

# Teaching History

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# TEACHING HISTORY: A JOURNAL OF METHODS

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# Teaching History in the Time of Generative AI

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When I sat down at my departmental retreat in August 2023, one of my colleagues began interrogating me about my use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom. She was upset that in one of my courses that spring, I had students use ChatGPT to construct constitutions as a group activity to wrap up the semester.<sup>1</sup> As I explained the assignment to her, detailing why I wanted to teach students how to engage with ChatGPT, she cut me off. Then, she rhetorically asked why I was “not doing more to stop this nonsense.” Her frank assessment of generative AI as inherently bad is not an uncommon one in academia. Despite holding innovation and the creation of knowledge at the core of academic institutional missions, academics are not always early adopters of change. In fact, as Brian Rosenberg’s *Whatever It Is, I’m Against It* argues, twenty-first-century academics are very likely to actively, openly, and vehemently resist change.<sup>2</sup> My conversation with my colleague very much highlighted that reality for me. While I was excited about the possibilities that generative AI posed, my colleague was strongly digging her heels in to resist it. Neither of us were right nor wrong. Rather, the rapid development of tools like ChatGPT, Perplexity AI, and Microsoft Copilot has sparked considerable trepidation, excitement, and confusion.

As large language models (LLMs) become increasingly sophisticated and accessible, history educators find themselves at a crossroads, grappling with the opportunities as well as the challenges that these tools present. Generative AI tools offer unprecedented opportunities to enhance research capabilities, as well as to provide personalized learning experiences, and to streamline administrative tasks. Yet, it also raises profound questions about academic integrity, critical thinking skills, and the very nature of historical inquiry and knowledge production. This special section, “Teaching History in the Time of Generative AI,” of *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* explores the deliberate efforts that higher education instructors have made to teach *with* AI. Intended to inspire educators looking to innovate and rethink their assignments, course designs, and teaching philosophies, this special section optimistically embraces the possibilities generative AI presents while also acknowledging the need for additional ethical discussion and the development of barriers around its exponential growth.<sup>3</sup>

Each of the six authors demonstrate tremendous ingenuity and pedagogical bravery, sharing their assignments, reflections, and ideas for refinement. Several of the articles explore a rather accessible entry point for many teaching in the time of AI: critique. By inviting students to critique LLM-generated responses, instructors can check students’ knowledge acquisition and help students grow their critical thinking skills. Three authors also touch on the importance of teaching students a new transferable skill: prompt engineering. In teaching students how to effectively and ethically prompt LLMs, students may be empowered to employ these programs as tools instead of as replacements for human thinking and creativity. One particularly innovative author, Ben Breen, even details his experience building an LLM-enabled educational game. From these articles, history educators can

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<sup>1</sup> See Julia M. Gossard, “Creating Constitutions with ChatGPT,” in *Teaching and Generative AI* (Utah State University Press, 2024); Gossard, “Empowering Citizens: Teaching Constitutionalism and Generative AI,” *AHA Perspectives*, September 11, 2024. <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/empowering-citizens/>

<sup>2</sup> Brian Rosenberg, *Whatever It Is, I’m Against It: Resistance to Change in Higher Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of experimenting with generative AI tools, I employed Perplexity AI to help me craft this and the paragraphs that follow in the introduction. To let you compare how I updated it, you can access the public link to the PerplexityAI response here: [https://www.perplexity.ai/page/teaching-history-with-ai-Boo\\_TyCOTmzcWiXm2O1wQ](https://www.perplexity.ai/page/teaching-history-with-ai-Boo_TyCOTmzcWiXm2O1wQ)

find inspiration to experiment with new tools, build effective strategies, and adopt approaches to teaching that do not revert to traditional, perhaps outmoded, techniques of assessment and learning in the face of unprecedented change.

What these articles do not include are polemical treatises warning of the end of the historical discipline as we know it. Though the authors acknowledge that there are serious concerns that must be addressed at both institutional and individual levels regarding the use of AI in educational spaces, this is not their primary focus. Yet, it would be remiss to not recognize that as AI programs become more prevalent, additional questions arise about academic integrity violations, the nature of intellectual property, the potential for bias in AI-generated content, and the impact on students' critical thinking skills. At the conclusion of this special section, an interview with Jeffrey Washburn and Jennifer McCutchen about their article, "AI Meets AI: ChatGPT as a Pedagogical Tool to Teach American Indian History" touches on these topics, especially the prevalence of racialized biases as well as the need to teach students about intellectual property and LLMs.

There is no denying that generative AI tools have and will continue to fundamentally change the world around us. The speed and prevalence of generative A.I.-enabled learning tools (and shortcuts) is a marked difference from one of the other great threats of the historical discipline in the twenty-first century, Wikipedia. Due to its very nature as a crowd-sourced encyclopedia, Wikipedia did not grow at nearly the same rapid rate that LLMs are. But, academics had similar concerns around it as evidenced in headlines from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that warned the death of universities and critical thinking as we knew it.<sup>4</sup> Despite that fear mongering, academics found ways to actually embrace Wikipedia. For example, Sam Wineberg and Mike Caulfield even advocated for its use as a research tool.<sup>5</sup> While the generative capabilities of LLMs may indeed make ChatGPT, CoPilot, and Perplexity AI a different kind of obstacle compared to Wikipedia, we will likely find ways to ethically, appropriately, and meaningfully use these tools.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Laurie Essig, "Can Wikipedia Shut Down Universities?" *Chronical of Higher Education*, January 18, 2012; Cathy N. Davidson, "We Can't Ignore the Influence of Digital Technologies," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 23, 2007. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/we-cant-ignore-the-influence-of-digital-technologies/>; Brock Read, "What Does Wikipedia Mean for the Future of Expertise?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 20, 2009. <https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/what-does-wikipedia-mean-for-the-future-of-expertise>; Brock Read, "Middlebury College History Department Limits Students' Use of Wikipedia," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 15, 2007. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/middlebury-college-history-department-limits-students-use-of-wikipedia/>.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Caulfield and Sam Wineberg, "Teaching Students How to Use Wikipedia as a Tool for Research," *Edutopia*, January 24, 2024. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-wikipedia-for-research/>

# Where Are the Citations?: ChatGPT Discussions in the History of Sexuality

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During the spring 2023 semester, I experimented with ChatGPT in my course on the history of sexuality in the United States. Several students had fallen behind in this asynchronous online class. Because I recognize that this course delivery method can present unique challenges for online learners, I wanted to provide these students the opportunity to earn a strong grade.<sup>1</sup> I also wanted to see how students engaged with generative artificial intelligence (AI). For these reasons, I created four bonus discussion posts where students could use ChatGPT to advance their knowledge of the history of sexuality. These assignments, which I simply titled “ChatGPT and the History of Sexuality,” challenged students to critically engage with the information provided by generative AI.

I built my course on the history of sexual on a zero-based grading system, an assessment strategy that makes it possible for the instructor to add assignment options late in the semester.<sup>2</sup> In this approach, every student starts with zero points. Each time the student completes an assignment, though, they earn points toward their final grade. Students in history of sexuality had a range of assignments they could complete for points, from weekly discussion posts and lesson plans, critical analyses of historical monographs, and a research paper. (See Figure 1: Assignment Breakdown for more information on the course’s assignment choices.) Students could complete any number of these assignments to build the 94 points required for an A. As I have written elsewhere, the zero-based grading system, with many assignment choices in the course, makes students active agents over their own learning.<sup>3</sup>

After combing through the grade book in the tenth week of the semester, I discovered that although some students fell behind on earning points, most students were approaching the course in the same way. They completed the weekly discussions, which asked for them to select and analyze a piece of evidence from a lecture or the required reading, and they turned in one or two of the critical analysis papers. To earn points, nearly every student submitted at least one lesson plan, an option I include for the teaching majors and minors who enroll in my courses. Ultimately, only three students turned in a research paper, which had to be eight-to-ten pages in length. Even with all these assignment choices, a handful of students found themselves short of points as we approached the semester’s end. Instead of asking students to go back and complete assignments for which due dates had passed, I created another kind of discussion board. In these discussions, students engaged with ChatGPT.

For the last four weeks of the semester, students could turn in a discussion post where they were responsible for three tasks. First, the assignment required students to type into ChatGPT a question that the week’s material

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<sup>1</sup> See the following articles on how students can struggle in asynchronous online learning environments: Doris U. Bollinger and Florence Martin, “Instructor and Student Perceptions of Online Student Engagement Strategies,” *Distance Education* 39, no. 4 (2018): 568–583; Amber D. Dumford and Angie L. Miller, “Online Learning in Higher Education: Exploring Advantages and Disadvantages for Engagement,” *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* 30, no. 3 (2018): 452–465; Jenna Gillett-Swan, “The Challenges of Online Learning: Supporting and Engaging the Isolated Learner,” *Journal of Learning Design* 10, no. 1 (2017): 20–30; and Florence Martin, Chuang Wang, and Ayesha Sadaf, “Student Perception of Helpfulness of Facilitation Strategies That Enhance Instructor Presence, Connectedness, Engagement, and Learning in Online Courses,” *The Internet and Higher Education* 37 (2018): 52–65.

<sup>2</sup> Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning, “0-Based Grading Concepts,” *Delphi Deep Dive: Design Cookbooks*, accessed October 9, 2024, [https://tutorials.delphi-me.com/deep\\_dive/design-cookbooks/0-vs-based-grading/0-based-grading-concepts](https://tutorials.delphi-me.com/deep_dive/design-cookbooks/0-vs-based-grading/0-based-grading-concepts).

<sup>3</sup> Chris Babits, “‘I Can Do What I Want?’ Student Agency in a U.S. History Survey,” *The History Teacher* 57, no. 3 (May 2024): 329–355.

(i.e., lectures and readings) helped to answer. In the assignment directions, I asked students to open their post by letting the class know the question they asked ChatGPT. Second, students had to copy-and-paste the answer ChatGPT gave them into their discussion post. For this, I wanted everyone in the class to see the exact words ChatGPT gave in its response. Last, students had to analyze ChatGPT's answer. For this part of the assignment, they needed to share the strengths and shortcomings of the answer ChatGPT provided them. I asked, *Was the answer adequate?* This part of the assignment, which is what I was most interested in, required students to write six-to-eight sentences where they analyzed ChatGPT's answer.

If students completed these parts of the ChatGPT and the History of Sexuality assignment, they could earn up to five points toward their final grade. Students could also earn one or two bonus points if they advanced the discussion. To earn more than five points on the ChatGPT discussion, students could build on their classmates' insights into the answer ChatGPT offered. They could also note other strengths or shortcomings in the answer ChatGPT provided. Or students could share their general thoughts on AI bots after reading some of their classmates' posts.

From the moment I conceptualized this assignment, I hoped that by keeping responses somewhat flexible, students would have multiple entry points into participating in the discussion. I thought that these discussion posts could reinforce some of the learning goals I have in my courses, such as asking students to explain the important of the history of sexuality in their own words while applying historical methods to analyze sources. Most importantly, I want students to ask and develop questions that interest them. Doing so, I believe, challenges students to take control over their own learning. As Johnson notes, students can construct deeper meanings of online discussions via personal contributions, particularly through collaboration and knowledge construction.<sup>4</sup> In addition, I want students to be skeptical consumers of texts and sources. As a historian, I believe that every source has a purpose and perspective to share. But what purpose and perspective does generative AI have? Though there is no definitive answer to this question at the moment, my course's ChatGPT discussion board could provide some insights on the question.

Students could complete the ChatGPT and the History of Sexuality assignment for the first time during Week #12. This week focuses on the sexual revolution, with lectures titled "Women, Sex, and the Pill," "Sex and the Liberated Woman," and "Liberation." (This last lecture covers the early history of the gay rights movement.) The required readings offer a different perspective on the sexual revolution. Readings include primary and secondary sources on Paul R. Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, a book that argued that humanity would face destructive famines and hunger if the world's population continued to grow. Week #12 offered students a wide range of material around which they could ask ChatGPT a question.

After Week #12's posts were due, I was pleased with my students' ability to pose strong questions to ChatGPT. More specifically, students asked ChatGPT penetrating questions that demonstrated how closely they watched lectures and engaged with the required reading. Students wrote excellent questions, for instance, about Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl*, the birth control pill, Anne Koedt on the myth of the vaginal orgasm, Stonewall, and how the sexual revolution changed life for African American women. These were all topics that lectures had covered to some extent. But it was clear students wanted to know even more about these parts of the sexual revolution.

Although I was impressed by the questions students asked, I was less enthusiastic about how students interpreted the answers ChatGPT provided. Put simply, ChatGPT generated what I thought were facile historical understandings of the sexual revolution. In its best form, ChatGPT constructed three or four paragraphs about events like the Stonewall Riots. In the worst of the answers, ChatGPT offered vague numbered lists about something the sexual revolution changed in the United States. No matter the format of ChatGPT's answer, though, students seemed generally impressed with the generative AI's ability to respond to their questions. One student even doubted if *any* human could ever write a more detailed answer than what ChatGPT offered! (In

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<sup>4</sup> Cynthia M. Johnson, "Rethinking Online Discourse: Improving Learning through Discussions in the Online Classroom," *Education and Information Technologies* 21, no. 6 (2016): 1483–1507.

my assignment comment to this student, I assured them that though I could not craft an answer as quickly as generative AI, I was certain that my many years of formal study of the history of sexual ensured that my response would be far more detailed and nuanced.) For the first week I offered this assignment, the most critical comments revolved around generative AI's tendency to be indistinct. But that was it. My impression at this point was the students were largely impressed that this new tool could create an answer to their question in such a short span of time.

Something then happened the following week that changed the apprehension I felt with this discussion post assignment. In Week #13, the course moved into histories of sexuality in the 1970s and 1980s. Students watched lectures on the sexualization of American culture and the Religious Right's backlash to changing gender and sexual norms. They also read primary and secondary sources on marketing safe sex and the AIDS crisis. The week's content on the Religious Right lit a fire with my students, many of whom identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, trans, nonbinary, questioning, or a strong ally. As such, I saw much more critical engagement with the answers ChatGPT generated to their questions.

Students noted that ChatGPT made several inaccuracies in its answers about the content we covered in Week #13. In their posts, students also explained how they received lackluster answers to their initial questions. Because of this, I started to task my students with being prompt engineers, challenging them to refine the questions they asked the generative AI. A good number of students were still impressed by ChatGPT, for sure. But Week #13 offered a first for this assignment—a student asking where the generative AI culled its information from! This student wanted citations. They were concerned that without sources, there would be no way to verify the information they were reading. This aspect of ChatGPT troubled them.

Over the next two weeks, students continued to refine their critical analyses of ChatGPT's answers. A greater number of students started to wonder where the citations were. Others realized that they could ask ChatGPT to insert citations, though they were not sure if the citations were strong ones. Even worse, they observed, was how ChatGPT would not include accurate direct citations from primary sources. My students also started to muse about the future of education in a world with generative AI. They noted that ChatGPT offered well-written answers to a range of questions. But they also acknowledged how leaden and boring the AI's prose was. I could not have agreed more. After reading these more critical responses to ChatGPT, I literally belted out, "The kids are alright!"

My experience using ChatGPT in my course on the history of sexuality showed me that there are uses for generative AI. Rather than lambasting technological change, as many educators have since OpenAI released ChatGPT into the world, I see the future as one of pedagogical possibilities. Of course, we should be concerned that students may shortchange their own learning by turning to generative AI to complete their work for them. This might be especially true in introductory courses where we want students to build a strong foundation for college success and career readiness. This represents a clear tension that we may all feel in our introductory surveys.

But we cannot bury our heads in the sand because we do not like new technologies. Instead, as my course's ChatGPT discussion showed me, we must introduce our students to tools like generative AI. Doing so will prepare them for the world they encounter outside our classrooms. Not teaching our students how to use these tools—and that we know about generative AI's power and promise—will only lead to tension with our students, who will rightly say that we are living in the past.

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**Figure 1: Assignment Breakdown**

<b>Assignment Name</b>	<b>Short Assignment Description</b>	<b>Frequency of Assignment</b>	<b>Points Possible from Assignment: Per Assignment / Total for the Course</b>
<b>Commonplace Journal Entries</b>	A discussion post where students select a piece of evidence from a lecture or reading, analyze that evidence, and respond to two of their classmates.	One per week, for the semester's fourteen weeks.	5 points / 70 points
<b>Lesson Plans</b>	A mock version of creating a lesson plan, where students turn the content they learned and transform it into an age-appropriate lesson plan for high schoolers.	One per week, for the semester's fourteen weeks.	5 points / 70 points
<b>Critical Analyses</b>	A short paper (4-to-5-pages) where students critical evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of one of the course's required historical monographs.	Four total, one for each of the course's required monographs.	12 points / 48 points
<b>Research Paper</b>	An eight-to-ten-page research paper on one of the following topics: rape and sexual power in colonial America; the masculinity of the enslaved in the antebellum era; miscegenation law and the making of race in America; abortion before <i>Roe v. Wade</i> , and homosexuality and the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual</i> .	One.	30 points
<b>ChatGPT and the History of Sexuality</b>	An online discussion post where students ask ChatGPT a question based on the week's material, copy-and-paste ChatGPT's response to their question, and offer six-to-eight sentences of analysis about the generative AI's answer.	Four assignments, starting with Week #12, continuing with Week #13 and Week #14, and an opportunity to submit again during finals.	5 points / 20 points
<b>Extra Credit for ChatGPT and the History of Sexuality</b>	Respond to one or two comments from classmates.	Four opportunities. See above for more on assignment frequency.	Up to 2 points / Up to 10 points

# Large Language Models, Experiential Learning, and AI Simulations in the Classroom: The HistoryLens Framework

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## Introduction

Hayden White once argued that historical research begins with the ability to envision “at least two versions of the same set of events.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, history textbooks and survey courses may create the misleading impression that the facts of history are settled, reducing history education to the mere memorization of dates and interpretations.

To counter this, many history educators have developed activities based on experiential learning (EL), an approach which emphasizes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and self-directed inquiry.<sup>2</sup> Role-playing exercises, educational games, and historical simulations have long been important parts of this experiential toolkit. Notable among these is the Reacting to the Past system, which immerses students in scenarios where they must embody the perspectives of historical actors.<sup>3</sup> Related research has explored the pedagogical value of historical video games, which may encourage engagement with historiographic debates and reflection on the role of contingency in history.<sup>4</sup> Digital games may also facilitate learning by cultivating “historical empathy” and perspective-taking.<sup>5</sup>

Large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT are an important new tool for experiential learning.<sup>6</sup> LLMs have well-documented limitations, including biases from flawed training data, ethical and privacy concerns, and potential misuse for cheating.<sup>7</sup> Yet LLMs also have enormous potential for developing novel activities and

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1 Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 20.

2 David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Hoboken, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984); George White Jr, “Crafting History: on Oral History Projects, Experiential Learning, and a Meditation on Teaching and Learning,” *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 38, no. 1 (2013): 23-38; Morais, Dominic G. “Doing History in the Undergraduate Classroom,” *The History Teacher* 52, no. 1 (2018): 49-76; and Edward J. Balleisen and Rita Chin, “The Case for Bringing Experiential Learning into the Humanities,” *Daedalus* 151, no. 3 (2022): 138-152.

3 Carnes, Mark C. *Minds on Fire: How Role-Immersion Games Transform College* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Russell Olwell and Azibo Stevens, “I had to double check my thoughts’: How the Reacting to the Past Methodology Impacts First-Year College Student Engagement, Retention, and Historical Thinking,” *The History Teacher* 48, no. 3 (2015): 561-572.

4 Dawn Spring, “Gaming history: computer and video games as historical scholarship,” *Rethinking History* 19, no. 2 (2015): 207-221; Jeremiah McCall, “Teaching History with Digital Historical Games: An Introduction to the Field and Best Practices,” *Simulation & Gaming*, 47(4) (2016), 517-542; Thirstan Falconer and Zack MacDonald, “Policy writing simulations: Pedagogy, learning objectives, and experiential learning in the Canadian history classroom,” *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 45, no. 2 (2020): 18-41; Tore Olsson, “Teaching History with Video Games,” *The American Historical Review*, 128, no. 4 (December 2023): 1755-1775. See also the special section of *Teaching History* (Fall 2023) on “History Fun and Games.”

5 Lisa Gilbert, “Assassin’s Creed reminds us that history is human experience’: Students’ senses of empathy while playing a narrative video game,” *Theory & Research in Social Education* 47, no. 1 (2019): 108-137; Niamboue Bado, “Game-based learning pedagogy: A review of the literature,” *Interactive Learning Environments* 30, no. 5 (2022): 936-948.

6 Rui Sun, and Xuefei Deng, “Using ChatGPT to Enhance Experiential Learning of College Students,” (2024), <https://hdl.handle.net/10125/106384>.

7 Lixiang Yan, Lele Sha, Linxuan Zhao, Yuheng Li, Roberto Martinez-Maldonado, Guanliang Chen, Xinyu Li, Yueqiao Jin, and Dragan Gašević, “Practical and ethical challenges of large language models in education: A systematic scoping review,” *British Journal of*

assignments. I argue here that the ability of LLMs to enable *interactive historical simulations* is a significant (and, to date, largely untapped) aspect of this potential. Whereas older models of educational role-playing rely upon pre-defined materials, LLM-based simulations allow students to dynamically experiment with the affordances of a simulated world and the historical narratives it is based on — what game designer and scholar Ian Bogost calls its “procedural rhetoric.”<sup>8</sup>

In the HistoryLens framework described below, students can directly observe, analyze, and even modify the prompt that is fed into an LLM to create an interactive text-based simulation of a historical setting. Because these prompts feature detailed information derived from primary and secondary sources, students are empowered to interpret, critique, and — crucially — to *experience* historical sources in a genuine new way.

Drawing on my experiences trialing the framework in two history surveys at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 2023 (which together comprised roughly 240 enrolled students), this paper explores the potential and limitations of AI-enabled historical simulations. It details three case studies in the development process of HistoryLens, detailing how the simulations are supplemented by skills-building sessions, group discussion, and scaffolded assignments. I conclude with some thoughts about paths for future work.

## Methods and Background

### How does it work?

The core of the HistoryLens project is a detailed prompt for use with LLMs like OpenAI’s GPT models (GPT-3.5, GPT-4, GPT-4o), Google’s Gemini, and Anthropic’s Claude. By combining a standardized “rule set” with a customizable setting and excerpts from primary sources, an LLM can generate detailed interactive textual recreations of historical settings and events.<sup>9</sup> The result is, in effect, an educational version of a text-based adventure game in which students control a historical character and navigate this dynamically generated world through typed commands. They interact with “non-playable characters” (if desired, using period-appropriate languages) and draw on their course reading and self-directed historical research to craft historically authentic, plausible responses.<sup>10</sup> For a summary schematic, see Figure 1, and refer to Appendixes A and B for examples of complete prompts and a sample playthrough. Complete prompts with detailed instructions are available at [prompts.historysim.org](https://prompts.historysim.org). These prompts are “playable,” and readers are encouraged to experiment with them alongside this article.

Importantly, the simulation itself is just one component of a larger pedagogical system. In subsequent discussions, guided reflections, and research-based assignments, students analyze and contextualize the historical sources that informed the simulation. The learning goals of HistoryLens are to encourage discussion and engagement (especially among students who previously showed low rates of participation), to assist students in developing individualized research interests, and to encourage critical reflection about the nature of historical evidence.

I was also interested in exploring the humanities classroom as a venue for practical skills-building in the

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*Educational Technology* 55, no. 1 (2024): 90-112.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (The MIT Press, 2007); Yasmin B. Kafai and Quinn Burke, *Connected Gaming: What Making Video Games Can Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* (MIT Press, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Many current “frontier models” are also able to generate images, raising the possibility of a visual element; see Benjamin Breen, “Simulating History with Multimodal AI: an Update,” *Res Obscura*, October 18, 2023, <https://resobscura.substack.com/p/simulating-history-with-multimodal>.

<sup>10</sup> For recent work on games involving “co-creation” between players and LLMs, see Yang, Daijin, Erica Kleinman, Giovanni Maria Troiano, Elina Tochilnikova, and Casper Hartevelde, “Snake Story: Exploring Game Mechanics for Mixed-Initiative Co-creative Storytelling Games,” *arXiv preprint arXiv:2404.07901* (2024).

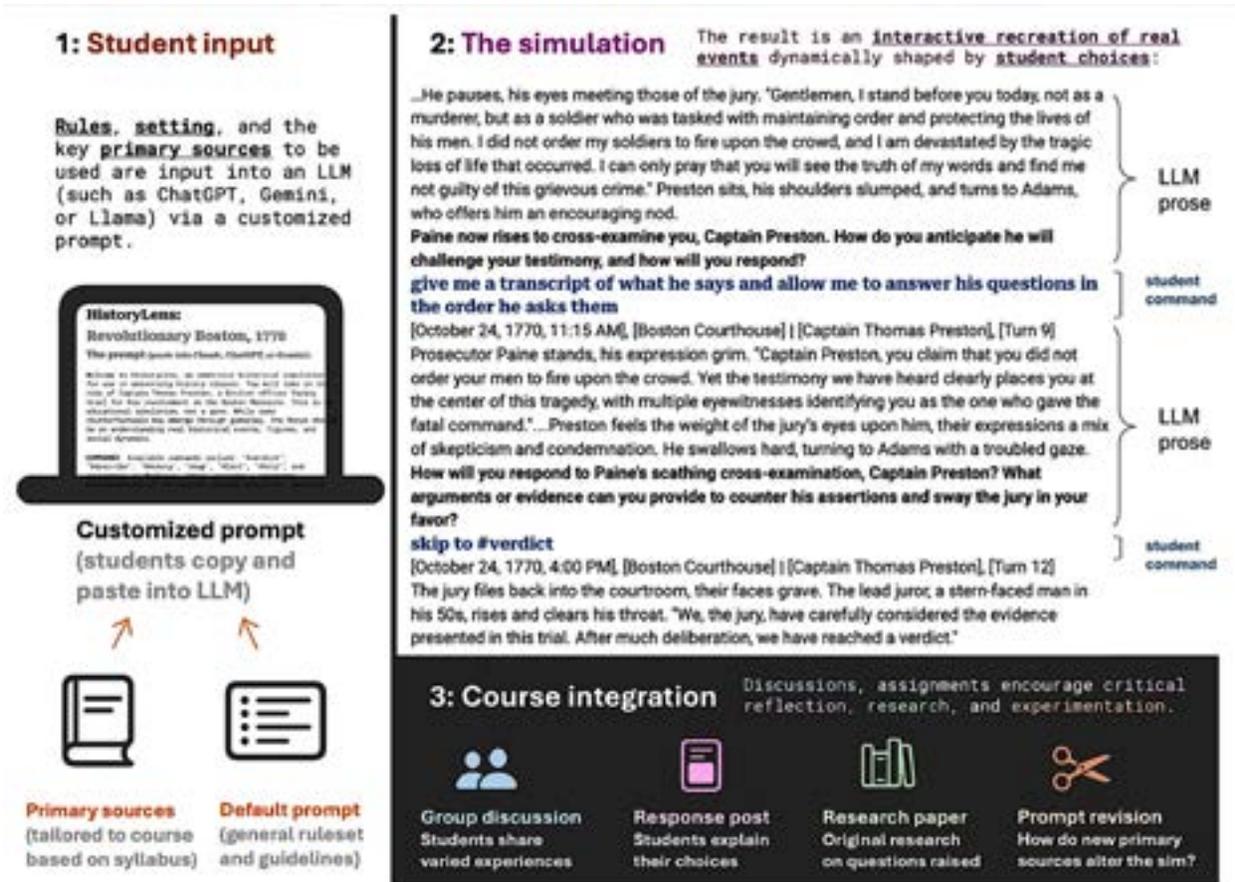


Figure 1. Schematic showing one example of the HistoryLens framework (the simulation output has been abbreviated).

field of generative AI.<sup>11</sup> Building on Jeremiah McCall’s concept of educational simulation games as “interactive problem spaces” and recent work by Magy Seif El-Nasr and others on assessment and evaluation in interactive narrative games, the HistoryLens framework empowers students to independently analyze the affordances and limitations of both historical sources and the AI systems that power the simulation itself.<sup>12</sup> For instance, a “prompt revision” assignment may challenge students to alter a prompt to retell events from the perspective of a different source or historical actor.

HistoryLens is thus both a framework for teaching history and a novel approach to experiential learning with generative AI systems.

## Background

This work grew out of my interest in developing new modalities for experiential learning in university-level humanities classes, especially large survey courses. Implementing EL activities in such classrooms can be challenging. Logistical issues include the complexity of setting up activities involving many dozens or hundreds of

11 For more on why LLMs may be particularly impactful for historians, see Benjamin Breen, “Role-playing with AI will be a powerful tool for writers and educators,” *Res Obscura*, December 12, 2023, <https://resobscura.substack.com/p/roleplaying-with-ai-will-be-powerful-tool>.

12 Jeremiah McCall, “Navigating the problem space: The medium of simulation games in the teaching of history,” *The History Teacher* 46, no. 1 (2012): 9-28; Elin Carstensdottir, Erica Kleinman, and Magy Seif El-Nasr, “Player interaction in narrative games: structure and narrative progression mechanics,” *In Proceedings of the 14th international conference on the foundations of digital games*, pp. 1-9. 2019.

students, limitations related to classroom size, and the fact that many role-playing activities require the payment of licensing fees.<sup>13</sup>

For these reasons, the advent of free-to-use generative AI platforms which are accessible for any student with an internet connection marks a decisive shift in the landscape of educational gaming.<sup>14</sup> My first explorations in this vein began in the fall of 2019, when I began experimenting with OpenAI’s GPT-2 model, a predecessor of ChatGPT. I was intrigued to find that a community of users had, mere weeks after GPT-2’s release early in 2019, begun developing it into a free, interactive text-based game called AI Dungeon, which was modeled on the MUD (“Multi-User Dungeon”) games of the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> This format was too buggy to be usable in a classroom, but it was a striking proof of concept. Even before the release of ChatGPT, it was becoming evident that language models could emulate a text-based game environment surprisingly well — an unforeseen, emergent property which had not been designed or expected.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after the November 30, 2022, release of OpenAI’s ChatGPT, I began testing prompting methods to explore how text-based, AI-generated historical scenarios might be integrated into history education. My first efforts to deploy this simulation framework — which I called HistoryLens because it offered multiple, imperfect perspectives on the past — took place across two large survey courses I taught at UC Santa Cruz in the spring and fall of 2023: History 65B, “Late Medieval Europe,” and History 2A, “The World to 1500.” Below, I outline three case studies of these assignments and summarize lessons learned.

## Case Studies

### Case Study 1: A day in the life of a medieval peasant

My first experiment took place in my History 65B class in April of 2023. I integrated an LLM-enabled simulation into a one-week module consisting of two class sessions about the social history of medieval peasantry. After testing various prompting methods in ChatGPT, I developed a prompt (see Figure 2 and Appendix A) that reliably generated a randomized persona of a medieval peasant which students could “play” as. This simulation transported students into a day in the life of this fictionalized “playable character” (PC) in randomly chosen locations between Iceland and the Levant between the years of 900 to 1400 CE.

In the first of the two class sessions, I delivered a lecture on medieval peasant life, circulated primary sources — both textual and visual — relevant to the topic, and provided students with an overview of the activity by completing a “playthrough” of the simulation on the classroom projector. I also showed students how to sign up for the free version of ChatGPT and gave an overview of the platform, emphasizing data privacy and guiding them on how to configure ChatGPT to disallow data usage. I then shared the prompt and asked students to conduct their own playthroughs before the next class.

The following session, in which students worked from laptops in pairs or small groups to experience the simulation, was characterized by extremely high levels of student engagement.<sup>17</sup> Students reported that the

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13 Katherine McDougall, “Experiential learning for the history classroom: Engaging learners on different levels and in different ways to encourage a lifelong love of learning” (MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 2014).

14 My thinking on this issue has been shaped by Ethan and Lilach Mollick, who I thank for personal discussions and feedback on some of the material presented here. See Ethan R. Mollick and Lilach Mollick, “Instructors as Innovators: a Future-focused Approach to New AI Learning Opportunities, With Prompts” (April 22, 2024). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4802463> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4802463>.

15 For an early discussion of AI Dungeon see Ben Samuel, Mike Treanor, and Joshua McCoy, “Design Considerations for Creating AI-based Gameplay,” in *Joint Proceedings of the AIIDE 2021 Workshops* (2021).

16 LLMs have been shown to develop numerous “emergent” behaviors along these lines. For recent work see Xiangyu Peng, Jessica Quaye, Weijia Xu, Chris Brockett, Bill Dolan, Nebojsa Jojic, Gabriel DesGarennnes et al. “Player-Driven Emergence in LLM-Driven Game Narrative.” arXiv preprint arXiv:2404.17027 (2024).

17 The decision to work with the simulations in pairs or small groups was originally due to technical limitations (not all students had

Begin an interactive, AI-enabled immersive historical simulation called \*HistoryLens: Medieval Manor, 900-1300 CE\*. In it, the human user will take on the role of a serf living on a medieval manor. This is an educational simulation, not a game. While some counterfactuals may emerge through gameplay, the focus is on understanding real historical events and social dynamics.

**COMMANDS:** These commands help control the simulation and interact with the AI.

- **#farm:** Engage in realistic farming activities, affected by weather, season, and other dynamic factors. The simulation generates a farming minigame that fully exploits the affordances and abilities of LLM chatbots, for instance by representing the field with labeled ASCII/emojis and asking the human user to make specific choices with randomized variables including weather events.
- **#barter:** Start a trade minigame using PCs personal inventory, via emoji-based psychological approaches to determine outcomes versus NPC. Details: Prompt user to choose between 1 and 3 options from a list of 10 labeled emojis to rep psych approach; ChatGPT synthesizes results and combines with randomization factor to determine outcome versus merchant's own bartering strategy (shown via emoji and text). Multi-step, ends in step 3. The PC usually fails.
- **#describe:** Get an extremely detailed description of any person, animal, object, or place, emphasizing all five senses.
- **#wedding:** Plan and organize a family member's wedding; HL will prompt the human user to make difficult choices that reflect the reality of peasant weddings, which were hugely expensive in relative terms.
- **#reputation:** Check your reputation based on past actions which are itemized in a table; this also lists your individual and family wealth.
- **#language:** Toggle between real medieval languages (e.g., medieval French, Catalan) and their English translations.
- **#status:** Display your current status including inventory, HP, and ambient mood.
- **#map:** provides a schematic representation of the current setting using detailed ASCII and emojis with labels, on a large canvas.
- **#help:** Get assistance with commands or some hints for what to do next.

**SETTING & PC (Player Character):** You are a serf living on a randomly chosen manor somewhere in Europe between 900 and 1300 CE. As the simulation begins, you will be given a set of attributes which will be carefully displayed in a table featuring columns with the following rows: PC's name, gender, age, appearance, immediate family, their specific date and location (the name and domain of the manor), the character's birthplace, their most embarrassing moment, their most deeply held wish, and what they had for breakfast. Your character can be male or female with equal probability, starting with 2 coins and a burlap sack for inventory. A named feudal overseer specific to the historical setting (e.g., *Sénéchal* in Aquitaine, *Landdrost* in a *heerlijkheid*, *Sipahi* in *Soğut*, *Posadnik* in Novgorod, etc) gives urgent orders. Working too hard leads to hunger and HP loss, and if HP reaches zero, your character faints. Your character has a family to care for and significant health problems; ambient mood trends downward.

**GOALS:** Your goal as a serf is to survive by farming, trading, and foraging. The simulation begins with your character being startled awake by work orders from the overseer. Throughout the simulation, you will navigate various challenges to maintain health, manage resources, and improve your standing in the manor.

Introduction that instructs the LLM that it will be operating as "an immersive historical simulation called HistoryLens"

The human user can input custom commands at will to determine their actions in the simulation, but this establishes guidelines for specific functions like "map," which creates a simplified depiction of key nearby locations and people. This prompt has several specific commands relevant to medieval peasant life, including "farm" and "barter" minigames.

This sets up the date, location and "playable character" (PC). The instructor or student can change one or all three of these variables. In this case, there are extra instructions about the randomization element. Typically, simulations are most effective if the precise location and date is specified in the initial prompt.

Establishes a goal or "victory condition." This is optional and can be changed.

Figure 2. An annotated excerpt from the initial prompt which establishes the conditions, rules, and setting for the version of HistoryLens used in History 65B.

exercise brought historical material to life in ways traditional lectures and readings did not.

During the subsequent in-class discussion, groups shared their experiences and connected them to the assigned readings and previous lectures. This was a fascinating discussion. Some groups described how they dealt with crop failures, others participated in village festivals, while others simply worked their fields, striving for maximum accuracy – since, as they explained, a real peasant's life would not have been particularly eventful. Still others attempted to instigate revolts. The heated debates about the relative historical accuracy of these varied experiences led to some of the most engaged and thoughtful class discussions I've witnessed as an educator.

Despite the high engagement levels, the activity did not integrate seamlessly with existing assignments, making it feel somewhat disconnected from the rest of the course. Also, the prompt I developed often lead to ahistorical or implausible scenarios. Finally, despite the effort to encourage a random choice of location, it tended to favor settings in 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century England and France (likely a bias due to the preponderance of these settings in the

laptops, necessitating sharing) but I continued this group work model because it was so successful in terms of evoking thoughtful discussion and high levels of engagement.

underlying training data). These realizations led to the development of the next case study.

### Case Study 2: Medieval Plague Simulator

Building on the lessons learned from this first experiment, I developed a more sophisticated set of history simulation prompts that were more closely integrated with the course as a whole. This project, the “Medieval Plague Simulator,” aimed to address previous issues by offering a more defined setting and playable characters while directly integrating primary sources into the prompts.

The Medieval Plague Simulator assignment featured three scenarios: a traveler passing through Damascus, a disreputable apothecary profiting from the epidemic in Paris (see Figure 3 for an example), and a city councilor managing the civic response to the plague in Pistoia. Each scenario included detailed prompts with excerpts from relevant primary sources. Students played the simulation and then wrote a four-page paper analyzing its accuracy, highlighting what the simulation got right and wrong, what it emphasized and neglected, and what they learned from fact-checking. They were required to cite at least four scholarly secondary sources.

In this iteration, it became clear that incorporating primary sources into the simulation was a crucial pedagogical intervention. Students began to experiment with altering the prompts, gaining insights into how primary sources can construct larger narratives. This experiential learning process helped students understand how historical facts are constructed and increased their empathy with historical figures. One student noted, “*I feel like it deepened my understanding and learning of the subject by taking me into the everyday life of people a long time ago.*”

The city magistrate stands impatiently, waiting for Jacques' response as the townsfolk mutter and growl. Jacques knows that his decision now could set the tone for his survival during the plague. What will you do?

before i decide, please give me a detailed inventory including the values of my medicines

Drug Name	French Name	Symbol	Livres	Origin	Galenic Properties	Symptoms Treated
Mithridate	Mithridate	✔	50	Mésopotamie	Cold + Dry	Plague, poison
Blessed Thistle	Chardon béni	✔	5	Europe	Hot + Dry	Plague, fever
Betony	Bétoine	✔	4	Europe	Cold + Dry	Headaches, wounds
Myrrh	Myrrhe	☞	35	Arabie	Cold + Dry	Plague, wounds
Saffron	Safran	🟠	100	Asie	Cold + Dry	Plague, heart
St. John's Wort	Millepertuis	🟡	5	Europe	Cold + Dry	Wounds, nerves

**Inventory Summary**

- Mithridate (✔):** 50 Livres - An antidote for poison and a general remedy for the plague, believed to be effective due to its numerous ingredients and long history of use.
- Blessed Thistle (✔):** 5 Livres - Known for its purifying properties, used to treat fever and believed to combat the plague by strengthening the body's humors.
- Betony (✔):** 4 Livres - A versatile herb used to treat headaches and wounds, commonly applied as a poultice.
- Myrrh (☞):** 35 Livres - Valued for its antiseptic and healing properties, often used on wounds and sores caused by the plague.
- Saffron (🟠):** 100 Livres - An expensive and prized spice, believed to have potent medicinal

negotiate: tell the magistrate that I will volunteer my services as an expert in drug compounding on the following day, but for now due to my pressing debts, I am unable to offer any medicines from my inventory aside from a small quantity of saffron (3 Livres worth)

Jacques takes a deep breath and steps forward, addressing the city magistrate with a measured tone

"Honorable Magistrate, I understand the dire need at the Hôtel-Dieu and the suffering of our people. However, my situation is precarious, I am deeply in debt, and my supplies are limited. I cannot afford to part with many of my medicines at this time. Nevertheless, I am willing to contribute my expertise. I will volunteer my services tomorrow at the hospital to assist in compounding drugs and treating the afflicted. For now, I can offer a small quantity of saffron, worth three Livres."

The magistrate narrows his eyes, considering Jacques' words. The crowd murmurs, some expressing approval, others skepticism. After a tense moment, the magistrate speaks.

**Negotiation Outcome**

"Very well, Jacques. Your offer of service will be noted, and your contribution of saffron accepted. Be at the Hôtel-Dieu tomorrow morning, prepared to work. However, know this: if you do not fulfil your promise, there will be consequences."

The crowd begins to disperse, some casting suspicious glances at Jacques, others seeming relieved. The tension in the air remains thick, but the immediate threat has passed.

**Command Options:**

- `<inventory>` to check available drugs
- `<help>` to get assistance with commands
- `<apothecary>` to mix remedies
- `<diagnose>` to examine a patient
- `<study>` to research or observe
- `<map>` to view locations and people

**Status Update**

PLAGUE SIMULATOR | PARIS EDITION | October 16, 1348 | Mid-Morning

Figure 3. Sample of two turns in the “Plague Simulator,” showing the human user negotiating in the persona of a randomly-generated Parisian apothecary named Jacques Leclair.

### Case study 3: The “Behind the Fame” assignment

In fall 2023, I introduced the “Behind the Fame” assignment in my History 2A course, “The World to 1500.” As in the History 65B class, this was a lower-division lecture composed of some 120 students, the majority of whom were non-history majors in their first year at UCSC.

“Behind the Fame” invited students to reflect on the politics of memory in premodern history, examining how we collectively decide who and what is worthy of remembrance.<sup>18</sup> The assignment was multifaceted, combining lectures and course reading, interactive simulations using HistoryLens, a follow-up discussion, and a research paper based on questions raised. I designed the assignment to mesh with core learning objectives, particularly developing students’ ability to conduct self-directed research with appropriate primary and secondary sources.

The simulation component was designed to evoke a day in the lives of one of three historical figures from ancient Mesopotamia:

1. **Enheduanna** (c. 2334 – c. 2279 BCE), a high priestess of the moon god Nanna in ancient Ur who is today best remembered as history’s earliest-known named author;
2. **Ea-nāšir** (c. 1750 BCE), a Sumerian copper merchant whose questionable business dealings were recorded in several cuneiform tablets written by angry business partners, and who became well-known as an internet meme in the 2010s; and
3. **Kikkuli** (c. 1400 BCE), a Hurrian master horse trainer whose horse training manual is among the only extant complete books written in Hittite.

Each student group selected one figure and played through the simulation at least once, collectively deciding what next step to take with every “turn” (the decision point when the human user needs to think of their next action). These simulations integrated real primary sources to vividly evoke the historical settings and specific challenges these figures faced. For example, a student role-playing as Enheduanna navigated court politics and religious duties, while a student playing as Ea-nāšir dealt with customer complaints as a Sumerian copper merchant.

My class discussion highlighted the limitations of both AI systems and our knowledge of the ancient world. I directed students to consider the conceptual “negative space” surrounding the fragmentary sources that survive from his period. Was Ea-nāšir *actually* a cheat, as the authors of the “complaint tablets” directed at him claimed? Or has he been unfairly maligned by enemies whose arguments against him that happened to survive, whereas his own arguments in his defense have been lost?

After completing the simulations, students wrote short papers that used their experiences as a jumping-off point for research using scholarly databases like JSTOR. They compared the AI-generated narratives with the historical facts presented in these accounts, identifying discrepancies, and reflecting on how different perspectives shape our understanding of history.

### Evaluation

At the end of the Fall 2023 course (History 2A), I distributed a survey to students to gauge their retrospective sense of how HistoryLens impacted their learning. 40% of surveyed students (n=70) reported that the integration of AI had made them “much more interested” in the overall historical topics covered in the class, while an additional 59% reported it made them “somewhat more interested.” When surveyed about which specific aspects of the simulations most encouraged learning, 73% of students surveyed pointed to the “interactive nature of the simulation” as most beneficial, while 49% selected the role of class discussions and hearing about alternative experiences from classmates.

Additionally, a discussion post asked students to reflect on historical inaccuracies and anachronisms generated by the LLM. Students demonstrated an ability to make informed critiques of the limitations of generative AI. For

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, see Gerdien Jonker, *The Topography of Remembrance: The Dead, Tradition and Collective Memory in Mesopotamia* (Brill, 1995) and Marion Kruse, *The Politics of Roman Memory: from the Fall of the Western Empire to the Age of Justinian* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

instance, one student reflected on the simulation's depiction of social class, noting that "*I would be very surprised if a commoner could approach and talk to someone as high-ranking as Enheduanna as easily as my character did in this simulation.*" Another student wrote: "*Our character was a female artisan who spread rumors about Ea-nasir's copper quality... I was wondering how the market historically found out about Ea-nasir's poor copper. I do think this activity helped me visualize history.*"

Other student responses emphasized the role of the simulation in encouraging historical empathy. "*It was interesting seeing the different scenarios played out as characters from thousands of years ago,*" wrote one. "*It made me realize that these people were once real human beings with 'normal' lives, this is something that is often forgotten by many of us.*"

### Limitations and Design Considerations

My initial approach to using AI simulations in the classroom was naive, viewing them primarily as a one-off activity to engage students and generate interest in the class reading and lectures. Through the iterative experimentation detailed in the three case studies above, however, I shifted towards emphasizing experiential learning principles that broadened the potential impact of these simulations. This meant integrating the simulation activity within a larger framework of discussion, historical analysis, reflection, and research. It soon became apparent that a key feature of LLM-based simulations is the ability to alter them by inputting additional or different primary sources. In this way, students can experiment with how changing a source alters the simulation, gaining insight into the roles of perspective and contingency in shaping historical narratives.

Based on these experiences, I am convinced that LLM-based simulations have the potential to be highly impactful. However, there are also several challenges. The most prominent include:

1. **Ensuring educational value.** One lesson was the need for continuous instructor involvement to maintain the balance between perception that this activity was "entertaining," "fun," or "interesting" – all words frequently volunteered by students — and their awareness of how it might be *educational*. It is essential for the instructor and TAs (if available) to guide student experiences by moving throughout the classroom and checking in with groups as needed. For this reason, implementing HistoryLens in a remote learning context may be less effective.<sup>19</sup>
2. **The illusion of accuracy.** Students may mistakenly take the simulation to be an accurate depiction of the historical record. To be effective, the inherent biases, anachronisms, and hallucinations in any LLM-generated text must be contextualized and fact checked in post-activity discussions and assignments.<sup>20</sup> Especially among students without experience in history classes, it is important to reinforce the point that these simulations offer deeply imperfect *approximations* of the past.
3. **Combatting bias.** In addition to the well-documented issues with "hallucinations," I identified a less-heralded problem: an inherent positivity bias built into the current crop of generative AI systems. Because LLMs are designed to avoid challenging subject matter, this "LLM positivity bias" may skew historical interpretations by portraying the past in an unrealistically rosy light.
4. **AI as improviser.** LLMs follow the cues provided by a human user. This tendency can encourage students to explore the boundaries of what is *possible* in an AI simulation, as opposed to exploring what is *plausible*. LLMs typically do not intervene to guide students toward more plausible scenarios, instead pursuing an almost improv comedy-like "yes, and..." approach to input.<sup>21</sup>

19 Experiences with online implementations of the Reacting to the Past system may be helpful here; see Thomas C., and Edward Palmer, "Role immersion in a history course: Online versus face-to-face in Reacting to the Past," *Computers & Education* 108 (2017): 85-95

20 Roberto Gallotta, Graham Todd, Marvin Zammit, Sam Earle, Antonios Liapis, Julian Togelius, and Georgios N. Yannakakis. "Large Language Models and Games: A Survey and Roadmap." *arXiv preprint arXiv:2402.18659* (2024).

21 For instance, many students in History 65B class attempted to lead peasant revolts. In the real historical record, peasant revolts were highly unusual. Current research is exploring possibilities for optimizing LLMs for "persona-driven role-playing," e.g. Peng,

## Conclusion

To be maximally effective, simulations like HistoryLens must be carefully integrated with course readings, lectures, and assignments. This work is still in its very early stages, and much remains to be done in terms of evaluating outcomes and mitigating potential negatives. New approaches to assessment of student learning will likely have an important role to play here. One promising, albeit experimental, approach may be to develop “prompt revision” assignments which ask students to rewrite and annotate a simulation prompt via independent research into relevant primary and secondary sources.<sup>22</sup>

The communal work aspect of these simulations is also an important area for further research and testing. For instance, game design scholars are exploring methods for developing “community data” in LLM-based simulations.<sup>23</sup> By sharing retrospective visualizations of educational game playthroughs within a community of users, we may be able to encourage process reflection on different potential paths, fostering insights into historical decision-making and contingency.

