the forced removal of the neighborhood. A depiction of this “squatters’ town” can be seen in Figure 2, an illustration published in an 1872 book titled *New York and its institutions, 1609-1871* that included information about the creation of Central Park, among other things NYC-related. The image very clearly shows Seneca Village as a rundown and rudimentarily built collection of homes, with no reference to the infrastructure or community organizations present (pictured below).

No mention of the thriving Seneca Village community was ever included in the documents preserving and memorializing Central Park. Through her efforts to make the finds of the archaeological excavation accessible to the public, Copeland hopes to change the narrative. Now, with the archaeological evidence, Copeland and other historians can facilitate active, hands-on learning, which will allow New Yorkers to gain a better understanding of Seneca Village’s complex history.

⁷ United States Department of the Interior National Parks Service, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form: Central Park*, report no. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74), 2, https://s3.amazonaws.com/NARAprdstorage/lz/electronic-records/rg-079/NPS_NY/66000538_NHL.pdf.



Figure 2: The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. “Squatter settlement, 1855 - now Central Park,” New York Public Library Digital Collections.

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-2cb0-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

When understanding the legal history of Seneca Village’s creation and lack of commemoration, it is important to understand how NYC was able to requisition the land to create Central Park. In 1853 the New York State Legislature enacted a law that allotted 775 acres of land (from 59th to 106th Streets, between Fifth and Eighth Avenues) in Manhattan to create Central Park. The city used the process of eminent domain to acquire the land. Eminent domain has a long history of use in the mid-to-late 1800s when many American public parks were being created. In fact, eminent domain was used to build much of Manhattan’s grid just a few decades prior. The Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states, the government has the ability to seize property through eminent domain; however, “private property [shall not] be taken for public use, without just compensation,” so whenever the government acquires property through eminent domain, it has

a constitutional responsibility to “just[ly]” compensate the owners.⁸ But from this, it is unclear which party involved gets to decide what merits just compensation.

From the beginning, the establishment of Central Park through eminent domain created an exclusive site, where white New Yorkers could escape the stress of urban life, not caring that the creation of the park meant to make their lives less stressful caused enormous stress and strain on the Black community living there. These Black New Yorkers were unfairly removed, and NYC did not fully compensate inhabitants for the property they lost in the razing of Seneca Village. In the 1840s, in the aftermath of disease outbreaks, lack of space, and the monopolization of public lands for private development, civic-minded New Yorkers wrote letters in local newspapers arguing that it was important to set aside open spaces for the public amid the rapidly-growing city.⁹ The Central Park Conservancy, a nonprofit organization that is entrusted with the day-to-day operations of Central Park, is clear that “there is no evidence that the City or State’s decision on the park location was directed by an interest in destroying Seneca Village.” However, journalists and others arguing in favor of the creation of Central Park depicted the site as “a wasteland and those lying on the land as impoverished squatters.” This portrayal was likely an attempt to justify NYC’s unprecedented possession of the land—to show that the creation of the park was “the utmost transformation, one of beauty replacing blight.”¹⁰ As shown in Figure 2, the landscape of Central Park in the 1940s was not one of “blight.” It was simply more convenient for observers to portray it in this negative light. The strongest language used against Seneca Village inhabitants is from an 1856 *New-York Daily Times* article that

⁸ “The Constitution of the United States,” Amendment 5. <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/full-text>.

⁹ Central Park Conservancy, *Discover Seneca Village*, 2019, sign 13, https://s3.amazonaws.com/assets.centralparknyc.org/new_images/programs/Seneca-Village-Signs.pdf?mtime=20200207092028.

¹⁰ Central Park Conservancy, *Discover Seneca Village*, sign 14.

denigrate the village as a “N***** Village.”¹¹ This language further demonstrated the city’s devaluation of Seneca Village as a community.

The Common Council of the City of New York took the recommendations of these citizens’ editorials, and on June 11, 1853, they settled on the land for the park (seen in Figure 1). Interestingly, as NYC urban historian Alexander Manevitz describes, “despite its size and significance, Seneca Village made up only six blocks out of the 141 initially taken to create Central Park.”¹² While Seneca Village may not have physically been a large section of the land being converted to Central Park, the local spirit and community identity were to be completely wiped out by the creation of the park. After the plans for the park were approved, the city ran a piece in the *New York Times* asking anyone who was “interested or affected” by the proposal to come forward and state their claim. Every Seneca Village resident came forward, but the most outspoken were William Mathew, Thomas Scudder, and Alan Cook.¹³ Mathew was invited to speak to the New York Supreme Court, and on November 5, 1855, he gave a deposition claiming that his property was worth much more than what the city awarded him. NYC valued his property at \$1,235, but he asserted that the “estimate is not sufficient,” demanding at minimum

¹¹ “The Present look of our Great Central Park. Tired of Life. POLICE INTELLIGENCE. The Statue of Washington. The Children that Went West. The Wilson Industrial School, No. 137 Avenue A. Monthly Report of the Dispensaries. Double Names for Streets. Trial of a fire Engine. Miscellaneous.,” *The New York Daily Times* (New York, NY), July 9, 1856, 3, <https://nyti.ms/40HBq9I>.

¹² Alexander Manevitz, “‘A Great Injustice’: Urban Capitalism and the Limits of Freedom in Nineteenth-Century New York City,” *Journal of Urban History* 48, no. 6 (January 23, 2021): 1375, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144220976119>. Throughout his article, Manevitz cites the Central Park Benefit and Condemnation Files located in the New York County Clerk Division of Old Records. These are inaccessible digitally, so I am citing Manevitz’s work knowing that if readers would like to see the original documents the exact citations for those exist in Manevitz’s citations.

¹³ Manevitz, “A Great Injustice,” 1355.

\$2,000.20.¹⁴ It is important to note that Mathew's engagement with the structural system that worked to destroy his community was not his endorsement of it. Instead, he hoped that by working within the system he could change the way that his community was treated. Unfortunately, his plea was unsuccessful.

Mobility as the gateway to freedom for African Americans is a popular historiographical argument but is only true of voluntary mobility. For Seneca Villagers and other free Black communities in the North, mobility also signified a threat to their freedom. In the beginning years of Seneca Village, being kidnapped and sold into enslavement was the dark, looming form of forced mobility that hung over every Black New Yorker. Locally, urban development (like Central Park) and economic instability made it difficult for African Americans to create permanent neighborhoods and establish communal social institutions across generations. These were the very challenges that pushed people to Upper Manhattan and to Seneca Village.¹⁵ Mathew, for example, lived in Seneca Village for 23 years, which contradicted Central Park supporters' claims that park-dwellers were temporary residents and could therefore be easily displaced. His wooden home was like what most New Yorkers lived in and was certainly not a domicile for "squatters" or temporary residents, as the public had said.¹⁶ While there are no clear records that show where residents went after 1857, it is likely that some people may have gone to other African American communities in the area, like Skunk Hollow, New Jersey or Sandy Ground, Staten Island.¹⁷

Mathew's deposition appealed to the longevity and permanence of Seneca Village, which starkly contrasted the surrounding narratives of the

¹⁴ Manevitz, "A Great Injustice," 1371.

¹⁵ Manevitz, "A Great Injustice," 1371.

¹⁶ Manevitz, "A Great Injustice," 1372.

¹⁷ Central Park Conservancy, "Before Central Park: The Story of Seneca Village," Central Park Conservancy, last modified January 18, 2018, <https://www.centralparknyc.org/articles/seneca-village>.

inhabitants. He emphasized that NYC was not treating him fairly, simply because the existence of his community was seemingly at odds with the image of the city that New Yorkers wanted to perpetuate. His deposition in support of fair compensation for Seneca Villagers highlighted the importance of the Village to residents amid the backdrop of 1850s NYC.