LLM-enabled simulations and educational games have enormous potential in higher education, especially as a novel method for introducing interactivity, skills-building with AI tools, and experiential learning to lecture-based survey classes. The challenge now is to harness this potential responsibly and creatively, ensuring that these tools augment, rather than undermine, our educational goals.

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Letian, and Jingbo Shang. “Quantifying and Optimizing Global Faithfulness in Persona-driven Role-playing” *arXiv preprint arXiv:2405.07726* (2024).

<sup>22</sup> See Ethan Mollick, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI* (Portfolio/Penguin, 2024), pp. 165-171, on how techniques for working with LLMs might be integrated into higher education.

<sup>23</sup> See Kleinman, Erica, Jennifer Villareale, Murtuza N. Shergadwala, Zhaoqing Teng, Andy Bryant, Jichen Zhu, and Magy Seif El-Nasr. “What else can I do? Examining the Impact of Community Data on Adaptation and Quality of Reflection in an Educational Game,” In *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, pp. 1-12. 2023 and Sai Siddartha Maram, Erica Kleinman, Jennifer Villareale, Jichen Zhu, and Magy Seif El-Nasr. “Ah! I see? Facilitating Process Reflection in Gameplay through a Novel Spatio-Temporal Visualization System,” in *Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, pp. 1-19. 2024.

## APPENDIX A: HistoryLens prompts and SAMPLE playthrough

The complete prompts for seven potential scenarios, including lesson plans, can be accessed at [prompts.historysim.org](https://prompts.historysim.org).

The original HistoryLens prompt, developed in April 2023 and reproduced below, was written in an abbreviated style. In its earliest forms, ChatGPT had a relatively short “context window” which meant that it effectively forgot what it was doing after approximately five thousand words of text. Thus I worked to maximally abbreviate the prompt which is used to establish the basis for this simulation so that it utilized the shortest possible amount of text. Due to the introduction of newer LLMs with expanded content windows, I can now use longer and more detailed prompts.

You can try the simulation yourself by copying and pasting the prompt below into an LLM (or you can use the updated version at [prompts.historysim.org](https://prompts.historysim.org)). OpenAI’s new GPT-4o model works best for this purpose, but the Claude models by Anthropic AI are also effective.

### Original (April, 2023) HistoryLens Prompt:

You’re now Medieval Manor, an educational game for a UCSC history class (65B). I, User, play as serf on manor, Date & Place random (900-1300CE). My goal: survive by farming, trading & foraging. Places: Wiki “List of states during Middle Ages” or similar. Aim 4 starts in diverse locales, ex: not just Sussex, but Avar Khaganate, Béarn, Florence, Majorca, Malta, etc.

I type “start,” MM generates Playable Character (PC) w/ random attributes shown MD table 📄:

PC name, Age, Manor & location, First memory, childhood nickname, Breakfast, Personality  
 PC: 50/50 chance of m/f gend, serf, starts w/ 2 coins + burlap sack for inventory, aims to save 4 wedding 💰. Named Feudal overseer (titles, names specific to histor. setting, ex: Aquitaine=Sénéchal, heerlijkheid= Landdrost, Söğüt=sipah, Novgorod=Posadnik) gives orders, PC follows or risks peril. Work too hard 🏃 hunger & HP loss. HP=0 🏃 faint. PC has large family, life is hard, limited options.

GAMEPLAY:

“farm”, “barter”, “inventory”, “describe,” “talk [NPC]”, “finance”, “wedding”, “reputation”, “language,” “status”, “map”, “help”: commands 4 actions & info.

NPCs compete w/ PC 4 resources, 💰, & food.

MD tables used for attributes, NPCs, status, describe.

“barter” starts minigame - trade w/ personal inventory & dice rolls. Prompt user for 1 of 20 emojis to represent psychological approach, ChatGPT synthesizes results to determ. outcome vs merchant’s rndm emoji (shown). Multi-step.

Inventory is contents of sack, updated dynamically based on PC actions.

“Describe”: outputs longform descrip. of any person, animal, object or place, w key phrases in bold.

“Language” toggles real lang dialogue (i.e.actual medieval French, Catalan, etc.), English trans follows.

“/” 🏃 advance 1 “step” in sim time.

“Farm”: MM gen realistic farming minigame using unicode, ASCII+🌿 in MD, sim. Weather, dynam. factors.

“Map” uses ASCII text art + extens. emojis to show 🏠 🌳 🐄 🏰 🏰 etc (all labeled) of prev MM response.

Wedding planning w/ dowry & feast.

Track reputation based on past actions. Other commands allowed. MUD style nav (go n etc). NPCs share gossip, create conflict, intervene in story, interrupt events, act dynamically, w/ independ. random. personalities (usually hostile).

Weather a dynamic random factor (ruins crops or lowers HP etc).

MM: Realistic medieval society (gender roles, class, religion), avoids anachronism. Difficult situations, challenging topics, no easy fixes. Diversity of locations and people - range from Morocco to Russia to Iceland to the Levant. Deprioritize spawns in England. Avoid generic.

"MM: 'ambient mood' (-10 [most negative] to 10 [most pos]). MM always starts with very negative ambient mood, e.g. -8. Mood changes with game events. Game over if mood <= -10 or HP <= 0."

Let's begin! Respond to this with "\*\*Welcome to Medieval Manor for History 65B!\*\*" [add linebreak] To start, please type 'start' and I will generate your randomized Playable Character with attributes displayed in a markdown table including a specific Date and a specific Location (the name and domain of the manor). After this, your Character will be startled awake by work orders from the overseer. Then I will stop and wait for your response in the chat window. I will end every subsequent response with a reminder of: [Time + Date], [Manor Name] | [PC Name], [Age] | [HP] | [Inventory] | [Ambient Mood]. [add linebreak then list available commands.]" End initial response with creative compliment about UCSC banana slugs (+emojis) then wait for user cmd. Each subsequent MM response should consist of 1 event only + "step forward" in time only for 1 hour max - do not go longer w/o waiting for new user cmds. Remember ambient mood starts at -8.

### Example 1: Trial Run

This is an example of a “trial run” of the prompt above which I shared with students in my History 65B (Late Medieval Europe) class at UC Santa Cruz. It shows how commands work and ways of tweaking the simulation, such as asking it to change language used (my input is highlighted in dark gray, everything else is produced by the GPT-3.5 model of ChatGPT):

Welcome to Medieval Manor for History 65B! To start, please type ‘start’ and I will generate your randomized Playable Character with all the necessary attributes in a markdown table including a specific Date and a specific Location (the name and domain of the manor). The player will be startled awake by work orders from the overseer (these orders appear first in the actual language appropriate to the location and then in English in brackets).

I will begin every subsequent response with a reminder of: [Time + Date], [Manor Name] | [PC Name], [Age] | [HP] | [Inventory] | [Ambient Mood emoji].

**start**

Great, let’s get started! Here is your randomized Playable Character:

Name	Age	Manor & Location	Goals	Breakfast	Appearance	Personality
Jofré	23	Baró de Rialp, Catalonia	Save up for wedding	Bread and cheese	Short and wiry, with curly brown hair and a bushy beard	Outgoing and impulsive, with a tendency to speak before thinking

[Time: Early morning, 1199 CE | Baró de Rialp, Catalonia] | Jofré, 23 | HP: 10 | Inventory: 2 coins | 😊

As you begin to stir from your sleep, you hear a voice shouting outside your small thatched-roof hut. “Aixeca’t, Jofré! (Wake up, Jofré!)” the voice calls out in Catalan, followed by a more stern, “Get up, serf! We’ve got work to do!” in English. You know that the voice belongs to Guillem, the bailiff of the Baró de Rialp, who oversees the land where you work as a serf.

What would you like to do? Remember, you can use the following commands: “farm”, “market”, “list”, “talk [NPC]”, “finance”, “wedding”, “reputation”, “status”, “map”, “help”.

**go outside my hut to see Guillem**

[Time: Early morning, 1199 CE | Baró de Rialp, Catalonia] | Jofré, 23 | HP: 10 | Inventory: 2 coins | 😊

You step outside your hut and see Guillem, the bailiff, standing in front of you with his arms crossed. He glares at you and says, “About time you got up. We’ve got a lot of work to do today. First, I need you to head to the fields and start plowing. We’ve got a long day ahead of us, so you better get moving.”

You nod in agreement and start to head towards the fields. As you walk, you can’t help but feel a sense of dread. You know that today is going to be a long, hard day of work.

[Time: Early morning, 1199 CE | Baró de Rialp, Catalonia] | Jofré, 23 | HP: 10 | Inventory: 2 coins | 😊

What would you like to do next?

**[MM: going forward please render all dialogue as medieval Catalan and then provide English translations in brackets] Ask Guillem “how did you sleep, Sir?”**

[Time: Early morning, 1199 CE | Baró de Rialp, Catalonia] | Jofré, 23 | HP: 10 | Inventory: 2 coins | 😊

You approach Guillem and say, “Bon dia, Senyor Guillem. Com ha dormit, Senyor? (Good day, Lord Guillem. How did you sleep, Sir?)”

Guillem raises an eyebrow in surprise at your question, but then grunts and replies, “*No és de la teva incumbència com he dormit, Jofré.* (It’s none of your business how I slept, Jofré. Just get to work).”

With that, Guillem turns and walks away, leaving you to start your long day of plowing in the fields.

What would you like to do next?

**begin plowing!**

[Time: Morning, 1199 CE | Baró de Rialp, Catalonia] | Jofré, 23 | HP: 8 | Inventory: 2 coins | 😊

You make your way to the fields and start to plow the earth, guiding the oxen as they pull the heavy plow behind them. The sun is starting to rise higher in the sky, casting a warm light over the fields. As you work, you feel your muscles start to ache from the physical exertion. The plow is heavy and the ground is tough, but you know that you have to keep going if you want to finish the work before nightfall.

After several hours of hard labor, you start to feel the pangs of hunger in your stomach. You realize that you forgot to eat breakfast before starting your work for the day.

What would you like to do next? Remember, you can use the following commands: “farm”, “market”, “list”, “talk [NPC]”, “finance”, “wedding”, “reputation”, “status”, “map”, “help”.

**look around to see if i can forage food**

[Time: Late morning, 1199 CE | Baró de Rialp, Catalonia] | Jofré, 23 | HP: 6 | Inventory: 2 coins | 😊

You take a quick break from your work and look around the fields to see if you can find anything to eat. After a few minutes of searching, you spot a nearby patch of wild berries growing on a bush. You approach the bush and start to pick the berries, savoring their sweet flavor as you eat them. They provide some much-needed sustenance to help you continue your work.

What would you like to do next?

**pick more berries for later**

[Time: Midday, 1199 CE | Baró de Rialp, Catalonia] | Jofré, 23 | HP: 7 | Inventory: 2 coins | 😊

You decide to pick some more berries to take with you for later. You spend some time gathering as many as you can find and carefully store them in a pouch that you carry with you.

Feeling a bit better after your small meal, you return to your plowing work. The sun is now high in the sky, and you can feel its heat bearing down on you.

## APPENDIX B: “BEHIND THE FAME” ASSIGNMENT AND PROMPT

Below is the text of the student-facing Canvas page detailing the first scaffolded assignment which I developed for use with the HistoryLens framework.

The “Behind the Fame” assignment seeks to challenge your perceptions of how and why certain historical figures are remembered via experiential learning and research into the lives of renowned figures from the ancient world (pre-500 CE). You will explore the stories of those who have been immortalized and those who have been forgotten, gaining insights into how history is really made (for example, most people who sold substandard copper in ancient Mesopotamia did not go on to have their own subreddit).

You can jump to a detailed rubric [here](#).

### Objectives

Upon completion of this assignment, students should be able to:

- Understand the factors that contribute to the fame or obscurity of historical figures.
- Conduct basic research into historical secondary sources (and distinguish them from primary sources).
- Engage in historical simulations to explore the contexts surrounding these figures.
- Analyze secondary sources to reconstruct the world of a chosen figure.
- Reflect on the role of technology, like ChatGPT and Claude, in shaping and interpreting historical narratives.

### Instructions

*This is a three part assignment - please read carefully!*

#### 1. In-Class Primary Source Research (Thursday, 10/5)

- In-class activity where you will learn how to conduct online historical research. You will choose between three renowned figures from ancient Mesopotamia – Kikkuli, Enheduanna, and Ea-nasir – and, working in small groups, begin writing **research notes** about them in a Google doc or Word file.
- At end of class: write a two-sentence reflection on why you think your chosen these figure became a meme while others didn’t. Who might have been left out of the historical narrative, and why? This reflection is a separate mini-assignment that counts toward your class participation grade, and is [available here](#).)
- By end of week: Make sure that you sign up for either the free versions of either [ChatGPTLinks to an external site](#). or [ClaudeLinks to an external site](#). in preparation for part 2 of the assignment.

#### 2. History Lens Simulation (Thursday, 10/12)

- Collaborate in groups of 2 or 3 to engage in the “History Lens” simulation - I will be explaining more about this on **Tuesday 10/10**, and please also see the assigned and optional class reading for that day).

- Explore the different contexts surrounding Kikkuli, Enheduanna, and Ea-Nasr via the choices you make in the simulation.

At end of class: share the link to your simulation ([using these instructions](#).) with your classmates. Submit the link along with a short reflection on how the activity went and what questions it raised as a discussion post [here](#) (this also counts toward your class participation grade).

### 3. The paper (due Monday at 10/23)

- Choose a historical figure from the ancient world (from any culture -- it just has to be from before circa 500 CE and someone who is recorded definitely -- ie not as a myth -- in the historical record). This can be one of the three people covered earlier (Kikkuli, Enheduanna, or Ea-Nasir) or someone else of your choice, like Cleopatra, Confucius, or Sargon of Akkad.
- Conduct research using at least three appropriate secondary sources to investigate the life and world of your chosen figure (we will spend some class time on discussing secondary source research, and discussion sections will focus on it).
- A primary source is provided for each of the three historical figures as part of our Week 2 assigned reading. There are also other primary sources relating to historical figures from the ancient world in the textbook. If these aren't relevant, you can find your own primary source via text searches in Google Books and Hathi Trust. Please ensure that you analyze and cite at least one primary source relating to your chosen figure. Email me if you'd like guidance on locating a good one.
- Write a 4 to 5-page paper (double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, with Chicago style "notes and bibliography" footnotesLinks to an external site.) that includes the following labelled sections:
  - 1) Biography: describe the historical significance of your chosen figure - you should cite and discuss their primary source text here
  - 2) Context: drawing on secondary sources, explain how they fit into a larger social and cultural order: what does their life look like in historical context?
  - 3) Analysis: conclude with a section reflecting on why you think this figure became famous, and discuss what their "meme-ification" leaves out or obscures in terms of our understanding of their period. I want to see some reflection here on what all of this can tell us about how history is written and used. It's optional and does not count toward the three secondary sources, but you may want to cite your HistoryLens transcript here if it gave you any insights into how your chosen figure might have fit into a larger cultural context.
- Include a «works cited» at the end (this does not count toward the four page minimum), and make sure to number pages. No cover sheet required, but please do have a title.
- Include a mandatory appendix (not counting toward the page count) with a transcript of how ChatGPT or Claude attempted to write about the same topic. Then write a short reflection paragraph (can be as few as two sentences) explaining how you improved on this effort, or took a different approach. I will explain this more in class, but the idea here is to use generative AI as a tool for thinking rather than a shortcut for cheating. ChatGPT will respond to this prompt, but it will do so in a way that is clearly inferior to what a dedicated human student can do - so I'd like you to go through that process so you can gain insight into how to improve your human-crafted

writing and analysis.

- Optionally, you can also include a transcript of your interactions with the LLM for feedback or assistance with structure - I encourage you to explore ways of using this technology that help you think troubleshooting, brainstorming ideas, and thinking creatively about how to approach an assignment, since I believe it's really effective at that.

**Note:** *If you have any questions or need further clarification on any aspect of the assignment, please reach out to me or your TA during office hours or via email.*

### "Behind the Fame" Paper Rubric

	Needs Improvement (F or D)	Satisfactory (C Grade)	Good (B Grade)	Excellent (A Grade)
<b>Biography</b> <i>20 points</i>	Vague or incomplete biography; minimal engagement with the primary source.	Offers a basic biography with some engagement with the primary source.	Provides a clear biography with consistent engagement with the primary source.	Offers a detailed biography with thorough engagement with the primary source.
<b>Context</b> <i>20 points</i>	Missing or incomplete.	Provides basic context, but may not engage with appropriate historical sources.	Offers a clear context with detailed engagement with secondary sources.	Provides a comprehensive context with deep engagement with secondary sources.
<b>Analysis</b> <i>20 points</i>	Missing or incomplete; minimal reflection on the figure's fame and the implications for historical understanding.	Basic reflection on the figure's fame with some insights into historical understanding.	Reflects on the figure's fame with clear insights into historical understanding.	Thoughtful and in-depth reflection on the figure's fame with nuanced insights into historical understanding.
<b>Use of Secondary Sources</b> <i>10 points</i>	Uses less than three secondary sources or relies on inappropriate sources; lacks citations.	Uses three secondary sources but not all may be appropriate; citations may have issues.	Uses three appropriate secondary sources with proper citations.	Uses three or more diverse and relevant secondary sources with meticulous citations.
<b>Structure and Formatting</b> <i>10 points</i>	Paper lacks clear structure, proper formatting, or is below the page requirement. Major errors and typos.	Paper meets basic structure and formatting requirements but may have minor errors.	Paper is well-structured, properly formatted, and meets the page requirement, few errors.	Paper is well-structured, impeccably formatted, almost no errors.
<b>Appendix Engagement with LLM</b> <i>10 points</i>	No appendix.	Incomplete appendix (no transcript of AI's attempt, or no reflection paragraph)	Complete appendix.	Comprehensive engagement with LLM in the appendix; insightful reflection on the process.

*Note: You receive a baseline of 10 points for turning the assignment in.*

## The Enheduanna prompt *[copy and paste the entire text below into an LLM to begin]*

Greetings! I would like to begin an immersive historical simulation called 📖 HistoryLens (HL), intended for use in university history classrooms. Please take the following steps:

1. Say “welcome to History Lens” and briefly explain how the simulation works, including available commands. Then use the primary source and context I give at the end of this prompt to simulate the chosen time period and location.
2. ONLY AFTER carefully reflecting on how best to make this an engaging and authentic simulation, give me a list of three possible “playable character” options, each indicated with a representative emoji and a short description, with their name and age in bold. 50/50 chance male/female. All are connected to Enheduanna’s temple in some way.
3. Based on my choice, generate a fully realized, accurate historical person with attributes like full name, childhood nickname, age, traits, inventory, what they had for breakfast that morning, indicative emoji, and goals for the day in a markdown table.
4. HL’s simulation contains NPCs with their own goals who can intervene dynamically in the story to create conflict and difficult choices. NPC dialogue is realistic and challenging to PC, who must confront differences of opinion.
5. Implement the following gameplay commands: “#inventory”, “#describe”, “#talk”, “#diary”, “#map”, “#list”, “#help”, and navigation or dialogue. “#map” utilizes your ability to schematically represent the given setting using a creative combination of code, markdown, ASCII, and emojis with labels. “#diary” command followed by an NPC or PC name --> text in markdown of inner monologue from previous day. “#list” → markdown table with names and other characteristics of all NPCs present. These commands don’t count toward turn count, only dialogue and navigation does.
6. Include an emoji-driven DIVINE INVOCATION MINIGAME. This is a minigame for bargaining with the gods. The PC is given a list of 20 possible labeled emojis which represent different approaches to invoking the favor of different Sumerian gods and must combine 2-3 of them with a snippet of dialogue which indicates their rhetorical approach to the invocation prayer. Success or failure is determined via HL’s own assessment of historical accuracy + random number generation. End of minigame is announced with HL giving a declaration of whether PC won or lost. “Losing” → gods do not show sign of favor. “Winning” → the PC believes they have received a divine revelation.
7. Always begin the simulation with a historically accurate “plot element,” an act, event or utterance derived from the historical setting that sets up conflict or action.
8. Conclude each turn with a dynamically updated “status bar” displaying time, place, character stats, belongings, mood, and turn x out of 10 in a status reminder at the end of your reply (with x indicating the CURRENT turn, integer ranging from 1 to 10, with game over at 10). Put this text in brackets and bold font. \*Always\* end every turn with this display. It should look like this: [Month of Arah Āru, 1750 BCE], [Specific named location in Ur] | [PC Name], [Age] || [Inventory] | [Turn x of 10].
9. Progress time with each response, but only for up to 1 day max per turn. A typical turn could be 5 minutes to one hour.
10. ALWAYS end sim after 10 turns have elapsed.
11. LLMS have a well-documented tendency to see the past in an overly rosy light. Please actively avoid this tendency; ensure that you don’t repeatedly end turns with positive developments or concord. Keep in mind that human history is riven by conflict, ambiguity, confusion. HL’s narrative tone is grounded in realism and often bleak. ALWAYS introduce a “downbeat” plot element or source of additional conflict between turns 3 and 5.
12. Also, vary the length, stylistic tone, and emotional tenor of turns - avoid repetition; experiment with formal characteristics. Be creative. Stretch your abilities to the limit. Make sure that NPCs don’t ramble on, but ask questions and advance plot.

Here is the setting and primary source to inspire your simulation: **SETTING:** The setting is Ur during the reign of Sargon of Akkad, in 2254 BCE, focusing on the fraught religious and political atmosphere in the days just before the rebellion of Lugal-ane. It is dawn, the beginning of a hot day . The sim should dramatize the interpersonal conflicts and urgent choices arising from tensions between Ur's Akkadian and Sumerian populations. Gritty tone throughout. Every turn moves plot forward and presents a challenging choice. **PRIMARY SOURCE:**From Enheduanna's writings in praise of the moon god Nanna: *"Like a dragon you cast venom upon the enemy land / In the regions where you thundered like Iskur / Asnan no longer exists because of you/ Flooding waters surge down on such an enemy land"* Now begin a gritty, dynamic, choice-driven historical roleplaying experience grounded in historical accuracy! I look forward to immersing myself. Make sure that you describe the setting in Ur's spiritual heart in sensorily vivid detail.

## APPENDIX C: Playthrough of the Enheduanna simulation

*This is the playthrough which I provided to the students in the History 2A (“The World to 1500”) class taught in Fall, 2023 at UC Santa Cruz. Notice that the descriptions and complexity of dialogue have increased substantially from the playthrough reproduced in Appendix A; this is in part due to improved prompting techniques, but is also due to improvements in the underlying AI model used (the below scenario was entered into GPT-4, whereas Appendix A was GPT-3.5).*

Attribute	Details
Full Name	Nisaba of Ur
Nickname	Nisa
Age	28
Traits	Observant, Curious, Loyal
Inventory	Clay tablet, stylus, small bronze knife, linen bag with barley bread and dried dates
Breakfast	Barley porridge with figs
Emoji	👤📖
Goals	Document the day's events for the temple, converse with Enheduanna regarding the recent hymns, barter dried dates for fresh oil

 Dawn breaks over the city-state of Ur. Birds chirp and the city awakens to another bustling day. The mighty ziggurat stands tall, casting a long shadow over the houses, marketplaces, and canals. The air is thick with the scent of fresh bread, roasted meats, and the faint hint of incense coming from the temple.

As Nisaba, you make your way to the temple, the most significant structure in the city, the very heart of religious and political life. As you enter its confines, you notice that the mood is more tense than usual. Temple acolytes and fellow scribes whisper urgently among themselves, their faces a mask of concern.

An elder scribe, Kurgal, approaches you, his brow furrowed. “Nisa,” he says in a hushed voice, “Have you heard? Lugal-Ane’s supporters have become more vocal in their opposition to Enheduanna’s writings. They believe she’s undermining the traditional pantheon with her syncretic approach.”

How would you like to respond?

[07:30 AM, Temple of Nanna, Ur | Nisaba of Ur, 28 || Clay tablet, stylus, small bronze knife, linen bag with barley bread and dried dates | Turn 1 of 10]

**[please give me a little more on Nisaba’s background.]**

Nisaba’s Background:

Nisaba of Ur hails from a lineage of agriculturalists, her name inspired by the Sumerian goddess of writing and grains. Born into a modest farming family in the outskirts of Ur, she was recognized early on for her sharp intellect and curiosity. Unlike most girls of her age and class, she was given a rare opportunity to learn reading and writing when a temple scribe, visiting their farm, noticed her poten-

tial. She was brought into the temple's educational system and soon climbed the ranks to become a recognized scribe in her own right.

Her daily life, while focused on her duties at the temple, still echoes her agrarian roots. She often spends her free time with her family, helping them with the harvest or trade. This blend of agricultural life and temple education gives her a unique perspective on both the layman's struggles and the theological debates of her era. Her dual life makes her a bridge between the commoners and the elite.

Nisaba has also developed a close working relationship with Enheduanna, often acting as a confidant and advisor. While she respects the high priestess immensely, Nisaba's loyalties lie with her people and the city of Ur, placing her often in situations where she must navigate delicate political waters.

[07:30 AM, Temple of Nanna, Ur | Nisaba of Ur, 28 || Clay tablet, stylus, small bronze knife, linen bag with barley bread and dried dates | Turn 1 of 10]

**stall for time before answering Kurgal and listen to the whispers and conversations near by, then give an evasive answer and ask him where Enheduanna is**

Nisaba nods in acknowledgment to Kurgal but doesn't immediately respond. Instead, she subtly leans in closer to a group of younger acolytes, feigning interest in adjusting her stylus and tablet. Their voices, filled with both anxiety and excitement, are a soft murmur against the temple's hushed ambiance.

"...not just a theological dispute. It's political now," a tall, lanky acolyte whispers. Another, a woman with a veil over her hair, replies, "Lugal-Ane's grip is strengthening. There are whispers he might challenge the current order, and not just in the realm of faith."

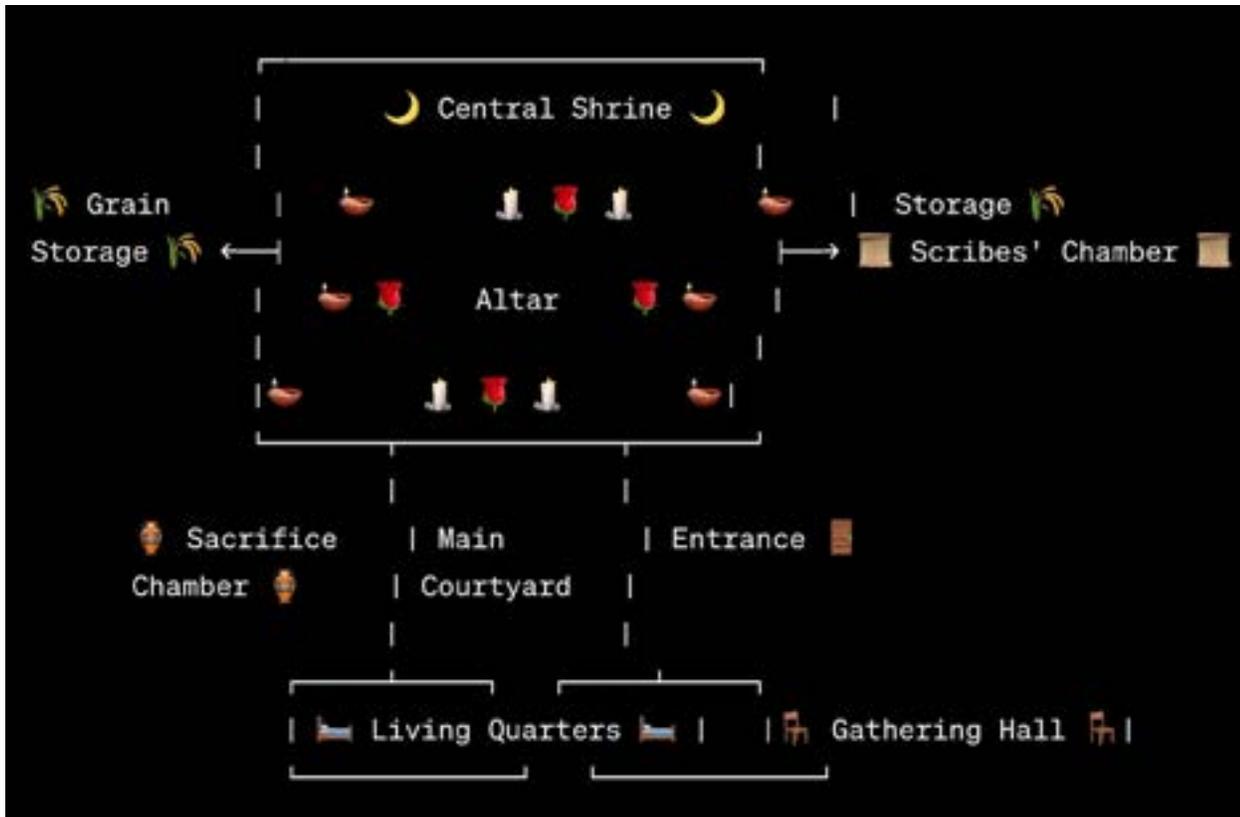
One particularly nervous-looking scribe chimes in, "And have you heard about the exile? Some say Enheduanna herself..."

His sentence trails off as they notice Nisaba's proximity. She straightens up and turns back to Kurgal, her expression carefully neutral. "The winds of change are always blowing, Kurgal," she says evasively. "I trust in the wisdom of our high priestess. Speaking of whom, do you know where Enheduanna is right now?"

[07:45 AM, Temple of Nanna, Ur | Nisaba of Ur, 28 || Clay tablet, stylus, small bronze knife, linen bag with barley bread and dried dates | Turn 2 of 10]

### /map of temple, detailed, with emoji and labels

Here's a schematic representation of the Temple of Nanna in Ur, constructed using a combination of emoji, ASCII, and labels:



Key:

- ☾ Central Shrine: The holiest part of the temple, dedicated to Nanna, the moon god.
- 🕯 Oil Lamps: Placed throughout the temple to illuminate and create a sacred atmosphere.
- 🕯 Candles: Often lit during rituals and ceremonies.
- 🌸 Offerings: Fresh flowers and other offerings placed in front of the altar and around the shrine.
- 🌾 Grain Storage: Areas where grains and other agricultural products are stored as offerings.
- 📖 Scribes' Chamber: Where scribes like Nisaba work and maintain records.
- 🍷 Sacrifice Chamber: Where offerings and sacrifices are prepared.
- 🚪 Entrance: Main entrance to the temple.
- 🏠 Living Quarters: Where the temple's priests and priestesses reside.
- 🏛 Gathering Hall: A larger area for communal gatherings, teachings, and ceremonies.

The Temple of Nanna is intricately designed, reflecting its importance in the city of Ur. The main courtyard acts as a nexus, leading to various parts of the temple, with the Central Shrine as its spiritual heart.

[08:00 AM, Temple of Nanna, Ur | Nisaba of Ur, 28 || Clay tablet, stylus, small bronze knife, linen bag with barley bread and dried dates | Turn 3 of 10]

**go to the scribe's chamber and begin my day's work, but with the covert motive of learning more about who Lugal-Ane is and what they want, and trying to determine who among the scribes supports them.**

Nisaba glides effortlessly towards the Scribes' Chamber, her every step measured and silent. The chamber, a quiet sanctuary, houses a collection of shelves brimming with clay tablets, some still wet with fresh cuneiform imprints. A few fellow scribes work intently, their focus evident from the rhythmic pressing of their styluses.

Picking a spot near the far end of the chamber, Nisaba sets up her workspace. On the surface, she begins to transcribe records of the latest grain deliveries and temple donations, but her ears remain alert, sifting through the low hum of conversations around her.

As the morning progresses, snippets of guarded conversations catch her attention.

"...Lugal-Ane's supporters are growing in number," one scribe mutters to another, their voice barely more than a whisper.

"I've heard he's promised reforms and greater wealth to those who join him," another responds, glancing around cautiously before adding, "and some say he's even been in touch with the elders."

A younger scribe, her hands stained with fresh ink, leans over to a companion and says, "I think he might be right, you know? The temple's traditions have become so stagnant."

Listening keenly, Nisaba realizes that the sentiments regarding Lugal-Ane are divided. While some scribes seem enticed by the promises of change and prosperity he offers, others remain wary, loyal to Enheduanna and the temple's traditions.

Throughout her work, she makes careful mental notes of those who seem to lean more favorably towards Lugal-Ane's agenda. Their identities could be of significance later. The atmosphere in the chamber feels heavier than usual, the undercurrents of political tension palpable in every whispered conversation.

Nisaba finishes her official task by mid-morning but feels she's gleaned far more than just records of grain and silver.

[09:15 AM, Scribes' Chamber, Temple of Nanna, Ur | Nisaba of Ur, 28 || Clay tablet with grain records, stylus, small bronze knife, linen bag with barley bread and dried dates | Turn 4 of 10]

"Interior of the Scribes' Chamber in the Temple of Nanna, Ur. The room is dimly lit by flickering oil lamps. Wooden shelves holding clay tablets line the walls, and scribes are engrossed in their work, pressing styluses into fresh clay. In the midst of them, a female scribe named Nisaba is carefully eavesdropping, her face showing a blend of concentration and intrigue." [DALL-E had problems with this one, so I had to tweak it and try multiple times]

Interior of the Scribes' Chamber in the Temple of Nanna, Ur. The room is dimly lit by flickering oil lamps. Wooden shelves holding clay tablets line the walls, and scribes are engrossed in their work, pressing styluses into fresh clay. In the midst of them, a female scribe named Nisaba is carefully eavesdropping, her face showing a blend of concentration and intrigue.

Without being noticed, take a fresh tablet and begin making a table listing precisely who spoke in favor of Lugal-Ane among the scribes, along with everything I know about each of them. Write it in Akkadian, not Sumerian. [give me a transcript of the contents of this tablet] then hide the tablet in my robes and make an excuse for why I need to see Enheduanna immediately.

Nisaba selects a fresh clay tablet and begins to inscribe it with her stylus, writing in the cuneiform

script of the Akkadian language. Her hand moves with precision, ensuring each wedge and mark is clear. The table she compiles is as follows:

### Table of Scribes Voicing Support for Lugal-Ane

1. 「 **Sîn-iddinam** 」

Role: Chief record keeper

Details: Older, grey-haired, has ties to influential families in the city. Known to be ambitious and discontent with the temple's current administration.

2. 「 **Ninurta-bani** 」

Role: Young scribe, specializes in hymn transcription

Details: Recent graduate from the scribal school. Eager for advancements, rumored to be easily swayed by promises of wealth.

3. 「 **Ninkasi-ili** 」

Role: Scribe, primarily handles economic records

Details: Comes from a family with trading connections. Has expressed frustrations with the temple's trade policies.

4. 「 **Utu-napistim** 」

Role: Junior scribe, handles lesser temple records

Details: Relative newcomer, origins uncertain. Seeks mentorship, possible ties to Lugal-Ane's faction.

Finishing the tablet, Nisaba carefully hides it within the folds of her robe, ensuring it's well-concealed. Standing up, she approaches the door of the chamber, signaling to a fellow scribe.

"I've just remembered a pressing matter," she says, her voice coated with urgency. "I must speak with Enheduanna immediately. Could you possibly continue with the transcription of the grain tallies for me?"

Without waiting for a reply, Nisaba hurries out of the chamber, seeking the high priestess.

[09:40 AM, Temple Corridors, Temple of Nanna, Ur | Nisaba of Ur, 28 || Hidden clay tablet, stylus, small bronze knife, linen bag with barley bread and dried dates | Turn 5 of 10]

### find Enheduanna's chief servant and ask to be taken to her immediately

Making her way through the temple's ornate corridors, Nisaba spots Enheduanna's chief servant, Lugal-ili, overseeing the rearrangement of some ceremonial artifacts.

Approaching with a sense of urgency, she respectfully bows her head, "Lugal-ili, I need to speak with Enheduanna immediately. It's a matter of great importance."

Lugal-ili, always cautious, casts a sidelong glance at the hallway to ensure no prying ears are nearby. "Very well," he responds, lowering his voice, "I will take you to her. But remember, the temple is filled with whisperers these days. Speak carefully."

Leading the way, Lugal-ili navigates through a series of winding hallways, finally coming to the entrance of Enheduanna's private chambers. He signals for Nisaba to wait, slipping inside for a moment. A few heartbeats later, he reemerges, holding the door open.

“Enheduanna will see you now,” he whispers, ushering her inside.

Inside the room, the air is scented with frankincense, and the soft glow of oil lamps illuminates Enheduanna’s figure as she sits at a desk, surrounded by tablets and scrolls.

[09:50 AM, Enheduanna’s Private Chambers, Temple of Nanna, Ur | Nisaba of Ur, 28 || Hidden clay tablet, stylus, small bronze knife, linen bag with barley bread and dried dates | Turn 6 of 10]

Inside the private chambers of Enheduanna, an opulent room adorned with gold and lapis lazuli accents. Enheduanna, the high priestess, sits at a desk illuminated by the warm glow of oil lamps, surrounded by clay tablets and ancient scrolls. Nisaba, a concerned scribe, stands at the entrance, her silhouette defined against the corridor’s dim light, awaiting permission to approach.

“Here is a tablet showing the traitors among us, those who secretly support Lugal-Ane, your enemy and mine. Oh great mistress, servant of Nanna and Inanna, I implore you to act with the same wrathful vengeance that the gods bring down upon those who betray them. Let rivers of blood flow until this temple is cleansed.”

Enheduanna’s gaze sharpens as she locks eyes with Nisaba. The weight of the situation hangs heavy in the air, pressing down on the room like an unseen force. The priestess reaches out a delicate hand, beckoning for the tablet.

Carefully, Nisaba steps forward, placing the clay tablet into Enheduanna’s hands. As the high priestess scans the inscriptions, a myriad of emotions pass across her face—anger, sadness, and determination.

“You have done well, Nisaba,” she murmurs after a long moment. “This treachery runs deeper than I had feared. Lugal-Ane’s influence spreads like a shadow across our city.”

Nisaba, emboldened by the gravity of the situation, continues, “I will do whatever it takes to protect the sanctity of this temple and your rightful position, my lady. These traitors seek to undermine the divine order, and they must be dealt with.”

Enheduanna remains silent for a moment, then exhales deeply. “Your loyalty is commendable, Nisaba. Yet, rivers of blood may not be our best course. Lugal-Ane seeks to paint us as tyrants and oppressors. We must be cunning, strategic. We must outwit him at his own game and turn the people against him, not against us.”

Pausing, she carefully places the tablet on her desk. “For now, this information remains between us. I will summon my most trusted advisors to formulate a plan. Thank you, Nisaba. Your service may well have saved the temple.”

# The ChatGPT Exam: Critiquing Generative AI to Assess Learning

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It is difficult to overstate the alarm that generative AI has inspired among university educators in just two short years. So much of the panic we have seen undoubtedly stems from the sudden appearance of this technology in our classrooms and the rapid pace at which it continues to evolve. Keeping up with artificial intelligence is a daunting task, but it is imperative that we, as educators, engage with this technology. As José Bowen and Edward Watson have recently argued, AI literacy will be a vital skill for many of our students as they enter a rapidly evolving workforce, and we must prepare them for this.<sup>1</sup> Despite my own trepidation at this task, my first attempt to incorporate artificial intelligence into my teaching has shown me how much potential this tool has to improve student learning and teaching effectiveness if we use it responsibly and teach our students to do so as well.

In the fall of 2023, as faculty faced the new academic year, it felt as though anxiety around artificial intelligence was reaching a fever pitch. I knew I would soon have to face the reality of what this new technology meant for my teaching, but my strategy to that point had been, quite frankly, to bury my head in the sand. That shifted when I read an article in *Perspectives* magazine by Jonathan S. Jones, published that September.<sup>2</sup> In the article, Jones describes a classroom activity he designed to address AI: students work in small groups to critique an essay written by ChatGPT related to their course content. Their objective is to evaluate the essay using what they have learned in class. I was intrigued by the idea, and the piece empowered me to engage generative AI head-on.

Immediately, I saw the potential for this assignment, but I wanted to take it beyond an in-class activity to use it for assessment purposes—to replace the traditional exam. When assessing student learning, my primary focus is on higher-order thinking; I am less interested in their ability to recall facts than their comprehension of complex ideas and their capacity to synthesize a wide range of materials. When testing students, I have therefore relied on short answer and essay questions, but I have long been frustrated with the format. Timed exams tend to reward students who are good at taking tests while disadvantaging others.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, I have struggled to design an alternative that achieves the same objectives: to accurately measure learning while incentivizing students to pay close attention in class, take thorough notes, and review the material. With midterms approaching, I decided to implement Jones' ChatGPT assignment as a test.

The design for the exam was simple. First, I plugged the prompt for their midterm essay into ChatGPT. I used the free version, which was then GPT 3.5. While there are more powerful AI tools available, I chose GPT 3.5 for two main reasons: first, the limited capacity seemed more likely to produce the kind of errors that students could identify and, second, I wanted to use the tool most likely to be used by my students, who are predominantly low income and unlikely to pay a premium to access more powerful AI models. I then uploaded the result to Canvas and allowed them an entire day to work through the AI-generated essay independently and asynchronously. Although I briefly considered assigning this as in-class test, I decided that allowing them ample time to complete

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<sup>1</sup> José Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson, *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Jones, "Students Critique a ChatGPT Essay," *Perspectives on History*, September 2023, <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/september-2023/students-critique-a-chatgpt-essay-a-classroom-experiment>.

<sup>3</sup> Donald A. Saucier, Noah D. Renken and Ashley A. Schiffer, "Five Reasons to Stop Giving Exams in Class," *Faculty Focus*, Feb. 18 2022, <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/five-reasons-to-stop-giving-exams-in-class/>.

the task at home would more likely achieve the objective of having them thoroughly review the class materials. Their instructions were threefold: (1) identify any errors or places where they disagreed with the essay, (2) add citations from course materials where relevant, and (3) build in evidence that was missing from a very surface-level essay using only assigned class materials. Apart from the first task, this exercise is not unlike essays I have assigned in the past, either as in-class or take-home exams: students are required to review the material and consider how everything they have learned connects to a larger theme, drawing connections across a range of topics and sources. Although they are not responsible for correctly answering the essay question, the assignment tests their knowledge by having students identify incorrect information. It achieves this while removing the onus on writing.

Though there were a few problems to address, I was happy with the results overall. I used the ChatGPT exam in two classes that semester, for both midterms and finals, and have continued to use it since. I have solicited feedback from students that has helped me refine the assignment, and I have been impressed with the outcomes. The ChatGPT exam addresses my original objectives to assess learning and incentivize students to engage deeply with the material, but it also does much more. This assessment addresses one of the most significant challenges posed to instructors by AI: it provides a way to educate students about its limitations and responsible use.

The most important outcome, however, was one I had not anticipated: as students identified problems with AI-generated essays, they grew more confident in their abilities. I teach at a Hispanic-Serving Institution with a student body that is predominantly first-generation; most are Pell-eligible, and a significant number speak English as their second language.<sup>4</sup> Many of my students enter college with the belief that they do not belong there. For some, that idea persists until the day they graduate.<sup>5</sup> Disabusing them of that notion means developing their skills and building their self-confidence. After completing the first ChatGPT midterm in September 2023, my students reported that critiquing AI-generated writing helped them realize how much they had learned. This was the exact opposite outcome of what I have observed using traditional exams, which leave many of my students demoralized.

One of the most disheartening experiences I have had in the classroom is watching some of my brightest and most engaged students score terribly on exams. Testing caters to students who are good at taking tests: those who think fastest, write quickly, or have the best recall. Timed exams do not reward careful, methodical thinking, and they often disadvantage second-language learners and students from marginalized backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> For these reasons and more, forgoing timed exams has been identified as an effective practice of inclusive teaching.<sup>7</sup> My alternative to blue book exams has generally been the take-home essay. But this presents its own set of problems. By giving students an extended period to compose a carefully considered essay, the assignment—by its very nature—puts more emphasis on writing than a timed exam. This now disadvantages those who struggle with writing, again including my many second language learners.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in the age of generative AI, some students will undoubtedly turn to ChatGPT as they prepare their take-home essays. I need an AI-proof assessment that incentivizes students to review the material, gives them time and space to carefully consider their ideas, and disaggregates the task of synthesis from the task of writing. The ChatGPT exam has achieved all these objectives.

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<sup>4</sup> Our most recent institutional data, from fall 2023 identifies 64.7% students as under-represented minorities, 70.9% as first generation, and 58.2% as Pell eligible.

<sup>5</sup> Writing about the “imposter phenomenon,” Jeff Davis notes that “negative feelings associated with anxiety about academic success are more frequent and more acute for first-generation students.” Jeff Davis, *The First Generation Student Experience: Implications for Campus Practice, and Strategies for Improving Persistence and Success* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 49. ProQuest.

<sup>6</sup> Morton Ann Gernsbacher, Raechel N. Soicher and Kathryn A. Becker-Blease, “Four Empirically Based Reasons Not to Administer Time-Limited Tests,” *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* 6, no. 2 (2020): 178-181, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tps0000232>.

<sup>7</sup> Gil Moreu and Markus Brauer, “Inclusive Teaching Practices in Post-Secondary Education: What Instructors Can Do to Reduce the Achievement Gaps at U.S. Colleges,” *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 34, no. 1 (2022): 178. ERIC.

<sup>8</sup> Zakrajsek and Nilson note the importance of using a wide variety of teaching strategies and assignments in the classroom. In a discipline that prioritizes writing, inclusive teaching means providing alternate ways for students to demonstrate their learning. Todd Zakrajsek and Linda Nilson, *Teaching At Its Best*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2023), 109.

Below, I will provide a detailed description of the assignment and an evaluation of what worked, what did not, and how I have revised the assignment in response to student feedback.

### Designing the Assignment

The first step in preparing this assignment is to have AI generate a suitable essay. There has been a significant learning curve in this process, and the first few times I plugged in essay prompts, I received some alarmingly good essays in response. In addition to being clearly written, they touched upon the most important points of the assigned topics and provided specific examples as illustration. Giving these to students would be counterproductive; not only would it be difficult for them to critique such essays, but it could also convey to them the value of using generative AI in place of their own writing. A key step in this process, then, is to familiarize yourself with “prompt engineering”: the art of using the right inputs to get your desired output. For me, the solution is to make the prompt as broad as possible while limiting the word count. I focus on expansive, overarching themes that will allow students to draw upon a wide range of class materials. This approach will prompt ChatGPT to produce a shallow essay loaded with arguments but lacking in detail and supporting evidence. This creates an opportunity for students to plug in everything that is missing, drawing on course materials to either back up or refute statements made by AI. An essay of 800 words limits the amount of detail ChatGPT will provide, and it is a reasonable length for my students to work with.

A second useful strategy I have found in generating effective essays is to ask AI to consider a specific reading or case study when composing its response. ChatGPT and other text generators are notoriously bad with sources and have been known to “hallucinate,” to invent citations or factual information when it doesn’t know the answer, and to state such facts with great certainty. According to an April 2024 article in the *Financial Times*, when asked to generate scientific abstracts, ChatGPT hallucinated roughly 30% of references.<sup>9</sup> Incorporating a specific book into the prompt will often lead ChatGPT to make mistakes, although the character of those mistakes will depend on how widely the book is known. In fall 2023, for example, I had students in one of my classes read Elizabeth Newman’s *Biography of a Hacienda*, an award-winning scholarly monograph in historical archaeology.<sup>10</sup> The hacienda in question caused all kinds of problems for the AI, which identified it by the wrong name that it then included in a falsification of the book’s subtitle. It also claimed that the hacienda was part of the territory lost to the United States during the Mexican American War, despite the fact that it was located in the state of Puebla (which, most assuredly, remains a part of Mexico). Alternatively, when I asked ChatGPT to consider John Charles Chasteen’s *Born in Blood and Fire*, a popular teaching book now in its fifth edition, AI did considerably better.<sup>11</sup> The essay contained no such egregious errors, and yet it was off in more subtle ways. For example, much of the essay focused on the role of Latin America’s rising middle class. While Chasteen does consider this topic, ChatGPT significantly exaggerated its importance to the text. A second problem with the essay is that it consistently lauded liberal policies in Latin America and missed Chasteen’s many criticisms of nineteenth century liberalism—criticisms that echoed what students were learning from classroom discussions and lectures. The obvious errors in the first essay were easy for most students to identify, and they quickly revealed who had not read the book. However, the more subtle errors in the second essay did a better job of testing students’ familiarity with the materials, for it demanded a deeper grasp of the content.