The History of Seneca Village

The first record from Seneca Village was a NYC tax record from 1829, where the community consisted of nine houses. In 1840, 25 buildings existed. By 1856, when the area was surveyed to prepare for demolition, over 60 buildings were documented. Historians often rely on the 1850 Federal Census for a representation of what the community looked like upon its removal: 230 residents living in two-story wooden frame houses, some with sheds and barns. Surprising to many, the census notes that one third of the Seneca Village population were Irish immigrants.¹⁸ In 1825, John and Elizabeth Whitehead, a white couple who owned farmland in the modern-day West 80th-90th streets put their land up for sale. It is unclear how the sale was advertised, but Andrew Williams, a Black man, bought three lots. Alongside Williams were Epiphany Davis and John Carter. The settlement of the land after these three Black men was slow, but it was set in motion.¹⁹

One of the strategies that some Black New Yorkers used to withstand the discrimination and racial violence was to establish a community for themselves, complete with a network of separate institutions like churches and schools. The creations of churches and schools in Seneca Village helped the community become permanent—until Central Park was created. The 1821 New York State Constitution imposed a \$250 property suffrage requirement for Black residents (and white property requirements were lifted); in addition, for Black voters to cast a ballot, a three-year residency was required (only a one-year requirement existed for white

¹⁸ Wall et al., *Seneca Village*, 2.

¹⁹ Central Park Conservancy, *Discover Seneca Village*, sign 5.

European Americans). Many Black New Yorkers flocked to Upper Manhattan, inspired by the possibility to own land, and establish their own lasting community, which would allow them to fulfill the residency voting requirements. Little Africa became another popular destination for migrating African Americans, but this neighborhood remained in the downtown, urban, Manhattan landscape.²⁰ Owning property in Manhattan became a gateway towards citizenship and voting rights, as it often was in early America.

Even though Seneca Village provided new opportunities for Black New Yorkers, it did not provide an entire separation from the struggles of the city. The racial, economic, social, and political inequities of capitalist society pervaded the community, regardless of whether they embraced or resisted it. “Property ownership meant a way out of the housing discrimination and segregation they faced in cramped dwellings downtown,” Manevitz wrote. It also meant that churches, which had been forced to move from building-to-building, became reliable community organizations that had permanent cemeteries—a luxury that was lost when the neighborhood was destroyed. Seneca Village became a place to perform republican citizenship during and after the end of enslavement in New York. Just as foundational as physical buildings for religious worship, strong educational opportunities were of the utmost importance for Seneca Villagers, since they were the first step to wealth. In fact, the All Angels’ Church and the African Union Church were among the few “colored” schools in the City.²¹ As seen on the 1850 census data, compared to Little Africa residents and the standard of the era, Seneca Village boasted extremely high literacy rates.²² Even when having children prioritize school

²⁰ Wall et al., *Seneca Village*, 98-101.

²¹ Manevitz, “A Great Injustice,” 1368.

²² Nan A. Rothschild, Diana DiZerega Wall, and Cynthia Copeland, “Seneca Village and Little Africa: Two African American Communities in Antebellum New York City,” *Historical Archaeology* 42, no. 1 (2008): 104, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25617485>. This information was taken from Table 8 in the article, which uses data from 1850 Federal Census records.

may have meant an overall loss in family earnings, from the census data it was clear that an education was worth the temporary loss in money for the family, since they believed that literacy would lead to future wealth. Further, a proper education would allow Black children to preserve the social status their families were chasing by moving to Seneca Village, buying property, and establishing a permanent home.

While it does seem that there is a fair amount of information about the residents of Seneca Village, the maps and data are mostly because of their active efforts to make their advancements known to the New York community amidst the debate over whether to establish Central Park. The data from before 1855 is minimal, consisting mainly of property records and census data. The most detailed map of Seneca Village is from the 1956 “Condemnation Maps.” Though neither of these maps show individual property lots, they do mark the location of certain buildings that suggest that this was a middle-class neighborhood. Just as Mathew stated in his deposition, the homes were mostly frame houses, with one or two stories, not the “shanties” described by their white contemporaries. Despite protests from its residents (and Mathew’s Supreme Court visit), Seneca Village was demolished—above ground, that is. For decades, the soil remained untouched, until a 2011 archaeological excavation led by Diana DiZerega Wall, Nan Rothschild, Meredith Linn, and Cynthia Copeland unearthed history.