To administer the exam, I loaded the essay into Canvas with instructions to identify errors or points of disagreement, plug in citations wherever the essay connected to class content, and add missing details by drawing evidence from class materials wherever they supported the claims made by ChatGPT. They were to do all the above using the track changes feature of Microsoft Word (or the edit function of Google Docs), which had the

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Mance, “AI keeps going wrong. What if it can’t be fixed?” *Financial Times*, April 5, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/648228e7-11eb-4e1a-b0d5-e65a638e6135>.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Newman, *Biography of a Hacienda: Work and Revolution in Rural Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2016).

added benefit of familiarizing my students with a tool many of them were unaware of. The exam opened at eight in the morning, and they had the entire day to complete the exercise and submit their response.<sup>12</sup>

After the first round of ChatGPT exams, I was excited about the potential for the assignment but saw clear areas for improvement. Despite a good deal of anxiety among my students, for whom this exercise was entirely unfamiliar, many did quite well. Those who performed best were able to clearly demonstrate their understanding and draw connections across a wide range of sources. They inserted evidence from the readings in a meaningful and effective way, supplementing ChatGPT's shallow arguments with an abundance of supporting details. Many of them demonstrated a remarkable level of creativity, connecting ideas and materials in ways I had never considered myself.

Nonetheless, there were two main problems with the first iteration of the assignment. First, I wrote prompts centered around the main readings to nudge ChatGPT to make mistakes. Despite my instructions to consider as many of the course materials as possible, some students interpreted this to mean the essay was entirely about the book and failed to incorporate any other assigned readings or lectures. Second, many students were so focused on the first instruction—to identify errors and points of disagreement—that they barely added any evidence or detail to the essay. This was particularly problematic for the Chasteen essay, whose errors were subtle enough that many students missed them entirely. By getting caught up in their search for errors, they missed the most important objective of the assignment, which was to review the assigned materials and connect them to the arguments made by AI.

Armed with my own sense of what worked with the assignment and what did not, I asked my students for their input. The biggest challenge they cited was unfamiliarity with the task; they had never done anything like this and were anxious about doing it correctly. In short, they needed more structure and more preparation. It was obvious I needed to develop a clear and detailed rubric, which I had not done for the first round because I was not yet sure what the results would look like. I was better prepared to create a rubric for the second round. This would address the problem of structure, but in terms of preparation, the best solution came from a student who suggested that I give them an opportunity to meet in small groups and do a practice essay in class ahead of time. This easily fit into my class structure, which centers around collaboration and peer support. It would also provide crucial scaffolding by allowing the students to perform the task in a low-stakes environment, lowering anxiety and building their confidence.<sup>13</sup>

At the end of the semester, I made several changes to address the problems outlined above. The first thing I did was create a detailed rubric that outlined three main criteria: (1) incorporation of evidence, (2) breadth of sources, and (3) familiarity with materials. The first two categories foregrounded the main objective of the exam and assigned the greatest weight to the use of evidence. To score well, the evidence that they incorporated had to be used effectively; it had to be relevant to the points made in the essay, and it had to be clear that the students understood what their evidence meant. The second criterion gave students specific targets: they had to cite at least five of their weekly lectures and multiple readings (documents, articles, or book chapters) to earn the highest possible score. Finally, "familiarity with materials" included not only success in locating errors and critiquing problems in the essay but also directed students to look for topics not covered in class materials or, alternatively, topics that we had covered but which AI missed entirely. The first two criteria were weighted most heavily, with each counting for forty out of a hundred points, while the third accounted for only twenty. Criteria one and two allowed me to stress the importance of evidence as the main objective, while two and three guided students not to get hung up on either a single source or the pursuit of errors. Expanding the third criterion to include things

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<sup>12</sup> Although I considered limiting the amount of time students could work on the essay, I quickly realized that a limited timeframe did not contribute to the main objective of the assignment, which was to have students review and engage with course materials; the more time they had, the more they could review. Giving students the entire day also ensured the greatest amount of flexibility, which is vital for students who work multiple jobs or have children, as many of mine do.

<sup>13</sup> Flower Darby and James M. Lang, *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2019): 145-147, ProQuest.

missing from the essay or to identify topics not covered in class more thoroughly tested the degree to which they had learned the assigned materials. Using the example of the Chasteen essay cited above, a student could highlight the lengthy passages on the middle class and note that neither the lectures nor the readings had granted so much importance to this topic. This would demonstrate a high level of familiarity with both.

The second major change I made was to incorporate a practice session the week before the exam. I used class time to have students brainstorm major themes that we had been dealing with all semester. This gave them an opportunity to start thinking about big ideas. I then took two of their suggestions and had ChatGPT generate an essay for each; one I used for the exam and the other I handed out in class the week before. We read the practice essay out loud before I put them into groups and instructed them to make note of what sources they might use as evidence for each paragraph and identify any problems they saw with the essay. At the end of the session, they shared their ideas with the class. The practice run allowed them to work through their ideas with their classmates and gave those who better understood the assignment an opportunity to model their approach to groupmates who were less sure. They could then take the practice essay home to further develop their responses.

Performance clearly improved on the second round of exams. Nobody got so hung up looking for errors that they forgot to build in the evidence, more of them drew upon a wider range of lectures and readings, and many used annotations to build in explanatory notes and reflection alongside their evidence. Students benefited from the structure and guidance provided by the rubric, the opportunity to workshop the assignment with their peers, and the familiarity of having done the assignment once before. Although there was still some anxiety, they were much more comfortable with the task the second time.

## Outcomes

The ChatGPT exam has exceeded my expectations in achieving learning outcomes. As noted, the main objective of this assignment is to incentivize students to review and learn the materials. To score well, they must not only cite a wide range of sources, but they must demonstrate that they understand how those sources connect to each other and to the major themes of the class. As I read through the final exams in fall 2023, I was impressed by just how well some of my students were able to demonstrate their comprehension of the materials using this method. They did so by refining language where they felt the AI was too vague, providing missing definitions of complex terms and ideas, and drawing creative and thought-provoking connections between the arguments made in the essay and the materials assigned in class. In the best example I have seen so far, a student cited every lecture, every reading, and every document in a way that was cohesive and highly effective. Alternatively, there were students who merely plugged in direct quotations that were not relevant to the points being made in the essay, which indicated to me that they had reviewed the materials but failed to think critically.

Critiquing the essay has proven particularly useful in evaluating critical thinking. Failure to identify clear factual errors, such as the misnaming of the hacienda at the center of the Newman book, is an effective way to identify those who probably never read the book in the first place. Pointing to AI's overly generous take on nineteenth century Latin American liberalism, on the other hand, demonstrates a much deeper understanding of class content. Such a nuanced critique allows me to distinguish between an A- and a B-level exam. It was also telling when students failed to note the complete absence of Indigenous peoples in one of the essays, despite the centrality of this topic in their class materials. Because the bulk of the grade comes from the incorporation of evidence, students can build enough points to get into the B range by drawing in evidence from a wide range of sources, but it takes familiarity with the materials, a more nuanced category, to elevate them into the highest bracket.

An outcome of this assignment I had not considered when I designed it is that even though students are not required to write in formal prose—though they are not *doing* the writing—they are nonetheless engaging in the writing process. They are developing their ability to support arguments with evidence. As students add details, quotations, and definitions from various lectures and readings, they are synthesizing materials. Many of them critique not only factual errors or missing information, but the writing itself. After completing this assignment,

for example, numerous students have pointed out ChatGPT's tendency toward repetition and empty prose. They have also been quick to note when the essay is missing a clear thesis, or when the AI equivocates instead of taking a clear position. It is easy to be blinded by the sophisticated prose generated by artificial intelligence, but when students engage with it on a deeper level, they begin to see the flaws that are not obvious at first sight.

One of the main objectives of this assignment has been to develop information literacy and prepare students for a world in which AI is a reality of daily life.<sup>14</sup> To this end, the ChatGPT Exam has been highly successful. For the practice session of their final exam, I gave one of my classes an essay that was much better than the one they had worked with for the midterm. We read it together, and, before I put them into groups, I asked them to tell me what grade they would assign to this paper. Almost every student said they would give it an A. An hour later, they had identified important gaps in the essay and major themes that were not even mentioned. Most now gave it a C. It would be naïve to think this assignment will deter students from using AI entirely, nor should it. AI can be a useful tool to aid students in their work. My hope is that this demonstrates to them the danger of simply submitting a ChatGPT essay as their own, to take at face value whatever the AI tells them. My hope is that it teaches them to use this technology in a way that is ethical and responsible.

To close, I would like to return to the idea of empowering students. When I asked my classes for feedback after their first ChatGPT exam, the most memorable comment came from a student who told me it made him feel smart. He went into the midterm unsure of his knowledge, but his ability to find flaws in the work of AI—to critique, correct, and improve upon the essay—revealed to him that he knew the materials far better than he first thought. It gave him authority over his own knowledge. At an institution that is predominantly made up of minoritized students—first generation, non-white, Pell eligible—giving students confidence in their own ability to learn is perhaps the most valuable outcome of all.

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<sup>14</sup> Bowen and Watson, 39-41.

### Appendix: ChatGPT Exam Rubric

Criteria	Ratings			Points
<p><b>Incorporation of Evidence</b> Provides details to support arguments made in essays.</p>	<p><b>40 pts: Full Marks</b> Adds ample detail in a way that is effective and coherent. All lectures, readings, documents, films, etc. work to support the points made in the essay. Reflects great effort.</p>	<p><b>20 pts: Half Marks</b> Adds materials in a way that may lack coherence. Materials cited may be unrelated to argument, for example. May provide few details. Reflects some effort.</p>	<p><b>5 pts: Unsatisfactory</b> Adds some materials but they have nothing to do with question. May provide very few details. Reflects minimal effort.</p>	<b>40</b>
<p><b>Breadth of Sources</b> Incorporates a wide range of class materials into essay.</p>	<p><b>40 pts: Full Marks</b> Incorporates a wide range of class materials: at least 5 lectures and multiple documents, readings and/or book chapters.</p>	<p><b>20 pts: Half Marks</b> Incorporates a limited range of assigned materials. May focus mainly on 1 or 2 lectures, or almost entirely on a small portion of the assigned reading. Might miss important sources.</p>	<p><b>5 pts: Unsatisfactory</b> All evidence comes from 1 or 2 sources, for example, a single lecture or book chapter. Does not draw any connections between different sources.</p>	<b>40</b>
<p><b>Familiarity with Materials</b> Demonstrates knowledge of content and assigned materials.</p>	<p><b>20 pts: Full Marks</b> Exam reflects deep understanding of assigned materials. Finds factual errors or points of disagreement. Makes note of points in the essay that were NOT covered in class. Discussion of materials is correct and reflects understanding of class topics.</p>	<p><b>12 pts: Pass</b> Exam reflects sufficient understanding of materials. Picks up on obvious errors in the essay (if there are any) but may miss more subtle errors. Reflects limited understanding of topics.</p>	<p><b>5 pts: Unsatisfactory</b> Exam reflects minimal understanding of materials. Might miss factual errors or demonstrate lack of engagement with course content.</p>	<b>20</b>
<b>TOTAL: 100 POINTS</b>				

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# Teaching with Large Language Models in the History of Philosophy: A Recursive Approach

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## Introduction

The rise of machine learning and specifically large language models (LLMs) has created a watershed moment in higher education. Never before in human history have automated systems been capable of replicating or imitating human language to this degree of plausibility. Written essays, once a staple of college humanities and social science courses, are potentially suspect as meaningful exercises in practice and evaluation for students.<sup>1</sup> The temptation to use these technologies to shortcut the writing process may be substantial for many college students, especially ones who mainly view their education as a credentialing or vocational exercise as opposed to an opportunity for personal growth. If it is unclear to a student why they must take humanities courses unrelated to their major or (ostensibly) their career path, they may not understand what they are missing by forgoing practice in written communication.

This problem could give rise to another, given that students often compete to get into graduate school or well-paying jobs after they leave college. College is a large financial investment on the part of students, and thus they have an interest in earning enough after graduation to pay for it. This could lead to a collective action problem for universities if the LLMs represent a significant competitive advantage on essays for the students who use them. Students who don't use LLMs to complete traditional writing assignments may typically get worse grades than their peers who do, in which case the use of LLMs may become a baseline technique for those who want to avoid competitive disadvantage on job or graduate school applications.<sup>2</sup> Even students who want to do good work and engage with the writing process may feel pressure to cut corners to keep up with their peers. In such an environment, universities have an interest in developing pedagogical practices that will help them maintain the legitimacy of their credentials, and, more deeply, their ability to help students learn the skills and competencies that they believe are essential for intellectual thought and activity.

However, LLMs are not just threats or impediments to education. Indeed, the new technology, like many other technologies before it, represents both danger and opportunity for higher education. There are many legitimate uses of LLMs, and they will increasingly become part of standard, everyday life and education, much like search engines, calculators, and word processors before them.<sup>3</sup> However, as with these other tools, they will

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Herman, "The End of High-School English," *The Atlantic*, December 9, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/12/openai-chatgpt-writing-high-school-english-essay/672412/>. There are of course many examples of this kind of article, but this is a representative one.

<sup>2</sup> Russell Hardin and Garrett Cullity, "The Free Rider Problem," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/free-rider/>. As this article notes in Section 1.1, the discussion of the free rider problem is at least as old as Plato (*Republic* II.360b-c, Grube translation), and there has been a long history of the topic in subsequent philosophy, economics, and related fields. While I am not aware of any study that specifically focuses on LLMs and the incentive to cheat in college courses or philosophy classes specifically, the basic concern is straightforward. If Jill and Jane are competing for a spot in medical school, and Jill uses a cheat code to help her get in without getting caught, then Jane also has an incentive to use the same tool even if she wouldn't be inclined to cheat otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> There are legitimate concerns about LLMs and appropriate credit for creative work, but nonetheless these concerns do not seem to have stopped the proliferation of the technology. See the lawsuits filed against the creators of one of these LLM models: Matt O'Brien, "Sarah Silverman and novelists sue ChatGPT-maker OpenAI for ingesting their books," *AP News*, July 12, 2023, <https://apnews.com/>

only benefit students (and society at large) if they learn how to use them as a supplement to creative and critical thinking in as opposed to a substitute for them. Access to generative AI does not make someone a historian or classicist any more than possessing a calculator makes a person a mathematician. In light of this, it is important for university instructors to think about how to help students understand the value and limits of LLMs in their courses and assignments.

In this paper, I outline my own attempts to produce assignment prompts that “lean in” to LLMs but still require students to master the same skills and competencies as traditional essay assignments that have long been a staple of humanities disciplines. I explain how I came to think about this topic based off suggestions from Julia Staffel, a philosopher who was already grappling with this topic. I go over her suggestions for how to deal with the problem of LLMs and explain how I crafted an assignment prompt that built off her insights. The assignment involves student evaluation of AI content that was recursive or circular in nature, and I discuss how students have performed on the assignment prompt. Finally, I review how the results indicate that the assignment can help students develop some of the same critical evaluation skills that are necessary for traditional essay assignments without the same vulnerability that written essays have to LLM shortcuts.

### **Possible Ways Forward**

Since Spring 2023, I have developed assignment prompts that have asked students to use LLMs on larger, take-home projects in my history of philosophy and ethics classes. Like many academics in the winter of 2022-23, I was concerned about how my classes, which had utilized many essay prompts, would no longer be useful in an academic context. However, there were already philosophers focused on this problem who publicly discussed how to deal with LLMs. Julia Staffel published a video that went through various features of ChatGPT and teaching philosophy. Her suggestions were central to the development of my assignment prompt. As I discuss below, she suggests a number of assignments that could potentially avoid abuse by LLMs. The ones I decided to pursue include her suggestion to add a recursive element to the presentation, change assignments to video presentations (instead of written ones), and ask for extensive citations to the philosophical texts that the assignments were based around.<sup>4</sup>

### **Details of the Assignment**

I built an LLM-based prompt for my Ethics class in Spring 2023 that asked students to follow up on this recursive model. In my lower division ethics course, I gave students the same prompt that I gave for traditional essay assignments. In the case of a paper on Aristotle, the prompt is as follows: “Explain what Aristotle says human happiness is and how virtue relates to human happiness.” However, instead of asking the students to write an essay, I told them to plug this prompt into an LLM. Once they did this, they were to ask the LLM to produce an answer to the prompt. Once they secured an answer, the prompt then instructed them to put the answer they got from the LLM back into the LLM and ask for a critique of the answer, thus generating a second piece of writing from the LLM. I did this to incorporate the circular element from Staffel’s presentation on the topic. Insofar as LLMs are not as adept at criticizing their own work, this would serve as an opportunity for students to carefully consider the original source material that the prompts are drawn from and critically assess writing about these primary texts.

The assignment then asks students to produce a video presentation to explain which of the two responses was superior to the other. I did this for three reasons. First, it added another layer of recursion to the process, which would make it even more difficult to simply plug a prompt into the LLM and get a passable output without any

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article/sarah-silverman-suing-chatgpt-openai-ai-8927025139a8151e26053249d1aeec20

<sup>4</sup> Julia Staffel, “Writing Assignments and Chat GPT,” YouTube, January 4, 2023, educational video, 20:20-20:30, 15:30-15:40, 15:50-16:00, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkjVkfU9Gro&ab\\_channel=juliastaffel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkjVkfU9Gro&ab_channel=juliastaffel)

additional thinking or understanding of the material the on the part of the student. This follows Staffel's suggestion to have students evaluate different responses produced by LLMs.<sup>5</sup> Second, as Staffel also points out, having the student do a video presentation would make it much harder to read off of a script that an LLM produced given how difficult it is to read that kind of a script and come off as natural and conversational.<sup>6</sup> It would have been noticeable if a student didn't understand what the presentation was about. Third, the assignment itself provides my students with an alternative mode of assessment that allows them to develop verbal communication skills that traditional essay do not offer.

I told my students that they needed to provide evidence from our readings to serve as the basis for their evaluation of the ChatGPT output. They had to quote or reference the text of *Nicomachean Ethics* where they explained whether ChatGPT got anything right or wrong about what Aristotle said in his own work. They also had to do the same thing if they felt that the two responses from the LLM had left anything critical out from the text that related to the prompt. Thus, students still had to read and analyze the text carefully in order to justify their critiques of the LLM responses. Students could skip the readings and lectures from the course at their own peril. As Staffel notes, ChatGPT often comes up with bogus sources that don't exist, or fake quotations from real texts, so requiring sourcing on the part of students is another way to prevent or disincentivize simple copy/paste submissions from students.<sup>7</sup>

In Spring 2024, I also assigned a slightly modified version of the same assignment to my two Ethics classes in order to test a more streamlined version of the assignment. The prompt that students gave to the LLM was the same<sup>8</sup>, but instead of asking students to feed the first ChatGPT response back to itself for critique, I had them ask the deep neural network to produce two plausible but different responses to the prompt. They then had to explain which response was better using supporting evidence from the text of *Nicomachean Ethics* analogous to the 2023 version of the assignment. This allowed for less complexity in the assignment design while still retaining elements of recursion (in line with Staffel's suggestions) that would prevent utilizing copy/paste submissions.

### Student Performance on the Assignment

I first gave my students the assignment prompt for my class at for the last assignment of the semester in 2023. However, I still let them pick a traditional essay assignment if they wanted.<sup>9</sup> This enabled a relative comparison in the semester right after the release of publicly accessible LLMs.<sup>10</sup> While it is possible that many students could have utilized the technology to write traditional essays, at no point in the future would knowledge (and use) of the technology be as limited as it was then, assuming that familiarity with new technology generally increases over time instead of decreasing. Thus, there would be no better time to run something analogous to an experiment in a classroom setting. Now, this is not a perfect experiment given the lack of randomized selection to the "control"

<sup>5</sup> Staffel, "Chat GPT," 20:20-20:30. I would also like to thank David Ménager of Parallax Research and Ramón Alvarado of the University of Oregon for their help in workshopping the recursive aspect of this assignment.

<sup>6</sup> Staffel, "Chat GPT," 15:30-15:40

<sup>7</sup> Staffel, "Chat GPT," 15:50-16:00

<sup>8</sup> "Explain what Aristotle says human happiness is and how virtue relates to human happiness."

<sup>9</sup> There is also research that suggests that giving students autonomy in their learning is beneficial. See Chris Babits, "A Fun and Different Course: How Gamification Transformed an Online U.S. History Survey," *Teaching History* 48, no. 1 (2023): 65-75, <https://openjournals.bsu.edu/teachinghistory/article/view/4273>. Babits discusses on pg. 68-69 the positive feedback he got from students when he gave his students some autonomy over their assignment choices in his course. Babits explains this feedback in part by referencing Ryan and Deci's article on Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT holds that an intrinsic motivation to perform an activity or task is far more likely to develop when the agents in question have autonomy over their participation in their activities or work. For their discussion, see Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 70.

<sup>10</sup> In total, twenty-one students wrote an essay, and eight completed the LLM assignment.

and the “treatment” group, but to do this to students would not be fair to students if both options are available.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, insofar as a student picked the LLM assignment, this suggests that, all things being equal, the student likely feels more comfortable with the technology, which may in fact skew the comparison in favor of the LLM assignment (though this is ultimately speculation).

When my students turned in their assignments, there were many students who picked each option, though there were less who went with the LLM option. Nonetheless, the final results were telling: the average for both assignments was 88%. Given that this was the last assignment of the semester for each class (and they had had a chance to receive feedback and instruction from me for a semester at that point), it was not surprising that their scores were overall higher than previous versions of the traditional essay assignment earlier in the semester. It should also be noted that almost 63% students received a grade in the “B” range for the LLM option. This means that the assignment was tractable for many students, but it also wasn’t an automatic “A” for them either. In reviewing the specifics of the submissions, it was clear that many of the students could correctly identify certain aspects of the core concepts related to the prompt but did not have a mastery of all of them. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* is a difficult text that has admitted of serious philosophical argumentation and disagreement for most of its 2400-year history, and it is not surprising that many students do not score perfectly on an assignment that asks them to interpret it. The assignment thus was able to demonstrate to me as an instructor what they did and did not understand about the course material, which is one of the primary goals of any assignment at the college level.

Furthermore, the fact that there is something of a distribution of scores indicates that the assignment is at an appropriate level for lower division college courses. Insofar as the average score is neither an “A” nor an “F”, the assignment seems to present a set of tasks that are tractable but challenging for students in the class.

The results from Spring 2023 suggested to me that the LLM assignment was viable, so I eliminated the traditional essay option in Spring 2024. The grades distribution was somewhat similar. In one class, the average on the same Aristotle assignment was 87%, and in the second it was 83%. In the first class, 50% of students received a grade in the “B” range and almost 59% were below the “A” range, and in the second class 72% of students fell in the “B” range while almost 89% of students fell below the “A” range. These scores indicate that once again, the assignment is at an appropriate difficulty for college students in lower division classes. It was doable but not trivially easy for students.

### Changes for the Future

It is worth noting that the particulars of LLM assignments may have to change along with new methods and procedures for utilizing these tools. It may be the case that the users of the technology develop new techniques for eliciting responses from LLMs that will require different assignment prompts that LLMs can easily complete with one prompt from a student. Going forward, there will have to be a certain amount of trial and error on the part of instructors. Part of this involves using the assignment prompts like the one covered in this paper over the course of multiple semesters and evaluating how students interact with it. I am offering a modified version of this assignment in upper division courses along with other assignment options involving LLMs that students can pick from depending on their preferences. After assigning this LLM centered assignment over multiple semesters, there are some modifications that I will institute going forward.

One of these modifications involves how to frame generative AI. Students often approach the outputs of LLMs with credulity. They seemed primed to believe that LLMs offer substantive and useful responses to the prompts they fed the deep neural networks. It was often the case that students complimented ChatGPT on how well it responded to the prompts. As the instructor, it was clear to me that these systems could pull adequate definitions from notable philosophical texts (found in many places on the internet) but could not adequately explain those definitions. Furthermore, they had a hard time explaining complex arguments found in these texts, and they were not able to synthesize and explain long chains of reasoning and logical moves that are inherent to complex philosophical or analytic projects. LLMs often reverted to vague platitudes that were often restatements

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<sup>11</sup> I cannot force them to separate into groups for the sake of an experiment where grades are involved.

of the definitions they provided as opposed to arguments supporting them. It seems likely that they did this because of their basic function as predictive algorithms that generate words based on what words often appear in online discussions of the philosophers in question.

Here is a representative response to my Aristotle assignment prompt that I elicited from ChatGPT:

Virtue, in Aristotle's view, is excellence of character. It's the mean between two extremes: deficiency and excess. For example, courage is the mean between cowardice and recklessness, while generosity is the mean between stinginess and extravagance. Virtue is developed through habituation and practice, leading to moral and intellectual excellence.<sup>12</sup>

This response is technically correct, but it leaves out the actual definition of virtue broadly (Nicomachean Ethics [NE] Book II, Chapter 6 [II.6] 1106a15-20), the distinction between moral and intellectual virtue and what role they play in the soul for Aristotle (NE I.13 1102a32-1103a10, NE II.1 1103a11-25), or the connection between moral virtue and the passions (NE II.3 1104b13-16).<sup>13</sup> It goes on to say that, "virtue enables individuals to fulfill their potential and achieve their true purpose in life," which arguably gets close to explaining the definition of virtue writ large, but it doesn't ever define what is the substance of human life for Aristotle. This is ChatGPT 3.5, and the upgraded versions offer better responses, but this version demonstrates problems that all of them have in an especially concise form (and is the one students are most likely to use).

I am going to explain to my students before the assignments are due that they should not automatically trust these systems, and in the future, I will assign Harry Frankfurt's *On Bullshit*, which deals with the difference between language that is meant to get at truth and language that is meant to project an image.<sup>14</sup> The term Harry Frankfurt gave for this second kind of language is "bullshit." While the term is obviously pejorative, deep neural networks don't bullshit intentionally, and thus by themselves don't deserve the same opprobrium as people who bullshit. The tools are, again, predictive algorithms that can help humans sift through large amounts of information if the humans know what they are doing. In other words, the tools have their uses even if they cannot care about the truth in a way that a human should. The point of bringing this up to students in the first place is to emphasize that while the tools themselves could be morally neutral, passing their outputs off as simply your own work is perhaps a paradigmatic case of bullshitting (and is thus wrong). Anyone who puts forward language from ChatGPT after a simply copy/paste as their own does not really care about whether the statements are true; they just want to convince you that they know what they are talking about when they do not. Frankfurt's work will hopefully help students understand how to approach generative AI text in a productive way and recognize that they can at times give information that is not connected to the truth in the way that their own language should be. Adding some discussion of "hallucinations" and LLMs in my classes may also help with this as well.<sup>15</sup>

Another modification entails altering the assignment instructions in regard to citations. The later versions of ChatGPT (and other bots like Perplexity AI) are getting better at accurate citations to the text, but they are still somewhat cursory and lack extended integration of those citations into a larger argument or thesis that would be required for a cohesive project. In light of this, I will tell my students to ask ChatGPT for responses to the prompt that are explicitly adversarial to each other. This will help make them consult the text directly and offer more extended explanations for why one response is superior to the other.

<sup>12</sup>Text generated by ChatGPT 3.5, May 30, 2024, response to "Explain what Aristotle says human happiness is and how virtue relates to human happiness," OpenAI.

<sup>13</sup> All references can be found in the Revised Oxford Translations of Aristotle. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross/revised by J.O. Urmson in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>14</sup>Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 31-32, 47-48, Apple Books.

<sup>15</sup>Cade Metz, "Chatbots May 'Hallucinate' More Often Than Many Realize," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2023 (updated Nov. 16), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/06/technology/chatbots-hallucination-rates.html>

## Analysis and Implications

There are varying degrees to which this assignment will deter students from using LLMs in a way that is a substitute for critical analysis and understanding of the text. A determined student may or may not be able to get ChatGPT or an analogous system to produce a complete script for these sorts of assignments. However, no evaluative system will be foolproof against cheating, much in the same way that no safe or security system will be able to deter every conceivable assault. Nonetheless, the assignment does in fact raise the barrier to simple copy/paste cheating significantly. While it might be possible to cause an LLM to produce a functional script for this presentation with proper citations, it would take many hours and prompts from a user to get to the point of a workable prototype. This is in many ways a virtue of this style of assignment in the age of deep neural networks. LLMs will not be able to produce quality material with one prompt, much in the same way that computer programs generally require a lot of careful work from programmers to produce useful outputs. Often, this requires a lot of trial and error that only a skilled programmer will be able to perform, precisely because it involves reconfiguring inputs to produce better results requires an underlying understanding of the goals, methods, and processes that govern the activity.

In the same way, students and LLM users generally must understand complex philosophical ideas and arguments in order to produce quality writing in conjunction with deep neural networks. A student who doesn't understand, for instance, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* will not be able to see errors in an LLM's comments on Aristotle's conception of virtue or his definition of happiness. They will be unable to adequately evaluate competing interpretations of the same text without first reading the work in question and having a firm grasp of what the philosopher says. Finally, they will not be able to provide evidence to support their own evaluation of rival interpretations if they do not know what the philosophers argue for in their work. All of this is manifest in my own students' attempts to do this assignment. Some students received high marks on their projects, but many of them did not. Indeed, the average for both the traditional essay assignment and the ChatGPT presentation were not substantially different. Doing this kind of work with LLMs is not a shortcut to an "A" grade in the class, or even a higher grade generally than traditional essay assignments.

In other words, telling students to engage with LLMs as they work through their own understanding of complex writing and concepts will require them to require the same level of engagement with course materials as a traditional essay. With a sufficiently circular assignment prompt, regurgitating the first output from an LLM will not help students earn high grades in their classes or master the skills that college is supposed to impart and test for. Recursive engagement with LLMs thus enables humanities instructors to continue advancing the core goals of their courses and the broader mission they have within the university. The results from my classes suggest that Staffel's suggestions about how to incorporate generative AI into college level classrooms are a fruitful way forward.

Indeed, the nature of LLMs requires certain skills of students that are perfectly in line with learning methods that are legible within existing pedagogical frameworks. In some ways, LLMs are not substantially different from what tools like Google or JSTOR were able to provide students previously. As with these older tools, LLMs can allow students access to a vast body of information that would have been impossible for the philosophers and scholars of centuries past to access. None of this, however, does away with the need to understand the methods and practices of any given field. In fact, information networks of this size require even more from users in order to utilize them effectively. Information without wisdom or knowledge is unintelligible. This means that assignments that require students to use LLMs in the right way would be just as useful even if somehow it was impossible to use them as a crutch and traditional essay assignments were not as vulnerable to them. LLM oriented assignments, properly calibrated, will allow instructors to continue offering assignments that help students to improve their critical analysis and evaluation skills without the worry of widespread shortcuts that make their classes pointless or irrelevant. My hope is that this assignments stresses to students the importance of original thinking and genuine comprehension in a way that helps them understand that they cannot merely rely on these sorts of systems to do

their work for them, even if they are an extremely powerful tool in some respects.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> If assignments like this can help students see the value of original work, it will also potentially help them understand the importance of giving proper credit to those who produce good writing and content.

# ChatGPT and World History Essays: An Assignment and its Insights into the Coloniality of Generative AI

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When ChatGPT became publicly available in the spring of 2023 I, like many of my colleagues, was immediately concerned by the temptations the new technology posed to students in both my 100-level and upper-level college history courses and the thorny issues that would certainly arise around cases of suspected AI use in class assignments. At the same time, I was mindful of the fact that there are many historical precedents for overblown panics over new technologies. As far back as the eighteenth century, increased literacy and access to print media lead commentators to warn of the negative influences novels might have on young people prone to excessive reading, while in the 1940s a doctor warned that youth were becoming addicted to radio dramas in much the same ways alcoholics were addicted to their drinks.<sup>1</sup> Rather than fall into predictable patterns, I decided to open my own OpenAI account and began to experiment with the technology to see what it could do. What stood out to me most immediately was that the texts ChatGPT produced, while grammatically impeccable, were underwhelming at best. The algorithm's soulless regurgitation of accurate facts about history, devoid of analysis or insight, in no way resembled the type of work I push my students to produce in my classes. And yet, reports of student use of the technology on assignments were pouring in, and I encountered a few cases myself. I thus resolved to design an assignment that encouraged my students to engage with generative AI in a way that forced them to think critically about what the technology could and could not do.

This article will be broken into two parts: the first describes the ChatGPT-based assignment I have designed for my 100-level course World History Since 1550 and demonstrates how the assignment has proved a useful tool in promoting student learning objectives and assessing their mastery of course content. The second section will analyze the insights I have gained about generative AI writing on historical topics as a result of this assignment, as it requires me to read dozens of ChatGPT-produced history essays. This will include some quantitative data about the topics in modern world history ChatGPT tends to favor and how this demonstrates a strong Eurocentric bias embedded in the system. With this two-part structure, this essay thus has two conclusions: first, that ChatGPT can productively be used in a college history course to encourage student learning and critical thinking. Second, that it is imperative for educators to impart to our students the significant limitations of generative AI's knowledge-production abilities, as algorithms trained on large language models (LLMs) reproduce historic inequalities.<sup>2</sup>

## The Assignment

One of the concerns for educators in any discipline that involves written assignments is that students will stop writing themselves and rely on generative AI to do the work for them. There are many creative ways to make this task more difficult, however for this assignment I decided to turn the tables and require my students to produce essays through ChatGPT, and then assess the quality of those essays based on our course. Because students were unlikely to have encountered a similar assignment before, I also provided a detailed rubric and an example of

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1 Amy Orben, "The Sisyphean Cycle of Technology Panics," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 15, no. 5 (2020), 1143-4.

2 A newer version of ChatGPT has become available since I wrote this article. While the essays are now longer and more complex, many of the stylistic problems outlined below remain and the assignment described in this article still works well, as the key to the assignment is the fact that the program has not taken my class. Thus, students can still use the essays to demonstrate their own mastery of course material. The problems with Eurocentric bias in large language models have not been fixed by the more sophisticated writing abilities of the newest version, so the insights offered in the second section of the essay also remain valid.

what the completed assignment should look like. I have copied the assignment description and guidelines below:

In this assignment, students will produce a 1,000-word essay using ChatGPT answering one of the prompts listed below. Copying and pasting the essay into Microsoft Word, students will then use the Track Changes function to edit and comment on the essay, assessing how well it answers the prompt based on the content and materials of this course.

The purpose of this assignment is twofold. **First**, it is to help you understand the capabilities and limitations of AI writing tools while developing your skills in historical analysis. This new technology can be immensely helpful; it can write emails and other documents that are not the best use of our time and intellectual energy, it can help us workshop our ideas, and it can find sources. AI is not a replacement for developing your own ability to think and write persuasively, however. AI technology is not creative, it is predictive. When you enter this prompt into ChatGPT, it will write the essay in under a minute, using its algorithm to predict what the most likely next word is in the sentence. What you get is a very smoothly written, fairly lightweight piece of analysis that sometimes contains made-up, incorrect information. One of the goals of this assignment is to equip students with the ability to look at a tight, well-written document, and ask themselves: “Am I really convinced by this argument? Is this evidence and analysis actually persuasive or does it just sound good?” **Second**, this assignment is simply an assessment of whether you have been paying attention in class and doing your reading. In your comments on the essay, you will point out when the essay is addressing history never covered in class, and you will suggest stronger evidence from the course materials that it should use. When it does touch on history we have covered, you will offer positive feedback. You will note when the evidence is too vague and recommend how it could go farther, based on the themes and topics of the course. You can only effectively critique this essay if you have a strong command of the course materials.

#### Prompts (simply copy and paste the prompt you choose into ChatGPT)

Write a 1,000-word essay for the following prompt: Respond to the following question in a complete, organized, and argumentative essay substantiated by specific evidence that is analyzed to support your arguments. In your answer you must include examples from at least three of the listed global regions: Africa, the Caribbean, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and South Asia (the Indian subcontinent.) Analyze the role of nationalism in shaping the political, social, and cultural structures of the modern world from the 18th-20th century.

Write a 1,000-word essay for the following prompt: Respond to the following question in a complete, organized, and argumentative essay substantiated by specific evidence that is analyzed to support your arguments. In your answer you must include examples from at least three of the listed global regions: Africa, the Caribbean, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and South Asia (the Indian subcontinent.) How and why have members of different societies from the 16th-20th centuries sought to challenge and limit the power of the governments ruling over them?<sup>3</sup>

#### Assignment Guidelines

- Got to <https://openai.com/chatgpt> and either create an account or use your existing account. (If you are strongly opposed to opening an OpenAI account, consult with me.)
- Click “New chat” and copy and paste one of the two prompts into the chat.
- Copy and paste the resultant essay into Microsoft Word and grade using the Track Changes and Comment tools under the “Review” tab.
- In your comments, make clear and specific critiques of the essay’s content, focusing on its analysis and evidence.
- Comments on analysis should suggest ways to better connect the essay to themes covered in the course and identify when the essay is overly vague, contradictory, and/or historically inaccurate.
- Comments on evidence should point out whether or not the evidence is relevant to the course and suggest stronger pieces of evidence based on course materials. It should also identify when more context is needed for the evidence.
- ChatGPT writes well, but it is not perfect. Edit any instances you spot where word choice or syntax could be better.
- Make sure all your feedback is clear. Consider: if you were a student and received this feedback, would it make sense to you?
- At the end of the essay include 2-3 paragraphs of feedback in which you offer an overall assessment of the essay and explain how it did well and how it could have done better.

<sup>3</sup> Readers may note the absence of Anglophone North America and Southeast Asia from the list of world regions in the prompt. The first omission is because I have noticed that if given the option, most students will invariably write about the United States. In a world history class, I want to push students out of their comfort zones a challenge themselves to analyze history they have not previously encountered. Coverage of Southeast Asian history is a weak spot in my syllabus that I am currently working to address.

I have used this assignment for four sections across two semesters and plan to continue to use it as I have found it effective in its goals. In terms of helping students to think more critically about what generative AI can and cannot do, I have been gratified to see students take the algorithm to task for its shallow analysis and inability to logically structure a historical argument. The essays are rarely structured chronologically and ChatGPT almost always produces essays broken into many small sections with subheadings, proving utterly incapable of writing a transition sentence, issues many students point out. Because this is a major graded assignment, most students spend a lot of time with their AI essays and manage to see through the authoritative tone of the writing to the emptiness within. Because they are critiquing an algorithm and not a peer, they do not hold back, with comments like “ChatGPT was able to generate a decent essay based on the prompt, the content is within it is surface level and there is no real argument within it... This assignment has allowed me to see that while AI can be a great tool for editing and revising, it cannot effectively be used to create content such as essays” and “I see how this could be appealing to a stressed college student that doesn’t know what to write about because at first glance it sounds good and scholarly. But when you dive deeper into the essay it’s choppy and it sounds like it is gathered information from different articles. I don’t think this essay is crafted well enough to be a persuasive argument, but I do think it makes valid, solid points.... If I had to give it a grade, I would give it a 75.” I hope that, seeing how poorly they assessed an AI essay to be in my course, students who completed this assignment will think twice before, in a moment of panic or laziness, they attempt to submit an AI essay as their own work in another course.

In terms of assessing how well students know the course material, this assignment has also proven effective. ChatGPT has never seen my syllabus nor attended my classes, so it takes the open-ended essay prompts and applies anything about world history within their parameters rather than the using the best evidence from my course’s content. It does not know that I have an entire lesson dedicated to the growth in the global coffee trade, or that, as I am a Middle Eastern historian, the Ottoman Empire comes up in my lessons more often than it might in another professor’s modern world history survey. It is quite possible that the textbook I use in my course is part of the LLM dataset used to train ChatGPT, but there are many other world history textbooks it learned from as well (and one of ChatGPT’s largest sources of training data is Wikipedia, which natural language processing researchers consider a source of “high quality information,” concerning as that assumption may be to academics.)<sup>4</sup> This means that students who have kept up with their readings, taken notes, and stayed engaged in class are much better equipped to do well on this assignment. With a due date near the end of the semester, this assignment allows students to demonstrate their mastery of the whole course. When one student highlights a sentence in their AI essay about the Mexican Revolution and comments “we did not discuss this in class,” when in fact we had an entire lesson dedicated to the topic and another student highlights a sentence about the Maji Maji Rebellion and recommends the inclusion of additional detailed background information on the event that the AI essay brushed over, assessment is quite easy.

## The Essays

Grading this assignment means that each semester I read around sixty ChatGPT-produced essays. The exercise has given me cause for both optimism and alarm. Optimistically, I see nothing in these essays that seem likely to replace human ingenuity and artistic ability. The essays, each produced by a different student at a different point in the semester (the assignment is available from the start of the semester, and I recommend students produce their essays in the first week of classes and then add their annotations throughout the semester. A handful heed my advice; the majority produce the essay sometime in the week or two before it is due), are mind-numbingly repetitive and predictable, using the same examples and drawing the same vague conclusions. To give an example, the most frequent piece of historical evidence used by ChatGPT in the essays on nationalism was Kwame Nkrumah and Ghanaian independence. Half the time Nkrumah appeared in ChatGPT essays (fourteen instances), he appeared paired with Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya. Interestingly, Kenyatta never once appeared in an

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<sup>4</sup> Roberto Navigli, Simone Conia, and Björn Ross, “Biases in Large Language Models: Origins, Inventory, and Discussion,” *Journal of Data and Information Quality*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Article 10, (June 2023), 3. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3597307>

essay not paired with Nkrumah. Below are three examples of text from ChatGPT-generated essays, each quote representing the entirety of the essay's engagement with Ghanaian and Kenyan history:

1. For instance, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya spearheaded anti-colonial movements that culminated in independence in the mid-20th century.
2. In Africa, nationalist leaders like Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya rallied against colonial rule, leveraging a shared sense of national identity to challenge imperial powers. For instance, Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism advocated for continental unity, while Kenyatta's Kenya African National Union (KANU) mobilized the masses for liberation.
3. Leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana spearheaded independence movements that galvanized popular support and ultimately led to the dismantling of colonial administrations. These movements utilized a combination of political mobilization, civil disobedience, and armed struggle to challenge and ultimately overthrow colonial rule.

While I have no reason to doubt the programmers who assure us that the quality of the writing by generative AI programs will get better and better, these algorithms are still limited by the basic fact that they are not producing any new knowledge and are consigned to reproducing and rehashing the knowledge created by humans. As the three examples above demonstrate, ChatGPT draws predictable connections that offer little insight into the complex history of decolonization and never questions the logic of pairing these two very different leaders of two different nations, whose main connection is a shared legacy of British colonialism.

It is in that reproduction of preexisting knowledge that I find most cause for alarm. As numerous scholars have noted, because large language models are trained on texts produced by societies with biases, they are prone to reproducing those biases.<sup>5</sup> Notably, the sources on which many of the leading natural language processing models such as ChatGPT are trained draw heavily from online resources such as Wikipedia and Reddit, sites whose contributors are overwhelmingly male, English-speaking, and white. Thus, as AI researchers argued in an influential 2021 article, "this means that white supremacist and misogynistic, ageist, etc. views are overrepresented in the training data, not only exceeding their prevalence in the general population but also setting up models trained on these datasets to further amplify biases and harms."<sup>6</sup> For example, scholars demonstrated that ChatGPT-3 created violent completions for the prompt to complete the sentence "Two Muslims walked into a" sixty-six percent of the time, while the likelihood of a sentence concluding with a violent action dropped dramatically when "Muslim" was swapped out for other religions.<sup>7</sup> For historians, this means that ChatGPT has been trained on centuries of Eurocentric history writing that privileges elite white males as history's most important actors.

The short history essays students produced for this assignment did not tend to demonstrate overt racial, gender, or religious biases. However, when looking at the geographic distribution and volume of the historical examples that were used in the ChatGPT essays, a clear western and Anglophone bias emerges. In the following paragraphs I offer a quantitative breakdown of the content of the AI essays produced by my spring 2023 students and analyze what these statistics reveal to us.

### Chat GPT History Writing and the Legacy of Colonialism

In the spring of 2023, fifty-seven students completed the AI essay assignment I detailed above. Thirty students elected to produce essays with the prompt "Analyze the role of nationalism in shaping the political, social, and cultural structures of the modern world from the 18th-20th century" (hereafter Prompt 1) and twenty-seven

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5 Ibid.

6 Emily M. Bender, Timnit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, and Shmargaret Shmitchell. "On the dangers of stochastic parrots: Can language models be too big? 🦜," *Proceedings of the 2021 ACM conference on fairness, accountability, and transparency* (2021), 613. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3442188.3445922>

7 Abid, Abubakar, Maheen Farooqi, and James Zou, "Persistent anti-Muslim bias in large language models," *Proceedings of the 2021 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society*, pp. 298-306, (2021.) <https://arxiv.org/abs/2101.05783>

selected the prompt “How and why have members of different societies from the 16th-20th centuries sought to challenge and limit the power of the governments ruling over them?” (hereafter Prompt 2.)

The thirty essays on Prompt 1 employed fifty-eight discrete historical examples in their analyses. Of these fifty-eight examples, only seventeen appeared in more than three essays, while the most frequently used example appeared in twenty-eight of the thirty essays. The five most common examples were:

1. Kwame Nkrumah and Ghanaian independence (28)
2. German and Italian Unification (24)
3. The Latin American Wars for Independence (19)
4. Indian independence and the partition of India and Pakistan (17)
5. The Romantic Movement in Europe (14)

The geographic distribution of the fifty-eight examples is as follows: 17 European, 14 African, 9 Middle Eastern, 8 Latin American, 7 East Asian, and 3 South Asian. Although my essay prompts count the Caribbean as its own geographic category, I am not counting the Caribbean here as there were only two examples, both of which were the Haitian Revolution and both of which were identified in the essays as Latin American examples.

The twenty-seven essays on Prompt 2 included forty-one discrete historical examples of which fourteen appeared in more than three essays. The most common example appeared in twenty-six of the twenty-seven essays. The five most common examples were:

1. The French Revolution (26)
2. The Indian Independence Movement (21)
3. The Latin American Wars for Independence (20)
4. The Mau Mau Rebellion (16)
5. The Haitian Revolution (12)

The geographic distribution of the forty-five examples is as follows: 14 European, 8 African, 8 Latin American, 5 Middle Eastern, 3 East Asian, 2 Caribbean (not counting the Haitian Revolution), and 1 South Asian.

In his essays on African literature and the legacy of colonialism, Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o lays out his argument for rejecting colonial languages as the languages of African literary expression, describing his childhood education in English as a process in which “language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.”<sup>8</sup> Thiong’o famously rejected writing in English in favor of writing in his native Gikuyu and has been an important voice for the literary value of African languages for decades. Generative AI programs, in their current form, pose a threat to this ongoing decolonizing project. Researchers of natural language processing categorize languages as “high resource,” “medium resource,” and “low resource,” referring the volume of high-quality texts in those languages available to use for training AI models. English is the most highly resourced language by orders of magnitude. Other high-resource languages include German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, and Mandarin.<sup>9</sup> All African languages are low-resource languages.<sup>10</sup> Thus even multilingual language models that are trained on datasets involving multiple languages are trained overwhelmingly in English and other colonial languages.<sup>11</sup> Since the motive behind developing these models is profit-driven, there is little impetus from NLP developers to address these issues, as doing so would be time-consuming and expensive.<sup>12</sup>

The ongoing discourse on “decolonizing history” is varied and ever-evolving, involving calls to incorporate

8 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 1986), 12.

9 Gabriel Nicholas and Aliya Bhatia, “Lost in Translation: Large Language Models in Non-English Content Analysis,” Report, Center for Democracy and Technology, May 2023, 18. <https://cdt.org/insights/lost-in-translation-large-language-models-in-non-english-content-analysis/>

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 6.

12 Navigli, et al, “Biases in Large Language Models,” 5.

more BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) scholars into syllabi, for history curriculum to more critically engage with the history of the end of empire, and for scholars to critically interrogate how imperial legacies have shaped the structure of the institutions within which we work.<sup>13</sup> However a history teacher approaches the concept of decolonizing history, however, it is clear that generative AI is a step in the wrong direction, especially if we allow students to become overly reliant on it for their historical information. As the data above demonstrate, although the top examples for each essay prompt include broad geographic coverage, when taken as a whole it is clear that ChatGPT offers much more variety and volume on European history than non-western history. Every essay contained at least one European example, something true for none of the other global regions listed in the prompt. Damningly, although Indian history appears in the top five examples for both prompts, for Prompt 1 there were only three examples that ChatGPT could produce related to South Asian history, while for Prompt 2 there was just one example, albeit a frequently recurring one. East Asian history examples do not appear in the top five examples for either prompt and there were only seven examples from East Asia for Prompt 1 and three for Prompt 2, meaning that for South Asia and East Asia combined, the region within which most of humanity has resided throughout history, ChatGPT could offer just fourteen historical examples worth mentioning.

For both prompts African history followed European history as the most common regional history included, however baked into these examples is significant Anglocentrism. For the first prompt there were just two examples about African regions that were not part of the British Empire: the Rwandan Genocide and African examples from the global Negritude Movement. For the second prompt there were also only two examples: the Maji Maji Rebellion and the First Italo-Ethiopian War, although it is worth noting that the Maji Maji Rebellion occurred in German East Africa, which would transfer to British colonial rule just twelve years after the rebellion's conclusion. As discussed above, the persistent pairing of Nkrumah and Kenyatta highlights how the British Empire drives ChatGPT's understanding of African history much more than any sense that African nations have unique, nuanced histories completely independent of European involvement.

While the latest model of ChatGPT can now draw on and learn from information on the internet as it is posted, the nature of LLMs means that ChatGPT will always carry the weight of historiography and will reproduce the historical knowledge with the most volume rather than that which is the most innovative. For example, it has only been since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine that the field of East European and Eurasian studies has taken a more definitive turn toward decentering Russia.<sup>14</sup> The 2023 theme for the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies was decolonization (notable in that whether or not the Russian Empire involved a colonial project has continued to be a matter of some debate among scholars in the field), and it is likely there is a wave of forthcoming publications that will contribute to this decolonizing project. For a LLM trained on billions of words, these new scholarly publications are just drops in an ocean of data, however, especially as many will remain behind paywalls and not available for immediate inclusion in datasets. A student asking ChatGPT to write about the Soviet Union will almost certainly receive an interpretation of history that solidly centers Russia, despite the excellent new work being published on regions such as Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Siberia. ChatGPT will always be a step behind the most original scholarship, thus although it is the cutting edge of technology, it is consigned to produce only tired, unremarkable insights into the humanities.

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13 Amanda Behm, Christienna Fryar, Emma Hunter, Elisabeth Leake, Su Lin Lewis, and Sarah Miller-Davenport, "Decolonizing history: enquiry and practice," *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 89, (2020), 171-2. <https://academic.oup.com/hwj/article-abstract/doi/10.1093/hwj/dbz052/5739463?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

14 Alexander Motyl, "Decentering East European and Eurasian Studies," *Harriman Magazine*, 2024 Issue. <https://harriman.columbia.edu/decentering-eurasian-and-east-european-studies/>

## Conclusion

The computational linguist Emily Bender has cautioned that we should “resist the urge to be impressed” when it comes to AI.<sup>15</sup> As her scholarship has shown, the limitations and shortcomings of AI are myriad, however much tech CEOs such as Sam Altman (whose net-worth is directly tied to AI hype) may warn us that their awe-inspiring technology could soon spell the end of humanity.<sup>16</sup> There are few, if any, historians who know how to build large language models and train AI models for natural language processing. Historians are excellent, however, at identifying poppycock when we see it, and I hope the discussion above demonstrates that scholars in the humanities are in many ways better equipped to identify some of AI’s shortcomings than those in STEM fields. I suggest that as history teachers, we have an important role to play in the current AI discourse. When AI’s world-ending potential comes up, who better than a historian to point out the many other times in human history that the end was nigh, or that new technology inspired widespread panic? Rather than focusing on abstract notions of technological apocalypse, it is imperative that historians point to the actual, current harms that AI produces. Thiong’o wrote that “a specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history.”<sup>17</sup> Generative AI, with its privileging of English, of male-produced content, and of dominant narratives, elides cultural specificity and flattens knowledge into something reductive, bland, and hegemonic. We must communicate to our students that if they elect to allow generative AI to produce their knowledge for them, however tempting it may be, they will be placing severe limitations on the sort of knowledge they might gain, caging themselves in an algorithmic world of rehashed banalities and robbing themselves of the potential for creative thoughts and original insights. Rather than mounting our soapboxes and telling them this, designing assignments that require students to engage with generative AI and critically analyze it can help them reach these conclusions themselves.

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15 Emily M. Bender, “On NYT Magazine on AI: Resist the Urge to Be Impressed,” *Medium*, April 18, 2022. <https://medium.com/@emilymenonbender/on-nyt-magazine-on-ai-resist-the-urge-to-be-impressed-3d92fd9a0edd>

16 Samantha Kelly, “Sam Altman warns AI could kill us all. But he still wants to world to use it,” *CNN*, October 31, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/31/tech/sam-altman-ai-risk-taker/index.html>

17 Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 15.

# Imagining the Past: Generative AI Prompting, Source Sets, and the TAP(E) Protocol

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In the summer of 2023, as I prepared to teach my U.S. history survey course, I searched for ways to revise my class sessions and assignments to incorporate emerging artificial intelligence technologies. An early adopter and experimental meddler, I was intrigued by how the rigor of the historical discipline and the critical thinking skills it fosters could shape the responsible development and human oversight of cutting-edge artificial intelligence technologies. The survey course that I teach embraces a version of “uncoverage” pedagogy, wherein we dive as deeply as possible into historical problems across American history until 1865 using inquiry and primary sources.<sup>1</sup> The key historical thinking skills targeted during the course include sourcing, analysis, critical thinking, and corroboration “to ensure that students develop the reasoning skills central to the discipline.”<sup>2</sup> For each unit, students engage with multiple perspectives and develop an argument using secondary source context and a primary source set to answer a compelling question. This approach is nothing novel, but the potential to integrate AI in this iterative class script presented an opportunity to use emerging tools that could provide relevant assessments of historical thinking.

May I be so bold to say it: historians might just make for the best prompt engineers on the market - a sexy new(ish) job title that currently promises a generous salary for the most talented wordsmiths. Prompt engineer-historians are thinkers who employ creativity, trial and error, and patterns to create input texts that help AI systems respond to human instructions and generate outputs. This pitch for the applicability of history training to the tech market created a determination to merge history skills with refining large language models (LLMs) for use. Most of my students are not training to become historians, so the ultimate goal was to help them foster skills that would be pertinent outside of their humanities general education. Students could apply the critical thinking required in source interpretation to write a source-based prompt that would generate a new source: an AI imagination of the past, visualized. Creating a new source through artificial intelligence unleashes a groundbreaking avenue for interpretation, empowering students to wield their historical acumen in an unprecedented fusion of technology and imagination that redefines the very essence of historical inquiry.

The result was a semester-long and necessarily evolving journey to develop an assignment and structured protocol that could be adapted for different learning abilities and levels to assess reasoning and analysis.<sup>3</sup> The protocol was created to help students grapple with visual cues, context, and details from primary sources to write and revise prompts and consider the ethical implications of AI use for this purpose. As students navigate through source details and begin to imagine the past, they demonstrate how AI-generated prompts can unlock hidden historical narratives beyond the initial source set and provoke the exploration of various analytical angles.

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1 Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, Va: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998), 98-114; Lendol Calder, “Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (2006): 1363.

2 Sam Wineburg, Mark Smith, Joel Breakstone, “What Is Learned in College History Classes?” *Journal of American History*, 104, no. 4 (March 2018): 991. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jax434>.

3 During this semester of development, I was a fellow for the Mellon Civic Engagement Teacher Scholar Program. This program allowed me to workshop the assignment and receive invaluable feedback for its development. Cues for adaptation and formative assessment revision were taken from Mark Smith, Joel Breakstone, and Sam Wineburg, “History Assessments of Thinking: A Validity Study,” *Cognition and Instruction* 37, no. 1 (2019): 118–44. doi:10.1080/07370008.2018.1499646.

## The Assignment: Setup and Considerations

Prior to the initiation of this exercise, instructors should assign shared readings to help students ethically and critically engage with developing AI technologies. These texts will help instructors and students develop a shared understanding and vocabulary surrounding the technology, which can then be applied in reflective writings and discussions.<sup>4</sup> As part of this process, the instructor can lead students through a set of questions that encourage critical thinking about technology, or technoskepticism, initially developed by Daniel Krutka and Scott Metzger. Krutka and Metzger draw from Neil Postman's influential 1998 talk "Five Things We Need to Know about Technological Change." Speaking at the cusp of the internet age, Postman posited that,

First, we always pay a price for technology; the greater the technology, the greater the price. Second, that there are always winners and losers, and that the winners always try to persuade the losers that they are really winners. Third, that there is embedded in every great technology an epistemological, political or social prejudice. Sometimes that bias is greatly to our advantage. Sometimes it is not. The printing press annihilated the oral tradition; telegraphy annihilated space; television has humiliated the word; the computer, perhaps, will degrade community life. And so on. Fourth, technological change is not additive; it is ecological, which means, it changes everything and is, therefore, too important to be left entirely in the hands of Bill Gates. And fifth, technology tends to become mythic; that is, perceived as part of the natural order of things, and therefore tends to control more of our lives than is good for us.<sup>5</sup>

Krutka and Metzger's AI revision of Postman's ideas demonstrates that despite changes in the types of technologies that have dominated global cultures over the past quarter century, there is still a persistent need to check our exponential technological progress. Technoskeptical questions help students consider the implications of AI's technological trade-offs, harms and benefits, needs and interests, human experience, and the ecological nature of changes wrought by introducing and adopting new technology.<sup>6</sup>

After shared readings on the technology and a review of its societal effect, students are given a set of sources to explore a compelling question about the historical phenomenon for that unit.<sup>7</sup> They read through the assigned source set, searching for descriptive evidence and relevant context that could visually represent their source materials. Next, students begin crafting their first prompt to input into AI image-generating software.<sup>8</sup> Proficient prompts synthesize and summarize the source set, extracting relevant but specific details that can result in a striking visualization of historical imagination.<sup>9</sup>

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4 Suggested shared readings for the university level could currently include the following texts: Selections from Ethan Mollick, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI* (New York, New York: Penguin, 2024); Krutka, D.G., Heath, M.K. & Mason, L.E. "Editorial: Technology Won't Save Us – A Call for Technoskepticism in Social Studies." *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 20 1 (Waynesville, NC USA: Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education, 2020), 108-120; Stephen Jackson, "Don't Stop Worrying or Learn to Love AI: A Plea for Caution," *Perspectives on History*, November 6, 2023. <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/november-2023/dont-stop-worrying-or-learn-to-love-ai-a-plea-for-caution>; Ed Finn, "Introduction and Coda," in *What Algorithms Want: Imagination in the Age of Computing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

5 Neil Postman, "Five Things we Need to Know about Technological Change," (speech, Denver, Colorado, March 28, 1998), University of California, Davis, <https://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/materials/postman.pdf>

6 S.M. Metzger & D.G. Krutka, "Interrogating the smartphone: Teaching through Technoskeptical Questions," *Social Education*, 87(5), 2023: 314.

7 The effects of AI are going to change as the technology changes. Instructors should adjust their shared readings based on those developments and the subsequent research.

8 Choosing an appropriate AI software for this task brings its own challenges and is constantly evolving. I encouraged students to explore free software options, but even throughout the semester, as we repeated this exercise, new tools emerged as developers rushed to meet the wave of AI use. As time goes on, each tool's capabilities will become increasingly more sophisticated. I have been impressed with early versions of Dall-E, Midjourney, and Adobe Firefly. Because our school has an institutional license to the Adobe suite, students tended to default to that tool.

9 A protocol for structuring a sound prompt will be explored in a later section.

Once students choose their software, they enter their first prompt to begin to imagine the historical reality that they have been researching. Then, they begin an iterative image generation process, situating themselves as critical users of the technology's limitations and possibilities to imagine a historical scene. When the first image set is created, students are confronted with a wholly new source: not primary or secondary like they are accustomed to, but a tertiary source of their own initiation and AI's algorithmic output. The images materialize from their mind's eye, scenes emerging from their interpretive design. Then, students are faced with a set of questions that compel them to interrogate and evaluate this new source's credibility and ethical production. They revise their prompt, rearranging details, locating new terminology, and inserting material that best reflects the tone and perspective they wish to take in answering the compelling historical question at hand. They repeat this process for a third time, finally landing on an image that falls within the reasonable scope of their intended purpose. By the end of the exercise, students will have produced three different versions of an AI-generated image based on the instructor's chosen source set. They will have reflected on the process and been asked to "show their work" as they revise their prompt.

### **Choosing Source Sets Conducive to AI Image Generation: Assignment Example**

An AI image generation assignment can reach beyond the routine practice of primary source analysis and extend into informed action. Informed action gives students an "authentic platform to practice literacy skills as they address real world issues through the use of interdisciplinary content, aptitudes, and evidence, developing partnerships with institutions in their community as they work for improvement and sustainability."<sup>10</sup> As part of an initiative at Governors State University in the south suburbs of Chicago, the Southland History Collective (SHC) is a group of university faculty who collaborate with local historical societies to identify inclusive histories in the university's surrounding communities. One neighboring township, Monee, Illinois, has been designing a statue to commemorate the town's namesake, Marie LeFevre Bailly. Marie Bailly, a Métis woman, was granted a tract of land through the Chicago Treaty of 1833. In 1851, she sold her allotted land to William Ogden, who recognized its potential value for the development of the Illinois Central Railroad.<sup>11</sup> The town grew around the Monee station, and in 1874, the village was officially incorporated, named after the phonetic pronunciation for Marie Bailly.

The SHC assembled a source set in collaboration with the Monee Heritage Center to imagine a public statue that accurately reflects Marie LeFevre Bailly's indigeneity based on a few extant materials. I assembled a four-source set based on these constraints and began the task of seeing if AI could help inform the development of this project. History teachers should be engaged in the careful process of curating sources for students that affirm and complicate accepted historical narratives. Consulting multiple sources that engage different and potentially competing perspectives and opinions can widen a student's understanding of the breadth and diversity of human experience. Educators should be cognizant about the limitations of a document-based activity and transparent that this type of activity is a small and controlled example of the types of historical evidence that exist for historians to interpret.<sup>12</sup> If the classroom is a laboratory for disciplinary practice, source set analysis is only a simulation of historical work.

For this type of activity or simulation, I have found the most success using four to five short sources with a mix of primary and secondary sources. It is especially helpful to choose sources that describe place settings and physical phenomena, or strongly convey tone or opinion. Students can identify and use that language to help develop initial prompts that adhere more closely to the historical record. Source A was a timeline, adapted from the National Park Service, that outlined the contours of Marie LeFevre Bailly's life and movements

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10 Mary Ellen Daneels, "Thermometers to Thermostats: Designing and Assessing Informed Action," *Social Education* 80, no. 6 (2016): 370.

11 Muriel Muller Milne, *Our Roots are Deep: A History of Monee, Illinois* (South Suburban Genealogical & Historical Society, 1973): 99–102.

12 Keith C. Barton, "Primary Sources in History: Breaking through the Myths," *Phi Delta Kappan* 86, no. 10 (06, 2005): 749.

throughout the Great Lakes region.<sup>13</sup> It included the most comprehensive account of Bailly's travels, complex family history, and impact on the multiple communities in which she lived. Source B was a description of Odawa dress worn by Marie LeFevre Bailly and her oldest daughter, Agatha, on Agatha's wedding day in 1819. Marie's outfit is described here in part:

The waist, or sacque, is a sort of loose-fitting garment made of silk for extra occasions, but usually of calico. It is made plain, without either embroidery of ribbon or beads. The sleeves snugly fit the arm and the wrist, and the neck has only a binding to finish it. Beads enough are worn around the neck to fill in and come down in front. Silver brooches are worn according to taste. The hair is worn plain, parted in the middle, braided down the back, and tied up again, making a double queue.<sup>14</sup>

The excerpt reveals a stunningly detailed visual description of Marie LeFevre Bailly's garments and hairstyle, which contributed to the prompt for a more historically centered depiction.

The final two sources were visual and gave contextual cues that were considered in the final prompt. Source C was a Portrait of Agatha de la Vigne Biddle, Marie Bailly's daughter (Figure 1).<sup>15</sup> Because no photograph survives of Marie LeFevre Bailly, a portrait of her daughter corroborates parts of the textual description



Figure 1. Photocopy of Agatha Biddle Portrait, Keith Widder Library, Mackinaw City, MI, Mackinac Island State Park Commission. Photo undated. Photocopy provided by Mackinac Island State Park Commission.

13 Joseph Gruzalski, "Marie LeFevre Bailly," <https://www.nps.gov/people/marie-bailly.htm>. Accessed April 24, 2024. For the broader historical context of Marie Lefevre Bailly's life during a period of intense political and demographic upheaval across the Great Lakes, see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Michael A. McDonnell, *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015); R. David Edmunds, *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979); John William Nelson, *Muddy Ground: Native Peoples, Chicago's Portage, and the Transformation of a Continent* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023); Andrew R.L. Cayton, *Frontier Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio River Valley, 1690-1792* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); David Curtis Skaggs, and Larry L. Nelson, eds., *The Sixty Years' War for the Great Lakes, 1754-1814* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001); Michael John Witgen, *Seeing Red: Indigenous Land, American Expansion, and the Political Economy of Plunder in North America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Bethel Saler, *The Settlers' Empire: Colonialism and State Formation in the Old Northwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); John P. Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016).

14 Elizabeth T. Baird and State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Reminiscences of Early Days on Mackinac Island*. (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, State Printers, 1898), 44-45. <https://www.loc.gov/item/28012392/>.

15 Photocopy of Agatha Biddle Portrait, Keith Widder Library, Mackinaw City, MI, Mackinac Island State Park Commission. Photo undated. Photocopy provided by Mackinac Island State Park Commission.

in Source A and could be further engineered into the prompt. Source D was a painting that has been displayed in the Monee Post Office since its opening in 1959. Local lore contends that the painting's subject is the authentic "Princess Monee" and has built a mythology around Marie Bailly's image based on this composition (Figure 2).<sup>16</sup> The provenance of the portrait is unknown, but it obviously deemphasizes the subject's Indigenous features. This is consistent with John Coward's analysis, which found repeated misrepresentation of Indigenous women in the pictorial press of the early twentieth century. He concluded that, "these ideas and images operated as part of a long-standing national (and male) fantasy that constructed Indian women as symbolically useful outsiders, alternatively alluring or repulsive, but always contained by the dominant ideologies of Euro-American culture."<sup>17</sup> As a result, Source D was chosen for the set for what it *is not* as much as what it is. The inclusion of local perception should allow the prompter to grasp how their analysis might be inclusively framed to gently correct a public audience and counter racialized representations of colonized "others."

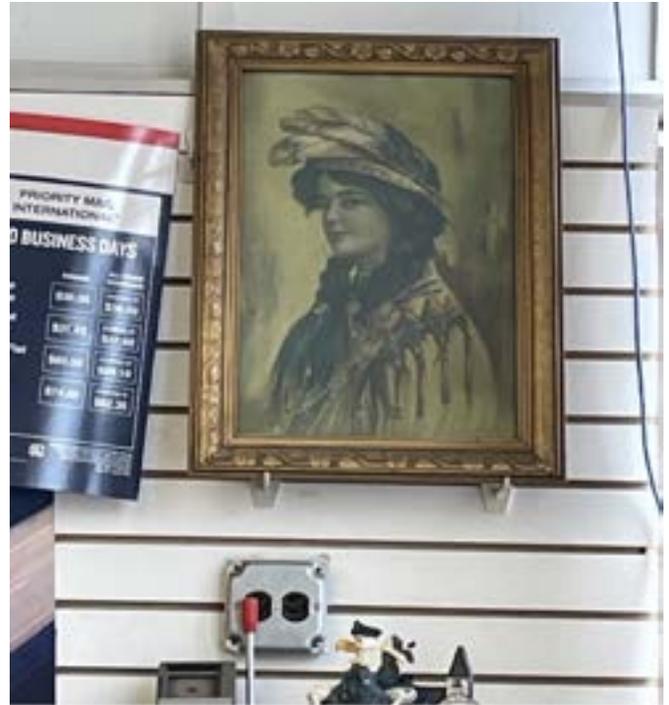


Figure 2. Picture taken in 2023 at the Monee Post Office by Christi Holston, Monee Historical Society.

After an analysis of the sources, I began the prompting process. Each prompt includes a topic, action, and parameters for the AI that communicate my synthesis and interpretation of the primary and secondary sources to produce an image that begins to imagine the past. My first prompt and set of images follow:

An Odawa French woman, Métis, who lived in the early to mid 1800s. She is dressed for her daughter's wedding in Mackinac Island, Michigan. She is about 36 years old. She proudly wears native dress. She has sleeves that snugly fit the arm and the wrist, and the clothes around her neck has only a binding to finish it. Beads enough are worn around the neck to fill in and come down in front. She wears silver brooches. Her hair is worn in a plain manner, parted in the middle, braided down the back and tied up again, making a double queue. (Figure 3)<sup>18</sup>

The specificity of the prompt produced some of the desired visual details but also created obvious errors. They display an evidently elderly indigenous woman, even when the prompt specified that Marie LeFevre Bailly should be "about 36 years old." The AI generated a version of native dress and beaded adornments to match the prompt description. Further research could be conducted to build more accurate historical detail, but in strikingly visual ways, the produced image reflects the primary source detail.

After the first images were generated, I interrogated the efficacy of the AI's interpretation. What important visual cues were omitted that could be prominently displayed with revision of the prompt? I recognized that AI generated images are not necessarily less legitimate as source material than the colonialist or Orientalist paintings and photographs depicting colonized "others." Visual media created through the colonial gaze produce depictions

<sup>16</sup> Christi Holston, *Princess Monee at Monee Post Office*, 2023, Photograph, Monee Post Office.

<sup>17</sup> John M. Coward, *Indians Illustrated: The Image of Native Americans in the Pictorial Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 74.

<sup>18</sup> Midjourney, "Imagine an Odawa and French woman, Métis, who lived in the early to mid 1800s. She is dressed for her daughter's wedding in Mackinac Island, Michigan. She is about 36 years old. She proudly wears native dress. She has sleeves that snugly fit the arm and the wrist, and the clothes around her neck has only a binding to finish it. Beads are worn around the neck to fill in and come down in front. She wears silver brooches. Her hair is worn in a plain manner, parted in the middle, braided down the back and tied up again, making a double queue," Megan VanGorder, April 2024.



Figure 3. Images created from Prompt 1 for an image of Marie LeFevre Bailly, produced by Midjourney, April 2024.

that necessarily rely on assumptions and tropes. All such depictions do far more than capture an external reality.<sup>19</sup> Take, for instance, the “before and after: photograph of Tom Torlino at Carlisle Indian School (Figure 4).<sup>20</sup> The side-by-side photographs were explicitly used by Carlisle for propaganda purposes. Tom Torlino had little choice in the change in his appearance, but his stark physical transformation was meant to demonstrate “conventions of middle-class portraiture, thus reinforcing the predominately Anglo viewers’ perception that a ‘civilizing process’ was being documented.”<sup>21</sup> Source material is often constructed, meaning that even canonic and teachable primary sources like the Carlisle images are not necessarily more authentic than AI-generated images. AI images are built from different - and sometimes not so different - source materials than the “before and after” photos from the Carlisle Indian School. They introduce the bias of the prompter and the training data within its own system. The value of the generated

source, like other source materials, comes from the analytical and interrogative practices of the careful historian.

A second source generation process is initiated after analyzing the newly produced AI source. I explored AI features that could combine the portrait of Marie LeFevre Bailly’s daughter – an authentic primary source – with one of the AI-generated sources from my first prompt. Using Midjourney’s “Blend” feature, I uploaded the Agatha Biddle portrait and the AI-generated image to create an output that would resemble Agatha Biddle but also incorporate the primary source details related to dress. The result can be seen in Figure 5.<sup>22</sup> The second iteration of the imagined Marie LeFevre Bailly does not prominently display Odawa dress: the beads are understated, and the brooches are nonexistent. When the AI tool combined the images, it erased the shawl from Agatha Biddle’s portrait and replaced it with a plain black calico dress that reflects traditional settler dress. For each image uploaded to AI, the women don native dress elements, but the final image subdued those elements. The result perpetuates the old trope of the “Vanishing Indian,” and suggests that even explicitly articulated indigenous cultural elements are destined to disappear or assimilate into the dominant culture.<sup>23</sup> The AI image generation tools favored Euro-

19 For example, see George Winter, “Queh-Meh,” Watercolor, 1837, Tippecanoe County Historical Association George Winter Collection, Purdue University E-Library. <https://earchives.lib.purdue.edu/digital/iiif/gwinter/958/full/full/0/default.jpg>

20 John N. Choate, “Tom Torlino, 1882 and 1885,” Photograph, Reproduction, 1880-1889, in *Souvenir of the Carlisle Indian School* (Carlisle, PA: J. N. Choate, 1902), Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/images/tom-torlino-1882-and-1885>

21 Eric Margolis, “Looking at Discipline, Looking at Labour: Photographic Representations of Indian Boarding Schools.” *Visual Studies* 19 (2004): 78.

22 Midjourney, “Blend [Agatha Biddle Portrait] and [Midjourney image from Figure 3],” Megan VanGorder, April 2024.

23 Brewton Berry, “The Myth of the Vanishing Indian.” *Phylon* 21, no. 1 (1960): 51-57.



Figure 4. “Tom Torlino - Navajo. AS HE ENTERED THE SCHOOL IN 1882. AS HE APPEARED THREE YEARS LATER.” In John N. Choate’s *Souvenir of the Carlisle Indian School* (Carlisle, PA: J. N. Choate, 1902).



Figure 5. AI Generated Image. Midjourney’s Blend Feature using Agatha Biddle’s Portrait and the AI generated image from Prompt 1. Midjourney, April 2024.

American visual elements in the blended prompt. While subtle, the AI source perpetuates harmful stereotypes and downplays the ongoing existence and vibrancy of Native American cultures.

Throughout each part of the prompt generation and revision, I consistently engaged in an ethical evaluation of the AI tool’s creation. A critical assessment of language, syntax, and parameters helped align the prompt to better convey an imagined depiction of a historical figure. The produced image, even after adding source details, is not a magical conjuring of the past. However, employing historical thinking skills throughout the prompting process evoked a deeper engagement with the provided texts and led to a more holistic understanding of the nuances involved in public commemoration. While such an exercise could aid a community like Monee in its attempt to articulate its past with visual cues, the ultimate value of the assignment lies in the attention to source details and the evaluation of the interpretation made by generative AI.

### The TAP(E) Protocol for Generative AI Prompting

This approach enriches history source investigation and cultivates technoskeptical skills essential in the evolving AI age.<sup>24</sup> Through a structured protocol, students explore the ethical considerations surrounding AI, encouraging them to question and analyze the implications of technology on historical interpretation.

To provide a scaffolded structure for prompting, students might follow the TAP(E) protocol. The TAP(E) acronym represents the components of the prompt: the “Topic” for the generated image using historically specific terms; the “Action” to be executed by the AI tool; “Parameters” for the image that include periodization, geography, and other relevant sourcing information; and “Ethical Evaluation,” to identify potential bias to aid in a revision of the prompt. The topic, action, and parameters are crafted into a prompt, and then the image is generated (Figure 6).

The ethical evaluation is completed after the image generation process (Figure 7).<sup>25</sup> For each image generated in the assignment, students reflect on the possibilities and limitations of using artificial intelligence to imagine the past. Because they have read reflectively on the subject, students are better equipped to explain their prompt revision process. For example, they should be able to address: how did the AI respond to revised prompts? What biases were apparent in the image generations? Answering these questions should help them to frame the second and third iterations of prompts and images.

This portion of the assessment mirrors an AI training process called Reinforcement Learning from Human

#### TAP(E) Protocol – Generative AI Prompting

To engineer a thorough prompt for a generative AI model, consider the details necessary to produce a suitable image for your purposes. Follow the steps below.

*Explanation of each component*

	What is it?	Examples
Topic	refer to subject matter or specific historical event, period, or figure you want to explore or visualize	ancient civilizations, the industrial revolution, Frederick Douglass
Action	tasks or the type of engagement you want the AI to perform with the topic	creating a visual representation based on the description or details found in primary sources
Parameters	constraints, styles, or specific details that should be included in the response	Period, geographic location, cultural context, source type, artistic style
Ethical Evaluation	After the image has been generated, critically analyze and reflect on the content generated by AI in response to the given prompt.	

**Step 1:** Using the primary source set, construct a detailed prompt for the generative AI tool. Combine the Topic, Action, and Parameters into a coherent expression and input it in the TAP prompt box.

Topic	
Action	
Parameters	

TAP Prompt:

**Step 2:** Generate the image using AI and your TAP prompt.

Figure 6. Step 1 of the TAP(E) Protocol – student worksheet

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Pleasants, Daniel G. Krutka, and T. Philip Nichols, “What Relationships Do We Want with Technology? Toward Technoskepticism in Schools,” *Harvard Educational Review* 93, no. 4 (2023): 487.

<sup>25</sup> The order of operations for this protocol is why the “E” in the acronym is expressed parenthetically. Procedurally, the ethical evaluation occurs after each image is generated.

Feedback (RLHF).<sup>26</sup> As humans interact with AI, they can help reduce bias and continuously finetune Large Language Models. By keeping the “human in the loop,” students learn the importance of placing constraints on artificial intelligence through rating its representation of the human experience. RLHF encodes the perspectives and worldviews of the humans providing feedback into the AI system. As students critically examine and rate the AI’s representations through an ethical lens, they actively shape the model’s knowledge base and outputs. This experiential learning process underscores the importance of carefully curating the training data and feedback to avoid propagating harmful biases or narrow ideological viewpoints.

As teachers gather data from students’ ethical evaluations, they can initiate discussions about how the “RLHF process makes many AIs seem to have a generally liberal, Western, pro-capitalist worldview.”

<sup>27</sup> This observation invites deeper discussions around representation, inclusivity, and whose values get prioritized in AI development. By actively grappling with these issues through the assignment, students can develop an understanding of the ethical implications and potential injustices arising from biased training data. It also prompts critical self-reflection on individual biases. As students evaluate the AI outputs through their own socio-cultural lenses, they must confront how their subjective experiences and belief systems influence what they deem accurate or ethical representations. This self-awareness is crucial for responsibly stewarding AI technologies that will increasingly shape human society and knowledge systems.

## Conclusion

Throughout the semester, students in this survey course were given a choice between traditional essays and an innovative AI image creation and analysis assignment. As the instructor shared examples of their peers’ work, more students gravitated towards the AI option. At the conclusion of the course, students were asked to reflect on their experiences with AI and its impact on their engagement with the course material. The following responses from two students who chose to do the AI assignments over the traditional essays throughout the semester highlight the ways in which this new approach influenced their learning process and understanding of historical concepts.

One student who chose the AI assignment for all three assignments said, “Initially, I didn’t understand the benefits of AI and how it could benefit me in learning about history. After making so many images and trial and error, I didn’t struggle to create what I wanted by the third assignment; I explored the settings a little more in this

**Step 3:** Think critically about the information and narratives presented by AI. Evaluate digital content and understand the limitations and potential biases in AI-generated materials. Answer the questions based on the image that was produced by AI.

- How accurately and sensitively does the AI content represent historical events or figures?
- Does the AI-generated content exhibit any biases, and if so, what are they?
- How do the AI’s interpretations align with or diverge from historical narratives and primary source materials?
- How would you change your prompt to better reflect historical narratives and primary sources? How would you change your prompt to avoid biased images?

**Step 4:** Revise your prompt by incorporating the ethical evaluation.

Revised TAP(E) Prompt:

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Figure 7. Steps 2-4 of the TAP(E) Protocol - student worksheet

<sup>26</sup> Yuntao Bai, Andy Jones, Kamal Ndousse, Amanda Askell, Anna Chen, Nova DasSarma, Dawn Drain et al. “Training a helpful and harmless assistant with reinforcement learning from human feedback,” *arXiv preprint arXiv: 2204.05862* (2022): 4.

<sup>27</sup> Mollick, *Co-Intelligence*, 37.

set, and I loved the photo outcomes. But I loved how this activity allowed me to retain more information about the topic and show my creativity.” This student's reflection demonstrates the potential of AI-based assignments to enhance engagement, creativity, and information retention in history education. It also underscores the importance of allowing students time to become comfortable with new technologies and providing multiple opportunities for practice and improvement. Perhaps most significantly, the student reports that the activity cause her to “retain more information about the topic.” This suggests that the process of creating AI-generated images may have helped students engage more deeply with the historical content through visualization and creative interpretation of concepts.

Another student reflected that image generation was more successful when the sources were thoroughly understood and analyzed. On the reflection they commented on a particularly successful image result: “I feel like I understood my source well which in turn helped me fine tune my prompts better.” This student's reflection offers valuable insight into the relationship between source comprehension and effective AI image generation. Their comment highlights a critical aspect of the learning process that emerges when integrating AI tools into historical studies. The student's suggests a symbiotic relationship between traditional academic skills and AI utilization. The AI assignment did not replace the need for rigorous source analysis, but instead complemented and potentially enhanced it. The student's experience indicates that deep engagement with historical sources directly translated to more refined and accurate image prompts. This reflection also hints at an iterative process of learning and creation. As students delve deeper into their sources, they likely develop more nuanced and historically accurate prompts, leading to more satisfying image results. This cycle holds the potential to motivate students to engage even more thoroughly with their sources to achieve better AI-generated outcomes, creating a positive feedback loop that enhances both historical understanding and technological proficiency.

This assignment and accompanying protocol shape the conversation around traditional source analysis by leveraging AI image generation as a creative learning tool. By crafting prompts that synthesize descriptive historical details, students can unlock new narratives and perspectives, materializing their interpretations through AI-visualized outputs. The process requires critically evaluating AI capabilities and limitations while honing skills like contextual analysis, ethical reasoning, and iterative refinement. As students revise prompts across multiple iterations, they develop a more complex understanding of how data inputs shape outputs and the weight of purposeful prompting. Using the AI generated image as a co-intelligence and co-author to the source material at hand adds “another layer of resistance, and thus reflexivity,” to the thinking of the researcher who uses it.<sup>28</sup>

Interrogating the AI images' credibility and responsible production pushes students to situate these visualizations within broader discourses around innovation ethics, human experience, and desirable technological change. Drawing from shared readings, they can thoughtfully consider and reflect on AI's societal impacts. This assignment holds potential for training algorithms to produce more equitable representations of humanity's diversity. By following the structured protocol and carefully curating prompts, students can effectively guide generative AI models to produce images that meet educational objectives while respecting standards and cultural sensitivities.

Applying prompt engineering to history education cultivates an invaluable intersection of interpretive analysis, creative expression, and critical thinking about society and progress. Inviting students to become both creators and critics of AI imagination exemplifies how AI can be used as a platform to foster historical learning objectives while simultaneously equipping students with digital and civic literacies. As capabilities rapidly evolve, exercises like this will keep humans in the loop and contribute towards producing the next generation of ethical, innovative AI citizens. It is unclear whether AI-generated images reinforce colonial or neocolonial biases or if they have the potential to challenge these biases by incorporating a diverse range of perspectives. By using and interrogating AI images as informed historical thinkers, students can be positioned to answer whether this technology can disrupt entrenched narratives and work towards the imagination of a more inclusive past.

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<sup>28</sup>Tommaso Venturini, “Bruno Latour and Artificial Intelligence,” *Tecnoscienza – Italian Journal of Science & Technology Studies* 14, no. 2 (2023): 104. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2038-3460/18359>.

# An Interview with Jeffery Washburn and Jennifer McCutchen

Interview by Julia M. Gossard

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*Introduction: In January 2024, Critical Humanities published “AI Meets AI: ChatGPT as a Pedagogical Tool to Teach American Indian History” from Jeffrey Washburn and Jennifer McCutchen. The following interview expands on the ideas covered in their article and provides additional thoughts for our readers on the growth and future of AI, especially as it relates to the history of marginalized peoples.*

**Julia Gossard:** Thank you both for joining me. What do you teach at your institutions, and what is your interest level in generative AI and large language models? Let’s start with you, Jennifer.

**Jennifer McCutchen:** I’m an assistant professor at the University of St. Thomas, which is in St. Paul, Minnesota. Before coming to St. Thomas, in 2022 I taught for 3 years at the University of Southern Maine, which was in Portland, and I earned my PhD in 2019 from TCU in Fort Worth, Texas. I am currently filling the line of early American history at St. Thomas. But I also teach courses in Native American history and gender history. The scope of the courses that I teach are Colonial America, American Revolution, and Native American history. And I have classes that are cross-listed with women and gender studies.

As a researcher, I pretty firmly describe myself as an ethnohistorian. I’m very interested in culture, political economy, and how those things shaped Indigenous life in the years before and during the American Revolution. Specifically, I use gunpowder as a lens to explore cultural adaptation, persistence, and culture change among Creek men during this revolutionary period. I highlight the uniqueness of gunpowder as a commodity because, unlike guns which were reusable and repairable, gunpowder had to be imported from Europe. It was not reusable, and so it was constantly a source that was in demand by both colonial settlers and Native American men. The fact that it was constantly in demand and had to be imported really shaped culture, diplomacy, negotiation, etc. So, I’m always trying to highlight the role of Native peoples or marginalized individuals as being active participants in shaping the worlds in which they lived. Take the American Revolution, for example. My students think they’re going to come into this class, and they’re going to know what we’re going to talk about because they either took AP US history or they’re just very familiar with this narrative of patriots and loyalists. I’m always trying to find ways to say, “Let’s complicate that narrative. Let’s look at the patriots, and how some of the things that they did were not very patriotic or humane. Let’s talk about tarring and feathering and how that’s a pretty gruesome practice. Or let’s look at Native peoples, women, African Americans, enslaved peoples and talk about how their participation in the Revolution and in the formation of the early American Republic really shaped a lot of systemic and structural issues. And how those systemic and structural issues from the founding shaped the course of history moving forward.”

So for me, tying it back to this idea of AI and the use of large language models, I’m always trying to get students to think critically about the past and think about those narratives that are not necessarily dominant in US History, and how our understanding of and the narrative of US History changes by looking at the information that we have available to us through a critical lens. Tying that back to AI, and the use of ChatGPT in the classroom, I think that’s what we really tried to get at with these projects, and our article was about how ChatGPT can be a great resource. But we have to look at the information that it produces with a critical lens, and

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if we look at it critically, then what are we going to uncover? Information? Research? All of these things?

**Jeff Washburn:** I'm Jeff Washburn. I'm an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Texas Permian Basin over in the western side of Texas. I've been here since I accepted the job in March 2020. I received my PhD from the University of Mississippi in 2020. We've connected through our work, which focuses on Indigenous perspectives inside the American Southeast. I focus a little bit more west – in Mississippi with the Chickasaws. And I focus on the importance of geography and leadership within my own research.

I'm wrapping up a course on Colonial American history right now. I teach the American Revolution, the early American Republic, and I've taught the very first courses on Native American history in the history of my university over the last couple of years. It's very similar when it comes to course material and what we're looking at for our research, which made it a really good meeting place when we started talking about how we wanted to incorporate large language models into our classroom. We want to incorporate this new technology in a way that still emphasizes the importance of different communities inside the classroom and marginalized communities inside our research. Sometimes, we see inherent biases within these new large language models in generative AI, and it oftentimes becomes problematic with how it identifies and understands the perspectives of both Indigenous history and other people of color in American history.

When it comes to my interest level in large language models, I've never considered myself to be tech-savvy. That's never been my focus with this, but the fact is that when it came to our classroom, it was going to be something that our students would either know about or would come to terms with inside of other classes or in their working environment later on. I felt like it was an inherent responsibility for us as educators to teach our students some of the ethical underpinnings of this, the problematic aspects, how we can still use it, and the right to say no. That was something that really was important and has continued in research when it comes to using generative AI and large language models inside the classroom.

**Julia Gossard:** Thank you both. I want to talk about the journal article you co-wrote for *Critical Humanities*, "AI Meets AI: ChatGPT as a Pedagogical Tool to Teach American Indian History." You discuss the creation of different assignments and assessments with these large language models, specifically dealing with Indigenous and Native American history. One of the main points you make in this article is that the rise of LLMs like ChatGPT or Google's Bard has created "an inherent urgency for instructors of Native American history." Can you explain what this urgency is, why it exists, and some of the ways that you and your students have sought to overcome the challenges posed by this?

**Jennifer McCutchen:** It goes back to when I think about my own pedagogy. As we talk about in the article, these LLMs – ChatGPT, Bard – are only as good as the information they're working with because that's how they learn. If they are producing knowledge that our students are going to access, and that knowledge is based on inaccurate material or source material that is out there on the internet, it's only going to perpetuate these Eurocentric narratives and these racial biases that we, as instructors of Native American history or larger African American and non-Eurocentric history, are trying to combat. The urgency for us as instructors of Native history is to make sure that students aren't taking that biased information that ChatGPT or other LLMs are producing at face value. We don't want students to take that information and say, well, this is what ChatGPT produced. It has to be correct, or it has to be right, so this is what I'm going to take as gospel or take at face value.

The plagiarism issue for us in academia is always going to be there. It's always going to be a problem. But it's also about teaching students to think critically and analytically about what information is on Wikipedia. What information is accessible via Google, what information is on Tiktok or Youtube? It's another exercise in teaching students to say this is information that is out there and accessible to you. But how do you think about that

information based on what we're learning in class about Indigenous peoples or other members of marginalized communities? Do you take this information from ChatGPT, TikTok, or other media sources at face value? Or are you going to use the breadth of knowledge that you're gaining as a college student to think about this information in this source base?

More critically, I think there's an inherent urgency in ethnic studies, area studies, and Native American studies to really get students to understand this whole larger concept. It's our pedagogical aim in these classes to debunk myths about US History from Eurocentric narratives and push back against those narratives that have really shaped a lot of students dominant understanding of what American history is. So, the inherent urgency for me is to create projects and assignments that incorporate ChatGPT or other forms of media or information and teach students to look at those language and media models more critically.

**Jeff Washburn:** I'm glad that you mentioned the Wikipedia aspect with this, too, Jen, because I think we have this moment right now to both confront and discuss this with our students in an open and honest way. It's important for us to remember that both we, as instructors and students, are still figuring this out, and we still don't know. We're still trying to figure out all this material and how we're going to be using it. In the classroom, there are different perspectives on how we can possibly use it, or how it's problematic, or how it's a boogeyman. But this is an opportunity for us to really be at the forefront of this and how we can explain it to our students. I think that's really cool and awesome, especially when it comes to the inherent urgency for Native perspectives.

Actually, both Jen and I have had a textbook analysis project inside of our classes, where our students have broken down 2 or 3 different chapters from a high school or a lower-level history course on how it incorporates Native perspectives. From those we can already see that, oftentimes, Native peoples are at the very beginning of history and then just fall off when it comes to those perspectives. We're seeing better work when it comes to the inclusion of Native peoples, but as scholars have shown, it's not just simply the fact of including Native peoples into a narrative, but including Indigenous perspectives and identities and cultural reasonings into this work. If ChatGPT is gleaning and sifting and scraping all this information from millions and millions of pages of material, oftentimes, it's scraping from all of these different sources that do not understand, heighten, or look at Native perspectives. So, it leads to a greater disappearance of this.

Jen and I are not the first people who have done this. In fact, there are dozens of scholars who have been working on this for years. Folks like Meredith Broussard, Safiya Noble, Timnit Gibrú, have all been identifying these issues when it comes to AI for a long time. It's something that is not just simply for early American history. When we were talking about thinking about Native peoples for American history by bringing them into an Indigenous present or an Indigenous future, this is something that many different tribal communities are considering right now. In fact, there is an article from *Indian Country Today* talking about this controversy when it comes to a European company who use the Navajo term for beautiful without their terminology for it, and they created AI-constructed photographs of the Navajo for this. The Navajo turned around like, yeah, that's not us. That's not our work. There's concerns about digital sovereignty that scholars like Joseph Robertson, up in South Dakota with the Wokini initiative, have been focusing on. This is an important perspective for us, not just for thinking about the past but also the present, for how Indigenous communities are considered. As scholars of Native American history, we need to make sure that we confront these inherent biases.

**Julia Gossard:** One of the things that students don't necessarily have the knowledge to grasp right now is where ChatGPT is gathering its data. But it's not going into the peer-reviewed publications that we all know and look for behind JSTOR's paywall. So, the emphasis on critical thinking is such an important juncture to really teach that source evaluation. Thinking carefully about how knowledge is produced. Who's reproducing it? And how do we push back against that Eurocentrism? Both in the past and, Jeff, as you're saying, too, towards the future as

well.

So, what are the assessments that you created with LLMs to intentionally center these Native American voices and perspectives?

**Jeff Washburn:** When we were writing this article, David Chang (University of Minnesota) mentioned a “tool of theft to talk about theft,” and I absolutely love that concept. For the first time, this is an opportunity for students to see there are inherent issues when it comes to looking at Native perspectives or cultural biases within our history and understanding that larger historiography. Oftentimes, it’s front and center. It’s blatantly obvious with these large language models, and it becomes something that we can use as a teaching tool. One way that we used it is this idea of a pedagogical punching bag. The idea that we can kind of beat up on it sometimes and use it for peer to peer review. We would generate essays on the books that we’re reading, or tools like Perusall for our readings, or survey courses, and it’s a chance for students to really engage in the deconstruction of the Eurocentric biases within it. This comes into the idea of breaking it down to students and illustrating the fact that this is not Artificial Intelligence. This is a large language model. This is what it does. This is how it is created. This is basically fancy mad libs. Another scholar has called it spicy auto correct. It’s very much the idea that this is not something outside of their realm. They can combat and critique it, and that often turns into some really good conversations in ways that maybe students would be a little bit nervous about engaging with in peer-to-peer review or critiquing something that was written by a scholar who’s been doing this, for, you know, 20, 30, 40, 50 years. It gives them an opportunity to go toe to toe and really let loose. We mentioned in the article some of the ways that students would specifically attack the Eurocentric biases we see within this generative material, and it’s been cool to see.

For survey students, we would have threads on Perusall where there were 10-15 students on the same thread saying, yeah, I didn’t see this perspective on African enslavement, on Indigenous removal, on the importance of Mexican Americans when thinking about manifest destiny. I’ve started to incorporate a few other ways to teach different skills that are so important within the history profession, like outlines and editing. I’ve got a colleague here by the name of Amin Davoodi who has done some amazing work using it as an editing tool for foreign language students. It gives us an opportunity to have students engage at a higher level and gain a foundation of the minimum of what we’re seeing. How can we build off of it? How can we incorporate Indigenous voices so they don’t feel like they have to repeat what ChatGPT already generates? And they can use that as a stepping stone to move forward.

**Julia Gossard:** That sounds really interesting.

**Jeff Washburn:** Jen was the person who got me into it, and it’s been really helpful. This is one of those things that we’ve been thinking about when it comes to generative AI and large language models. There are ways we can go about teaching that are not going to be exciting for students. And there are ways that are going to engage with them in a way that isn’t saying, “I don’t trust you and I’m not going to include discussion boards, because I think you’re just going to throw it into Chat AI.” Instead, it’s giving us another form of assessment that gets students excited in a way that maybe a discussion board won’t.

**Jennifer McCutchen:** For me, one of the things I learned from writing across the curriculum training, which I’m sure you have at your university, too, is students are more responsive to low stakes assignments than they are to high stakes assignments. This is, especially for an online class, the perfect low stakes writing assignment because it allows students to stream of consciousness what they’re thinking about while reading. I structure it in my classes by providing them with opportunities to make comments or interactions on a personal reading. Each individual comment or interaction is not worth that many points, but by the end of the semester, it comprises a

pretty large chunk of their grade. The low stakes aspect of it is great because students end up writing what they're thinking in the moment, and it's not like that big canvas discussion board where they ultimately write what they think I, as the instructor, want to hear. So it's just more natural and fluid. I really love it for that aspect, too.

**Julia Gossard:** That's great to know. What do you think are the biggest takeaways from these assessments for your students? What are your own as instructors?

**Jennifer McCutchen:** My takeaways and the students' were very similar. My students, when they were writing their evaluations at the end of the semester, were grateful that I incorporated ChatGPT, because what they had been hearing from their other instructors all semester was like, no, no, no, no, no! You can't do that. You can't do this. Don't use it, it's bad. So, they realized that, when used in the right way, it can be very helpful and innovative. But, we need to learn how to use it the right way for it to be useful and assist the learning process. Generally, I think my students enjoyed experimenting with it, and enjoyed learning more about how ChatGPT and other LLMs work. I was grateful they were willing to use it and go on this experiment with me as an instructor. I even had a student at one point say, "If Dr. McCutchen keeps one project in this class the next time she teaches it, keep the ChatGPT Assignment, because that was really cool."

So, I think students appreciated that instead of being told no, my class took a step out there and said, "Let's collaborate on this together. I'm going to learn about it alongside you, and we're going to see what the final outcome of learning is." The students got out of it what I wanted them to get out of it, which was that we have to do some leg work. If we're going to use ChatGPT, we can't just say ChatGPT produced this response. This is obviously correct, and I'm going to turn this in as an answer to whatever assignment McCutchen assigned. Really, it clicked with them that there are a lot of inherent biases. There are a lot of problems with using this LLM. If I can think critically about what's being produced, then I'm doing what a historian does, which is take information, think critically about it, and then come to my own conclusions. So, I think to answer this question, both the students and I felt the same way about ChatGPT and using it through these models of assignments. And I think it was successful because of that.

**Jeff Washburn:** Yeah, when it came to the article for this, we finished reviewing for Jen's course and went through the IRB process for her. I was the person who did most of the writing to incorporate the comments from Perusall. It was very similar to what I found with my courses so far, and like what Jen was talking about. I had one student who told me they were planning on going into teaching, and they were very doom and gloom about it because of what they were hearing about ChatGPT as the end of education as we know it and all that kind of stuff from all these different networks. To confront it and see that it's not as big of a boogeyman gave them confidence to teach inside of other classrooms. One thing that I'm taking away from this now is teaching students the concept of consent. That becomes so important both for our classes and later on wherever they're working, because ChatGPT and other large language models are proliferating in a lot of different fields. Having that context of how they can work with it and what is problematic about it turns into the opportunity for them to say yes or no inside and outside the classroom.