The Seneca Village Project and an Archaeological Excavation

Before ground was broken in 2011, Cynthia Copeland began investigating the history of Seneca Village. The story of Seneca Village picks up 136 years after the 1856 movement, in 1992, when Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig published *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*, in which an entire section was devoted to the history of Seneca Village. Two years later, in 1995, Cynthia Copeland, then working at the New-York Historical Society (N-YHS), began to use primary sources from the N-YHS collection relating to Seneca Village as a tool for middle and high school educators to introduce their students to historical

research.²³ In an interview for the New York Preservation Archive Project in 2017, Copeland discussed her involvement in Seneca Village. She mentioned how students at local NYC schools partnered with N-YHS curators and educators to “discover” Seneca Village for themselves: “we were able to basically set them up on a journey and we kind of presented it as a detective kind of story. So, we never really revealed what this place was,” she said.²⁴ Copeland realized that her research into Seneca Village contained more than just curriculum, and, building on her own research and that of Blackmar and Rosenzweig, in 1997 she curated an exhibit at the N-YHS titled: *Before Central Park: The Life and Death of Seneca Village*. Copeland said, “We were able to create an exhibit that kind of stumped New Yorkers. They were like, ‘Wait a second, I’m a New Yorker. I’m supposed to know all this stuff. How come I didn’t know it?’”²⁵ That same year, Associate Professor of History at the City College of New York Diana DiZerega Wall attended one of Copeland’s workshops. She was enthralled by the history and by Copeland’s research, and the two began to collaborate. The team was joined by Nan Rothschild, an archaeologist from Barnard College, and in 1997 the three women founded the Seneca Village Project. Now, the project has transformed into the Institute for the Exploration of Seneca Village History.²⁶ In 2001, the Seneca Village Project’s first task was completed: erecting a sign in Central Park to acknowledge the forgotten community. Fittingly, the sign was placed in February during Black History Month.

While the Seneca Village Project was being created, topographical

²³ Wall et al., *Seneca Village*, 6.

²⁴ Cynthia Copeland, “Historian Cynthia Copeland Speaks about the Process of Rediscovering the History of Seneca Village and the Archeological Excavation of Its Former Site in Central Park.,” interview by Liz H. Strong, New York Preservation Archive Project, last modified October 13, 2017, <https://www.nypap.org/oral-history/cynthia-copeland/>.

²⁵ Copeland, “Historian Cynthia,” interview, New York Preservation Archive Project.

²⁶ Wall et al., *Seneca Village*, 6.

and preliminary archaeological studies were being conducted on Central Park soil. Bruce Bevan's 1997 remote sensing survey determined that archaeological potential existed on the former Seneca Village sites, and Susanna Selby's 2004 soil sampling confirmed that these naturally formed, intact layers of soil from Seneca Village's time survived the creation and subsequent use of Central Park. The final study that confirmed the need for a full archaeological investigation was geophysical archaeologist Lawrence Conyers' ground penetrating radar tests in the area that Selby identified as having archaeological potential. Conyers identified what he believed to be several house floors, middens, shafts, features, and burials.²⁷ In an interview with the Central Park Conservancy, Wall described her elation at learning that Central Park would approve an archaeological excavation and how she began to narrow down grid proposals for the dig. "We knew where the village and its buildings had been in the park because we were able to superimpose detailed maps of the village over maps of the modern Park," she began. Once they knew exactly where the Village had been, they followed Selby's method, taking soil borings at the area she and Conyers identified. They established clear areas where floors of old buildings or privy shafts from old outhouses existed underneath the modern Central Park.²⁸ The archaeological study began with two research questions. First, do remains of Seneca Village exist? And second, if they do, how can we use the archaeological evidence to better understand the community at the time of its razing? The first question was solved by their preliminary scientific studies: "architectural, stratigraphic, and artifactual remains [exist] from the village."²⁹

In addition to physical questions, the archaeologists were interested in exploring what it meant to be a middle-class Black community in mid-

²⁷ Rothschild, Wall, and Copeland, "Seneca Village and Little Africa," 105.

²⁸ Marie Warsh, "Dishes, Shoes, and Tiles: The Excavation of the Seneca Village Site," Central Park NYC, last modified February 7, 2019, <https://www.centralparknyc.org/articles/uncovering-seneca-village>.