The last thing I want to mention is that there's an inherent boost of confidence in students. It gave them an opportunity to say, "Okay, I know this material, and I know how to critique, and I know how to have a conversation with this material in a way that this machine that has gleaned from millions of pages can't actually add that context to it." I think that if you are incorporating it and saying, "Okay, we are all learning about this together. This is an open conversation. These are the reasons why. I want to see your writing, your editing, and your expertise on this because there are still issues with these programs." It gives students confidence to go into it and say, "Okay, I see some of these problems. I see some of these issues." I had a student of mine actually ask me to incorporate more large language model material into our survey class this semester, and we had some

opportunity to engage with it a little bit more.

**Julia Gossard:** It's cool when they really like it. And then they think about how they could expand this even further. I always find that really gratifying.

So, how are you two planning to teach with LLMs in the future?

**Jeff Washburn:** I'm currently working on a new article project for this last semester. I've tried to address large language models throughout the course, both through different assessment possibilities and different skill-based activities, and seeing how we can incorporate it into thinking about editing, creation of outlines, discussing historiography, etc. It's something new that has been fun. And again, I'm still learning. Thankfully, my students have gone along for the ride with me. But it's something that I'm still working with.

The other thing, too, is to think about different forms of workarounds. And I'm not saying this is the idea of looking on with suspicion. But this is an opportunity for us to think ethically and to think about how. Basically, the fact that ChatGPT and other large language models are not going to replace the important aspects of what it means to be a writer, what it means to critically analyze, what it means to think about evidence. So, find new ways to encourage that type of writing. We've talked about different forms of assessment, but finding workarounds that are exciting for students and are not inherently focused on, "I do not trust you." Let's find new and exciting ways together to think about these assignments. Of course, things like Unessays or other projects are always something we've been thinking about. Learning is something else with it. There are other new opportunities for us to think about assessments or how to encourage critical analysis inside of our classes. I don't believe it's going to destroy anything we're doing in the classroom, but instead it's encouraging us to think outside the box a little bit, and that's not a bad thing.

**Jennifer McCutchen:** Yeah, Jeff, you mentioned a couple of things that are definitely on my brain as well as I think about the fall semester. I'm teaching a Senior Capstone Seminar in the fall. So, I'm definitely thinking about how I can use ChatGPT or LLMs to teach students. How can we look at historiography, or construct an annotated bibliography? How can we strengthen our writing skills by looking at what ChatGPT does not do well? One of the things I have conversations with both my students and colleagues about is the plagiarism aspect of ChatGPT. It's hard to determine if a student has used ChatGPT to plagiarize. But one of the things that my colleagues and I remind each other of, and that we remind students of, too, when we have to have this tough conversation about plagiarism, is that ChatGPT doesn't do a good job of writing. It doesn't produce well-written material, and it's not going to produce a well-written historical paper if you're relying on it for your end of semester essay. So, thinking about those things when I teach the Capstone in the fall will be really useful, and I'm hoping that I can structure some low stakes assignments around that.

The other thing I'm hoping to do, that Jeff mentioned, is reacting to the past and game-based learning activities. As part of those reacting games, students are required to do research for a specific role or a specific faction, and I notice, especially at the survey level, students really struggle with that research aspect of it. Oftentimes, they end up just regurgitating what is already outlined for them in the game book or in the role sheet that they're given. I haven't figured out a way to do this yet, but I'm interested in how we can use ChatGPT or other LLMs to facilitate student research. If we can nudge them along on the research process, and ChatGPT is a way that's gonna successfully allow them to jump off and do the research on their own, then I'd love to find ways to be able to do that.

**Julia Gossard:** I just got finished last week teaching our Senior Capstone course here, and I did a couple of these small assignments using ChatGPT. One of them was brainstorming. Basically, you go through the process, and then you use ChatGPT to help you refine further. I was really surprised that I had a class of 15, and only 2 chose

to do it that way. I anticipated that everyone would choose that route, and it was the opposite. I asked them why, and a lot of them were like, well, I'm an expert now in this particular historical concept and idea. I'm a senior. I've been studying it this whole time. Why would I need ChatGPT to help me? That was not the answer I thought was going to happen there, but it seemed to work really well. One of the things I did, too, was once they had their rough thesis statements, I had them think in terms of, how would you evaluate this? Could you make this stronger, even just playing with some wording in order to make it more argumentative or more based in this? That seemed to help. Even if ChatGPT didn't give them better wording, it incentivized them to think more intentionally about the wording. It was a great way to have them experiment with it in a low stakes way. That also let them know I was okay with them using it in this capacity, but don't you try to write your whole essay with this thing.

**Jennifer McCutchen:** For sure, and that is what Jeff and I are both trying to get at. There are ways that ChatGPT can improve your writing, or if you have this great idea but you don't know how to articulate it, ChatGPT can help you with that, and we want to encourage that. But yeah, don't you dare submit a 25-page research paper produced by ChatGPT because we will figure it out.

**Jeff Washburn:** No, I definitely did stuff like that this semester. Sometimes the suggestions from ChatGPT just aren't good. It was fun to do something different with it.

The place that I've seen students using LLMs the most has been with editing. Basically, they see it as grammar, especially if they're using Grammarly, with this idea of accepting all edits there. I had a fun discussion with my students about the inherent issues of accepting all of this material as an editing agency. But again, a colleague of mine has been using it for English and foreign language students, and that has been a great opportunity for them because they can direct ChatGPT to give suggestions on what to change. Then, they just have to go through and make the changes like you would with Grammarly.

The other thing is that a lot of students don't know much about this still, or if they do, they're nervous about the idea of cheating. I think that we've kind of exploded in our minds the possibility of every single student using it, when in reality, they're just as new and confused about it as we are sometimes. We should walk through with them and explain to them what it is, what the tools are, what the problems are with it, and then show them what it can be used for. Oftentimes, I'm pretty enthusiastic just learning about it and understanding when and where it can't be used.

There's another part with it, too, and I've joked about this. Have you seen Abbott Elementary? I'm on the episode where they're jumping from desk to desk. I always think about that when it comes to something new. The fact is that as soon as a bunch of teachers are like, "We know about this, we're really excited to use this." Some students are just going to be like, oh, the teachers are using it. Never mind. It's kind of like Facebook, or Twitter, or any of these different social media platforms.

I have colleagues who enthusiastically use it, and I have others who don't trust it at all and send it to different checkers like Turnitin. When it comes to large language models, these measures are not good. Especially where I'm coming from at an Hispanic serving institution. There have been studies that show it inherently flags folks who have English as a second language more than any other group. It falsely flags them with it. And again, it breeds that issue of distrust. We've got all these different kinds of arguments across the spectrum at our school, and what that means is that most of the students have no clue. The regulations, requirements, and expectations for each class are a moving goalpost, and that can be scary for them. So, if we can provide them the tools to be conversant in it, then they can use it to talk to their professors ahead of time, and to be open and honest because we're open and honest with them – with our students. This creates an opportunity for collaboration rather than

distrust.

**Julia Gossard:** Absolutely. That segues nicely into the last question. In the article, you mentioned that one of your chief concerns when creating these assessments was the ethics and privacy of LLMs. I'm wondering if you can discuss these concerns a bit more, especially for those who may be interested in designing assessments that have students submit their intellectual property to LLMs.

**Jeff Washburn:** This is actually something that I'm really big about when it comes to talking with my students. The idea of consent. Explaining to them that anything they submit to an LLM they're giving away. You're giving away your intellectual property for free. AI is going to learn from that. And then it's going to package it off, and it's going to get smarter and make a profit off what you're doing. You are providing free labor. It's a labor issue, and I explained that to my students. There are inherent copyright issues that are still ongoing, with many different folks opening lawsuits against these different large language models because of the act of consent. I know that other scholars talk about the inherent issues when it comes to an environmental or personal impact for these different projects. When it comes to my different assignments, it is almost always generated material from me that they're interacting with. I had an opportunity for them to use it this last semester, but these assignments had opt-outs. If they did not want to use it, I would generate it for them. We have a footnote inside our article from the Algorithmic Justice League talking about affirmative consent. I repeat that to my students and walk them through the fact that this is a tool of theft. So, I'm very open and honest with them about what it can and can't do. That's something that I'm very proactive about.

On the other side, communication is so key to how we understand this. Not just simply with the idea of designing assessments, but also in how we trust or support our students, and how we communicate this material to them. I don't think that large language models are something that we should ever simply jump into using just because they're the new fad. They should not be something that we jump into without providing detailed information to our students about the problems, the benefits, and what can happen. Even if you pay for the versions like ChatGPT 4, or whatever it is, they can still use your intellectual property. The only way you can keep that is if you purchase an institutional sandbox version of it, and then they can't scrape and use your material. But again, I don't think that most universities are paying \$25,000 for that right now.

When it comes to it, communication is key. Whenever you're providing it, it needs to have some kind of opt-out, and you need to be very cognizant of what you want to use with it. When I was talking to my colleague about this, he talked about the fact that technology does not make you a better teacher. It simply amplifies who you are as a teacher. When it comes to using ChatGPT, it's similar to how we create these different assessments. It should not be oh, this is a brand new tool or fad. It think critically about how it aligns with your learning objectives, how you can debrief your students, how you can introduce this material, and why you're introducing this material to the students.

**Jennifer McCutchen:** That was so great. My approach to ethics with my students is mirrored in what Jeff has said because he's taught me so much about it. As a teacher, I never want to put students in a position where they feel uncomfortable. Whether that's talking about sensitive materials in class, or using these large language models that, like Jeff said, are a tool of theft. So, I tried to create assignments where I was the one producing the ChatGPT generated materials and then disseminating that out to students. But in the future, as we talk about incorporating this stuff into the capstone or in other upper level courses, I always want to put that option out there that there is a Plan B, and if you don't feel comfortable putting your intellectual property into ChatGPT, work with me, and I'll do it for you. Come to my office hours, we'll work on this together. Email me what you would like to have ChatGPT look at, and I can put it in there for you. I'm happy to be the middle man because of these really big questions about ethics that we don't have the answers to yet.

**Julia Gossard:** Fabulous. Is there anything you want to share with our readers?

**Jennifer McCutchen:** I just want to thank Jeff for being the mastermind of this whole article and project and inviting me to be a part of it. I feel really grateful. I learned so much from him. I'm glad to be here talking about it and working with Jeff, and doing some more cool stuff with ChatGPT in the future.

**Jeff Washburn:** Well, Jen is so kind, and it's been a wonderful process to see the feedback, from my students and also from Jen. We also did want to mention our project went through the Bright Institute at Knox College. They provided incredibly helpful feedback to allow this work. This is not just something that the two of us have created. This is something that well over a dozen scholars took a look at the work, provided feedback, and challenged us to think about this in different ways. Hopefully, we can continue to adjust. One of the reasons I want to think about this, and one of the reasons I am very invested is the agency of us as instructors. Right now, we are in a situation where the concern oftentimes is how teaching is viewed from an outside perspective, and if ChatGPT or other large language models can just take the responsibilities of teaching or writing or assessments. One of the reasons why I'm engaging with this so much is to make sure that, if there are outside forces that encourage me to incorporate things into my classroom, I understand it enough that I can tell them. I can incorporate that in, rather than either blindly believing or blindly rejecting, and that goes back to the idea of agency for our classes. It's not just for students. It's also for us.

**Jennifer McCutchen:** I know we mentioned this in our article, but our students are amazing. Every time that Jeff and I would talk and meet and compare notes, we would talk about how our students are amazing for going on this journey with us and being okay with us experimenting in class. Just to reiterate that we could not have done any of this without our students at our respective universities. That is my final thing that I would like to say.

**Julia Gossard:** Well, that's a great way to close it out. Thank you both.

# Eighth-graders' Historical Reading, Thinking, and Writing about Convict-leasing

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Over the last decade, there has been an increased emphasis on unearthing racist elements of cities, states, and universities across the United States. Historians, journalists, and educators have shined lights on these racist elements to explore a location's past; they have used these historical events to put into context the racist roots that appear today. Examples include the recent study of Black Wall Street's financial successes and the subsequent violence that resulted in the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 and White segregationists overthrowing of the multiracial government in Wilmington at the 19<sup>th</sup>-century's end.<sup>1</sup> These two examples, separated by decades, speak to the long-simmering resentments and racist actions across the country in the decades after the U.S. Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

Neither of these examples included the individual and institutional racism of the convict-leasing system. The convict-leasing system started with arbitrary laws and pernicious policing practices targeting primarily African Americans, who—once convicted—are forced to engage in brutal labor to pay off court fees and fines.<sup>3</sup> The convict-leasing system emerged throughout the American South in the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War.

Students need learning opportunities to investigate primary and secondary sources like historians. This inquiry positioned eighth-graders to explore the convict-leasing system, social injustices that violated the rights of African Americans, and racist sentiments present in Alabama and the South in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This article reports how eighth-grade students readily grasped individual and institutional racism throughout the South in history during implementation of a previously published guided inquiry.<sup>4</sup> The authors, two social studies education professors, selected this unimplemented guided inquiry because they appreciated the curricular possibilities within it. The historical content—convict-leasing in the American South—is engaging, accessible, yet often overlooked and largely forgotten.

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1 Hannibal Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100: An American City Grapples With Its Historical Racial Trauma* (Forth Worth, TX: Eakin Press, 2020); Tim Madigan, *The Burning: Tulsa Race Massacre* (New York: Griffin, 2021); David Zucchini, *Wilmington's Lie the Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy* (New York: Grove Press, 2021).

2 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019); Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

3 Douglass Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2019); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996); Matthew J. Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict-leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

4 John H. Bickford and Jeremiah Clabough, "Imprisoned Civil Liberties: Teaching Middle Grade Students about Prisons, Racism, and Profit". In Janie Hubbard's (Ed.) *Extending the Ground of Public Confidence: Teaching Civil Liberties in K-16 Social Studies Education* (171-193, Information Age Publishing: 2019).

## Historical Overview

American chattel slavery originated with enslaved Africans' survival of the Middle Passage and arrival in the New World. Chattel slavery is characterized by unending labor and ineffable brutality over generations.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Civil War's conclusion prompted Congress to end chattel slavery, except "as a punishment for a crime" when the citizen has been "duly convicted."<sup>6</sup>

With optimism generated from newly freed African Americans and some political gains—such as African American males' voting rights and elections to public office—during Reconstruction, reactionary resistance emerged forcefully and in multifaceted ways.<sup>7</sup> Civil liberties were rescinded, violence rose, and hopes of serenity and security evaporated after Reconstruction as White America largely refused to accept African Americans' newly-established civil liberties.<sup>8</sup> The convict-leasing system played an integral role in this reactionary response. Convict-leasing was grounded on dubious (and even false) charges, arbitrary imprisonment, and dangerous working conditions for indefinite periods of time, which kept African Americans as second-class citizens. The convict-leasing system helped White industrialists in the South avoid contentious labor issues of the time while perpetuating existing racist sentiments long after the end of the U.S. Civil War.<sup>9</sup> Students can grasp the complex content if the sources are age-appropriate, the scaffolding is discipline-specific, and the pedagogy is cutting-edge.

## History-Based Pedagogy

Recent state and national education initiatives include the Common Core State Standards and the C3 Framework.<sup>10</sup> Both are grounded in discipline-specific pedagogy.<sup>11</sup> Critical thinking appears in gradations of intensity throughout both.<sup>12</sup> *Remembering* and *understanding* make up lower tiers of criticality, *application* and

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5 Ira Berlin, I. (1998). *Many Thousand Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); John Boles, J. *Black Southerners 1619-1869* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1983); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1972); Lawrence W. Levine, L. (1977). *Black culture and Black consciousness: Afro-American folk thought from slavery to freedom* (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1977).

6 Amendment Thirteen, 1865

7 Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, NY: Harper, 2014); Gates, *Stony the Road*; Allen C. Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

8 Michael Ezra (Ed.) (2013). *The Economic Civil Rights Movement: African Americans and the struggle for economic power* (Routledge Press, 2013); Allen C. Guelzo, A. *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2012); Tera W. Hunter, T. (1997). *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture After Slavery* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 1992).

9 Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name*; William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); William H. Worger, W. (2004). Convict labour, industrialists, and the state in the U.S. South and South Africa, 1870-1930. *Journal of South African Studies*, 30, no. 1 (2004): 63-86.

10 National Council for the Social Studies, *Social Studies for the Next Generation: Purposes, Practices, and Implications of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (Bulletin 113, Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013); National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 2010).

11 Jeffery D. Nokes, "Recognizing and Addressing the Barriers to Adolescents' 'Reading Like Historians,'" *The History Teacher* 44, no. 3 (May 2011): 379-404; Peter C. Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto, Canada: Nelson College Indigenous, 2012); Samuel S. Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001).

12 Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001); Association for Middle Level Education (formerly, National Middle School Association), *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, fourth ed. (Westerville, OH: Association for Middle Level

*analysis* form the middle tiers, and *evaluation* and *creation* are at the highest levels. Adolescents can demonstrate all levels of criticality when using accessible, engaging texts and effective, discipline-specific tasks.<sup>13</sup> Students' criticality, when scaffolded appropriately, appears in disciplinary formats.<sup>14</sup>

This scholarship on the teaching and learning of history is grounded in historical literacy, historical thinking, and historical argumentation.<sup>15</sup> Historical literacy manifests as close readings of diverse primary and secondary sources when students scrutinize each document for its source, the source's perspective or bias, the context in which it was created, and if claims can be corroborated by other sources.<sup>16</sup> Understandings developed from history literacy shape historical thinking, which emerges when students explore historical significance, continuity and change, cause and consequence, and ethical dilemmas in history, to list four historical thinking heuristics.<sup>17</sup> Interpretations generated from history literacy and historical thinking inform historical argumentation, or evidence-based communication of conclusions. Viewed from the lens of educational psychology, history literacy is synonymous with close reading and manifests as analysis; historical thinking is disciplinary cognition and emerges as evaluation; and historical argumentation is text-based communication that centers on the critical expressions using evidence.<sup>18</sup>

These pedagogical elements—historical literacy, thinking, and argumentation—emerge within state and national education initiatives.<sup>19</sup> Both Common Core State Standards and the C3 Framework expect students to use disciplinary concepts to unpack primary and secondary sources to deconstruct and contextualize arguments (C3 Framework's Dimensions 2 and 3 of the Inquiry Arc; Common Core Reading Standards) before constructing and articulating historical understandings about the issues, people, and events (C3 Framework's Dimension 4 of the Inquiry Arc; Common Core Writing Standards), like historians.<sup>20</sup> The C3 Framework and Common Core State Standards influenced the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Accreditation

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Education, 2010); Victor Benassi, Catherine E. Overson, and Christopher M. Hakala, eds., *Applying Science of Learning in Education: Infusing Psychological Science into the Curriculum* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2014); Benjamin S. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956).

13 Association for Middle Level Education, *This We Believe*.

14 Ross Collin and Gabriel A. Reich, "Literacy Models and the Reconstruction of History Education: A Comparative Discourse Analysis of Two Lesson Plans," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015): 462-485.

15 Chauncey Monte-Sano, Susan De La Paz, and Mark Felton, *Reading, Thinking, and Writing About History: Teaching Argument Writing to Diverse Learners in the Common Core Classroom, Grades 6-12* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014); Jeffery D. Nokes, *Building Students' Historical Literacies: Learning to Read and Reason with Historical Texts and Evidence* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*; Samuel S. Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001); Samuel S. Wineburg, Daisy Martin, and Chauncey Monte-Sano, *Reading Like a Historian: Teaching Literacy in Middle and High School Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011).

16 Nokes, "Recognizing and Addressing the Barriers to Adolescents' 'Reading Like Historians'"

17 Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*;

18 Anderson and Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing*; Benassi, Overson, and Hakala, *Applying Science of Learning in Education*;

19 National Council for the Social Studies, *College, Career, and Civic Life*; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, *Common Core State Standards*.

20 Linda S. Levstik and Keith C. Barton, *Doing History: Investigating with Elementary and Middle Schools*, fifth ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015); Nokes, *Building Students' Historical Literacies*; Monte-Sano, De La Paz, and Felton, *Reading, Thinking, and Writing About History*; Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*; Bruce A. VanSledright, "Fifth Graders Investigating History in the Classroom: Results from a Researcher-Practitioner Design Experiment," *The Elementary School Journal* 103, no. 2 (November 2002): 131-160; Bruce A. VanSledright, *Assessing Historical Thinking and Understanding: Innovative Designs for New Standards* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*; Wineburg, Martin, and Monte-Sano, *Reading Like a Historian*.

Standards, which emphasize historians' analytical skills in American teacher preparation programs.<sup>21</sup> The subsequent section details the specific pedagogical steps for this guided inquiry.

### History-Based Sources, Strategies, and Sequence

This guided inquiry engaged eighth-grade students in history-based pedagogy using diverse texts over the course of five consecutive class periods. Each day, students individually analyzed different primary and secondary sources. For homework, students completed post-reading synthesis questions, or thinking prompts, which were individualized for each specific historical text. Graphic organizers—differentiated for source type—positioned students to engage in historical literacy, thinking, and argumentation to determine and communicate historical understandings.

Sam Pollard's 90-minute documentary *Slavery by Another Name* was the central text and took two class periods to view entirely.<sup>22</sup> On days three through five, students analyzed the primary and secondary source collection within the previously published guided inquiry.<sup>23</sup> Students' analyses of these fourteen sources form the crux of this paper. As social studies textbooks and trade books often detach chattel slavery from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and omit related events in-between, this convict-leasing unit fills a curricular gap.<sup>24</sup>

Graphic organizers can direct students to engage in complex historical reading, thinking, and writing. Teachers can scaffold students' historical thinking using a variety of possible graphic organizers. The *Digital Inquiry Group: Historical Thinking Chart* (DIG),<sup>25</sup> the *Historical Thinking Project's* chart (HTP),<sup>26</sup> *Library of Congress: Primary Source Analysis Tool* (LOC),<sup>27</sup> and *National Archives: Document Analysis Worksheets* (NA)<sup>28</sup> were all considered because they all had similar intents with distinct emphases. DIG's prompts spark students' sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, and close reading, which are key elements to history literacy. HTP evokes students' consideration of continuity and change, ethical dimensions, cause and consequence, perspective, and significance, to mention a few historical thinking heuristics. LOC's interactive site allows students to record observations, reflections, and questions prior to printing and offers distinct questions for specific types of sources. NA's printable worksheets have distinct queries depending on the type of primary source and are organized around students' abilities and experiences. Aspects from DIG, HTP, LOC, and NA were selected and utilized within the employed graphic organizers, which came in two forms: one (Figure 1) provided prompts specifically for text-based sources and another (Figure 2) contained questions for visual-oriented sources.

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21 National Council for the Social Studies, *National Standards for the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers* (2018). A general overview of this document is available at <<https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/teacherstandards>>. The document itself is available at <[https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/media/2017/Nov/ncss\\_teacher\\_standards\\_2017-rev9-6-17.pdf](https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/media/2017/Nov/ncss_teacher_standards_2017-rev9-6-17.pdf)>.

22 Sam Pollard (Producer and Director), *Slavery by Another Name* (Twin Cities Public Television, 2012) <https://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/>

23 Bickford and Clabough, "Imprisoned Civil Liberties."

24 John H. Bickford and Lieren Schuette, "Trade Books' Historical Representation of the Black Freedom Movement, Slavery Through Civil Rights," *Journal of Children's Literature* 41, no. 1 (2016), 20-43; James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2007).

25 Digital Inquiry Group's Historical Thinking Chart can be found at <https://inquirygroup.org/sites/default/files/download-pdf/Historical%20Thinking%20Chart.pdf>

26 The Historical Thinking Project's graphic organizers can be found at <https://historicalthinking.ca/historical-thinking-concept-templates>

27 The Library of Congress's primary source analysis tools can be found at <https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/guides/>

28 The National Archives' graphic organizers are located <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets>

Document #	Questions:	Your Answer:
	What kind of document is this? (Letter, journal, interview, etc.)  Why was it written?	
	Who wrote this?  What do we know about this person?	
	Who is this written to?  What did the author want to convey to the audience?	
	What is the most important thing to learn from this?  Why did I have you read this?	

Figure 1. Text-Based Documents: Letters, Diaries, etc.

Document #	Questions:	Your Answer
	What kind of document is this? (photograph, drawing, map, etc.)  Why was it created?	
	What is the most important thing you can learn from this document?  What does this document tell you?	
	What cannot be learned from this document?  What is missing that the visual does not show you?	
	Where do you see overlap or similarity to a text based document?  How does it relate to the text based document?	

Figure 2. Visual Documents: Maps, Drawings, Photographs, etc.

Figure One, which targets text-based primary sources, sparks students' consideration of medium, source, source's intent, audience, and significance. Figure Two, which focuses on visual primary sources, elicits students' consideration of medium, significance, limitations, and potential areas for corroboration. In these ways, the graphic organizers were differentiated to accommodate the distinct types of sources students analyzed.

## Methods

Qualitative research practices enabled examination of students' work.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, we coded students' daily writing on the graphic organizers and responses to the thinking prompts (Appendix A). Both researchers read all students' writing samples. During open coding, or inductive analysis, each researcher worked independently to scrutinize individual students' work. All students' written responses to graphic organizers and thinking prompts were used to examine the presence, absence, and frequency of the codes. The researchers then discussed possible themes, or emergent patterns, that were notable. After the themes were identified, a matrix was created for testing during axial coding, or deductive analysis. The identified themes—reported in the following section within students' writing samples—underscore students' emergent historical understandings. The above steps aligned with best-practice qualitative methods.<sup>30</sup>

The teacher, Mr. Williams,<sup>31</sup> was a White, cisgender male with seven years teaching experience and a graduate degree. The students were eighth-graders studying American history after the U.S. Civil War. Demographically, 81% of the students were White with the remaining 19% being Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color, and 45% were on free and reduced lunch. The school is located in a small, midwestern college town. This was one of the students' first experiences ever analyzing primary and secondary sources during a guided inquiry.

## Findings

We analyzed the students' written responses to thinking prompts and graphic organizers. There were numerous examples from students' writing that illustrate how this project strengthened their historical literacy, thinking, and argumentation skills. In the following subsections, we first present one student's work as an exemplar and then report common patterns of eighth-graders' thinking which were apparent in their writing. Illustrative excerpts from students' thinking prompts and graphic organizers are provided throughout.

### An Illustrative Sample

Aftyn's work sample (Appendix B) was selected as an exemplar to highlight. She ably unpacked and constructed meaning from the collection of texts. Aftyn first analyzed prison records, which, she discovered, gave "information about convicts (personal info, death)."<sup>32</sup> She identified how some prisoners' records had a date-of-discharge ("April 7, 1911" for the first record) while other records had listed the date-of-death, place-of-death, and cause-of-death ("March 12, 1910; Pratt Mines; [and] Falling Rock", respectively, for the second record). Aftyn identified the source of the document ("the record taker for the jail"), determined the audience ("owners of convicts, prisons"), recognized the purpose ("personal information, death information of the convict"), and established historical significance ("there were many convicts that died from horrible living conditions"). These key detections emerged from scrutiny and interpretation, which are examples of the analysis level of critical thinking.<sup>33</sup>

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29 Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, (2003). *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2003); John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2017). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.), (New York, NY: Sage, 2017); Michael Williams and Tami Moser, "The Art of Coding and Thematic Exploration in Qualitative Research," *International Management Review*, 15, no. 1 (2019): 45-55.

30 Auerbach and Silverstein, *Qualitative Data*; Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*; Williams and Moser, "The Art of Coding and Thematic Exploration in Qualitative Research."

31 All names are pseudonyms.

32 Two pages from a convict register, listing six African American men who were tried in the city court of Montgomery, Alabama. (1909 August 7). Alabama Department of Correction and Institutions: State Convict Records, SG007463, Volume 7 <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/voices/id/2959/rec/1>

33 Anderson and Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing*; Benassi, Overson, and Hakala, *Applying Science of Learning in Education*; Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.

Aftyn next analyzed a photo of the entrance of an abandoned mine.<sup>34</sup> When prompted to identify similarities or connections between documents, she wrote, “This is a picture of an abandoned mine. [Document] 10 had a record of a man who died in a mining incident. The mine he died in probably ended up like this [mine in the photograph].” Aftyn engaged in corroboration as she constructed meaning at the intersection of two distinct primary sources, a prison record and a photograph. Intertextual connections are meaningful examples of the evaluation level of critical thinking.<sup>35</sup>

Aftyn next analyzed what she described as “a section of the Constitution”, which actually were the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. She ably noted their purpose (“to make chattel slavery illegal, give everyone voting rights, and equal rights...that these issues were extremely serious that a law needed to be made”), its authors (“President, Congress, [and] Leaders of US”), and its audience (“Citizens of the United States”). When asked the most important item learned, Aftyn mockingly noted both “the laws’ orders in sequence, and how they left out women.” Her wry comment about women was a text-to-self connection beyond the curricular boundaries of this unit, which suggests Aftyn’s deep rumination with the material and refined historical schema. Aftyn reinforced her previous droll observation (“#13 abolish chattel slavery; #14 not allow citizen rights restricting laws legal; #15 giving *men* [emphasis added] the right to vote”). Aftyn, later, made the intertextual connection with the Black Codes (“Document 2 [which] talks about vagrancy [laws] which targeted certain groups like the Amendments said”). She adroitly unpacked, constructed meaning from, and made intertextual connections using these three Amendments.

The final document Aftyn analyzed was a photograph<sup>36</sup> of “a graveyard that is huge,” she wrote. She established the historical significance (“so many laborers died from poor conditions that they made a graveyard that is huge”). When asked about the document’s limitations, Aftyn noted an untold numbers of laborers beneath the soil (“how many laborers died, and [were] buried in the cemetery [sic]”). Aftyn was asked about similarities and connections with other documents, and she made two strong intertextual connections:

This [photograph, Document 12] is showing at [the] mine[’s] graveyard and [Document] 11 [photograph of mine opening] showed a [sic] actual mine and [Document] 10 [which was] a record for a man who died in the mine, he might have been buried in a grave like this.

Aftyn thoroughly evaluated this source. She placed it in the proper context using understandings developed from prior analyses of other primary documents.

Aftyn’s historical understandings appeared more nuanced, more complex as she progressed through the source analysis from her first fully analyzed source to her fourth (Appendix A). Other students were similarly successful analyzing and evaluating the primary and secondary sources. Specific patterns of thinking emerged across students’ work with graphic organizers, which are reported and unpacked in the subsequent subsections.

## Grasping the Unjust Convict-Leasing System

The eighth-grade students ably depicted the convict-leasing system as unjust. For example, Arthur wrote, “The vagrancy laws don’t explicitly state it’s about [African Americans], but we can guess they are a large majority.” Arthur suggested that the convict-leasing system specifically targeted African American males by charging them

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34 Historic American Engineering Record, Creator. *Pratt Coal & Coke Company, Pratt Mines, Coke Ovens & Railroad, Bounded by First Street, Avenue G, Third Place, Birmingham Southern Railroad, Birmingham, Jefferson County, AL*. Alabama Birmingham Jefferson County, 1968. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/al1109/>. (Accessed October 04, 2023.)

35 Anderson and Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing*; Benassi, Overson, and Hakala, *Applying Science of Learning in Education*; Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.

36 Historic American Engineering Record, Creator. *Pratt Coal & Coke Company, Pratt Mines, Convict Cemetery, Bounded by First Street, Avenue G, Third Place & Birmingham Southern Railroad, Birmingham, Jefferson County, AL*. Alabama Birmingham Jefferson County, 1968. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/al1048/>. (Accessed October 04, 2023.)

with breaking the law. In a similar fashion, Mike described it as a “scheme”: “The scheme in Alabama is to arrest [African Americans] for something they didn’t do to make them work as forced laborers.” Ally argued that there was a need to get more convict laborers. “The goal is to get more convicts that are African American so they work for Whites.” This echoed sentiments expressed by Jack that “African Americans were being treated bad by the Whites.” Kyler wrote of African Americans’ bad treatment by saying that “They had to get permission to leave... That there were actual laws set to keep [African Americans] there working.” All of the students’ comments got at the concept with the convict-leasing system that Black men’s labor was used to enrich White men’s pockets.

Several students determined that the local and state levers of power were designed to perpetuate the convict-leasing system. Molly said, “The goal of the law was to enslave [African Americans], but in a different ‘legal’ way.” Blaire also inquired about a charge raised against an African American and punishment of work done as a convict laborer due to the “supposed crime”: “A question I have is about why the judge would have a plan to accuse the [African Americans] when he knew it was a small crime.” The students’ comments here demonstrate that they grasped the components of the convict-leasing system and how state government—the courts, law enforcement, prison—empowered this racist system and enabled racist individuals.

### **Capturing African Americans’ and White Segregationists’ Perspectives**

Many students’ comments captured African Americans’ and White segregationists’ perspectives about issues and events in the half century after the U.S. Civil War. Most of the students focusing on African Americans’ perspectives discussed the horrible living and working conditions in the convict-leasing system. Jonah’s comments about the living and working conditions are indicative of what numerous students stated. “It shows the terrible sleeping and working conditions while in prison. Lots of Blacks had to sleep in a condensed area.” Natvayle further articulated the frustration that African American males forced to work in the convict-leasing system felt about the economic inequalities of this unjust system. “... Blacks are being forced to work with no pay.” Students did not dive deeper into African American males’ perspective past these statements, but they did go in much more depth about White segregationists’ perspectives.

Several students captured White segregationists’ perspectives about not being able to let go of their racist beliefs after the U.S. Civil War. Shannon argued that White segregationists were still “fighting for the Confederacy” even after the U.S. Civil War ended. Grady, being more specific, argued that White segregationists “... wanted to have government power. The Whites thought they had power over Blacks.” Seth stated that White segregationists wanted to “control everything and that African Americans had no power or rights.” Emily built on Seth’s argument by commenting, “... they [White segregationists] are going to still try and have segregation, and they are not going to allow African Americans’ [civil] rights to stand.” Students’ comments here illustrate how White segregationists were committed to maintaining the social, cultural, economic, and political status quo after the U.S. Civil War that kept African Americans as second-class citizens.

### **Analyzing Causes and Consequences of the Convict-Leasing System**

Two students analyzed the causes and consequences of the convict-leasing system.<sup>37</sup> Specifically, they articulated that the convict-leasing system needed a large pool of workers to function. Ellie stated, “These rules [laws] are to get more convicts that are African Americans so they can work for them [White business owners in the South].” Jakson echoed the same sentiment as Ellie but took it a step further. He realized that in the attempt to get more convict laborers to work that “... the number of African Americans’ arrests are going up.” Both of these students made the connection that the convict-leasing system depended on a constantly growing pool of laborers.

### **Exploring Continuity and Change with Post-Bellum Racial Discrimination**

Students consistently connected chattel slavery to the Black Codes and convict-leasing system. Most of the students focused on the connections between chattel slavery to the convict-leasing system, but a few students

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37 Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*.

made connections between chattel slavery and the Black Codes. For example, Kyler said “The state [of Alabama] wants to keep segregation ...” Mike went into even more depth on the goal of the Black Codes. “The goal is to section off the Blacks from Whites and segregate them. The laws also were a lot like slavery. It makes the lives harder for the newly freed slaves.” Kyler and Mike each argued that chattel slavery system and Black Codes shared similar goals: African American subjugation.

Students made judgments about the convict-leasing system. For example, Jonah wrote, “... Black conditions in the Confederacy are similar to convict-leasing system.” In a similar vein, Tom argued that, “Convict leasing was just as bad as slavery.” Mike contended that White segregationists’ calculated steps perpetuated racial discrimination against African Americans: “Sources talk about the loopholes that people used to get out of being convicted so they [White segregationists] could have slaves legally.” He went on to argue that convict-leasing system put “restrictions on their [African Americans’] lives, and they [the restrictions] are similar to slavery.” Nick did a nice job of summarizing the purpose of laws to wrongfully convict African Americans to force them to work in the convict-leasing system. In his words, “The point was to give a substitute for slavery that was just no longer called slavery.” Students’ comments demonstrated that they made connections with the racial discrimination that African Americans faced across time.

### **Contextualizing Racial Discrimination through Different Means**

Students consistently argued that White people found “loopholes” to perpetuate racial discrimination against African Americans. Jack mentioned how the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments were designed to help African Americans. “All of these amendments all have the same goal, which is to help African Americans to get equal rights. These amendments caused the Black Codes by White people.” Jack is communicating that White people reacted to changes to the U.S. Constitution by using new laws, in this case the Black Codes, to try to maintain the status quo. Emma argued that, “The goal of the Black Codes was to make life more difficult for newly freed slaves shortly after the Civil War.” Students ascertained that the Black Codes were partially in response to slavery’s demise and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments and made similar arguments when it came to the convict-leasing system.

Students determined the convict-leasing system to be a “loophole” used by Whites. Ally argued that, “People [White Southerners] are creating schemes of arresting Black people and to put them in slavery [the convict-leasing system].” Seth focused on the trap of the convict-leasing system when he noted, “I learned that they [African Americans] really couldn’t legally leave or get to a better place because the Whites found loopholes to keep them [African Americans] there.” Tom’s individual writing extended Seth’s arguments by stating that, “People in the convict-leasing system were stuck there because they could not pay out of the lease.” Students’ comments about the convict-leasing system and Black Codes show the adaptability of Southern segregationists to develop new legal methods to perpetuate their racist beliefs and policies.

### **Understanding the Ethical Dilemmas of Racial Discrimination in the Post-Civil War South**

A handful of students talked about the ethical dilemmas of racial discrimination in the Post-Civil War South. Shannon argued that the racial discrimination African Americans encountered stemmed from the belief that “... Whites think that they’re superior.” White Southerners’ racist mindsets, Shannon argued, led to the creation of laws that discriminated against African Americans. Shawna stated, “[I learned] that African Americans were treated poorly.” Ally built on Shawna’s argument by stating, “African Americans were punished for things that they couldn’t help [the color of their skin].” Jonah argued that this punishment took the form of the Black Codes. “... Black Codes were wrong. Black Codes were worse than they sound.” Jonah concluded that the Black Codes, in particular, perpetuated African Americans’ second-class status.

Several students focused on a letter from an Alabama judge, Thomas Goode Jones,<sup>38</sup> while expressing moral

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38 Letter from Thomas Goode Jones (Federal Judge in Alabama) to Philander C. Knox (Attorney General in Washington DC), March 21, 1903, ff 5280-03, RG60, NA as quoted directly in Blackmon (2008), p. 423-424.

outrage about the racial discrimination present in the convict-leasing system. Natvayle wrote, "An Alabama judge [Thomas Goode Jones] is trying to protect a Black person from violence [endemic within the convict-leasing system]." She went on to say that, "The most important thing from this source is a judge trying to protect an African American during that time period." Judge Jones is taking these actions according to Molly because, "T.G. Jones is a judge and doesn't think [African Americans] should be working while imprisoned [in the convict-leasing system]." According to Jakson, Judge Jones realizes "... African Americans were being locked up and their freedoms were being taken away from them." Students' focus on Judge Jones illustrates their realization of the realities of the time period that not all White Southerners supported the convict-leasing system, and some opposed it based on the violation of individual rights and freedoms guaranteed to all American citizens in the U.S. Constitution.

### **Historical Significance of African Americans' Racial Discrimination in U.S. Justice System**

Several students pointed out the disparate treatment African Americans received through the U.S. justice system. Grady noted how the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments did not address all the issues African Americans faced in the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War. "They [the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments] didn't give Blacks all of the freedom they deserved. Although they had freedom, they didn't have full freedoms [and civil] rights." Grady, in writing this, pondered the limits of freedom.

Several students inquired about the disparate treatment that White Americans and African Americans had before the law. Logan astutely asked, "Are these laws [Black Codes and vagrancy laws] the same for White men and women?" Several students articulated the different treatment African Americans had under the law. For example, Shannon wrote, "I learned about the very strict laws and their consequences." Several students used this type of language to describe African Americans' treatment under racist laws. Emily argued that, "It is important to learn that these harsh laws against African Americans happened and how they [the harsh laws] discriminated against them [African Americans] and their rights." Mike wrote that the discriminatory laws African Americans faced had specific goals. "Laws [Black Codes] for the Blacks were forcing them into basically a new type of slavery to tell them what they can do and what they can't do." All of these statements illustrate how students established the historical significance of convict leasing by articulating how racial discrimination seeped into U.S. laws and legal system in the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War. Students, in doing so, recognized racism to be both individual and institutional.

### **Corroborating Arguments and Intertextual Connections**

The students consistently corroborated arguments across primary and secondary sources within the guided inquiry. Many of the students' statements demonstrated their ability to corroborate arguments about the challenges African Americans faced after the U.S. Civil War. For example, Ally stated that, "Document #7 connects to Document #8 because they are both talking about the terrible things that are happening to Black people." Emily built on Ally's argument and went in more depth. "In Document #1, it describes the laws that were against the African Americans, and you can see that in the pictures of that hatred in their conditions and shackles on their feet." Emily references African Americans' treatment in the convict-leasing system. Kiley described the horrible working conditions that African Americans endured. "Both Document #11C and Document#11D show African American males being worn out from working [as convict laborers]." Emma stated several primary sources "show African Americans being locked up in jail." The students' comments provided here illustrate that they corroborated African Americans' experiences through the convict-leasing system using several sources.

### **Regionalizing Racial Discrimination African Americans Faced after the U.S. Civil War**

Many students regionalized the racial discrimination African Americans faced during and after the U.S. Civil War in the South. This outcome should not be surprising since all of the documents used originated in the

American South. Aftyn stated about a political cartoon<sup>39</sup> that, “The man has a belt with ‘Confederate States of America.’ They are on top of a Black man, which represents White people’s place over Blacks [presumably due to racist public policies].” In a similar vein, Seth wrote that, “African Americans’ lives were hard and unfair in the South.” Several students focused on certain items that discriminated against African Americans. For example, Tom wrote, “Black Codes inform us of the extreme segregation in the South.” Tom was the only student that explicitly connected the Black Codes to the South. However, Jonah and Kiley connected the Alabama judge Thomas Goode Jones’ moral outrage to the convict-leasing system in his home state in basically the same argument. Jonah wrote that, “Alabama is in the South and was part of the Confederacy.” Across all five students’ arguments, they identified in different ways how the South, and Alabama as part of this region, illustrate a sustained history and various examples of racial discrimination against African Americans.

### Discussion

The students spent two days watching the movie, *Slavery by Another Name*,<sup>40</sup> before three days of analyzing related primary and secondary sources.<sup>41</sup> The employed texts and tasks were both age-appropriate and discipline-specific. The students engaged in complex reading, writing, and thinking as they critically evaluated an oft-forgotten era using the best available evidence. This study has import for both teachers and researchers.

Students’ inexpertly incorporated the contemporaneous language when writing and speaking. The students read 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century sources in their original prose and syntax, which included the word *Negro*. Many students repeated the word within their classroom speech and text-based writings, despite the teacher’s admonitions about how it was once common, its problematic history, and how it is now considered profane. This is a difficult situation as the primary source material routinely used the word *Negro*, though the secondary sources employed the terms Black and African American. Teachers might consider removing the word from the primary sources entirely or, taken constructively, utilize students’ verbal usage of the word as teachable moments and students’ written use of the word as an opportunity for revision and resubmission. While a seeming small step on the surface, it is important that history teachers take measures to not perpetuate the use of derogatory racist terms in the public sphere.

Not all curricular resources were thoroughly unpacked. The teacher allowed students to simply watch *Slavery by Another Name*.<sup>42</sup> Mr. Williams did not have students engage in note-taking, analysis, or other forms of active viewing,<sup>43</sup> which was not anticipated by the researchers. Passive viewing might reveal why students did not refer much to the relevant documentary when making intertextual connections. Or, perhaps students did not refer to the documentary because it was many days removed from primary source analysis. Regardless, students did not unpack all the meaning out of all the sources.

Students failed to contextualize the sources as being largely from Birmingham, Alabama. Convict-leasing flourished in Birmingham, Alabama, in particular, because of valuable natural resources under the soil and reactionary resistance to formerly enslaved folks exercising citizens’ rights and privileges.<sup>44</sup> The city of Birmingham, founded in 1871, sat atop vast deposits of iron ore, coal, limestone, and sandstone. These natural resources, which geological surveyors first identified in the 1840s and 1850s, were needed to make steel.<sup>45</sup> After

39 Nast, T. (1868) “*This is a white man’s government*” “*We regard the Reconstruction Acts so called of Congress as usurpations, and unconstitutional, revolutionary, and void*” - *Democratic Platform* // *Th. Nast*. United States, 1868. [Photograph] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98513794/>.

40 Pollard, *Slavery by Another Name*, <https://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/>

41 Bickford and Clabough, “Imprisoned Civil Liberties.”

42 Pollard, *Slavery by Another Name*, <https://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/>

43 Bickford and Clabough, “Imprisoned Civil Liberties.”

44 Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*; Mancini, *One dies, get another*.

45 Eugene Allen Smith, “Geological Surveys in Alabama,” *The Journal of Geology* 2, no. 3 (1894): 275–287.

the U.S. Civil War's conclusion, White industrialists capitalized on the natural resources within the Birmingham area as entrepreneurs saw many opportunities for investments. During the Gilded Age, or the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century period of rapid economic growth in America, Birmingham's industrial center thrived.<sup>46</sup> As the city developed, an ever-present need for more workers emerged as labor relations were tenuous and strikes abounded across the country.<sup>47</sup> By 1875 with Birmingham's population under three-thousand, convict-leasing became entrenched as companies and individuals paid state and county governments to lease the prisoners' labor.<sup>48</sup> White segregationists benefitted by charging primarily African Americans with crimes. By 1900, with unfree hands providing free labor to the capitalist classes, Birmingham's population jumped to 38,415.<sup>49</sup> Birmingham became a key transitioning point between chattel slavery and the unfreedom of convict-leasing. The teacher could have prompted students to identify, and ask questions about, the context of Birmingham, which was featured in nearly all the primary sources.

The selected sources about convict-leasing were rich, yet so many more exist. Teachers, particularly at the high school and college level, might consider adding primary and secondary sources to the guided inquiry. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), a private and nonprofit American corporation whose members are American public television stations, has an abundance of supplementary sources, such as an interactive timeline<sup>50</sup> as well as dozens of additional text-based primary sources<sup>51</sup> and contemporaneous photographs.<sup>52</sup> PBS's *Slavery By Another Name* website also has curricular guides, entitled "Classroom and Community Materials," for Civics and Social Justice Curriculum, English and Media Literacy Curriculum, History Curriculum, Economics Curriculum, and Digital Storytelling Curriculum.<sup>53</sup> Teachers can utilize these resources to situate students as historians, economists, geographers, and political scientists.

Differentiation is effective, yet has the potential to marginalize struggling students. Hiding differentiation, we assert, is important in the middle grades because differentiation is necessary, yet students are sensitive to hierarchical social structures. Mr. Williams incorporated a multifaceted approach to hide his differentiation. First, he provided text-based primary sources in their original language and then in a simpler format, altered for length with adapted language. Next, Mr. Williams moved around the room directing children towards accessible, engaging sources. Finally, he overloaded the students with sources but required analysis of only four. Few eighth-graders can be expected to fully analyze more than a dozen sources in three class periods, yet all students ably examined the expected amount. Mr. Williams' differentiation appeared hidden to the students and effective to the researchers. It is important for scholars to be cognizant of students' diverse learning needs when designing projects like ours to help strengthen their historical thinking, literacy, and argumentation skills.

Students' writing within their graphic organizers left room for improvement. Students consistently articulated accurate analysis of primary and secondary sources. However, their analyses were extremely short. Most of their

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46 W. David Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of the Birmingham District: An Industrial Epic* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 1994).

47 Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*.

48 Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name*; Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge*; Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*; Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of the Birmingham District*.

49 Birmingham's Population, 1880–2000, Government Documents, Birmingham Public Library, [www.bplonline.org/resources/government/BirminghamPopulation.aspx](http://www.bplonline.org/resources/government/BirminghamPopulation.aspx). From: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990: Population and Housing Unit Counts: United States. Washington: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1993. [Table 46: Population Rank of Incorporated Places of 100,000 Population or More, 1990; Population, 1790 to 1990; Housing Units: 1940 to 1990] (C 3.223/5: 1990 CPH-2-1) [www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cph2/cph-2-1-1.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cph2/cph-2-1-1.pdf).

50 <https://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/interactive-timeline/>

51 <https://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/historic-documents/>

52 <https://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/slideshow/>

53 <https://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/classrooms-communities/>

writing in the graphic organizer was not more than two sentences for each prompt. Students' responses in the graphic organizers could be strengthened in several ways. First, teachers can expect students to write in full sentences. The teacher might develop prompts to do so. Next, the graphic organizer might contain lines (instead of open space) to provide students higher expectations for longer ideas. Finally, students can be asked to work together to share and build answers cooperatively and constructively.

This unit situated students to explore power displays within America's cherished institutions. Students readily grasped institutional and individual racism in laws, policing, and the courts, which occurs infrequently within common K-12 curriculum. The uniqueness of our project in relation to the concept of power appears in terms of race. Students commented on racist power dynamics in the South, and specifically Alabama. They constantly stated how White segregationists took calculated steps and employed local and state levers of power through different means, such as Black Codes and vagrancy laws, to perpetuate the existing, unequal racial order in the South. Students' comments demonstrated an unevenness that emerged before the law that caused African Americans' rights to be violated and for them to remain second-class citizens even after the U.S. Civil War.

These findings diverge with a previous study<sup>54</sup> where students failed to identify the Whiteness of segregationists and did not attach their actions to racist goals and outcomes. The students in our study had no problem identifying the Whiteness of segregationists and could attach their actions to racist goals and outcomes. This speaks to the importance of selecting evocative, yet accessible primary and secondary sources when teaching issues of race and the Black Freedom Movement. Scholars looking to build on our project need to select primary and secondary sources that allow students to identify the Whiteness of segregationists as well as how racist motives underpinned public policies that resulted in racially disparate outcomes.

## Conclusion

Learning about one region's racist history might spark students' queries into their own region's history. This unit has value for teachers and students outside of Birmingham and the South, as it was for the Midwestern students who engaged in the guided inquiry. To educate is to reclaim our oft-forgotten, yet shared histories. This unit had students examine an underexplored topic in the Black Freedom Movement: convict-leasing system. Students articulated the racist goals and outcomes of the Black Codes and vagrancy laws that emerged after the U.S. Civil War in Alabama and throughout the South. This work gets to the heart of being an historian. An historian's first duty is to the truth whether it paints a city, state, region, or country in a positive or negative light. In this case of Birmingham and the American South, racist sentiments and policies lie at the heart of its founding that unfortunately extend into the present.<sup>55</sup> It is an honest analysis and acknowledgment of a state's or region's racist past that allows history teachers to equip students as future democratic citizens with the knowledge to address the vestiges of racism in the present to create a brighter future for all.

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54 Jeremiah C. Clabough and John H. Bickford, "Freedom Summer and the Foot Soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement: Bottom Up Historical Inquiry to Combat the Master Narrative," *The History Teacher*, 53, no. 2 (319-353, 2020).

55 Alabama Political Reporter Staff. (2021, July 28). Alabama Department of Education launches campaign to recruit next generation of teachers. *Alabama Political Reporter*. <https://www.alreporter.com/2021/07/28/alabama-department-of-education-launches-campaign-to-recruit-next-generation-of-teachers/>; Rebecca Griesbach, (2022, September 12). Teacher shortages in Alabama, US are real, but not for the reason you heard. *AL.com*. <https://www.al.com/educationlab/2022/09/teacher-shortages-in-alabama-us-are-real-but-not-for-the-reason-you-heard.html>; Chip Scarborough, (2023, January 7). Teacher shortage lingers in Central Alabama districts. *WVTM 13 NBC*. <https://www.wvtm13.com/article/school-districts-faced-with-teacher-shortage/42424532>.

## Appendix A – Primary and Secondary Sources

### Document #1: Portions of the Bill of Rights

Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ratified 1791): The right of the people to be secure ... against unreasonable searches and seizures ... but upon probable cause.

Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ratified 1791): No person shall be ... deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.

Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ratified 1791): In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed.

Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ratified 1791): Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

### Document #2: Alabama Black Code (1865)

Sec. 1. No negro shall pass within city limits without special permit in writing from his employer. Violators will pay a fine of two dollars and fifty cents, or shall be forced to work four days, or suffer corporeal punishment (whipping).

Sec. 3. No negro shall rent or own a house within city limits. Any negro violating this provision shall be immediately removed and any person who shall rent or sell a house to a negro shall pay a fine of five dollars for each offence.

Sec. 4. Every negro is required to work for a white person who shall be held responsible for the negro's behavior.

Sec. 5. No public meetings of negroes shall be allowed within city limits after sunset.

Sec. 6. No negro shall be permitted to preach to congregations of colored people without a special permission in writing from the police.

Sec. 7. No negro shall be allowed to carry fire-arms, or any kind of weapons, without the special written permission of his employers and approved by the police.

Sec. 8. No negro shall sell, buy, or exchange any merchandise without the special written permission of his employer.

Sec. 9. Any negro found drunk shall pay a fine of five dollars, or five days on the public road, or suffer **corporeal punishment** (whipping).

Sec. 11. It shall be the duty of every citizen to act as a police officer for the detection of crimes and the apprehension of offenders, who shall be immediately handed over to the proper captain or chief of patrol.



stereotyped **Irishman** holding club “**a vote**” [Irish were looked down upon at the time], and another man wearing a button “**5 Avenue**” [perhaps it stood for 5th Avenue in New York City] and holding wallet “capital for votes,” with their feet on an African American soldier sprawled on the ground. In the background, a “colored orphan asylum” and a “southern school” are in flames; African American children have been **lynched** [killed] near the burning buildings. The words at the top say, “This is a white man’s government.” The words on the bottom say, “We regard the Reconstruction Acts (so called) of Congress as usurpations, and unconstitutional, revolutionary, and void” - Democratic Platform.

### Document #5: Secondary Reading

Nine former Confederate states adopted **vagrancy** (homeless) laws in 1865–1866. These laws made it illegal to be homeless and it jailed homeless men, women, and children for a period of time. Every state except North Carolina hired-out the vagrants, which was sometimes called *convict leasing*. Hiring-out, or convict leasing, put prisoners to work on public projects, like roads and bridges, or in private businesses, like mines and farms. Each of these nine former Confederate states also **enacted** (made) convict laws allowing for the hiring-out, or convict leasing, of people who could not pay their fines and costs. So, if someone was too poor to have a home and too poor to pay for a lawyer, then they were hired-out twice. The first part was as punishment for being homeless and second part was for not having the money for a lawyer. Douglas Blackmon called this “slavery by another name” and William Cohen said that African Americans were always “at freedom’s edge” but never fully in freedom.

Blackmon, D. (2008). *Slavery by another name: The re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*. New York, NY: Doubleday; Cohen, W. (1991). *At freedom’s edge: Black mobility and the Southern White quest for racial control, 1861–1915*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press; Lichtenstein, A. (1996). *Twice the work of free labor: The political economy of convict labor in the New South*. New York, NY: Verso.

### Document #6: Secondary Reading

We have got through with the South Carolina and Louisiana problems. At any rate, the troops are ordered away, and I now hope for peace, and what is equally important, security and prosperity for the colored people. The result of my plans to get from those states and by their governors, legislatures, press, and people pledges that the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments shall be faithfully observed; that the colored people shall have equal rights to labor, education, and the privileges of citizenship. I am confident this is a good work. Time will tell...

Linden, G. M. (1999). *Voices from the Reconstruction years, 1865–1877*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace/Cengage, 316.

## Document #7: Excerpt from Frederick Douglass's book

### Chapter III – The Convict Lease System

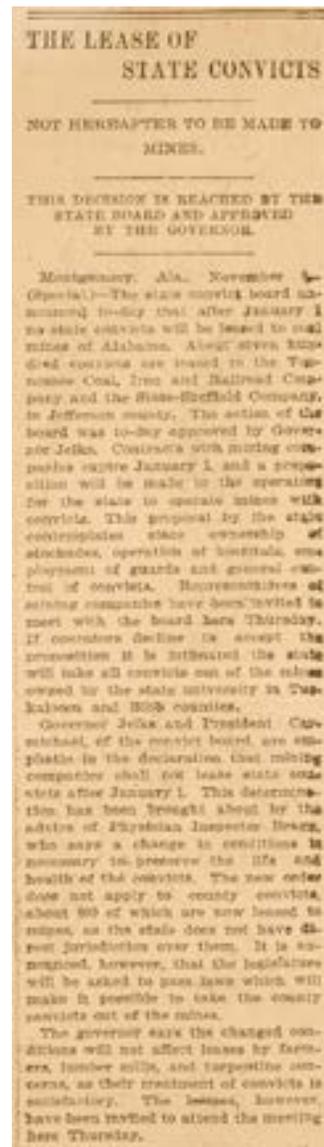
Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Washington claim to be too poor to maintain state convicts within prison walls. Hence the convicts are leased out to work for railway contractors, mining companies and those who farm large plantations. These companies assume charge of the convicts, work them as cheap labor and pay the states a handsome revenue for their labor. Nine-tenths of these convicts are Negroes. There are two reasons for this.

- (1) The religious, moral and philanthropic forces of the country — all the agencies which tend to uplift and reclaim the degraded and ignorant, are in the hands of the Anglo-Saxon [white]. ... The white Christian and moral influences have not only done little to prevent the Negro becoming a criminal, but they have deliberately shut him out of everything which tends to make for good citizenship. ... The Negro is shut out and ignored, left to grow up in ignorance and vice. Only in the gambling dens and saloons does he meet any sort of welcome. What wonder that he falls into crime?
- (2) The second reason our race furnishes so large a share of the convicts is that the judges, juries and other officials of the courts are white men who share these prejudices. They also make the laws. ... *The People's Advocate*, a Negro journal, of Atlanta, Georgia, has the following observation on the prison showing of that state for 1892. "It is an astounding fact that 90 per cent of the state's convicts are colored; 194 white males and 2 white females; 1,710 colored males and 44 colored females. Is it possible that Georgia is so color prejudiced that she won't convict her white law-breakers? Yes, it is just so, but we hope for a better day." ...

Every Negro so sentenced not only means able-bodied men to swell the state's number of slaves, but every Negro so convicted is thereby *disfranchised* [unable to vote].

Douglass, F. (1893). *The reason why the Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (pp. 19-23). [Manuscript/Mixed Material] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfd.25023/>

## Document #8: Newspaper article



(transcription)

### THE LEASE OF STATE CONVICTS NOT HEREAFTER TO BE MADE TO MINES.

THIS DECISION IS REACHED BY THE STATE BOARD AND APPROVED BY THE GOVERNOR  
Montgomery Ala. November 8 (Special) - The state convict board announced today that after January 1 no state convicts will be leased to coalmines of Alabama. About seven hundred convicts are leased to Tennessee coal. Iron and Railroad Company and the Sloss-Sheffield company in Jefferson County, The section of the board was today approved by governor Jelks. Contracts with mining companies expire January 1 and a proposition will be made to the operations for the state to operate mines with convicts. This proposal by the state contemplates state ownership at stockades, operation of hospitals, and employment of guards and general control of convicts. Representative at mining companies have been invited to meet with the board here Thursday. If operators decline to accept the proposition it is intimated the state will take all convicts out of the mines owned by the state university in Tuscaloosa and Bibb counties.

Governor Jelks and President Carmichael, of the convict board are emphatic in the declaration that mining companies shall not lease state convicts after January 1. This determination has been brought about by the advice of Physician Inspector Bragg, who says a change in conditions is necessary to preserve the life and health of the convicts. The new order does not apply to county convicts, about 800 of which are now leased to mines as the state does not have direct jurisdiction over them. It is announced, however, that the legislature will be asked to pass laws which will make it possible to take the county convicts out of the mines.

The governor says the changed conditions will not affect leases by farmers, lumber mills, and turpentine concerns, as their treatment of convicts is satisfactory. The leases, however, have been invited to attend the meeting here Thursday.

The Daily Register (Montgomery, Alabama) (1902 November 9). The Lease of State Convicts. V240, Alabama Department of Archives and History, 624 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36130 <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/voices/id/2810/rec/2>

### **Document #9: Alabama Judge**

Sir:

Some witnesses before the Grand Jury here have developed the fact that in Shelby County (Alabama) in this District, and in this Coosa County in the Middle district, a systematic scheme of depriving negroes of their liberty, and hiring them out, has been practiced for some time.

The plan is to accuse the negro of some petty offense, and then require him, in order to escape conviction, to enter into an agreement to pay his accuser so much money, and sign a contract, under the terms of which his bondsmen can hire him out until he pays a certain sum. The negro is made to believe he is a convict, and treated as such. It is said that thirty negroes were in the stockade at one time.

Thursday, a negro witness who had been summoned here, and testified before the Grand Jury, was taken from the train by force, and imprisoned on account of his testimony; but finally his captors became frightened and turned him loose. The grand jury found indictments against nine of the parties. I deemed it essential to the safety of the negro that a deputy marshal should protect him while in that county, and while here giving testimony; and that the accused parties should be promptly arrested and held to bail, in order to deter them, at least, from further violence to the negro. ...

Yours Truly,

T. G. Jones

Letter from Thomas Goode Jones (Federal Judge in Alabama) to Philander C. Knox (Attorney General in Washington DC), March 21, 1903, ff 5280-03, RG60, NA as quoted directly in Blackmon (2008), p. 423-424.

### Document #10: Alabama Newspaper

Washington, May 26, 1903 – The Department of Justice is investigating the charge of **peonage**, or holding another in slavery to work out a debt. This is happening in and around Montgomery, Alabama. The punishment for this crime is a fine of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 or imprisonment of between one year and five years.

One man, named Robert N. Franklin, has already been charged with keeping a negro in **peonage** for a least a year. Other information shows that this has been going on for a long time. The plan has been to accuse a poor negro of a flimsy charge. Having no money to pay a fine, the negro must work for the white man to reimburse him for the money and trouble he has taken to keep the negro out of jail. The negro is thereupon taken away and begins his peonage, being frequently whipped for failure to perform work to the satisfaction of his employer or owner.

An investigator who is now on the ground will make a thorough report of the whole system and turn over to the United States Attorney all information he may learn.

Source: Montgomery (AL) Advertiser, May 27, 1903

### Document #11

<https://bplonline.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4017coll6/search/searchterm/dukes>

### Document #12: Convict Records

<http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/voices/id/2959/rec/5>

**Source:** Two pages from a convict register, listing six African American men who were tried in the city court of Montgomery, Alabama. (1909 August 7). Alabama Department of Correction and Institutions: State Convict Records, SG007463, Volume 7

<http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/voices/id/2959/rec/1>

**Document #13**

**Source:** Historic American Engineering Record, Creator. *Pratt Coal & Coke Company, Pratt Mines, Coke Ovens & Railroad, Bounded by First Street, Avenue G, Third Place, Birmingham Southern Railroad, Birmingham, Jefferson County, AL.* Alabama Birmingham Jefferson County, 1968. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/al1109/>. (Accessed December 04, 2017.)

### Document #14



**Source:** Historic American Engineering Record, Creator. *Pratt Coal & Coke Company, Pratt Mines, Convict Cemetery, Bounded by First Street, Avenue G, Third Place & Birmingham Southern Railroad, Birmingham, Jefferson County, AL.* Alabama Birmingham Jefferson County, 1968. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/al1048/>. (Accessed December 04, 2017.)

## Appendix B – Affyn's Writing Sample

### Text-Based Documents: Letters, Diaries, etc.

(11)

#	Questions	Answers
10	<p>What type of document is this? (Letter, journal, interview, etc.)</p> <p><i>Why was it written?</i></p>	<p>Convict Records. To give information about convicts. (Personal info, death.)</p>
10	<p>Who wrote this?</p> <p><i>What do we know about this person?</i></p>	<p>The record taker for the jail?</p> <p>They might decide/help decide sentences for convicts.</p>
10	<p>Who is this written to?</p> <p><i>What did the author want to convey to the audience?</i></p>	<p>owners of convicts, prisons to read.</p> <p>personal information, death information of the convict.</p>
10	<p>What is the most important thing to learn from this?</p> <p><i>Why did I have you read this?</i></p>	<p>There were many convicts that died from the horrible living conditions.</p> <p>To understand how the recording process is. How much information the people had to find about the convicts.</p>

Visual Documents: Maps, Drawings, Photographs, etc.

#	Questions	Answers
11	<p>What kind of document is this (photo, art, map, something else)?</p> <p><i>What type of person made this?</i></p>	<p>Photo. "Pratt Coal and Coke Company" took the photo.</p>
11	<p>Why is this important?</p> <p><i>What can you learn from this?</i></p>	<p>To show old mines that had been damaged, there are probably many of these that are/aren't intact.</p>
11	<p>What <u>cannot</u> be learned from this document?</p> <p>What is missing that you don't see or know?</p>	<p>The detailed cause of the abandonment/destruction of the mine.</p> <p>The inside of the mine.</p>
11	<p>Where do you see a similarity to or a connection with another document?</p>	<p>10. This is a picture of an abandoned mine. 10 had a record of a man who died in a mining incident. The mine he died in probably ended up like 11.</p>

**Text-Based Documents: Letters, Diaries, etc.**

#	Questions	Answers
	What type of document is this? (Letter, journal, interview, etc.)  <i>Why was it written?</i>	It is a section of the Constitution. (document.)  To make slavery illegal, give every one voting rights, and equal rights
	Who wrote this?  <i>What do we know about this person?</i>	The President / Congress / Leaders of U.S.  They were probably pressured to write these even if their views weren't the same. They had much power.
	Who is this written to?  <i>What did the author want to convey to the audience?</i>	Citizens of the United States.
	What is the most important thing to learn from this?  <i>Why did I have you read this?</i>	That these issues were extremely serious, that a law needed to be made.  The laws' orders in sequence, and how they left out women.

Visual Documents: Maps, Drawings, Photographs, etc.

#	Questions	Answers
12	<p>What kind of document is this (photo, art, map, something else)?</p> <p><i>What type of person made this?</i></p>	<p>Photo. Photographer for "Pratt Coal and Coke Company"</p>
12	<p>Why is this important?</p> <p><i>What can you learn from this?</i></p>	<p>So many laborers died from poor conditions, that they made a graveyard that is huge.</p>
12	<p>What <u>cannot</u> be learned from this document?</p> <p>What is missing that you don't see or know?</p>	<p>How many laborers died, and and buried in the cemetery.</p> <p>↗</p>
12	<p>Where do you see a similarity to or a connection with another document?</p>	<p>11, This is showing at mine graveyard, and 11 showed a actual mine.</p> <p>10, It was a record for a man who died in a mine, he might have been buried in a grave like this.</p>

① Document #3:

#13: abolish slavery

#14: not allow citizen rights-restricting laws legal.

#15: giving men the right to vote.

Document 2 talks about vagrance laws which targeted certain groups, like the amendments did.

No questions.

② Document #2: They connect because 1 targets blacks.

The vagrance laws don't explicitly state it's about blacks, but we can guess they were a large majority. Why would they target homeless blacks first?

③ Document #1: To put blacks legally into slavery as much they could.

Why wasn't there an uprising by blacks?

④ Document #4

The man has a belt with "Confederate States of America." They are on top of a black man, which represents white people's place over blacks. They hold items representing voting. The white government rules over blacks.

No questions.

# Examining High School Students' Engagement with Object Lessons

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Teachers train students to engage as disciplinary apprentices.<sup>1</sup> Students' historical thinking often emerges during close reading of and text-based writing about primary and secondary sources. Historical inquiries usually involve curricular resources, such as secondary source excerpts and reprints of text-based and visual primary sources,<sup>2</sup> or captivating hardware and software.<sup>3</sup> Such texts and tasks are arguably more minds-on than hands-on, as the curricular resources are frequently facsimiles of historical documents printed on paper or projected on a screen.

Students' examinations of actual artifacts, though, are both hands-on and minds-on. Object lessons, as they are termed, are an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based pedagogy that position students to scrutinize, classify, and make historical meaning out of artifacts.<sup>4</sup> During object lessons, students develop observations, inferences, and responses to others' impressions. Curious, common, and obscure artifacts each evoke elements of history, geography, economics, culture, and civics as students are trained how to think, not what to remember. Students, in doing so, contextualize the object within the historical era and extract meaning from, as well as construct understandings about, the artifact and era. This article reports how one class of high school social studies students experienced object lessons about the Industrial Revolution after having studied the period. In doing so, students demonstrated complex reading, writing, and thinking using hands-on sources and minds-on strategies. Object lessons, as demonstrated in this article, are an effective tool for each teacher's toolbox.

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1 National Council for the Social Studies, *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013); National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

2 For example, Hilary Mac Austin and Kathleen Thompson, *Examining the Evidence: Seven Strategies for Teaching with Primary Sources* (North Mankato, MN: Maupin House Publishing, 2015); Linda S. Levstik and Keith C. Barton, *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools*, fourth ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010); Chauncey Monte-Sano, Susan De La Paz, and Mark Felton, *Reading, Thinking, and Writing About History: Teaching Argument Writing to Diverse Learners in the Age of the Common Core, Grades 6-12* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014); Sam Wineburg, Daisy Martin, and Chauncey Monte-Sano, *Reading like a Historian: Teaching Literacy in Middle and High School Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011); Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto, Canada: Nelson College Indigenous, 2012).

3 Keith Barton, "Oh, That's a Tricky Piece!': Children, Mediated Action, and the Tools of Historical Time," *The Elementary School Journal* 103, no. 2 (2002): 161-185; Bruce Fehn and Kim Heckart, "Producing a Documentary in the Third Grade: Reaching all Students through Movie Making," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 25, no. 3 (2013): 18-22; Bruce VanSledright, "Fifth Graders Investigating History in the Classroom: Results from a Researcher-Practitioner Design Experiment," *The Elementary School Journal* 103, no. 2 (2002): 131-160.

4 Meredith A. Bak, "Democracy and Discipline: Object Lessons and the Stereoscope in American Education, 1870-1920," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10, no. 2 (May 2012): 147-167; Sarah Anne Carter, *Object Lessons: How Nineteenth-Century Americans Learned to Make Sense of the Material World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

## The Objects

The teacher-researcher positioned students to examine different objects originating in the Industrial Revolution. Students could select from an array of two-dozen artifacts to analyze. The following items were representative samples of object lessons.

### Flying Shuttle: Artifact

A shuttle, used in making fabric during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, was passed by hand between two weavers through the threads. The flying shuttle, which John Kay invented in 1733, enabled one laborer—not two—to produce larger sheets of fabric.<sup>5</sup> A flying shuttle, which was mounted on wheels in a track, enabled each weaver to work more effectively and efficiently (Appendix A).

Students picked up the flying shuttle to examine its intricacies. They explored the progression of having to throw this shuttle back-and-forth, recognized the limitations of distance, and acknowledged the increased size of the producible material. Close inspection revealed the shuttle's pointed tips, which were hazardous for the worker. Students considered the implications of increased production and work-efficiency as well as potential work-related dangers. They contemplated who, specifically, benefitted from the increased efficiency and how they benefitted along with who shouldered the burdens of accidents.

### Child Labor: Photographs

During the Industrial Revolution, children—particularly the offspring of recent immigrants and poor parents—labored in miserly conditions at dangerous factories, mines, and textile industries.<sup>6</sup> Child laborers faced—and resisted, when possible—meager pay, employment insecurity, long hours for six or more days a week, employer abuse, and wretched living conditions until national initiatives, such as the National Child Labor Committee, and advocates, such as Mother Jones, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Lewis Hine, compelled change and promoted compulsory schooling.<sup>7</sup>

This photograph collection (Appendix B) featured young, school-aged children working various industrial jobs. Students scrutinized the photographs for details to extract historical meaning. They studied the clothing, identified—when possible—if the workers had shoes, speculated the inherent dangers of the industrial machines, and considered what the workers' lives would look like decades later. The early-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs were intentionally selected for the 21<sup>st</sup> century students, in part, because of their geographic vicinity to the Massachusetts factories and age proximity to the workers.

### Coal: Artifact

Coal is a sedimentary rock formed with pressure over time. This hard rock contains mostly carbon with hydrogen, sulfur, oxygen and nitrogen. Burned as a fossil fuel, coal was the figurative bedrock of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Students examined pieces of coal (Appendix C). They felt it flake and, considering the emergent

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5 Eric Chaline, *Fifty Machines that Changed the Course of History* (Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Books, 2012); Stephan R. Epstein, *Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400-1800* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Paul E. Rivard, *A New Order of Things: How the Textile Industry Transformed New England*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England: 2002).

6 John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985); Hugh D. Hindman, *Child Labor: An American History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002); David Lewis Parker, *Before Their Time: The World of Child Labor* (New York, NY: Quantuck Lane Press, 2007); James D. Schmidt, *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Doris Weatherford, *Foreign and Female: Immigrant Women in America, 1840-1930* (New York, NY: Facts on File Publishers, 1995).

7 Elliot J. Gorn, *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 2001); Brigid O'Farrell, B. (2011). *She was One of Us: Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Worker* (New York, NY: ILR Press, 2011); Walter I. Trattner, *Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America* (Chicago, IL: Quadrangle Books, 1970).

8 Alan Fernihough, *Coal and the European Industrial Revolution* (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014); John Langton,

dust, gained a deeper appreciation for what coal dust would have done to the lungs of miners who spent hours, days, and years breathing it underground. Students contemplated, as well, workers descending long, underground tunnels to retrieve the fossil fuel essential to factories throughout America and the industrializing world. Students explored the potential for accidents, such as a wall collapse or equipment failure. They considered also those that benefited most from coal extraction and those that shouldered the greatest burden.

Students carefully inspected each object and scrutinized the photographs. In doing so, the adolescent learners readily made intertextual connections about the Industrial era. The teacher-researcher positioned students to construct links between seemingly disconnected objects, some of which were hand-held artifacts and others were photographic reproductions of germane Industrial Revolution scenes. Object lessons are enhanced when students' intertextual connections elicit intersensory exploration, as American Studies and Material Culture scholar Sarah Anne Carter has argued.<sup>9</sup> These three artifacts are an illustrative sampling of the two-dozen that students interrogated.

### The Prompts

Students were tasked with analyzing, contextualizing, and establishing the historical significance of the artifacts. The teacher-researcher interjected important details at opportune times as students moved freely around the room. Four prompts sparked students' critical and historical thinking. First, at first glance what is the artifact? What was it used for? Second, describe the artifact in detail as if someone cannot see it. How does it feel, what does it smell like, etc.? Third, what inferences can be made about the artifact? What might it have been used for? What makes you think this way? Fourth, what does the artifact reveal about the time period? What makes you think that way?

The prompts were catalysts for criticality<sup>10</sup> and historical thinking.<sup>11</sup> Students' complex cognition—analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, in particular—emerged through their observations and inferences. Students' considerations of the artifact's intended use, which was elicited in the first prompt, was a logical starting point. Interrogating the object for details of texture and smell, as the second prompt elicited, was a novel task for social studies students more experienced with textbooks and primary source facsimiles. The third prompt returned students to the artifact's intended use, which would likely yield a more nuanced answer after previously-articulated observations. Reconsideration is comparably uncommon within history education, which often involves extemporaneous writing originating from initial analysis.<sup>12</sup> Collectively, the first three prompts position students to work to determine the object's historical significance, a key element of historical thinking. In the fourth and final prompt, students contextualize the artifact and view the era through the optics of the object. Elements of history literacy and historical thinking, specifically contextualization and establishing historical significance, manifest as students extrapolate meaning while scrutinizing the artifacts.

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*Geographical Change and Industrial Revolution: Coalmining in south west Lancashire, 1590-1799* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Carter, *Object Lessons*, p. 65-92.

<sup>10</sup> Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001); Victor A. Benassi, Catherine Overson, and Christopher M. Hakala, eds., *Applying Science of Learning in Education: Infusing Psychological Science into the Curriculum* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Jeffery Nokes, *Building Students' Historical Literacies: Learning to Read and Reason with Historical Texts and Evidence*, (New York, NY: Routledge: 2013); Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*; Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> John H. Bickford and Molly Sigler Bickford, "Facilitating students' historical argumentation about Eleanor Roosevelt, *The Conscience of a Generation*," *The History Teacher* 51, no. 2 (February 2018): 293-322.

## Students' Analyses

Object lessons positioned students to construct historical understandings from curious artifacts and to complicate their perceptions of the era. Though the texts (e.g., photographs, artifacts) were uncommon, the tasks—close reading prompts to spark text-based writing—were comparably common. *Student Example* (Appendix D) contains Sam's (all names are pseudonyms) work during object lessons, which illustrates a typical student's discipline-specific cognition that emerged from object lesson pedagogy. Sam's text-based writing was determined to be at the class median in complexity and criticality.<sup>13</sup>

Sam's writing exhibited critical and historical thinking elements (Appendix D). From dozens of actual objects, Sam first selected the flying shuttle. He brought forth understandings developed prior to artifact analysis when he detailed the flying shuttle's impact on modernization of weaving ("The flying shuttle was used to speed up the weaving process, now mechanized instead of human power, which would take a lot of work"). Sam, in an afterthought as demonstrated by its location in an incomplete sentence behind his initial evocation of prior knowledge, positioned the flying shuttle within the textile industry ("for the loom"). Sam's observations were thorough and precise as he noted its elements ("It is made of wood...[and] of metal"), shape ("like a canoe, pointy ends made of metal"), and features ("The inside is cut out where the textile bobbin is which has the thread on it") using his sense of smell as well as his sense of sight ("It smells like old cotton and fibers, which is what the factories smelled like"). Observations, enhanced with key historical background, generate inferences. Sam's inferences included both the flying shuttle's impact on the textile machinery ("...[T]he flying shuttle was a very important mechanism in the Industrial Revolution. It contributed greatly to the success of the textile industry") and the motivations behind the invention ("I think that...the machine was used in both the domestic system and the Industrial Rev [sic] shows that people were actively trying to make products faster and efficient. They were taking things they had and improving them."). Through extensive observations and inferences, Sam ably established the historical significance of the flying shuttle, which he contextualized within textile machinery, textile industry, and the owner's motivation for technological improvement. Sam scrutinized and made sense of the flying shuttle in discipline-specific ways.

Sam, also, examined photographs of child factory workers. The photograph collection evoked Sam's prior knowledge, as evidenced when his comments contained content not explicitly included within the borders of the photographs ("Factory owners exploited many people, especially children [who were] cheap labor"). Sam's initial response was enhanced through subsequent analysis. From the photographs, Sam observed the children's soiled attire ("covered in dirt and soot"), speculated the tasks they performed ("different jobs like making textiles and metal products"), and the perilous, drudgery involved ("around very large and dangerous machines"). From these observations, Sam extrapolated the owner's meager regard for labor ("[F]actory owners did not really care about terrible working conditions...the most important thought at the time was the production of the goods for money"). Sam clearly extracted meaning from the artifacts, yet his concluding point was arguably simplistic. He suggested poor working conditions originated from factory owners' naiveté ("People didn't realize better working conditions could improve the products"), which was perhaps incongruent with previous points about owners' cognizance of workers' lived experiences and working conditions. Adolescents, at times, rush conclusions to provide *an* answer, as opposed to the *best* answer. Sam's age, perhaps, tethered his conclusion on this particular artifact.<sup>14</sup> Sam's curiosity, though, might have already turned towards the next artifact, which was far more

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<sup>13</sup> Students' text-based responses contain clues to the criticality and complexity of their cognition. Criticality, which includes history literacy and historical thinking elements, appears as sourcing, contextualization, determining historical significance, and tracing continuity-and-change during object lessons. Complexity, which comprises length and depth, includes intertextual connections and the number and novelty of observations and inferences about analyzed artifacts. Examining criticality and complexity patterns in students' writings suggest the efficacy and accessibility of, respectively, the object lessons and the artifacts. John H. Bickford, Jeremiah Clabough, and Tim N. Taylor, "Fourth-Graders' (Re-)Reading, (Historical) Thinking, and (Revised) Writing about the Black Freedom Movement." *Journal of Social Studies Research*, 44, no. 2 (March, 2020): 249-261.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson and Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing*.

tangible—in scent, dust, and touch—than the photographs.

Sam inspected coal next. His observations originated from various senses (“Coal is like a black rock, but a little softer. It is very dry, and it has soot that gets on your hands”). Unlike analyzing primary source facsimiles, object lessons elicited his sight, smell, and touch. Sam’s rudimentary observations evoked historical background knowledge (“Coal from mines eventually became the leading source of power in the later Industrial Rev [sic]”). Sam contextualized and argued the historical significance of this inert mineral.

Coal can show that there was a big rise of mining in Britain during the Industrial Rev [sic] as it was eventually the main power source. [Number] of miners grew exponentially...Coal and the amount of it mined shows how much power was needed to get the machines to go. I think that because the amount of mills and machines throughout Europe and America was large. Machines were loud and powerful, but still needed manpower to mine its power source.”

Using prior knowledge of the period, Sam contextualized coal within Britain during the Industrial Revolution and coal’s importance during the era. A student without a strong historical schema certainly could not articulate so much from viewing a lump of coal. Analyzing the mineral powered Sam’s historical and critical thinking, much as it did with the textile machinery during the Industrial Revolution. His conclusions about coal’s historical significance were based on intertextual connections, an act involving the cognitive task of synthesis.

This is not to suggest that Sam’s thinking was without problematic elements. He did not recognize the limitations of each source. Sam did not articulate how the artifacts, specifically the flying shuttle and coal, revealed only so much about era, workers and owners. He did not convey that, like the photographs’ boundaries, the objects each had limitations. Sam confidently—perhaps unnecessarily—drew definitive conclusions, which is not always appropriate without considering the meaning that *cannot* be extracted from these particular sources. As many students are accustomed, Sam was guilty of filling space on a graphic organizer without saying anything substantive as evidenced by his circuitous response when tasked with inferences about the flying shuttle (“This artifact and the time it was in can tell us about the flying shuttle was a very important mechanism in the Industrial Revolution. It contributed greatly to the success of the textile industry”). Sam also conflated worker, inventor, and owner (“[P]eople were actively trying to make products faster and efficient. They were taking things they had and improving them.”). Like many students, Sam identified socioeconomic power differentials within the child labor photographs (“Factory owners exploited many people, especially children [who were] cheap labor”) while failing to recognize how comparable exploitation manifested in coal mining, industries that used coal, and the textile industry where the flying shuttle was implemented.

Sam’s text-based analyses were a representative sampling, yet other students’ observations demonstrated far more complexity. Emma’s description of a cobbler’s iron was particularly nuanced.

It is a cobbler’s iron, and it was used to hit in spikes to boots to secure the shoe to the sole. It contains 2 [sic] pieces. Piece 1 is a shoe mold for the shoe. It is about 5 inches long. Size 2 shoe mold. Black color all around with evidence of rust. Shows lack of locking mechanism at the top to keep it on the stand. Piece 2...is the stand for the cobblers [sic] iron. It is a tall black object with a welded curvy base spanning about 4 [sic] niches and sort of flat and stands about a foot tall. Welding marks are present and it has a metallic iron smell. Rusty on the bottom. Iron material most likely.

Emma, like many other students, scrutinized the selected artifact for every observable detail. Her analyses were extensive.

Object lessons, unlike common assessments that expect a particular answer, provide students a seemingly endless array of possibilities. Many students articulated logical inferences that Sam—the representative sample and a bright, eager student—overlooked. In developing inferences about the shuttle, Eleanor extracted that “The textile industry had innovations that...[must have] started in England or America [because] the instructions for its use are in English.” As many students constructed meaning from the minutiae of the objects, Eleanor’s understandings emerged from, and were refined by, the literal language of the instructions accompanying the

artifact.

Other students demonstrated skillful use of sourcing, in which one examines the author's or creator's perspective. Sourcing, a key element to historical thinking, is arguably more conspicuous when, say, scrutinizing a speech or a letter than when examining an artifact. Object lessons, perhaps, lend themselves more to contextualization and determining historical significance than sourcing. Though not explicitly tasked with sourcing, Anne interrogated the source of series of photographs "depicting city life". She noted,

I can infer that the pictures were used to convey information on scenery because some of the pictures included sculptures and buildings in the center. In other pictures[,] there are crowds of people utilizing [sic] transportation. This means that the photographer was trying to capture people doing daily activities and current structures of time.

Sourcing was unexpected considering students were not prompted to do so. The objects, unlike a speech, had a concealed source. Anne, clearly, sourced the artifacts as she considered how the photographer's intent, perspective, and selection shaped viewers' interpretations of the photographs. To do so, Anne contemplated the content not captured within the photographs' borders. In other words, Anne recognized—and explored beyond—the limitations of the artifact to explore its source in more depth. Sourcing was uncommon, though not anomalous, during the object lessons.

Intertextual connections also appeared uncommon and unprompted. Anne communicated text-to-text connections that developed during photograph analysis.

This artifact reveals that the time period was 1800s because of the trains shown in the picture and the camera being used. This was also taken in a place where English was spoken because of the names on trolleys and signs throughout the city. I also noticed advertisements[,] which meant that there was a large production of manufactured goods. It also shows that transportation was not only used for economy but also liesure [sic] because there are average people using it...

Anne extracted meaning from an object—the advertisement—within the object—the photograph—that she analyzed. Anne's intertextual connection originated as an observation ("I also noticed advertisements...") and emerged into inferential thinking about economics from various angles, contextual elements of urban geography, and historical elements of social class ("[the] large production of manufactured goods [reveals]...that transportation was not only used for economy but also liesure [sic] because there are average people using it..."). Anne's intertextual connection was nuanced and novel in comparison to her classmates.

Students' critical and historical thinking were evoked and mutually reinforcing during object lessons. The observations and inferences manifested as analyses and evaluation, which most often included contextualization and the determination of historical significance. Scrutinizing objects elicited prior knowledge and positioned students to view the historical period from the lens of the artifacts.

## Discussion

Object lessons can enhance instruction on virtually any historical era for as little time commitment as a single class period. The pedagogy provides countless curricular possibilities to spark students' interest and criticality. Students, in this study, analyzed common, curious, and obscure artifacts about the industrial era in history. Complex thinking emerges in uncommon ways as meaning—about production, distribution, and human impact, to mention a few—is extracted from the nuances within artifacts. This section centers first on students' impressions about their experiences and then on logical extensions for teachers using object lessons. The former could help scholars better understand the impact of pedagogy and content; the latter might assist teachers as they plan and implement.

## Students' Reflections

Students, when queried, were particularly aware of the novelty of the sources and strategies. They were asked to write about if and why they enjoyed the activity, if and how the learning experience could be improved, and

which objects—and why—they would like to explore in future exhibits. Students' reflections can inform both teachers' pedagogical and curricular emphases as well as researchers' understandings of the science of teaching and learning.<sup>15</sup>

Students, for various reasons, felt positively about the tasks. Their appreciation appeared to originate from one or more of three elements: originality, tangibility, and flexibility. Students, invariably, appreciated the novelty of object lessons. Holden, for instance, noted he “enjoyed the activity because it brought variety to our class”. High school students crave innovation and are resistant to routine and banality.<sup>16</sup> Object lessons were anything but ordinary, which Holden's comments illustrate. Students appreciated how artifact analysis made tangible the history that, to 21<sup>st</sup> century teenagers, often appears distant, obscure, or abstract. Jane said, “I really enjoyed how this activity...allow[ed] us to clearly study past time periods....Looking at artifacts allows us to take the information we learned in regular class and be able to apply it to the objects, and then understand better.” History curriculum and pedagogy are not often hands-on; art, music, physical education, and science, for instance, might lend themselves to tangible tasks in ways that social studies might not. Object lessons, as Jane noted, balanced hands-on and minds-on as students are both doing and thinking. Students, also, valued the flexibility that choice provided. Henry shared, “I really like how the lesson was set up in a museum walk and how we could pick [artifacts to analyze].” Students could move around the room exploring different artifacts like a tourist viewing exhibits in a museum; they were not silent or stationary. Henry's comment, which many other students articulated, reveals his appreciation for flexibility of movement. Students also did not have to analyze every object, like a long to-do list to complete; they could choose to explore the artifacts that most captivated their interest. Students, as Henry's comment demonstrates, appreciated the myriad objects to select and analyze.

Students articulated various ways to improve the object lessons. Specifically, they wanted more time to explore, more artifacts to analyze, or both. Anne, for instance, requested students be able to “spend more time developing our answers.” They were also quite specific about the objects they sought. Becca sought “more artifacts that represent each step of the process (from shearing the sheep to weaving the wool into clothes) and maybe add models of the transport vehicles from the period.” She would have liked to see all the “parts of the whole process of each industry.” Students, though, did not seek more class time and more artifacts because they were a distraction from learning. Their requests, instead, targeted ways to enhance their own learning experience as how athletes alert coaches to training or recovery needs. Jane, in justifying the request for more time and more objects, argued that “adding a few documents to the lesson...would allow us to put the artifacts into historical context a bit better...[this was] an excellent way to learn.” For nearly all students, the best way to enrich object lessons was, quite simply, to spend more time on the analysis tasks and to have more objects to assess.

Students' impressions do not dictate teachers' pedagogical and content decisions, of course. Their impressions, though, should certainly be considered. Students valued the originality, tangibility, and flexibility of object lessons. They sought more time on task and more artifacts to analyze. Students' experiences might be enhanced with logical extensions.

## Extensions

Teachers might prod students to scrutinize the foundation and implications of their own answers. Students' writing revealed close connections with capital, not labor nor the environment. Students focused on inventions, inventors, and owners. Only cursory attention was paid to the human impact of industrialization and usually only when viewing images of child labor. Few students wrote about the rise of pollution and resultant implications centuries later. Teachers might include specific prompts to direct students' identification beyond capital and inventions.

The prompts also did not position students to consider limitations of analyzing the objects. Students relied

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<sup>15</sup> Students' written reflections were examined through open-coding and axial-coding content analysis, which yielded the demonstrable patterns reported here.

<sup>16</sup> Benassi, Overson, and Hakala, *Applying Science of Learning in Education*.

on prior knowledge and their own curiosity to extrapolate meaning and make intertextual connections. They did not, however, explore the boundaries of their knowledge. Queries—such as, what might be happening beyond the object's borders? What cannot be learned from this artifact?—can provoke this line of thinking.

The inquiry-based pedagogy invoked all critical thinking tiers, yet different prompts might enhance students' thinking with intentional direction towards disciplinary guideposts. Object lesson prompts, for instance, often rely on sparking observations and inferences, which often appear as: Describe the details. What details did you expect but not see? How is this object connected to others? What do you suspect? What more do you want to know? Object lessons might be adjusted to incorporate different aspects of the social studies. Each artifact, of course, can be viewed from a historical, geographic, economic, and civic lens. The graphic organizer (Appendix E), entitled *Object Lessons for Social Studies*, includes the four common elements of social studies.

Critical thinking, of course, emerges differently in distinct disciplines. The above prompts incorporate common subdisciplines of the social studies. This adaptation does not suggest the provided prompts were ineffective or inadequate. Teachers must prudently pick the sources and strategies provided, as they cannot pose every possible query.

## Conclusion

Object lessons, as noted, teach students *how* to think, not what to remember. Artifacts are an aperture through which one can view the past; teachers will likely find a treasury of untapped curricular resources for innovative teaching. Object lessons enable social studies students to examine ordinary artifacts from uncommon vantage points. This interdisciplinary, inquiry-based pedagogy invokes all elements of the social studies, as evidenced in the examples provided about the Industrial era. Critical thinking, particularly analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, is scaffolded as prior knowledge is evoked and refined. In this essay, modern students use artifacts as catalysts to explore 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century American history and culture. Teachers might start with suggestions from American Studies scholar Sarah Anne Carter.<sup>17</sup> They could also consider benign objects like a table,<sup>18</sup> chair,<sup>19</sup> or cabinet.<sup>20</sup> The possibilities are endless, especially when one considers the obsolete artifacts stored in relatives' attics and available at garage sales and thrift shops.

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17 Sarah Anne Carter, "Object Study as Interdisciplinary Exploration for the Twenty-First Century," *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 2 no. 1 (Summer, 2016): 1-2. <http://journalpanorama.org/sarah-anne-carter-the-chipstone-foundation>.

18 Jenny Plevin filmed "Casey Harrington, Mengrup Yang, and Michael Herbert analyze 17th Century Boston Folding Chair," *Chipstone*, <https://chipstone.org/module.php/61/294/5.0-Table>

19 Dan Ollman filmed "Lily Higgins, Kabnoog Xiong, and Chase Markee analyze an 1819 Campeachy Chair made for Thomas Jefferson by his slave John Hemings," *Chipstone*, <https://chipstone.org/module.php/61/295/5.0-Chair>

20 Ray Chi films "Alexandra Port, Sara Sampoli and Hannah Redigan analyze an 18th century valuables cabinet with the assistance of Professor Edward S. Cooke," *Chipstone*, <https://chipstone.org/module.php/61/296/5.0-Cabinet>

### Appendix A – Flying Shuttle



## Appendix B – Child Labor Photograph Collection



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21 Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *Spooler tender - American Linen Co.* Location: Fall River, Massachusetts / Lewis W. Hine. Fall River Fall River. Massachusetts United States, 1916. [between and June 20, 1916] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018678097/>.

22 Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *Some doffer boys, Macon, Ga.* Location: Macon, Georgia. Georgia Macon Macon. United States,



23

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1909. January. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018674619/>.

23 Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *Cleaner and Sweeper - Spinning Department of American Linen Co.* Location: Fall River, Massachusetts / Lewis W. Hine. Fall River Fall River. Massachusetts United States, 1916. [between and June 20, 1916] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018678100/>.

## Appendix C – Coal



## Appendix D – Student Example

### Industrial Revolution Object Based Lesson

Today we have a series of items and objects related to themes and topics we have discussed in our unit on the Industrial Revolution. As you examine all of the pieces I would like you to pick three that you will focus on and complete the questions below.

#### Object # 1 - Flying Shuttle

At first glance what is the artifact? What was it used for?

The flying shuttle was used to speed up the weaving process, now mechanized instead of human power, which would take a lot of work. For the loom

Describe the artifact in detail as if someone cannot see it. How does it feel, what does it smell like, etc?

It is made of wood, shaped like a canoe, pointy ends made of metal. The inside is cut out where the textile bobbin is which has the thread on it. It smells like old cotton and fibers, which is what the factories smelled like.

What inferences can be made about the artifact? What might it have been used for? What makes you think this way?

This artifact and the time it was in can tell us that the flying shuttle was a very important mechanism in the Industrial Revolution. It contributed greatly to the success of the textile industry.

What does the artifact reveal about the time period? What makes you think that way?

I think that the fact that the machine was used in both the domestic system and the Industrial Rev. shows that people were actively trying to make products faster and efficient. They were taking things they had and improving them.

#### Object # 2

At first glance what is the artifact? What was it used for?

The artifacts are pictures of children at work in the industrialized factories. Factory owners exploited many people, especially children in cheap labor.

Describe the artifact in detail as if someone cannot see it. How does it feel, what does it smell like, etc?

The artifacts show child workers covered in dirt and soot who are working around very large and dangerous machines. The machines are massive, with different jobs like making textiles and metal products.

What inferences can be made about the artifact? What might it have been used for? What makes you think this way?

The pictures show how factory owners did not really care about terrible working conditions.

What does the artifact reveal about the time period? What makes you think that way?

These reveal that the most important thought at the time was the production of the goods for money. People didn't realize better working conditions could improve the products.

Object #3

At first glance what is the artifact? What was it used for?

The artifact is coal.

Coal from mines eventually became the leading source of power in the later Industrial Rev.

Describe the artifact in detail as if someone cannot see it. How does it feel, what does it smell like, etc.

Coal is like black rock but a little softer. It is very dry, and it has soot that gets on your hands.

What inferences can be made about the artifact? What might it have been used for? What makes you think this way?

Coal can show that there was a big rise of mining in Britain during the Industrial Rev. as it was eventually the main power source. # of miners grew exponentially.

What does the artifact reveal about the time period? What makes you think that way?

Coal and the amount of it mined shows how much power was needed to get the machines to go. I think that because the amount of mills and machines throughout Europe and America was large. Machines were loud and powerful, but still needed manpower to mine its power source.

**Appendix E – Object Lessons for Social Studies**

<p><b>Historical Thinking.</b> Where do you see continuity and change between when this object was commonly used and today? What is this item's significance to this particular time period <i>and</i> to today?</p>	<p><b>Economic Thinking.</b> Who profits? How well is labor paid and treated? How does this object illustrate the purposes, principles, and implications of capitalism?</p>
<p><b>Civic Thinking.</b> Is this object local, national, or international in impact? Are there ethical concerns with this object's construction and sale?</p>	<p><b>Geographic Thinking.</b> What does this object suggest about this society during this particular time? Where did this object originate? What materials make up this item?</p>

# Filmic and Other Forms of Historical Representation in the History Classroom: Ancient Sparta

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## Introduction

Teaching the history of classical times in Greek schools has mainly a nation-building dimension, but also moral focus and intentions<sup>1</sup>. The deeds of ancient Greek generals in the Persian and Peloponnesian wars, the military genius of Alexander the Great, the charm of the ancient Greek politicians and philosophers, all allow for history to function as an example to imitate, especially in primary education, while at the same time idealizing life in ancient Greece. The fact that the first time that students are taught history in primary schools (third grade, 8–9 years old) they are being taught Greek mythology during the first half of the year and ancient Greek pre-history during the second (Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations), is indicative of the way ancient history is treated by the Greek educational system. As a consequence of this curriculum design, at least until middle school many students cannot be sure whether Hercules and Alexander the Great are mythical figures or historical persons, and cannot distinguish historical facts from myths. Outside Greece, ancient history and classics are taught mainly in tertiary education, with different agendas and intentions each time, starting from a greater emphasis on the ethical aspects of life in ancient Greece as an example for contemporary democratic and liberal Western political life<sup>2</sup> on the one hand, to the capitalization on classical literature and history for the development of modern skills that meet the needs of contemporary society, such as intercultural communication, advocacy for human rights and developing critical thinking<sup>3</sup>, on the other.