²⁹ Wall et al., *Seneca Village*, 4.

nineteenth century NYC. Historical research has recently begun to focus on material culture in the hopes that it can help us understand how people expressed their ethnic, racial, and class identities. The 2011 report describes their analysis: “Although some harbored the dream that they could achieve equality as Americans by assimilation through moral uplift, others did not think this was possible.” Wall and her team believe that the Seneca Village community was split. Some, like Mathew, believed that “assimilation through moral uplift” —proving that Black New Yorkers were active, important members of their community—and fighting for his property rights and value was the best way to be American. Others disagreed. “Many of the latter looked to their African roots and some even considered emigration to Africa or Haiti.” The authors mention “emigration to Africa or Haiti,” but no other sources about Seneca Village discuss this movement in the community. Much historical scholarship, however, exists devoted to the phenomenon. “We believe that some Black New Yorkers established Seneca Village as an autonomous Black community because they felt equality and assimilation within American culture were not realistic goals in the racially charged antebellum climate,” the authors affirm. Seneca Village as an “autonomous Black community” is another central point in the authors’ arguments for why they chose to excavate the site and why the site merits further recognition.³⁰

Through her entire interview with the New York Preservation Archive Project, Copeland stressed the importance of creating historical analysis and understanding grounded in the newly-discovered material culture—she was amazed by the number of objects that the excavation unearthed. “The historical record is a wonderful thing, and it gives us information, it gives us names. But when you find the stuff people were using, it just really—that’s what humanizes these people. They touched it, they felt it,” Copeland said.³¹ Through her archaeological work, Copeland “humanizes” history, creating real connections between people of the past

³⁰ Wall et al., *Seneca Village*, 4-5.

³¹ Copeland, “Historian Cynthia,” interview, New York Preservation Archive Project.

and present. History can often seem overwhelming, especially when your only lens through which to interact with the past is “historical record.” Having access to material culture—to “the stuff people were using”—is a way to make connections across centuries. If you can touch the same artifacts that people in Seneca Village in 1850 were using, then you have a completely new path towards understanding, empathizing, and learning, which are the tasks Copeland set out to accomplish with her 1995 curriculum planning using Seneca Village sources. Hopefully through public access to material culture from Seneca Village, New Yorkers can begin to learn about the lives of these former residents, creating a bond that will help them truly understand the history.

Looking Towards the Future: Commemorating Seneca Village

The narrative of Central Park that historians often want to tell is not in line with the actual history. How can we as New Yorkers enjoy the benefits of Central Park while also acknowledging the realities behind how it was created? The first step, Copeland believes, is to ensure that all the stories of those who lived in Central Park before the land was seized are told. “Telling the African American story of Seneca Village...is the essence of the community, but there is no story without the others who were there. So we still have to look into the Irish community, and we have to look into the Germans and do a better job of trying to find out information about those folks and integrating that into the story,” she said. Further, Seneca Village was not the only community uprooted by Central Park. Harsonville, Jupiterville, and the Convent of the Sisters of Charity all existed in the northern region. Different smaller family neighborhoods, houses, and other buildings were sprinkled through the entire modern-day park.³² Similarly, little-to-no effort has been made to study the history of these communities.

A few important movements have worked to publicize the findings of the 2011 report and the often-hidden history of Seneca Village. The NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission’s online exhibit and collection *Seneca Village Unearthed* will give the public access to nearly 300 artifacts from

³² Copeland, “Historian Cynthia,” interview, New York Preservation Archive Project.

the archaeological excavation. Through this resource, people will get a “glimpse of what life was like for the Seneca Villagers in the mid-19th century,” a press release about the exhibit’s opening stated. “Being able to view and explore this invaluable historic material will be a great benefit to those seeking to learn about this extraordinary community,” Marie Warsh, Historian for the Central Park Conservancy said.³³ This exhibit is a part of the LPC’s continuing efforts to make the city’s archaeological research and artifacts accessible to as wide of an audience as possible. Like Copeland said, the objects provide a human tangible connection to the residents of Seneca Village. The online exhibit complements the Central Park Conservancy’s outdoor exhibition of interpretive signs about Seneca Village. The exhibit was on view in Central Park starting in 2019, but it was mysteriously removed, with no mention to residents.