The aims of teaching classical antiquity are often connected to the exposure of students to ecumenical values as they were formed in the world of Greek and Roman antiquity, while it is common to emphasize historical personalities that represent ideals such as patriotism, courage, comradeship etc. in order to inspire such attitudes in students and introduce them to the essence of these ideals. However, this approach may end up ahistorical, as it idealizes entire historical periods and distorts historical reality, turning incidents of ancient history into examples to imitate, without teaching valuable historical skills such as analysis of primary and secondary sources, detailed examination of available information in order to interpret particular political decisions through a research process, or connection of cause and consequence. At the same time, emphasis on the actions of historical personalities such as Pericles and Alexander the Great annihilates the social factor in historical developments, as well as the role of the specific historical contexts. After all, the Greek history teacher's book, which is distributed to Greek history teachers through the Ministry of Education in order to educate them on issues of teaching ancient history, warns its readers of this specific danger:

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<sup>1</sup> Efi Avdela, "Chronos, Istoría, Ethnikí Taytotita" ["Time, History, National Identity"], in *Ti Ein' I Patrída Mas? Ethnokentrismos stin Ekpaideusi* (in Greek) [*What is our Country? Ethnocentrism in Education*], eds. Anna Fragoudaki and Thaleia Dragona, (Athens: Alexandria, 1997); Giorgos Kokkinos, *Apo tin Istoría stis Istoríes* (in Greek) [*From History to Histories*] (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 1998); Maria Repoussi, "Politics Questions History Education. Debates on Greek History Textbooks," *Annales de la Société Internationale pour la Didactique de l'Histoire Yearbook 2006/2007* (2007): 99-110.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath, *Who Killed Homer: The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Harvard University Press, 1997): <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjghth8>.

It is impossible to limit the history lesson in this sanctimonious role. Humans are not characterized only by virtues. If the history lesson aims at offering its students, as much as possible, accurate knowledge of the past and helping them understand it, then it has to underline not only the bright sides of others' behavior, but also the dark ones. The dangers for the history lesson, which are inherent in the one-sided and dogmatic development of the sanctimonious style are obvious. History schoolbooks, following the national curricula, in order to edify national heroes, do not hesitate to glorify their behavior and generally their actions to the point of exaggeration, to stride to the realm of the irrational, to add to their narrations imaginary events and generally disdain the truth.<sup>4</sup>

The battle of Thermopylae in particular is considered the epitome of democracy's victory against theocracy, of a Western worldview against Eastern, of the ascendance of what later became European ideals against the alleged barbarianism the Persians represented in the collective imagination. This is the reason why the great battles of the Persian wars (Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis) have become paradigms of the war against and the victory over Eastern tyranny<sup>5</sup>. Their representations in contemporary culture suggest the superiority of Western civilization, as it is represented retrospectively in the faces of the Spartan warriors, strengthening thus xenophobic attitudes towards anything of Eastern origin during the greatest part of the 20th century and up until the 2010s<sup>6</sup>. The preference for representing the battle of Thermopylae in popular culture, in particular, is not accidental: the sacrifice of Leonidas and his soldiers is presented as a prototype for the fight of modern democracies against totalitarianism of any kind, at any cost.

The pedagogical intervention described here aims at a more manifold presentation of this part of ancient Greek history, with a special interest in life in ancient Sparta and the battle of Thermopylae and its importance for world history, but also the moral example it sets as an act of patriotism, courage and self-sacrifice (and, in addition, of military brilliance, if it were not for Ephialtes' betrayal). Moreover, a central interest of the study is for students to examine the different historical representations in popular media and reflect on them, since the battle of Thermopylae and the sacrifice of Leonidas and his 300 Spartans, as well as the Spartan way of life, have become examples and objects of study and admiration over time, through visual and other media. How do a poem, a graphic novel, a film and ancient written sources deal with the same facts? Do students understand the importance, agenda and mechanisms of each of these representations? Which of these do they consider more accurate? All these questions are formed in accordance with the classical reception studies discourse, which aims to understand the perception and reception of classical antiquity in the modern world, in order to initiate a meaningful dialogue with it<sup>7</sup>. For this purpose, we used three kinds of contemporary representations of the above, all of which have proven to be extremely popular depictions of ancient Greek history. In particular, we use a film, a graphic novel and a poem, in addition to three primary sources from antiquity, in order to introduce students to the historical reasoning process.

## The Visual Learning of History

While more traditional methods of teaching about periods or historical personalities such as with the use of primary historical sources have formed the canon for decades, especially in the Greek school context, lately ancient history is being taught with the use of visual media such as films and TV series<sup>8</sup>, the internet and interactive

<sup>4</sup> Theodoros Koutsoulakos, Georgia Kokkorou-Alevra and Vasileios Skoulatos, *Archaia Istoría A' Gymnasiou, Vivlio Ekpaideutikou* (in Greek) [*Ancient History, Teacher's Book*] (Athens: Institute of Computer Technology and Publications Diofantos, n.d.), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Kershaw, *The Harvest of War: Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis: the Epic Battles that Saved Democracy* (New York, London: Pegasus Books, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Kelsey Kilby, "Subversions of the Thermopylae Myth in Modern Literature," *The Albatross* 8 (2018): 76-88.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas, *Classics and the Uses of Reception. Classical Receptions* (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2006); Marguerite Johnson, "Classical Reception Studies: some Pedagogical Approaches," *Classicum* 39, no. 2 (2013): 6-14.

<sup>8</sup> Rhiannon Evans and Sarah Midford, "Teaching Historical Literacies to Digital Learners via Popular Culture," *Arts and Humanities in*

educational material<sup>9</sup>, and even graphic novels<sup>10</sup> and computer games<sup>11</sup>. Research after research has confirmed that movies have become the main source of historical learning for students and cinema plays a major role in our understanding of the past<sup>12</sup>. Cinema has a special characteristic that allows for audiovisual representation of past times, events and personalities, leaving little to the imagination and often, especially for those of a young age, offering a view of the past that has become commonplace in screen representation<sup>13</sup>, even though sometimes it is far away from the actual historical past. These audiovisual representations the big screen offers, however, have not been compared in depth nor contradicted with other representations, especially regarding their pedagogical value. Thus, the current research questions are formed as follows: Do students doubt the cinematic representation of history when it is challenged through analysis? Which type of historical source is perceived as more accurate and which less and why, given that students are introduced to their inconsistencies, limitations and agendas? Can a multimodal presentation of the same facts of ancient history lead to distinguishing the aims of each form of representation? Which kind of historical representation and source is preferable for students in the history classroom and why?

In order to address these questions, I conducted an experiment in which 25 students of the second grade of middle school (13-14 years old) participated. The school where the pedagogical intervention took place is a school in Central Greece, with very high numbers of Roma, as well as migrant students. The current Greek curriculum gives space for the teaching of skills that lead to the development of visual literacy while at the same time attempting to be inclusive. However, students with the abovementioned cultural background have little chance of succeeding in an educational system that cares primarily about the measurable academic development of the students, thus leaving many of them behind. The intervention was designed in order for students to develop skills of visual literacy, engage in the learning process and become active members in it, making the development of skills, such as audiovisual literacy and source criticism, that are loosely related to the current official curriculum, part of this process. Therefore, the goals of the intervention were for students to:

1. Interpret the importance of the battle of Thermopylae in world history and appreciate the sacrifice of Leonidas and the Spartans;
2. Compare, contrast and interpret the various representations of the decision process to proceed to the battle of Thermopylae in various media (ancient sources, contemporary poem, film, graphic novel) based on the peculiarities and agenda of each medium;
3. Compare ways of representation relating to life in ancient Sparta in the antiquity sources and contemporary popular culture and point out differences between the means of representation; relate

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*Higher Education* 21, no. 3 (2022): 285–301.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Mavrommati. *e- Arxaia Istoría: Protaseis Didaskalias me ti Hrisi Pígon* (in Greek) [e- Ancient History: Lesson Plans with the Use of Sources], (Thessaloniki: Grafima, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Vasileios Zagkotas, “Are Comic Books Appropriate for Teaching History? Three Suggestions for Greek Primary Education,” *Education* 3-13 47, no. 3 (2019): 358-365, <https://10.1080/03004279.2018.1452955>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew McMichael, “PC Games and the Teaching of History,” *The History Teacher* 40, no. 2 (2007): 203–18.

<sup>12</sup> Scott Alan Metzger, “Maximizing the Educational Power of History Movies in the Classroom,” *The Social Studies* 101, no. 3 (2010): 127-136; Richard Paxton and Alan Marcus, “Film Media in History Teaching and Learning,” in *The Wiley International Handbook in History Teaching and Learning*, eds. Scott Alan Metzger & Lauren McArthur Harris (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 579-601, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119100812.ch22>; Jeremy Stoddard, “Film as a ‘Thoughtful’ Medium for Teaching History,” *Learning, Media and Technology* 37, no. 3 (2012): 271-288, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2011.572976>; Maria Mavrommati, “Enhancing Historical Film Literacy: a Practical Framework and Findings from an Undergraduate Classroom,” *International Journal of Research on History Didactics, History Education, and History Culture. Yearbook of the International Society for History Didactics (JHEC)* 40 (2018): 143-160; Maria Mavrommati and Maria Repoussi, “‘Something was Wrong with the Movie.’ Formal Analysis of Historical Films and the Development of Historical Literacy,” *Infancia y Aprendizaje/Journal for the Study of Education and Development* 43, no. 3 (2020): 574-605.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film / Film on History* (Great Britain: Pearson Education, 2006).

these differences to the aims and functions of each of the selected media, asking questions about the realism, aims and agenda of such representations; and

4. Discuss the reasons for the popularity of the battle of Thermopylae and the Spartan way of life in various media in contemporary times and distinguish the presentation of the historical facts from their contemporary uses as moral examples.

## The Design of the Pedagogical Intervention

In the Greek history curriculum, ancient Greek history is taught three times, i.e. in primary school, in middle school and in high school, as a spiral curriculum design is followed for history. Each time, the main interest of the pedagogical discourse is centered around ideas like democracy and historical personalities such as Alexander the Great, always with a special focus on introducing and developing a nationalistic perspective<sup>14</sup>. According to this perspective, there is continuity between modern and ancient Greeks, which has not been interrupted either by the 400 years (in northern Greece 500 years) of Ottoman occupancy, nor the myriad population transformations, additions and alterations resulting from modern Greece's (used here in the geographical meaning of the word) participation in four consecutive empires: the Hellenistic empire of the Macedonians, the Roman, the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empire, all of which had strong multicultural characteristics. In addition, the Greek history curriculum is entirely monocultural, avoiding multiperspectivity. Schools in which there are high numbers of Roma and immigrant students, like the one this intervention took place, do not follow a specific differentiated history curriculum which could be of interest to the specific student population. In the Greek history curriculum, there is no interest in offering students a culturally responsive education that would enhance their interest in history and develop their historical thinking skills<sup>15</sup>.

Although ancient Greek and Roman history are taught in the first grade of middle school (ages 12–13), in the second grade literature class, students are taught a poem by K.P. Cavafy named “Thermopylae” (written in 1903), which refers to the great battle fought by Leonidas’ Spartans and has remained in universal consciousness as the epitome of love for one’s country as well as an example of self-sacrifice and courage. This poem served as the starting point for our journey in the multimodal approach to the historical fact of the battle of Thermopylae and the life of the Spartans, as well as the ideal of fighting for a higher cause without considering the consequences at a personal level, which is not at all a given in today’s postmodern, cynical society. While teaching the poem, I was surprised by the students’ interest in the facts surrounding the battle (which, as they explained, was a consequence of having watched the film “300” on Greek TV) and decided to attempt to teach about the life of the Spartans and our current knowledge and beliefs about it using multimodal representations of the facts, as well as modern interpretations of them, thus connecting the history and literature curriculum. In addition, the closure of the school year in that specific year would be marked by an educational visit to Thermopylae, which is very close to the school area, making this intervention a great opportunity for students to appreciate the events surrounding the battle.

<sup>14</sup> Christina Koulouri, *Istoria kai Geografia sta Ellinika Scholeia (1834-1914): Gnostiko Antikeimeno kai Ideologikes Proektaseis* (in Greek) [*History and Geography in Greek School Textbooks 1834–1914: Learning Subjects and Ideological Implications*] (Athens: Istoriko Arxeio Ellinikis Neolaias, 1988); Kostas Kasvikis and Georgia Kouser, “Antiquity Revisited: Challenges and Opportunities in the Creation of the new Greek History Curriculum,” *History Education Research Journal* 16, no. 2 (2019): 182–94, <https://doi.org/10.18546/HERJ.16.2.03>

<sup>15</sup> Richard Harris and Rosemary Reynolds, “The History Curriculum and its Personal Connection to Students from Minority Ethnic Backgrounds,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014): 464–486, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2014.881925>.

## The Educational Material

### The Poem Thermopylae

Cavafy's "Thermopylae" is taught continuously in Greek schools with the purpose of instilling the values of patriotism and self-sacrifice into the students, as it is one of the best-known poems by the poet and is appropriate for a first approach to his work at a young age. C. P. Cavafy was a Greek diaspora poet who lived in the 19th and 20th centuries and had great appeal in the Greek literary world due to his poetry's cosmopolitan character and the use of historical elements in his work, but also due to the deep philosophical and existential content of his work. The poem in question is one of his historical poems, which make up a large part of his work, since many of them refer to the historical reality, and specifically that of Greek-Roman antiquity, with obvious references to his contemporary times. These poems use antiquity as a starting point in order to reflect on philosophical issues. The poem "Thermopylae" consists of 14 verses, in which the poet expresses his deep admiration for the altruistic and patriotic act of Leonidas and the Spartan warriors in Thermopylae, while on a second level it talks about faith and persistence in ideals, even if this persistence seems pointless, if not foolish. After all, in Greece today the expression "guarding Thermopylae", which is a verse from the above poem, means the unconditional fight for the defense of ideals, an expression that may sometimes be said in a sarcastic tone. During the intervention's first stage we analyzed the poem, emphasizing the reasons why Cavafy was inspired by an event that happened 2500 years before his time. After the analysis, our discussion revolved around possible reasons for this: because Leonidas and his comrades proved their unconditional love for their country, and because it is important to fight for one's ideals, even if this seems pointless. Kindness, patriotism, collectivity and sacrifice for the common good and higher purposes make up a system of beliefs that Cavafy glorifies in his poem and which also constitute consistent attributes of moral behavior today, and this is the reason why this poem is so popular in Greece and worldwide and is taught continuously in Greek schools.

### The Film "300"

The second piece of educational material that was used was the film *300*, released in 2007 and directed by Zack Snyder. This film is an adaptation of a graphic novel of the same name, already very popular at the time the film was released, created by Frank Miller. Its aesthetic choices are a reproduction of those of the graphic novel, in terms of cinematography, mise-en-scène and also script, with some frames being a direct transfer from the graphic novel to the filmic medium<sup>16</sup>. After all, the director of the film never denied that his work was a faithful adaptation of the graphic novel and not a historical treatise, and that the genre of the film was more an opera than a documentary<sup>17</sup>. The film has been criticized by cinema critics, academic historians, and even the Iranian government since it came out, for its cartoonist aesthetics, which underline its unreal style, its many historical inaccuracies, its ideological implications, the extreme use of violence, the objectification of women,<sup>18</sup> and the problematic presentation of women's role in the narrated facts in general.<sup>18</sup> It is also criticized for its

<sup>16</sup> Murray, G. N., "Zack Snyder, Frank Miller and Herodotus: Three Takes on the 300 Spartans," *Akroterion* 52 (2007): 11-35, <https://doi.org/10.7445/52-0-50>.

<sup>17</sup> Josh Horowitz, "'300' Trivia: Albino Giants, Sequel Chances — And Sienna Miller", last modified March 13, 2007, <http://www.mtv.com/movies/news/articles/1554534/20070313/story.jhtml>

<sup>18</sup> George A. Kovacs, "Truth, Justice, and the Spartan Way: Freedom and Democracy in Frank Miller's *300*," in *Classics in the Modern World: A Democratic Turn?*, eds. Lorna Hardwick and Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Classical Presences, 2013), 380-392, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199673926.003.0026>; Ephraim Lytle, "Sparta? No. This is madness", last modified March 11, 2007, [https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/2007/03/11/sparta\\_no\\_this\\_is\\_madness.html](https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/2007/03/11/sparta_no_this_is_madness.html); Stacey Scriver, "Subjectivity, Identity and 300 Spartans," *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 14 (2009): 183-199 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/pcs.2008.35>; Robert Ebert, "Spartan Special at CGI Friday's", last modified August 4, 2008, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/300-2006>; Adam W. Tyma, "This is Sparta! Mediated Mythology as Pedagogy in 300," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2014): 5-20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859914539506>; Tyma, *This is Sparta* Thorsten Beigel, "With Your Shield or On It: The Gender of Heroism in Zack Snyder's *300* and Rudolph Mate's the 300 Spartans," in *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television, Gender and Politics*, eds. Almut-Barbara Renger and Jon Solomon (Leiden:

emphasis on supernatural masculinity, which is initially apparent in the depiction of bodily characteristics on the big screen, making Roger Ebert, a renowned film critic, wonder whether they have been “buying steroids wholesale for 300”<sup>19</sup>. Academic analysis of this film underlines the reproduction of a series of racist, homophobic and antifeminist clichés<sup>20</sup>. It was also criticized by the Iranian government as xenophobic, because of its racist representation of Persians who are depicted as uncivilized, feminine, detestable and boorish<sup>21</sup>.

It was exactly because of the above problematic issues raised through the close examination of the film and not despite them that this specific film was chosen as teaching material, along with its status as a popular film inspired by historical facts. After all, historical consciousness is shaped basically through Hollywood films<sup>22</sup>, detailed analysis of which rarely fails to reveal problematic points. I considered this film to be an excellent opportunity to discuss with my students the mechanisms through which the film industry may use historical facts to talk about current affairs and modern ideologies more than about the actual facts. It was therefore my goal to deconstruct the common conception, especially among students of this age, that they can “learn history” through films, meaning they can learn the truth about the historical facts represented. Of course, the scenes used in the classroom were selected carefully and were placed in a carefully structured course design with specific aims and additional supportive material. The specific film, then, precisely because of its inaccuracies and the discussions it raised can be used not as a simple visual representation of the past, but as a starting point for a discussion about the ways the past is perceived today, the reasons we still engage with this past, and its agendas in relation to contemporary life; in other words it is used in order to create the conditions for a discussion about the role of the historical past and the reasons why we need to engage with history in a critical manner.

## The Graphic Novel

The graphic novel “300”, released in 1998, belongs to a series of graphic novels with a superhero as its central figure, in the tradition of the comic books that started to flourish in 1930s USA. In this case however, the superhero is a historical personality of ancient times. The qualities of the superhero are all accumulated in the figure of Leonidas, whose name has become synonymous with bravery, war ethos, courage, mental strength and self-sacrifice. In addition, the renowned Spartan *agoge*, Sparta’s educational system which emphasized military training from a young age, in which Leonidas and his 300 comrades were raised, creates a very appealing environment for the average reader of this category of comic books. Miller’s noir influences are clear, as is his invocation of the “hypermasculine teenage ethos”<sup>23</sup>. In addition, the references to Spartan education that enhance the image of the superhuman power and discipline of Leonidas and the Spartan warriors, reminiscent of the qualities of superheroes, are common in Miller’s work. The same goes with the contestation of the role of the ephors, who appear corrupt at the very least; this is commonplace in Miller’s work, who stands against organized power structures such as the Church in other works as well (e.g. *Sin City*).

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Brill, 2013), 65-78, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004241923\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004241923_005); Vincent Tomasso, “Gorgo at the Limits of Liberation in Zack Snyder’s 300 (2007),” in *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 113-126, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137299604\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137299604_9).

<sup>19</sup> Ebert, *Spartan Special*.

<sup>20</sup> Murray, “Zack Snyder”; David C. Oh and Doreen V. Kutufam, “The Orientalized “Other” and Corrosive Femininity: Threats to White Masculinity in 300,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 38, no. 2 (2014): 149–165, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859914523983>.

<sup>21</sup> “Iran Condemns Hollywood War Epic”, BBC, last modified March 13, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6446183.stm>

<sup>22</sup> Rosenstone, *History on Film*.

<sup>23</sup> Kovacs, *Truth, Justice*, 382.

## The Sources from Antiquity

The ancient sources used were from Diodorus' *Historical library*, book 11, 11.4<sup>24</sup> which was used as a source from antiquity, in order to get information about the decision of the battle of Thermopylae, although the source is dated 400 years after the events, thus its value could be contested. A second source from antiquity was Xenophon's *The Polity of the Lacedaemonians*, 2.1–2.5<sup>25</sup>. The specific text analyses the peculiarities of the Spartan *agoge*, on which parts of the film are based. Xenophon's *The Polity of the Lacedaemonians* 8.1–8.5<sup>26</sup>, where the Spartan political system and the role of the ephors are described, was also used.

## Lesson Design and Implementation

The educational intervention took place in two groups of second-grade students in middle school and lasted for five teaching hours for each group. The total number of students participating was 25, and data was collected from both groups of students. Starting from the literature class and the lively discussions following the reading and examination of Cavafy's poem (first teaching hour), we focused on the representation of the specific battle in cinema. We specifically discussed and compared a) the Spartan *agoge*, as the basis and reason for patriotism and absolute self-sacrifice, since the Spartans were extremely brave warriors as a consequence of this specific educational system, b) the decision process to go to the battle of Thermopylae, and c) the role of the ephors in ancient Sparta.

The whole presentation of Leonidas on the one hand and the Spartan idea of debt to one's country on the other, is explained, in historiography as well as in fiction, through the lens of the special education which Spartans received. More particularly, the city was responsible for the military education of every healthy male child from the age of seven, providing them with military training and protection until the age of 20, when they would become proper Spartan warriors and complete their military service until the age of 30. According to Xenophon (*The Polity of the Lacedaemonians*, 2.1–2.5), the Spartan *agoge* included punishment of the boys using methods such as whipping to enforce discipline, deprivation of food in order to make the body get used to less food, walking and climbing barefoot, so that feet did not need the protection of shoes. The film causally connects the effects of Spartan *agoge* to the bravery and patriotism of Leonidas and the Spartans, starting with a scene that re-enacts the training of Leonidas. As a consequence of this hard training, the ruling class of the city welcomed him as a king, acknowledging his bravery and military excellence, thus explaining the courage and unselfishness of the king of Sparta. This causal relationship is a direct lift from the graphic novel, in which the proclamation of Leonidas as king causally follows his successful training, as part of *agoge*. In particular, what evidenced his extraordinary bravery was his confrontation and killing of a wolf when he was left alone to survive in the frozen wilderness. Leonidas outsmarts the wolf by luring it into a narrow rocky pass, forecasting visually the battle in the narrow pass of Thermopylae. This specific narration is not based on any confirmed historical account, but is used dramaturgically in order to support Leonidas' image as a mythical king, which is underlined even more by the fact that the story of the child who came back as king is a story that warriors share when sitting around the fire, so that they are inspired by the glory and honor that surrounded their king, even while he was still alive. The specific sequence of scenes and frames of the comic was accompanied by Xenophon's historical source, the details of which were compared to the representations of the two visual sources, the film and the graphic novel. After a dialogue relating to tracing differences and similarities between these representations, students were asked to give written answers to a questionnaire handout that was distributed in print form (second hour of the intervention).

During the third hour of the intervention, students watched the dialogue scene between Leonidas and the

<sup>24</sup> Diodorus, *Historical Library*, book 11, 11.4, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Diod.+11.4>

<sup>25</sup> Xenophon, *The Polity of Lacedaemonians*, 2.1–2, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0210%3Atext%3DConst.+Lac.%3Achapter%3D2>

<sup>26</sup> Xenophon, *The Polity of the Lacedaemonians*, 8.1–8.5, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0210%3Atext%3DConst.+Lac.%3Achapter%3D8>

ephors regarding the battle of Thermopylae. During this scene, the ephors are represented almost as lepers, extraordinary creatures with corruption, cruelty and ghastly appearance as their main characteristics<sup>27</sup>. During his meeting with them, Leonidas asks them to approve his proposal to fight the Persians in Thermopylae, after he satisfies their thirst for gold. This scene is depicted in an almost identical manner in the graphic novel. However, the antiquity sources with which the content of the scene was compared, those by Diodorus and Xenophon, give a completely different picture. According to Xenophon, the ephors were higher lords of the city of Sparta, to whom the king was completely devoted. Their role was to secure the Spartan polity. In the relevant source by Diodorus, we learn that Leonidas suggested taking a small army with him to fight in Thermopylae, and there is no reference to paying the ephors off, or of them denying his proposal. In particular, we learn that the ephors discuss Leonidas' choice to conduct a battle with such a small number of soldiers, because of the doubtful outcome of the plan. Diodorus, four centuries after the battle, explains that the ephors remarked to Leonidas that he would use too few soldiers to fight such a great number of Persians, to which comment Leonidas answered ambiguously that, for the deed he wants them, they are a good number. After we examined these two sources, the students were asked to give written answers to questions relating to the similarities and differences between the four accounts (two antiquity sources, the film and the comic book) (third hour).

During the fourth hour of the intervention, starting from the same film scene and series of comic frames, we discussed the representation of the ephors in these two visual sources and compared them to the account of their role as recorded by Xenophon. Again, at the end of this session, students were asked to compare the different sources and discuss the reasons for the divergence, and then write their answers to relevant answers in their questions log (fourth hour).

During the last hour of the intervention, we discussed the modern perception of the battle of Thermopylae and its re-enactment in the film in question. How is the representation of the Persians related to the contemporary (at the time of the screening of the film) perception of their descendants, the Iranians, in the Western world? How does this representation fit with the Western world's rivalry with the Muslim world? At the end of the final hour of the intervention, students were asked to answer questions relating to their perception of the film, the graphic novel, the poem and the antiquity sources and the ways all these re-enact the past (fifth hour).

## Data Analysis and Discussion

Four major themes, which correspond to the initial research questions, emerged from the data analysis process. The data collected was all students' answers to open-ended questions, which the students wrote at the end of each 45-minute class. The number of students attending the classes was 25, which is a fair number for qualitative research. Not all students answered all the questions, however, and some answers were incomprehensible, hence the difference between the total number of the students and the number of answers provided in each question. The questions were open-ended and the answers provided rich data which answered the initial research questions. The students' answers were transcribed and categorized, and then codes were identified and combined into themes, which corresponded to the foci of the research questions. Therefore, the themes were a) challenging current beliefs about the nature of film as history, b) characteristics of sources for history learning, c) distinguishing the different agendas of each form of historical representation and d) student preferences for history learning material. The major findings of the data analysis were the following, responding to the respective questions:

### *1. Do students doubt the cinematic representation of history when it is challenged through analysis?*

Each film clip used was correlated to the respective graphic novel frames it was inspired by and the antiquity sources referring to the relevant facts. Students were expected to question the validity of the filmic representation after they were exposed to detailed analysis and discussion of the inconsistencies, mistakes and exaggerations of the filmic medium, especially since its representations emerge from the graphic novel.

The shift in the evaluation of the film as valid source of information by the students is insignificant. In total, 9

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<sup>27</sup> Murray, Zack Snyder.

students in total considered the film as a more trustworthy source after the intervention, when the initial number of students considering films as a credible source was 11. In addition, at the beginning of the intervention, 11 students considered the antiquity sources as more accurate sources of knowledge about the past, while after the classes this number was reduced to 10. It is interesting that despite the lively conversations about the inaccuracies of the filmic representation and the comparative analysis of the other sources, almost half the students in total were still convinced, by the end of the intervention, that the film was a more trustworthy source, validating existing research with similar findings, namely that films are credible sources of information about the past<sup>28</sup>. Possible reasons for this were found in the analysis of the questions regarding the characteristics of each form and their relationship to objectivity and truth, as described in the answer to the research question 2, below.

2. *Which form of historical source is perceived as more accurate and which less and why, given that students are introduced to their inconsistencies, limitations and agendas?*

Although during the lessons the connection between the graphic novel and the film was made evident, as the film was an adaptation of the graphic novel, students believe that the film is more realistic and closer to the historical truth than the graphic novel. The graphic novel is not considered realistic nor reliable, even though a frame-by-frame analysis of the comic in juxtaposition with the cinematic frames it inspired was employed. For students in this group, realism in historical representation stems from the details depicted in the cinematic medium and the narrative depiction of facts, which are both a result of the audiovisual character of the film, echoing Harris et al.'s findings on students' preference to secondary sources as more trustworthy<sup>29</sup>. Although many of them commented on the inaccuracies of the filmic representation, as those were made evident from the analysis against the written antiquity sources, the film is still considered more accurate. The interesting point about the students' perception is that they believe that the visual nature of the film renders some accuracy, even though they do not consider it wholly truthful. Interestingly, it is evident that for students who are used to realistic digital representations, visual realism equals accuracy and validity in presenting facts. It seems that students used the term "accuracy" instead of "authenticity", two terms often used interchangeably, as explained by Saxton who contends that "authenticity refers to the experience of consuming an historical text and the audience's impression of whether it captures the past, even if this is at odds with available evidence" while accuracy refers to the amount of historical details found in a historical fiction production that can be verified by relevant historical research<sup>30</sup>. For example, a student commented that "the film is more truthful because it shows scenes and is more realistic, while the source from antiquity is less truthful because it does not analyze so much". In other words, more visual details amount to a more accurate historical representation, according to the students in this study.

3. *Can a multimodal presentation of the same facts of ancient history lead to distinguishing the aims of each form of representation?*

Students considered the film and the written sources from antiquity of equal value to the construction of a historical narrative. The difference between the written sources and the film was their nature, as the written sources were considered less analytical and more confusing, although for many students they were closer to the

<sup>28</sup> Peter Seixas. "Popular Film and Young People's Understanding of the History of Native American-White relations," *The History Teacher* 26, no. 3 (1993): 351–370; Peter Afflerbach and Bruce VanSledright, "Hath! Doth! What? Middle Graders Reading Innovative History Text," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 44, no. 8 (2001): 696–707; Jeremy D. Stoddard, "The Ideological Implications of Using "Educational" Film to Teach Controversial Events," *Curriculum Inquiry* 39, no. 3 (2009): 407–433, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2009.00450.x>.

<sup>29</sup> Lauren McArthur Harris, Anne-Lise Halvorsen, Gerardo J. Aponte-Martinez, "[My] Family has Gone Through that': How High School Students Determine the Trustworthiness of Historical Documents," *The Journal of Social Studies Research* 40, no. 2 (2015): 109–121, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2015.06.007>.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Saxton, "A True Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction," *Rethinking History* 24, no. 2 (2020): 127–144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2020.1727189>.

historical truth because they were produced closer to the events, in chronological terms. Those students that considered the ancient written sources to be more accurate also commented that the film has different aims, i.e. to be more realistic and easy to understand. For example, a student commented that “a historical source would tell the truth about the battle of Thermopylae because someone saw it and wrote it, while in the film and in the comic they would put some lies in”. At the same time, the poem’s moral focus was identified and very few students considered it a proper source for historical learning. A student wrote “the poet, depending on the sources, writes a poem with evidence he takes from the primary sources, but with a deeper meaning”, while for another student “the aim of the poem is to honor the 300, but the comic book and the film present us with the facts”. Students seem to distinguish between mere presentation of facts by the sources from antiquity and the film, and the moral and sentimental focus of the poem, hence trusting the latter less as source of information about historical facts, similarly to Harris et al.’s findings on students’ skepticism about the use of songs as valid sources of information about the past<sup>31</sup>. The graphic novel, even though identified at the very start of the intervention as the inspiration for the movie, was not considered as faithful to the historical events as the movie. According to a student “basically, the comic is far from the truth because it has a funny style, while all the others [film, antiquity sources and poem] are as close as possible to reality”. The students considered the film as an appropriate tool for learning, even though they identified its ideological implications and the inaccuracies, because of its visual nature (“in the film everything becomes more dramatic, and in the ancient source there has to be truth”). This visual nature equals details and details equal historical truth, according to the students, confirming Saxton when she explains that “the cumulative effect of seemingly accurate details is thus a sense of realism and, in turn, believability”<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, it seems that students did realize the different foci and aims of each source, and how this is reflected in the ways facts are represented in each medium, however they showed a strong preference to film as a source of information about the past.

#### 4. *What kind of historical representation and source is preferable for students in the history classroom and why?*

Both the written sources from antiquity and the poem are considered inappropriate for teaching history by most of the students, because of the textual form and the difficulties relating to the written text. In both, the density of the written form is a constraining factor for historical learning and usage in the history classroom, although many students commented on the value of the historical source as a first source for information and of the poem as a symbolic representation of the battle of Thermopylae. In addition, students considered all the written historical sources from antiquity used in the intervention of equal trustworthiness, even though the problematic nature of Diodorus’ source, which is dated many centuries after the actual battle of Thermopylae, was thoroughly discussed. In addition, for some students the poem was also considered a primary written source, and for those students it was considered inappropriate for learning history due to its textual form. The ancient Greek text, although translated into modern Greek, is difficult for students to understand, since the language is difficult and the text is not written in order to give direct answers to questions we raise today in the history classroom. The four dimensions of time, space, culture and language are the reasons for this distance of the students from the primary sources<sup>33</sup>, especially the ancient ones. Therefore, for most students, the visual contemporary sources, and mostly the film, are considered more appropriate for learning history, even though their weaknesses were discussed in detail.

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<sup>31</sup> Harris et al., *[My] Family*.

<sup>32</sup> Saxton, *A True Story*, 133.

<sup>33</sup> Lamiaa Youssef, “A Matter of Relevance: Teaching Classics in the 21st Century,” *College Teaching* 58, no. 1 (2009): 28-31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567550903252819>.

## Conclusions

Ancient history can be taught in very constructive and meaningful ways, if popular media are used along with primary sources from antiquity, but also when the teaching drifts away from the ethical approach usually followed. After all, ancient history is history too, and its teaching aims should not be different from those of other historical periods. Teachers could be inspired by the current discourse on the reception of these times and its implications in forming our dialogue with the past. Regarding the material used for a more holistic and multimodal approach to teaching ancient history, it should be kept in mind that the spectator is often an unconscious learner, through a process of consuming popular culture<sup>34</sup>. School should not fear popular representations of the past, but work towards deconstructing understandings of the past formed by these representations, especially since students show a strong preference to visual sources of information, such as films. It is evident from the findings of the present research that students still struggle to question the validity of visual representations of the past, even when these are confronted thoroughly in the classroom and students are taught how to question them in a step-by-step approach, a finding in line with similar findings of research that used multimodal, both primary and secondary, sources<sup>35</sup>. However, even when these weaknesses of cinema are addressed, it is still preferable by students, making it even more imperative to include such sources in the history classroom. A multimodal approach to history education including film along with other textual and visual sources presupposes learned guidance by the history teachers<sup>36</sup>, as well as a constructivist pedagogy based on dialogue<sup>37</sup>. Even when this is the case though, as with the current intervention, it seems that the power of the visual representation can undermine even a detailed process of source questioning in the classroom, since visual detail is considered enough for a cinematic work to be considered historically accurate. This means that history education should include the contemporary visual representations of the past and challenge them, but also include an understanding of the process of source criticism and visual analysis in order to challenge students' ideas about the accuracy of the cinematic representation<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, the written material is not a favorite of the students, who seem unable to comprehend it without clear directions and a step-by-step approach. The visual means of representation seem more powerful than the written word, even if the former are proven to be inaccurate. A dialogue between the popular depiction of the past and the historical sources is necessary in order for students to become critical spectators of the past on the screen.

The aim of the present research was to identify the level of students' acceptance of the filmic representations of history as accurate, when these representations are challenged through a carefully designed lesson which with the purpose to deconstruct them. The power of the visual medium, with its enormous narrative abilities, proved much greater than a targeted lesson design and evidence that featured the limitations of the filmic text as a source for history learning. Students still prefer it, although they acknowledge its limitations. Banning the film as one of students' favorite leisure activities is of course neither desirable nor feasible; nor can we expect students to analyze the contents of historical representations of films without arming them with methods to support an analytical evaluation of history on screen. On the contrary, it is exactly the power of this medium that makes it imperative for film to be included more formally as a source in the history classroom. Then, the question "does the film depict historical truth?" is replaced by questions such as "what does the presentation of the historical event in the

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<sup>34</sup> Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History, Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Harris et al., *My Family*; Jeffery D. Nokes, "Exploring Patterns of Historical Thinking Through Eighth-grade Students' Argumentative Writing," *Journal of Writing Research* 8, no. 3, (2017): 437–467, <https://doi.org/10.17239/jowr-2017.08.03.02>.

<sup>36</sup> Alan S. Marcus, Richard J. Paxton, and Peter Meyerson, "The Reality of it All: History Students Read the Movies," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 34, no. 3 (2012): 516–552, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2006.10473320>; Debra Donnelly, "Contemporary Multi-modal Historical Representations and the Teaching of Disciplinary Understandings in History," *Journal of International Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (2018): 113–132.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander Cutajar, "What Aspects of Historical Understanding Feature in the Analysis of Moving-Image Sources in the History Classroom?" *History Education Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (2022): 195–213, <https://doi.org/10.14324/HERJ.17.2.05>.

<sup>38</sup> Mavrommati and Repoussi, *Something Was Wrong*.

film tell us about the culture and society of its time of production and/or its time of analysis?”. This can add to the history lesson at school a dimension of inquiry on historical memory and public history, as part of developing a wider form of historical literacy<sup>39</sup>. In such an approach, the main aim of teaching is not to detect inaccuracies and misinformation in the film, but to use those creatively in order to teach students to analyze popular sources of historical representations and view films like any other source of information, about the films’ first temporality (historical time depicted) as well as the second (historical time produced) and the third (historical time viewed and/or analyzed in the classroom)<sup>40</sup>. An approach that combines an inquiry on the films’ narrative tools such as editing and cinematography (visual literacy), the historical context of its time of production (reception), and research about the contents of the film in combination with contemporary, to the represented time as well as the time of reception, primary sources<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Wolf Kansteiner, “Film, the Past, and a Didactic Dead End: From Teaching History to Teaching Memory,” in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, eds. Mario Cerretero, Stefan Berger and Maria Grever (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 169-190, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-52908-4\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-52908-4_9); Metzger, *Maximizing*.

<sup>40</sup> Maria Repoussi and Maria Mavrommati, “Historical Films in History Classrooms: Documentaries or Fiction Films? Teachers’ Views and Practices”, in *History Education in the Digital Age*, eds. Mario Carretero, Maria Cantabrana and Christian Parellada. (Springer Cham, 2022), 197-216, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10743-6\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10743-6_11).

<sup>41</sup> Debra Donnelly, “Using Feature Film in the Teaching of History: The Practitioner Decision-making Dynamic,” *Journal of International Social Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 17–27; Debra Donnelly, “Filmic Pedagogies in the Teaching of History: Research on and Recommendations for Using Video in the Classroom,” *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research* 14, no. 1 (2016): 113–123; Mavrommati and Repoussi, *Something Was Wrong*; Karel Van Nieuwenhuysse, “Is Seeing Believing? On the Educational Use of Mainstream Historical Films in the History Classroom,” *International Journal of Research on History Didactics, History Education and Historical Culture* 37 (2016): 191–212.

# Roleplaying Legal Disputes: Teaching Latin American History in the College Classroom

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In the United States, students enrolled in Latin American history courses generally complete short writing assignments based on their reading of translated primary sources. Among the sources available to English-speaking students is “Scandal at the Church: José de Alfaro Accuses Doña Theresa Bravo and Others of Insulting and Beating his Castiza Wife, Josefa Cadena (Mexico, 1782).” This document is a transcript of a criminal court record discovered and translated by historian Sonya Lipsett-Rivera for a collection of primary sources edited by Richard Boyer and Geoffrey Spurling titled, *Colonial Lives: Documents in Latin American History, 1550-1850*.<sup>1</sup> The document contains the intricate details behind the verbal and physical abuse allegedly sustained by a woman deemed racially inferior, according to dominant racial hierarchies in late eighteenth-century Mexico, at the hands of an elite woman outside of church. The document registers the criminal complaint made by José de Alfaro, the abused woman’s husband, who claimed that his family had been publicly dishonored as a result of this incident. He held the elite woman’s husband, a colonial officer, responsible for her actions and demanded justice. The document, however, is incomplete as it does not contain a transcript of the depositions made by the accused nor the final ruling in the case.

When I was a Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) at the University of Michigan, I graded four-page analytical papers in which undergraduate students offered their interpretations of this document as part of one of two writing assignments in a Colonial Latin America course. Their papers generally presented interesting perspectives and demonstrated persuasive efforts to connect patterns in the story to the larger issues that shaped colonial Latin American societies: wealth and power differences, blurry cultural boundaries, and racial stratification. But only some papers raised critical questions about the nature of the legal complaint itself and the process of administering justice in colonial times. A few students put themselves in the historian’s shoes and expressed outright frustration to work with a primary source that contained rich detail, but was incomplete. I enjoyed reading these students’ papers, but was often left with the sense that students ignored or left unexplored the versatility and complexities of this source. These papers did not always exhibit the critical thinking that this document has the potential to elicit because, as Polly Piergiovanni states, “it is not sufficient for instructors simply to tell their students to write; writing by itself doesn’t magically improve thinking.”<sup>2</sup>

As Assistant Professor of History at Western Michigan University, I teach a Colonial Latin America seminar to undergraduate students new to studying this geographical region and who usually major in History, Secondary Education, English, and Business. My main objective has been to increase students’ historical learning and improve their critical thinking skills through dynamic activities that consider the document at its fullest while stimulating student inquiry, reflection, and creativity. Thus, I made two critical changes when I first assigned this primary source to my eclectic group of students. First, I provided students with a copy of the transcript for the week we discussed issues of honor and crime but purposefully blocked out Prof. Lipsett-Rivera’s introduction to the document. I shared some of the contextual information available in the introduction with students in class, but let them process the story without much intervention. Second, I replaced the big writing assignment with a

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Boyer and Geoffrey Spurling, eds., *Colonial Lives: Documents on Latin American History, 1550-1850*, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 217-223.

<sup>2</sup> Polly Piergiovanni, “Creating a Critical Thinker,” *College Teaching* 62, no. 3 (2014): 87.

number of well-structured, hands-on learning activities (that still included short writing tasks) to be conducted over two lesson periods.

The learning activities involved roleplaying, self-reflection, group discussion, one-minute papers, and a problem-solving task. Through these activities, my students would, as James M. Lang suggests in *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning*, “spend at least some time doing things in the classroom rather than merely sitting there passively.”<sup>3</sup> They would engage in group and individual work in the classroom that required them to think, write, discuss, and make connections. Among the learning objectives for these activities was that students would obtain a greater understanding of historical episodes and themes in colonial Latin America through the close reading and open discussion of translated primary sources. Additionally, students would build and put into practice their critical thinking skills by engaging in informed speculation, an approach used by historians working with fragmentary evidence.<sup>4</sup> This, I hoped, would result in intellectual conversations on the production of history with an emphasis on the crafting of narratives that center ordinary people’s experiences and stories.

But meeting these learning objectives through the mentioned activities suddenly seemed daunting when the COVID-19 pandemic changed my mode of instruction. Could I replicate effective learning activities I had already tested out in the physical classroom to work in a synchronous virtual context? What initially seemed like a significant pedagogical challenge eventually turned into an opportunity to reimagine engagement, considering that it is “one of the most critical elements both to effective course design and to effective course facilitation in the digital environment.”<sup>5</sup> This reimagining involved communicating clear instructions to my students ahead of time, outlining virtual discussion rules and expectations, and incorporating at least one online collaboration tool to the activity redesign process.<sup>6</sup> In this essay, I discuss each of the areas I revised and adapted to offer this learning activity to the eighteen students who took my online class in Fall 2021 and conclude by describing how, in spite of the positive outcomes, there is still room for further improvement.

### Roleplaying Scenes of a Late-Colonial Criminal Trial

According to Michael A. Barnhart, “few things drive student engagement with their subjects more than role-playing them.”<sup>7</sup> And “Scandal at the Church,” as a transcription of a criminal court record, presents a great opportunity for students to reenact the court orders, depositions, and witness and expert testimonies from six different men recorded in the judicial files. Depositions and testimonies open a window into elite and ordinary

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<sup>3</sup> James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (Hoboken, United States: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 85, ProQuest Ebook Central; Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison, *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*, ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1 (Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development, 1991); John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011); Linda B. Nilson groups these activities under “experiential learning” and highlights that this method results in “more learning at higher cognitive levels, greater appreciation of the subject matter and its utility, and longer retention of the material than the traditional lecture.” Linda B. Nilson, *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors*, 4th edition (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 167.

<sup>4</sup> Historians Natalie Zemon Davis, Kathleen DuVal, and Tiya Miles have, for example, charted original approaches to reconstruct women’s stories that are informed by fragmentary evidence and the careful reading of relevant archival sources about other subjects. See Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Kathleen DuVal, *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution*, Reprint edition (New York: Random House, 2016); and Tiya Miles, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley’s Sack, a Black Family Keepsake* (New York: Random House, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Kelly and Todd D. Zakrajsek, *Advancing Online Teaching: Creating Equity-Based Digital Learning Environments* (Sterling, Virginia: Stylus, 2021), 137.

<sup>6</sup> Chad Hershock and Mika LaVaque-Manty, “Teaching in the Cloud: Leveraging Online Collaboration Tools to Enhance Student Engagement,” *CRLT Occasional Paper*, No. 31 (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Michael A. Barnhart, *Can You Beat Churchill: Teaching History through Simulations* (Ithaca, US: Cornell University Press, 2021), 52, ProQuest Ebook Central.

people's lives thanks to the rich details they provide. At the same time, those details do not represent truths and they should be read with skepticism given the potential for fabrication of evidence in lawsuits. In colonial Latin America, these parts of a court case were commonly redacted in the third person by an official scribe. However, in this particular case, the absence of an official scribe meant extra work for the judge, who simultaneously served as the town's mayor and ultimately had to oversee all legal procedures and record all testimonies by hand and in front of witnesses.

Since colonial criminal cases were not commonly deliberated with *all* the parties involved in one courtroom, official scribes would often travel to judges' offices, people's homes, and even to prisons and hospitals to collect statements, request signatures, provide updates, notify orders, or announce sentences. Traveling back and forth usually meant that cases could take years to be resolved. After explaining this to students in my online class, I invited them to consider a different scenario. We would role play a 1782 court trial the same way court proceedings all over the U.S. were being conducted in 2021 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic: over a virtual conferencing platform. In this way, our reenactment on Webex assumed everyone involved in the case was present in the same space at trial, an imaginary courtroom, but students understood this was not a faithful representation of how the process might have taken place in the past. Also, I had learned from previous experience that the role-playing activity would run more smoothly if students volunteered one week in advance to act out each of the six parts of the court record, which included statements by the judge, the plaintiff, two medical expert witnesses, and two eyewitnesses.

Students who volunteered to act out a part from the document had a full week to read and reread their assigned parts on their own. They had to get a better sense of their role in the lawsuit and the main points they made in their statements. In addition, these students also had to complete two related tasks in preparation for the role-playing activity: to re-write each of their assigned parts in the first person and to make slight modifications to the language—without altering the original meaning—if they considered it would improve both their comprehension of the material and the effective delivery of their part in our virtual classroom setting. Completing these tasks would lead students to learn experientially by “saying words, feeling emotions, and performing actions [...] to make a powerful impression and sharpen communication skills.”<sup>8</sup>

As for students who were not acting out a part from the document, I also expected them to read the transcript in full and to come to class prepared with notes that addressed the following questions: “What is this lawsuit about? Who are the people involved?” I instructed them on the day of the role-playing activity to analyze their peers' reenactment of the trial and explain to the class any patterns that “reflected concepts and principles addressed in the course.”<sup>9</sup> These tasks required *all* students to do a close reading of the primary source document by engaging in its critical examination. These tasks were also meant to foster deep thinking among students by asking them to consider the use of language to advance a position in a legal dispute.

This last point was among the most revealing aspects of the role-playing activity. Students used their creativity to turn legal verbiage into their own by using the first person. Most of the students acting out a part also added emotion to strategic parts of their statements through a careful play of intonation. This made the plain, formulaic words of the statements on the transcript come alive, and they also engaged the rest of the students in exciting ways. Students also revised their parts by exchanging words for more contemporary versions or colloquial expressions that captured the original meaning of statements while making them more accessible to our undergraduate audience. Ultimately, students inserted elements of their own personalities into their assigned roles, humanizing the historical actors who left a trace on the record.

In this way, reenacting a historical episode in the lives of elite and ordinary people who lived in eighteenth-century Mexico turned our virtual classroom setting into an imagined virtual courtroom that opened up a lively space to deliberate on the contents of the criminal case as well as to recognize and enjoy student talent. All of this

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<sup>8</sup> Raymond Fox, *The Use of Self: The Essence of Professional Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 155.

<sup>9</sup> Nilson, *Teaching at Its Best*, 169.

laid the groundwork for the stimulating group discussion that would follow about three main areas: the intricacies of the story, the legal system under Spanish rule, and the fragmentary nature of the historical record.

### Student Reflection and Group Discussion

When the last student in the group acted out her part, which was the testimony of an eyewitness, silence took over our virtual classroom. The testimony offered details about the fight between the two women as seen by a man who was allegedly standing blocks away from the church. Clearly, it was not the testimony of the accused nor the judge's ruling on the case. The students fell silent while looking intently at their cameras, waiting for me to explain what came next. I purposefully let the silence stay with us for a few seconds. I wanted to let that moment of awkward silence play a performative role too, one that symbolized what professional historians often experience when coming across this type of archival documentation for their own research projects. Typically, it is a moment of intense mixed feelings for the historian: excitement, disappointment, frustration, acceptance, potential, and hope can all coalesce.