Inspired by Seneca Village history, two additional exhibits have opened in NYC. First, the *Say Their Names Memorial Exhibition*, presented by the San Diego Museum African American Museum of Fine Art, is an augmented reality experience that uses photography, technology, and art to engage visitors with the faces of hundreds of forgotten figures from the past. The traveling exhibit was located at the physical location of Seneca Village for one month in September and October of 2022.³⁴ It used the physical remembrance of Seneca Village history to inspire conversation about African American histories that may have been lost over time, much like Seneca Village. Second, *Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room* is a fabrication of what a domestic space in Seneca Village would have looked like. Unlike traditional historical recreations, the rooms

³³ Landmarks Preservation Commission, “LPC Launches Seneca Village Unearthed, an Online Exhibit and Collection of Artifacts,” news release, February 20, 2020, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/lpc/about/pr2020/lpc-launches-seneca-village-unearthed-an-online-exhibit-and-collection-of-artifacts.page>.

³⁴ PRNewswire, “Say Their Names Memorial Exhibition Honoring Those Lost to Racial Injustice Debuts in Historic Seneca Village Site in Central Park September 2022,” PRNewswire, last modified September 6, 2022, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/say-their-names-memorial-exhibition-honoring-those-lost-to-racial-injustice-debuts-in-historic-seneca-village-site-in-central-park-september-2022-301618063.html>.

“reject the notion of one historical period and embrace the African and African diasporic belief that the past, present, and future are interconnected.” The artists ponder what Seneca Village might have been, had it been allowed to survive into the present and future.³⁵

A false dichotomy exists where people feel like they need to pick between preserving Seneca Village by returning the location to its original standard or preserving Central Park. It is unnecessary to pick between these two options. There is a way for these narratives to coexist. Copeland believes that educational spaces must be created to show New Yorkers that they can enjoy spending time in Central Park while still acknowledging the complex history of how the park came to be. She hopes that the Central Park Conservancy or the Parks Department formalize an institution like the Institute for the Exploration of Seneca Village History where a handful of people can dedicate themselves to keeping the memory alive so that we can continue to pass the stories on.

Considering these challenges, and thinking about physical commemoration, Cynthia Copeland has an unconventional suggestion:

We understand that the beauty of the park is its natural beauty, the naturalness of it all...So in collecting the dirt and the soils and trying to have that analyzed, perhaps seeing what kind of flora and fauna were there at that time...Then it would be in the spirit of the park. We don't want just the typical traditional plaque or statue. That doesn't work for us. But something that would be really sort of a contemplative space where you could sit and meditate and kind of sit and breathe and smell and feel the ghosts of the people of Seneca Village. We think that could be a form of historic preservation and the best way to work within the park itself, which is already a landmark.³⁶

³⁵ Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/afrofuturist-period-room>.

³⁶ Copeland, “Historian Cynthia,” interview, New York Preservation Archive Project.

She is clear that a “typical traditional plaque or statue” is not the right way to memorialize Seneca Village. Copeland believes that the best way to remember Seneca Village is to create a space in which the “natural beauty” of Central Park can be appreciated but the story of Seneca Village can be placed with it. A “contemplative space where you can sit and meditate...and breath and smell” and immerse yourself in the 19th-century “flora and fauna,” just as the inhabitants of Seneca Village would have done. She proposes a completely new way of thinking about preservation and landmarks, and certainly not something that has been done before. But, to Copeland and to the other archaeologists and historians on the project, a space like this would be the best way to honor what Seneca Villagers would want. Which, at the end of the day, is the question we should be asking when planning all our historic landmarks: how would this individual—or this community—want to be remembered? And, if we can think of an answer, we must make sure we can place it in the current landscape, so that we are able to partner the historic with the modern and create a space where visitors can feel a tangible connection to history. Hopefully, after Copeland and her team are done, no one will walk through Central Park and say, like they did when they visited the initial N-YHS exhibit, “Wait a second, I’m a New Yorker. I’m supposed to know all this stuff. How come I didn’t know it?”³⁷

³⁷ Copeland, “Historian Cynthia,” interview, New York Preservation Archive Project.

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