After a few seconds, I broke the silence with two questions: "What happened next? How did this lawsuit end?" A couple of students timidly stated what was obvious to everyone: the record was incomplete, to which I dramatically answered, "exactly, we don't know!" Students commented on how invested they were on the story and how anti-climactic its ending felt to almost everyone. One of those students was Allison Wolf, a senior who added that "it was a fun activity to do but frustrating not to know what the actual outcome [of the lawsuit] was."<sup>10</sup> Other students shared they were secretly hoping I would announce the outcome, which was clearly stated in the introduction to the document but I had intentionally blocked it out on the scanned copies I distributed among students so it was impossible for anyone to know.

At this point, I told students to prepare for a one-minute paper. I asked students who did not act out any roles to summarize what had happened in this lawsuit in order to make sure everyone in class was on the same page. These students drew both on the notes they had taken before class and on the fresh ideas they had gathered after seeing their classmates in action. Following this, I proceeded to do what Linda B. Nilson suggests in *Teaching at its Best*, "ask the players how they felt in their role at crucial junctures and what intentions and interests motivated their actions."<sup>11</sup> I asked the group of student volunteers to reflect on the historical characters they had played in the first person by answering this question in a one-minute paper: "What about the passages they had just reenacted stood out to them and why?" The students' reflection mainly focused on highlighting key moments of the story that raised questions about the understandings of morality like finding out that the woman who was allegedly accosted was pregnant or that throwing insults in public could be the basis of a lawsuit back then. The one-minute paper exercise encouraged students "to start thinking about where they go next with their learning."<sup>12</sup>

In the context of our class, this one-minute self-reflection served as a transition into a large group discussion that focused on more specific questions: 1) If a fight between two women was the reason why this criminal case originated, why were their own voices not recorded on file? 2) What about the way the aggrieved woman's husband framed his legal complaint stands out to you? Why? And 3) What do you think was the defendant's response to being sued by a socially-inferior family?" These questions allowed us to talk extensively about several themes running through the lawsuit including the ways in which the record reflected traditional conceptions of gender and patriarchal culture in colonial Mexico and how the plaintiff courageously filed a complaint with a well-crafted narrative even though his family was at a disadvantage for being poor and socially inferior.

To wrap up our group discussion about the details of the case, I asked students, "how did the multiple expert and witness testimonies help the judge arrive at a legal decision?" This time, all students responded quickly that the case was inconclusive. This was not meant to be a tricky question. Rather, it was meant to solidify students'

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<sup>10</sup> Allison Wolf, November 2nd, 2021, HIST 3702. Used with permission.

<sup>11</sup> Nilson, *Teaching at Its Best*, 169.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen D. Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 102.

“knowledge foundation through effective first exposure and then carefully planned sequencing and repetition.”<sup>13</sup> It was also a useful way for me to change the focus and lead the group to the final part of our discussion. We returned to the frustrations generated by the incompleteness of this particular court record and I admitted that feeling frustrated was an outcome I had envisioned for this activity. This “confession” made some students confused. I explained they had just experienced first-hand some of the challenges professional historians face when attempting to reconstruct the stories of ordinary people from the past. While frustration can be disappointing and even paralyzing, in my view, it can also be turned into the fuel that ignites historians’ creative approaches to writing history “from below.” This final part of our conversation offered an opening to discuss why fragmented evidence is still considered significant by historians who are pushed to think creatively about their methods and approaches. Consequently, this allowed me to transition into the third part of our activity.

### Problem-Solving in Small Groups

Our discussion about historians’ approaches to understanding the past centered on those in the fields of slavery and women’s history who have advanced the method of reading “against the grain” as a way to produce alternative readings that not only make room to incorporate less documented historical figures. This approach can also reveal silences and gaps which scholars can then productively highlight in historical narratives.<sup>14</sup> With this in mind, I encouraged my students to view the incompleteness of the lawsuit less like an obstacle and more like an opportunity. We could read against the grain and engage in informed speculation. We could speculate about the defendants’ side of the story and how the lawsuit potentially concluded.

The significance of this activity centered, thus, on motivating students to think as historians and come up with a believable outcome based on the learning they had been building up to this point about social and cultural relations in colonial Latin America. To get students started, I laid out a set of questions for consideration before assigning students to small groups led by those who had acted out a part in the role-playing activity.

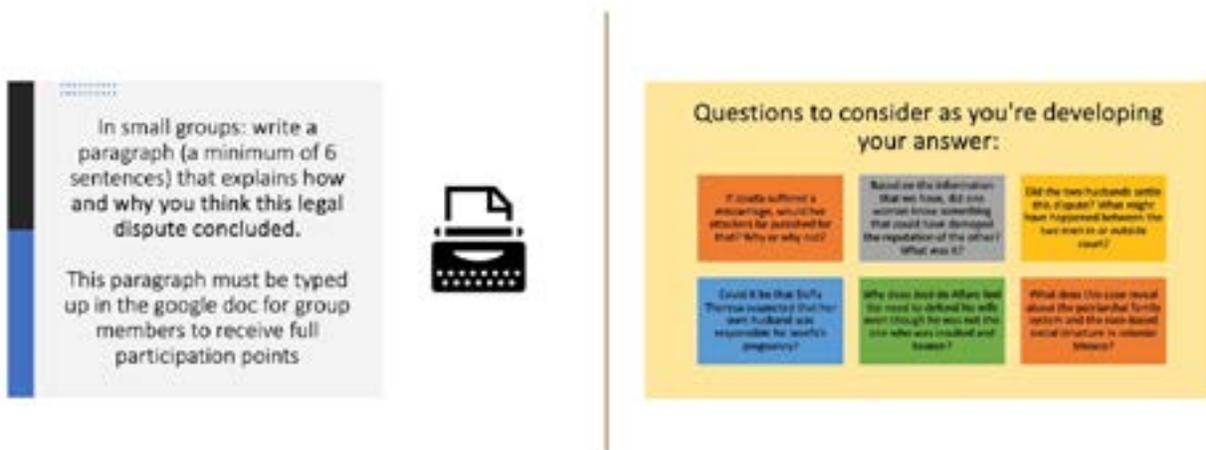


Figure 1. Small group instructions and questions to help students get started

To carry out this activity in our virtual classroom, students worked together in Webex breakout sessions where they put into practice their creativity and verbal communication skills by discussing potential scenarios and exchanging ideas with one another for approximately 30 minutes. I reminded students that historians who

<sup>13</sup> Lang, *Small Teaching*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); María Elena Martínez, “Sex and the Colonial Archive: The Case of ‘Mariano’ Aguilera,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (August 1, 2016): 421–43; Miles, *All That She Carried*.

engage in speculative thinking in their work, carefully consider potential scenarios or outcomes based on their methodical reading of a vast historiography and encouraged them to review their class notes. Once all members in a group discussed and agreed on a potential outcome, their task was to write up their answer—in the most convincing way possible—in the length of one full paragraph. Each group had to type up their paragraphs during class time on a shared Google Doc I had created exclusively for this activity. They easily found a link to the document inside that week's module on D2L eLearning, our learning management system at WMU. Since we had already used Google Docs for other online class activities, my students knew how to collaborate and edit together online.

Using online collaboration tools in the classroom such as Google Docs puts a healthy dose of pressure on students who understand they are expected to produce their best work possible for other classmates to read in real time. Students wrote interesting paragraphs that reflected student dialogue and critical engagement. For instance, one group wrote:

“The mayor was unable to come to a decision. He allowed Don Diego and Jose to challenge each other to a sword duel. It was clear to the judge that there was not enough evidence for prosecution. The obvious social disparity between the two may have made it hard to bring Don Diego to justice or account for his wife's actions, allowing the men to settle the difference. Thus, Don Diego and Jose proceeded to the street where they would duel. Don Diego was stabbed multiple times by Jose and would lose his life.”<sup>15</sup>

This was not the only group that brought up dueling as a potential outcome in this case. Another group raised it as improbable. They wrote, “[w]e also thought it was unlikely that the matter would be settled in a duel because the men did not injure each other.”<sup>16</sup>

The creative but unrealistic scenarios around dueling allowed me to open the following class session with a discussion about dueling and honor in colonial Latin America. I emphasized that dueling had, in fact, “long been a crime in Spanish colonial law, and it remained so after Independence.”<sup>17</sup> To narrow it down to Mexico, I used Pablo Piccato's work to highlight, to the surprise of most students, that dueling was “seldom employed” across Mexico in the colonial period.<sup>18</sup> It was only in the late nineteenth century that it became a frequent criminal practice connected to national elites' modernization projects and disputes. This meant that dueling was an improbable outcome. Additionally, both husbands in the court case belonged to drastically different social positions. If dueling ever happened, it happened between equals. I was glad to point this out to my students, even if this information weakened their propositions because it allowed me to emphasize that “informed speculation” must be, well, informed.

In the end, I downloaded the Google Doc as an accessible PDF file and uploaded it to the week's virtual module for all students, including a visually impaired student registered in the course, to read and explore on their own. As we wrapped up our class session, students eagerly expressed their interest in this particular criminal case and the topic in general both on screen and in the chat. For example, Leigh Murphy, a senior, revealed that in the problem-solving activity her group discussion centered on “the class of the people who were involved” in the case.<sup>19</sup> They discussed how conceptions of racial and class difference might have shaped people's lived experience during that period and how that might have been reflected in this case. They strongly believed that “Doña Teresa's high status would have protected [her and her husband] from severe punishment” due to their connections

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<sup>15</sup> Group 5, October 28th, 2021, HIST 3702. Used with permission.

<sup>16</sup> Group 4, October 28th, 2021, HIST 3702. Used with permission.

<sup>17</sup> David S. Parker, “Law, Honor, and Impunity in Spanish America: The Debate over Dueling, 1870-1920,” *Law and History Review* 19, no. 2 (2001): 313.

<sup>18</sup> Pablo Piccato, “Politics and the Technology of Honor: Dueling in Turn-of-the-Century Mexico,” *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 2 (December 1, 1999): 332.

<sup>19</sup> Leigh Murphy, November 2nd, 2021, HIST 3702. Used with permission.

and influence over others. Power emerged as a critical factor in our concluding discussion. People with power could obstruct a legal process or even delay it and then use their influence to have the authorities archive it. The students agreed that the existence of the document is a testament to people's quest for justice in the past, but its incompleteness is a sign of how power (whether exercised by contemporaries or in the archive) created a perpetual silence that blurred what really happened.

### Post-Activity Assessment

In a future iteration of this in-class activity, either online or in-person, I plan on making several changes to improve the flow and the lessons students get out of it. Grading is one of the areas that deserves careful revision. All students who attended and participated in each of the two class sessions received participation points, which added to their semester-long cumulative points. In addition to this, however, the problem-solving activity could be graded as well. This will further incentivize students to take good notes and contribute their creative ideas to produce a collective first draft in class using Google Docs. They will have a deadline after class to submit a revised draft that includes a summary of the case and their interpretation of how the legal dispute might have concluded with analysis backed up by at least three academic sources read in class. The group will be graded as a whole, but as suggested by Alison Burke, it won't "count for more than a small percentage of the student's final grade."<sup>20</sup>

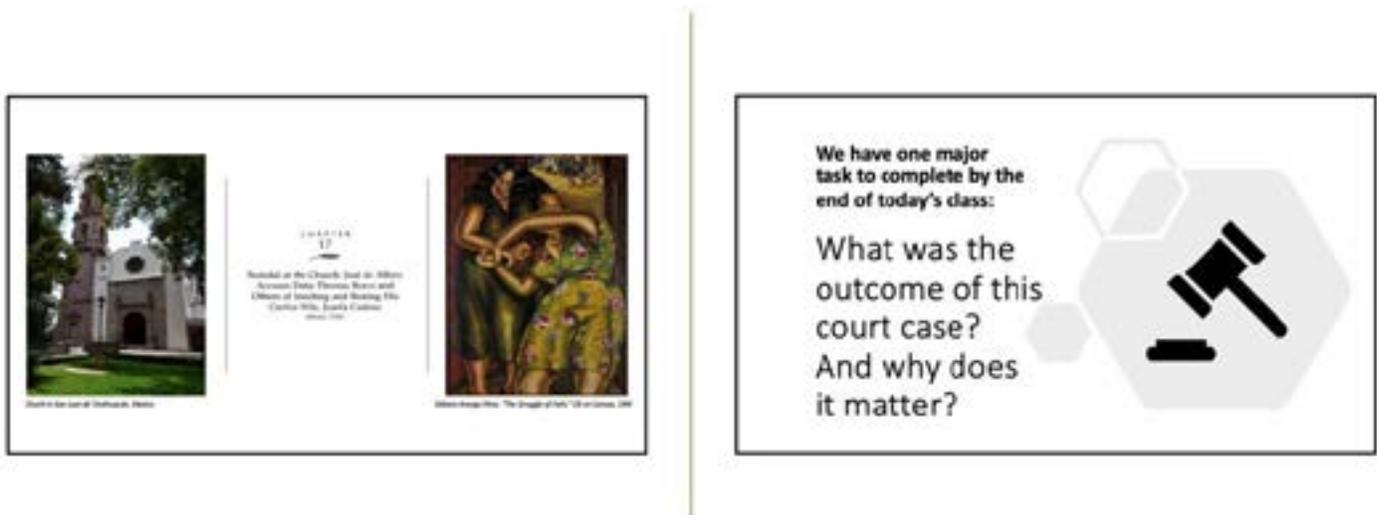


Figure 2. Introductory slides for future in-class activity

### Framing a Purpose from the Start

Linda Nilson suggests increasing student preparation by giving them a purpose "that is, things to look for or a strategy for devising their own purposes [...] possible purposes include seeking answers to questions."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Kelly and Zakrajsek highlight that "students succeed when teachers convey the purpose for doing something, the tasks to complete, and the criteria for success."<sup>22</sup> I realize that I gave my students a purpose only when we moved into the final part of the activity in which they had to work in small groups using problem-solving skills and informed speculation to answer: "What was the outcome of this court case? And why does it matter?" Retrospectively, I think that framing the whole class around these questions and presenting them to students

<sup>20</sup> Alison Burke, "Group Work: How to Use Groups Effectively," *The Journal of Effective Teaching* 11, no. 2 (2011): 92

<sup>21</sup> Nilson, *Teaching at Its Best*, 242; Flower Darby and James M. Lang, *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes* (Newark, U.S.: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 184.

<sup>22</sup> Kelly and Zakrajsek, *Advancing Online Teaching*, 47

before the roleplaying begins will help them stay focused throughout the activity, knowing that anything they observe or think about can lead to developing concrete ideas to accomplish our main task for the day. To borrow a phrase from *Small Teaching*, “connections improve comprehension” and students can arrive better prepared to the final problem-solving part of this activity if they know what to look for from the start.<sup>23</sup>

### *Expanding Student Responsibilities and Participation*

While all students in this online course had something to prepare for our in-class activity, it was clear that the students who volunteered to role-play put substantially more work and effort to make the activity a success. To make sure that future students in this class are equally involved in the activity and share similar amounts of labor and participation, a few changes need to be made. The first change is to frame the activity as a skit that will require the participation of every student in the classroom. The skit will be performed for an imaginary audience from the community who will “visit” to learn more about crime and honor in Colonial Latin America from the students themselves. Framing the activity as a skit with different parts will allow the instructor to assign other active roles to students who do not volunteer to act out a part of the eighteenth-century primary source transcript and expect they will produce work that significantly adds to the role-playing part of the activity. Everyone will then be expected to contribute equally either by providing historical context based on short research or by roleplaying the transcript.

### Instructions for role-playing students



OPEN THE “SCANDAL AT THE CHURCH” PDF FILE AVAILABLE IN THE WEEK 7 MODULE



SEARCH FOR THE NAME OF THE HISTORICAL FIGURE ASSIGNED TO YOU



CAREFULLY READ THE PARTS IN WHICH YOUR HISTORICAL FIGURE INTERVENES IN THE TRIAL



REWRITE THE PART IN THE FIRST PERSON AS BEST AS YOU CAN. MAKE THE TEXT YOURS SO IT COMES OUT NATURALLY. YOU MAY EDIT THE TEXT AS LONG AS NEW WORDS COVER THE SAME MEANING.



COME READY TO ACT OUT YOUR PART IN CLASS. WE WILL PRETEND TO BE IN AN IMAGINARY COURTROOM. YOU CAN BE AS DYNAMIC AS YOU SEE FIT.

### Instructions for the rest of the class

**Group 1:** In 3 slides, provide general historical highlights of San Juan Teotihuacán in Mexico

**Group 2:** In 3 slides, offer details about the town’s demographic and cultural life in the late eighteenth century

**Group 3:** In 3 slides, discuss the definitions for *calidad* and *castiza* and explain why these matter in the case

Be sure to read the full court document (“Scandal at the Church”) and come to class prepared to engage in small group discussion and activities

Figure 3 - Activity instructions for future students who take the course

Depending on the size of the class, the students who do not sign up for role-playing can be organized into small groups that prepare three-minute presentations that cover three main areas of interest for our imaginary visitors: The first group can provide general highlights about the history of San Juan Teotihuacán, Mexico, the town where the crime took place. These highlights can include details about the town’s Mesoamerican legacy and its significance in pre-Columbian research and culture in Mexico and the world. The second group can offer details about the town’s demographic, social, and cultural life specifically in the late eighteenth century, when the court case was filed. The introduction to the document offers some of these details, which the instructor can selectively provide to the group working on the research for this brief presentation. Lastly, a third group can present on the definitions of socially-constructed terms that denoted racial difference like *calidad* and *castiza* and why they

<sup>23</sup> Lang, *Small Teaching*, 99.

mattered in this particular legal case. Students in this group can use the footnotes on the court case transcript and, surely, any textbook assigned for the course to look for terms and definitions and share a persuasive interpretation of the racial language used in the case. Students will give these brief presentations in a strategic order: before and during the role-playing activity.

A skit in which some students perform the roles of historical figures engaged in a legal dispute at an imaginary courtroom while other students interject at key points to provide crucial background details to an imaginary contemporary audience will generate, I hope, an engaging interplay of past and present understandings of legal and social culture in colonial Mexico and Latin America more broadly. Assigning students different roles that are directly and indirectly related to the content of the lawsuit can help foment more dynamism and give *all* students a crucial sense of responsibility. This can also help students see that “both diversity of and participation by every student are of value” to the activity and, more generally, to the course.<sup>24</sup>

<b>Professor:</b> introduces the skit and calls on Group 1 for general information	<b>(Continues after brief recess)</b>
<b>Group 1:</b> Provides general historical highlights about San Juan Teotihuacan in Mexico (5 minutes max)	<b>Volunteer 1:</b> Mayor Velasco returns and orders first testimony (17.3)
<b>Professor:</b> Transitions from the broad to the narrow by calling on Group 2	<b>Volunteer 3:</b> Don Bernabé, qualified surgeon, reads his testimony (17.4)
<b>Group 2:</b> Follows up by providing specific details about eighteenth-century San Juan Teotihuacan, for context (5 minutes max)	<b>Volunteer 1:</b> Mayor Velasco orders second testimony
<b>Professor:</b> Connects background with lawsuit and calls on students to start role-playing	<b>Volunteer 4:</b> Don Felipe, master surgeon, reads his testimony (17.5)
<b>Volunteer 1:</b> Mayor and judge Don Thomas de Velasco acknowledges receipt of a criminal complaint (17.1)	<b>Volunteer 1:</b> Mayor Velasco orders Jose de Alfaro to present witnesses (17.6)
<b>Volunteer 2:</b> Jose de Alfaro reads his petition and criminal complaint (17.2)	<b>Volunteer 5:</b> Don Manuel Delfin reads his testimony (17.7)
[Volunteer 1 improvises and says an investigation will begin, but calls some experts in first to define terminology used by Alfaro]	(Volunteer 1 improvises and calls second witness)
<b>Group 3:</b> Presents term definitions and their significance (5 minutes max)	<b>Volunteer 6:</b> Manuel José de Ocampo reads his testimony (17.8)
	<b>Professor:</b> Ends activity with discussion questions for the class: “What happened next?” “How did this lawsuit end?”

Figure 4. Order of speakers in the skit and their respective roles.

### *Arranging Class Observations for Feedback*

Carrying out these activities in the history classroom requires coordination, planning, and, above all, commitment to improve the learning experience for future students through student feedback and what Stephen Brookfield calls “critically reflective conversations” with colleagues. He suggests that inviting a colleague to observe our class can “help us notice things we’ve missed and suggest aspects of our practice that need further scrutiny.”<sup>25</sup> Students would have to be warned ahead of time that a faculty visitor will join the class, virtually or in-person, with the sole purpose of observing the instructor’s teaching practice, not grading their work. Our conversations with colleagues interested in contributing to our pedagogical growth can also result in “alternative perspectives on situations we thought we’d analyzed correctly by offering us different readings of students’ behavior or power dynamics.”<sup>26</sup> Discussion of these perspectives can fruitfully highlight areas for improvement. For instance, refining one of the activity’s learning outcomes or trying out new digital tools to boost participation can improve student learning experience and success in the classroom while strengthening faculty pedagogical development and collaboration at our institutions.

<sup>24</sup> Kelly and Zakrajsek, *Advancing Online Teaching*, 143.

<sup>25</sup> Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 116. For other literature on the subject, see Jeffrey A. Fletcher, “Peer Observation of Teaching: A Practical Tool in Higher Education,” *The Journal of Faculty Development* 32, no. 1 (January 2018): 51–64; Anne Brockbank and Ian McGill, *Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education* (Philadelphia, U.S.: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 1998), 108 and 115; David Spencer, “Was Moses Peer Observed? The Ten Commandments of Peer Observation of Teaching,” in *Peer Review of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. International Perspectives*, eds. Judyth Sachs and Mitch Parsell (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 183–99.

<sup>26</sup> Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 116

Along the same lines, taking student feedback seriously is key to better identify student needs, make adjustments, and attract future students to our history classes. More students arriving in college with solid digital literacy skills want to take courses that incorporate active engagement and digital tools to facilitate their learning and interaction with others. As faculty committed to student success, this means that “continued training in digital humanities pedagogy and technological skills” is essential to meet students where they are, exceed their expectations, and promote the study of history in engaging and innovative ways.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Nicole von Germeten, Chris Lindberg, and Meghan Naxer, “Examining the Impact of Historical Role-Playing and Narrative on Motivation in the Online Classroom: Lessons Learned.” White Paper (Oregon State University Ecampus Research Unit, 2024), 7.

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# Teaching the history of Zionism in an Arab Context: Empirical and Ethical Imperatives

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## Introduction: Know Your Enemy?

“AUC Arabs unanimous: Israel has no right to exist” headlined *The Caravan*, the main student newspaper at the American University in Cairo (AUC), on May 10, 2009. “Despite studying at The American University in Cairo, the majority of Arab students here support a hardline view denying Israel’s right to exist . . . Those polled unanimously opposed the existence of the Jewish state, while half said they did not separate Israel from America.”<sup>1</sup>

The Arabic-language article on the same theme was even more provocative on account of its critique of the Egyptian government and the Arab states. A Palestinian student who was interviewed discounted the Arab world’s ability to influence the Palestinian cause, on account of its military and diplomatic weakness. As for Egypt’s position, he interpreted it structurally: “Egypt cannot stand with the Palestinians against Israel, or in other words against America,” because of American economic hegemony. Egypt’s relationship with Israel was particularly sensitive at that moment, since memories were still fresh of the calamitous and lopsided conflict between Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist faction dominating the Gaza Strip, and the Israel Defense Forces, fought in December 2008-January 2009. *The Caravan* noted that some Palestinians and Arabs—and certainly some Egyptians as well—saw the government of Hosni Mubarak as complicit in the massacre of civilians in Gaza, since Mubarak’s government made no secret of its aversion to Hamas’s rule over the tiny enclave.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a former Egyptian diplomat was also quoted, who asserted that Egypt had always upheld the right of the Palestinians to form a state.<sup>3</sup> This was, to be sure, the establishment view. But the opinion of most politically engaged students was probably better epitomized by Professor Rashid Khalidi, a senior Palestinian-American historian, who, while visiting the AUC campus in the wake of the 2011 uprising, declared: “Mubarak was the pillar of the [Israeli] occupation.”<sup>4</sup>

It’s worth noting that the *Caravan*’s opinion poll took place *thirty years* after Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty with one another. It has often been described as a “cold peace,” and the poll shows why. Three decades of diplomatic relations had done almost nothing to assuage anger at the injustice most Arabs perceive as integral, not only to the ongoing occupation of Arab lands seized in the 1967 war, but to the origins and continued existence of the Jewish state. Israel is not just a state with which Egypt shares a border; and most Egyptians’ rejection of Israel

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1 *Caravan*, 10 May 2009, 1 (English).

2 Hamas had seized control of the Gaza Strip from the Fatah-dominated Palestinian National Authority, in June 2007.

3 *Caravan*, “al-Tullab al-`Arab bil-Jami`ah ghayr murtahin li-siyasat Misr tijah Isra’il,” [Arab students at the University uncomfortable with Egypt’s policy toward Israel], 10 May 2009, p. 1 (Arabic).

4 Rashid Khalidi, “The New Middle East after Tunis and Tahrir,” a lecture given at AUC, 13 March 2011. Mubarak had, it is true, been pleading for Washington to intervene to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since at least 1985. On the other hand, it can be argued that the prolongation of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip throughout the 1980s was enabled by the neutralization of Egypt as a military factor in the Arab-Israel conflict, and by President Mubarak’s unwillingness to offend the U.S. by forcefully confronting Israel. More specifically, as Dr. Khalidi indicated to me in an email dated 28 January 2024: “Egypt was central to Israel’s siege on and external control of the Gaza Strip through its acceptance of Israeli control of entry and exit of people and goods.” Prof. Khalidi sees Egypt’s extensive security cooperation with Israel as further evidence of complicity in the occupation. The result of the continuing occupation and lack of progress toward Palestinian self-determination was the First Intifada, which broke out in 1987. See also Ibrahim Ibrahim, “Egypt, Israel and the Palestinians,” in *The Political Economy of Contemporary Egypt* (Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1990), Ibrahim Oweiss, ed., 298-306, esp. 299-302.

would seem to be *categorical*.<sup>5</sup> The fact that about half the persons polled made no distinction between Israel and America highlights another trope in what Hasan Barari calls “Israelism,” his way of referring to ideologically distorted Arab perceptions of Israel. According to Barari, “Israelism” views the state of Israel as basically a product and instrument of Western imperialism, a dependency of the U.S., possessing no indigenous sources of strength and no internal diversity worthy of investigation. Consequently, its culture is perceived to be of marginal interest and its polity as inherently predatory. Barari argues that these a priori assumptions have deformed Arab scholarship on the Zionist state, since the goal has not been understanding its social and historical dynamics, but simply exposing its illegitimacy.<sup>6</sup>

Hamas’s successful surprise attack on Israel, 7 October 2023, and Israel’s massive and ongoing military response—have, if anything, hardened pre-existing antipathies.<sup>7</sup> Arab journalism covering these events characterizes the Israel Defense Forces as the aggressors, and frames Israeli actions as part of a long history of brutalities inflicted on an innocent Palestinian population, albeit describing it as vastly more destructive. AUC’s *Caravan* is a case in point. An article from the Arabic section of the newspaper titled “Defense of the Palestinian Cause on Social Media Channels,” begins: “Many AUC students belonging to a dedicated Facebook group urged the necessity of going out to protest against the aggression [*al-`udwan*] committed by the Israel army against the Palestinians in Gaza since 7 October, similar to the history of the brutalities and persecution [*`ala ghirar tarikh al-intihakat wa al-idtihad*] extending back for decades.” The article goes on to note that this was just the first of many such demonstrations at AUC, and compared the action of AUC students to demonstrations taking place elsewhere in and beyond the Arab world. The article also assesses the journalistic challenge of covering the war, emphasizing the essential role of social media emanating from within Gaza, in providing an “inside” perspective on the effects of Israeli military operations.<sup>8</sup>

One might assume, with these widespread prejudices and the type of media coverage given to the explosions of intercommunal violence in Israel/Palestine, that Egyptian/Arab students at AUC would be unreceptive to a course on the history of Zionism. After all, why devote academic study to what is perceived to be a fundamentally

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5 This is in contrast to the assertion of Menna Abukhadra in her intriguing article, “How Resources Shape Pedagogy: Israel Studies at Cairo University,” *Teaching the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Rachel S. Harris, ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), 227-242. While Professor Abukhadra’s statement (“The categorical rejection of Israel no longer exists. . .”, p. 231) pertains to attitudes at Cairo University, it is unlikely that attitudes at AUC are substantially different than those held by students at Cairo University in this regard. Nor does it seem to me likely that the difference in date of the two sources (the *Caravan* article appeared 2009; Abukhadra’s article appeared 2019) reflects a transformative evolution in attitudes during that decade, though a modicum of change cannot be ruled out. I taught this course when the so-called “Abraham Accords” were agreed in 2020 (agreements to normalize relations between the U.A.E. and Bahrain on one side, and Israel on the other), and students disagreed sharply over the question of their legitimacy. Some students viewed the normalization of relations as a betrayal of Arab solidarity with the Palestinians (a view I expected); other students however took a position based mostly on Realpolitik, arguing that normalization was long overdue, and proved that Anwar Sadat, in his diplomatic acceptance of Israel into the region, was ahead of his time.

6 Hassan A. Barari, *Israelism: Arab Scholarship on Israel, a critical assessment* (Reading, U.K.: Ithaca Press, 2009), 21, 25, 28. The logical consequence of the Arab position, as Barari suggests, is the expectation that Israel would collapse were it not for its external patrons, and especially the aid it receives from the U.S. To be sure, this perception is not without a factual basis, since U.S. aid to Israel was and is enormous: \$158 billion since 1948 (Congressional Research Service, “U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Middle East: Historical, Recent Trends, and the FY2024 Background Request,” 15 August 2023, p. 5).

7 There is much that remains obscure about the current conflict, but an attempt to confront ahistorical treatments of the 7 October events is found in Tareq Baconi, “An Inevitable Rupture: Al-Aqsa Flood and the End of Partition,” *Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*, 26 Nov. 2023, <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/an-inevitable-rupture-al-aqsa-flood-and-the-end-of-partition/> For a discussion of the Gaza conflict that foregrounds Israeli perspectives, one may consult the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/israel-hamas-war-frequently-asked-questions>. A recent mainstream journalistic evaluation from a third-party perspective is found in Jeremy Bowen’s work: “Israel-Gaza Briefing: obstacles to peace seem larger than ever after six months of war” *BBC World News*, 7 April, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68735869>

8 *The Caravan*, 17 December 2023. The transliterated title of the article: *al-difa` `an al-qadiya al-filastiniyya `ala wasa'il al-tawassul al-ijtima`i*. Translations by the author.

illegitimate polity, a Trojan horse of American imperialism, a colonial oppressor, and, now, an alleged perpetrator of genocide? Except perhaps to understand better how to eliminate it—and a significant number of students, in response to a first-day-of-class questionnaire, have indicated that their reason for studying Zionism is to “know your enemy.”

In this regard, students at AUC and at Cairo University were, and probably remain, in full agreement. There, *unlike* at AUC, studies of modern Israel were at first philological in nature; instruction in modern Hebrew was the point of departure from which the curriculum expanded to include the history of Zionism, Israeli politics and society, and other Jewish studies courses. Nonetheless, a basic hostility has continued to inform attitudes toward the government and people of Israel, as Professor Abukhadra has observed.

The successive wars between Arabs and Israel significantly influenced the development of the teaching of Modern Hebrew language and the orientation of Israel studies at Cairo University. The 1948 Palestine War, the 1956 Suez War, the June 1967 Six-Day War, the 1969-70 War of Attrition, the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, the 1982 Lebanon War, and the 1991 Gulf War affected Israel studies in general and teaching about Zionism in particular, making it a program for “studying the enemy.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet, despite this seemingly static and unfavorable climate of opinion, the History Department at AUC launched a course on Zionism which is now in its twentieth year. This article is offered as a reflection on two decades of experience in teaching this course. The article will: (a) document the origins and reception of the course; (b) describe some of the challenges students and instructors faced at the outset, including in particular the identification of some key personalities and terms; (c) detail later modifications and enhancements to the curriculum; and (d) show how teaching a similar course at an American college threw light on differences and similarities between students in the U.S. and Egypt with respect to Zionism/Israel. The article is supplemented by appendices that include a list of documentary anthologies, the latest iteration of the syllabus, a set of heuristic questions for instructors, and guidelines for students preparing a primary-source research project.

My purpose in presenting this article is twofold. First, I wish to show that, with appropriate sources and structures, a “charged classroom” can foster rather than frustrate critical thinking. Second, and integrally related to the previous point, I hope to demonstrate how teaching the history of an identity-based conflict can serve a humanizing purpose, as variegated experiences and perspectives are explored, which undermine the stereotyping present in official and unofficial histories.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the encounter with primary sources in this context fulfills an ethical imperative assumed in all history-teaching, by recovering voices that have been lost, or suppressed because of conflict, thereby encouraging empathy for the other.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Abukhadra, “Israel Studies at Cairo University,” 229. It is perhaps worth noting that Professor Abukhadra’s naming of these wars assumes, for the most part, the Israeli perspective on them, or mixes Israeli and Arab nomenclature (though she is certainly fully conscious of the designations indicated here). The 1948 Palestine War is Israel’s “War of Independence”; in Arabic it is universally recognized as *al-Nakba* [“the Disaster”]; here it is simply the 1948 Palestine War. The 1956 war in Egypt is more commonly and more descriptively designated as the *al-`Udwan al-Thulathi* [“the Tripartite Aggression”]; the 1967 war is generally called *al-Naksa* [“the Setback”]; the 1973 war is usually *Harb Uktubar* (“the October War”) or the Ramadan War. The 1982 invasion of Lebanon is perhaps harder to characterize in a single widely accepted phrase: the Israelis called it “Operation Peace for Galilee” since it aimed to destroy the Lebanese bases of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Whatever the names, this litany of wars highlights the enormously destructive interstate violence that has punctuated the Arab-Zionist conflict.

10 Sarah Warshauer Freedman et al, “Teaching History after Identity-Based Conflicts: The Rwanda Experience,” *Comparative Education Review*, 52.4 (2008), 663-690. The article refers first to “entrenched unofficial histories,” since there was a moratorium on history-teaching in Rwanda for more than a decade after the genocide of 1994; however, the article also offers a critique of the government-sponsored “official history” (675-676).

11 “Empathy” not “sympathy”: I owe an emphasis on the distinction to Yoav Alon of Tel Aviv University. “Sympathy” in this case would imply agreement with Zionist arguments: “empathy” implies an understanding of the Zionists’ situation and logic, without endorsing it. I recall Matthew Ellis of Sarah Lawrence College making a similar point at the Endeavor Dialogue on Teaching the Middle East, Sarah Lawrence College, 13-14 November 2014. A brief but useful discussion of this distinction is found at the Wiki funded by the European Commission, “The Embassy of Good Science,” under the heading, “Empathy in Historical Research and Education.” Available at: <https://embassy.science/wiki/Theme:Cba7ec29-d4b6-47c0-9b47-a587e972c971>

## A “Jazzy” New Course?

Teaching the history of Zionism wasn't my idea; in fact, I was skeptical about the proposal. But my colleague, Mark Sedgwick, insisted that students would be attracted to this course, and we were being urged by our Dean—the late Nick Hopkins, a prolific scholar and a doughty defender of liberal education—to invent, as he put it, some “jazzy” new courses to increase enrollments in the humanities and social sciences. Mark proposed “What is Zionism?” It was approved, Mark started teaching it, and student demand for the course was consistently high. Does this demand for knowledge of Zionism cast doubt on the *Caravan's* assertion that AUC student opinion about Jews/Israel is monolithically negative? I think it does, as interviews with former students show, and as will be discussed below.

As the original title of the course suggests, Mark assumed—correctly—that most of our students had heard of Zionism, and “knew” it was something evil, but really didn't know what it was. The course therefore begins with references to foundational terms, personalities, and movements. I will digress here into some details about this part of the course.

I begin with “Zion,” since few students know this metonymy, Mount Zion being the location of the ancient Jewish temple, thus evoking Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Despite this and other biblical borrowings in Zionism's vocabulary, I define “Zionism” as a secular nationalist movement, since this was its formulation by its leading exponents, Leon Pinsker and Theodor Herzl, both secular Jews. There continues to be considerable confusion about how Judaism and Zionism are related to one another, which is not surprising. Without entirely resolving this confusion, I have sought to clarify by suggesting to students that one can be born a Jew, but one cannot be born a Zionist. Moreover, traditional Jewish eschatology is oriented toward God as the agent of a future and miraculous Jewish redemption, whereas Zionism is ideologically-driven Jewish self-emancipation in the present, and must be seen as contiguous with other nationalist movements of the nineteenth-century Europe. As Amos Elon noted, every important Zionist treatise before Herzl was inspired by a nationalist pulsation in central or eastern Europe.<sup>12</sup> However, unlike the other European peoples that established, or sought to establish, newly independent nation-states, the Jews lacked a common vernacular and were not concentrated in their ancestral land. As a result, a Hebrew cultural revival and Jewish colonization of Palestine, complemented and in fact preceded the drive for sovereignty and independence, which was effectively launched (or, more precisely, re-launched, after the faltering of *Hovevei Zion*) by Theodor Herzl, with his convening of the First Zionist Congress, in 1897.<sup>13</sup>

To return to our narrative of the course's development: some years later, after Mark Sedgwick had left AUC and I inherited his course, I interviewed him about his rationale for creating the course, reminding him of my erstwhile skepticism.<sup>14</sup> I thought that, as a foreign national residing in Egypt, showing an avid interest in Zionism and explicating it to Egyptian and Arab students, might provoke suspicions that one was a Zionist agent—which might sound like paranoia, but isn't. AUC is a well-established institution in Egypt, now over a century old; but

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It is not superfluous to add that, as of this writing, the current conflict, sparked by atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October 2023, which included the killing of some 1200 Israelis—answered by an Israeli counterattack that has so far killed over 30,000 Palestinians, displaced most of the population of the Gaza Strip, and made large areas of the enclave uninhabitable—has made attainment of historically-grounded empathy more difficult, yet perhaps for precisely that reason also more imperative.

12 Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (New York: Penguin, 1983), X. Elon refers here to Yehuda Alkalai, Moses Hess, Zvi Kalisher, and Leon Pinsker, whose works drew inspiration from, respectively, the nationalist movements of Greeks, Italians, Poles, and Bulgarians.

13 On the 1897 Zionist Congress, see Michael J. Reimer, *The First Zionist Congress: An Annotated Translation of the Proceedings* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2019). The question of Zionism's relationship to European colonialism is addressed in Part III of *Colonialism and the Jews*, Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017). For Herzl, there can be no doubt that he was proud of Zionism's colonial credentials. In his 1896 work, *Der Judenstaat*, he foresaw a Jewish state in Palestine that would form a rampart of European civilization against Asiatic barbarism, whose existence would also be guaranteed by Europe. See chapter 2, Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), online edition at [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25282/25282-h/25282-h.htm#II\\_The\\_Jewish\\_Question](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25282/25282-h/25282-h.htm#II_The_Jewish_Question).

14 Interview with Mark Sedgwick, Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies, Aarhus University, 21 June 2011 (Cairo).

when I arrived in 1990, veteran colleagues cautioned me that Egypt's public intellectuals, both secularist and Islamist, had not forgotten AUC's alien missionary origins.<sup>15</sup>

I was also worried that the course would become a forum for bigoted polemics. After all, most of us already knew what the results of the *Caravan's* poll had confirmed, i.e., that nearly all Arabs were anti-Zionist, and that anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic canards were and are common currency all over the Arab world.<sup>16</sup> The infamous forgery "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," originally a product of Russian anti-Semites and purporting to reveal the details of a Jewish conspiracy for world domination, has by now a long history of being cited as an authentic source for understanding Jews and Judaism.<sup>17</sup> Denial of the reality of the Holocaust was a feature of Egypt's national history curriculum, though this is mitigated somewhat by considerable variation in the curricula of private schools, from which most AUC students come.<sup>18</sup> Many students have informed me that the blue stripes on Israel's flag are the Nile and the Euphrates, and that the flag is standing evidence that the Israelis are determined to conquer all the lands between the two rivers.<sup>19</sup> What would be accomplished by having this formidable mythology rehearsed

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15 On which see Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), see esp. chs. 4-5.

16 It is important to emphasize that anti-Zionism in the Arab world has a long history, and was not born out of a prior anti-Semitism (although the two have certainly become intertwined). The King-Crane Commission, appointed by Woodrow Wilson to survey political opinions in Syria and Anatolia just after the end of World War I, noted a fierce anti-Zionism among Arabs all over the Levant. To quote that report *in extenso*:

"If . . . the wishes of Palestine's population are to be decisive as to what is to be done with Palestine, then it is to be remembered that the non-Jewish population of Palestine—nearly nine tenths of the whole—are emphatically against the entire Zionist program. The tables show that there was no one thing upon which the population of Palestine were more agreed than upon this. To subject a people so minded to unlimited Jewish immigration, and to steady financial and social pressure to surrender the land, would be a gross violation of the principle just quoted, and of the people's rights, though it kept within the forms of law.

It is to be noted also that the feeling against the Zionist program is not confined to Palestine, but shared very generally by the people throughout Syria as our conferences clearly showed. More than 72 per cent—1,350 in all-of all the petitions in the whole of Syria were directed against the Zionist program. . . The Peace Conference should not shut its eyes to the fact that the anti-Zionist feeling in Palestine and Syria is intense and not lightly to be flouted. No British officer, consulted by the Commissioners, believed that the Zionist program could be carried out except by force of arms."

For a digitized copy of the King-Crane Commission Report, see: [https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/951](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/951)

17 Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York: Norton, 1986), 208-210. Lewis points out that some Arab intellectuals were and are aware of the dubious origins of the Protocols. But it is fair to say that they continue to represent a significant element in popular anti-Semitism. On this, see Eric T. Justin, "Protocols of the Elders of Crazy," *The Harvard Crimson*, 3 October 2011: <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2011/10/3/arab-world-antisemitism-jews>

18 As documented by Marisa Jones, "Holocaust education in Egyptian secondary schools," M.A. thesis in Middle East Studies, American University in Cairo, 2008. Statistics on the "feeder schools" for AUC may exist, but I've been unable to extract such data from the AUC administration. My guess, based on several decades of experience, is that most of our students come from private institutions, where the national curriculum, if used, is significantly modified. The "AUC Profile," compiled annually by the AUC's office of data collection (which has gone under various names, but is now called "Strategic Management and Institutional Effectiveness" or SMIE), shows that most students do not enter AUC on the basis of results attained on the standardized Egyptian school-leaving examination, the Thanawiya Amma. In fact, surveying the secondary-school certificates received by entering AUC students for the past decade (2013-2023), one finds that fewer than 20% of students have done the Thanawiya Amma throughout this period, and that this percentage has been declining. These numbers can also be considered a rough measure of the curriculum students have been exposed to in secondary school. Perhaps the most striking and relevant example in this context is Cairo's best-known German school (Deutsche Evangelische Oberschule), where a unit on the Holocaust is actually a required element of the curriculum. For the AUC profile, consult <https://www.aucegypt.edu/about/auc-profile-and-fact-book>

19 For a fuller account of this particular canard, see Daniel Pipes, "Imperial Israel: The Nile to Euphrates Calumny," *Middle East Quarterly*, March 1994, available online at <https://www.danielpipes.org/247/imperial-israel-the-nile-to-euphrates-calumny>. Pipes mentions that the flag's design recalls the Jewish prayer shawl, and notes the fact that the Israelis withdrew from the Sinai after conquering it—which would suggest that Israel does not aim to annex the lands between Palestine and the Nile. In my experience,

in a course? Would Arab students really be open to looking at Judaism and Zionism critically and historically—for example, by distinguishing between them?

Fortunately, Mark brushed aside my anxieties from the first. As he explained, he structured his syllabus to preempt rancorous discussions about assigning or apportioning *blame* for the Palestinian-Israeli/Arab-Israeli conflict. The idea was to approach Zionism phenomenologically, to understand its origins and development “from the inside.” Mark saw clearly from the beginning that Western and Arab cultures have such different points of departure in their treatment of Zionism, that reconciling their points of view would be difficult if not impossible. But that did not mean that Arabs could not or would not want to learn about the history of this ideological movement in a more objective way. Mark intuited an unmet demand for genuinely historical knowledge about Judaism and Zionism, in contrast to the misinformation transmitted by school curricula and public media.

Mark’s intuition was confirmed for me when I conducted my own informal poll of about a dozen students who had taken this course.<sup>20</sup> When asked why they enrolled in this course, many answered in terms that acknowledged the inadequacies of the perspective to which they had been exposed as Egyptians and Arabs. One student put it baldly:

Because we are born in the Arab countries, we are taught to hate Jews and Israelis without really knowing why. All we know is that they are the bad guys, they took the land that wasn’t theirs but we’re not really grasping the details of the whole issue—we don’t know that there’s a difference between a Jew and being an Israeli. If you’re a Jew, you’re basically the enemy.<sup>21</sup>

On the positive side, the course was viewed as an unusual, even unique, opportunity to learn in greater depth about a topic all my students had heard about for years, which also explains why so many students whose majors are unrelated to history or politics have enrolled. Thus, students said the course was “an excellent opportunity to learn about Zionism from a non-Egyptian perspective,” to get beyond stereotypes, to understand Zionism from an “academic point of view not just rumors”; “to understand the viewpoint of the Zionist narrative”; and, since students suggested they knew they were “not really getting the whole picture” from what they heard about “Zionism and Jews and Palestinians” the course “made it more rational—the whole Zionist project.” While emotions have sometime made the classroom atmosphere tense, I have been impressed by the maturity of students, their willingness to grapple with readings that contradict their assumptions about Zionism, and, in general, their emerging empathy with the history of Jewish suffering.

### Reading, and Relating to Jews and Zionism

To be sure, there were tough challenges which both Mark and I, and the several other professors who have taught the course, encountered.

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these arguments do not always shake the firmness of this belief, and the Pipes article cites Yasser Arafat and other Arab leaders who disseminated what Pipes calls a “calumny.” While Pipes performs a valuable service in this article by tracing the probable origins of this idea, he dismisses rather glibly the Jewish Bible as a potential source of territorial and legal claims, and also omits a crucial piece of evidence which he must have been aware of. LEHI, the militant organization founded by Avraham Stern, whose adherents included future Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, made explicit its ambition to extend the borders of the Jewish state from the Nile to the Euphrates. For the LEHI program, see <https://www.saveisrael.com/stern/saveisraelstern.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> I was not the only one to teach this course after Mark’s departure from AUC (in 2007). The others were Joel Beinin (Stanford) and Sherene Seikaly (UCSB), who both did stints at AUC. The survey (which included students who took the course with aforementioned colleagues as well as myself) was conducted by my research assistant, Nareman Amin, in 2010; I prepared the questions and she interviewed the students. I want to register my appreciation for her work (Nareman holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Princeton and now teaches at Michigan State University). Our intention was to publish the results much earlier; but the Arab Spring intervened shortly as we were preparing to do so, and one delay led to another. However, as I review the comments of students in 2010, I find them to be consistent with attitudes expressed by students after 2010, up to the present, in 2024, since I have continued to ask students similar questions on my own. Indeed, the current conflict in Gaza has intensified the vocal anti-Zionism of the AUC student body, and, at the same time, spiked a surge of interest in the course.

<sup>21</sup> Per above, 2010 questionnaire. I should add that the same student also said: “The thing is, there are some Jews who are advocating the Palestinian cause, and they’re actually working for it more than the Arabs are.”

The first and biggest challenge in teaching this course is the requirement that the students engage in what has been termed “deep reading,” i.e., “the array of sophisticated processes that compel comprehension and that include inferential and deductive reasoning, analogical skills, critical analysis, reflection, and thought.”<sup>22</sup> And the issue is certainly not limited to this course, though the readings I assign sharpen its salience. Again and again I find that *students read yet don’t read*: i.e., they scan words and sentences but don’t take the message that is being conveyed, often even at the most basic level of comprehension, let alone at subtler intertextual levels. Some of this has to do with the relative age of our texts: every source-text I assign in the first month of this course is over a century old (of course, a good many are translated): Zangwill’s “Child of the Ghetto”; an 1882 article in *The Economist* about Russian Jews; Leon Pinsker’s *Autoemancipation*; Theodor Herzl’s *The Jewish State*; Max Nordau’s speech at the First Zionist Congress in 1897; letters of a woman whose family settled in Palestine in 1889; a couple of journalistic pieces by Ahad Ha’am; and Yitzhak Epstein’s landmark essay, “A Hidden Question,” about the impact of Zionist immigration and settlement on Palestine Arabs in the first few decades of the movement’s history. I have perhaps not sufficiently appreciated the extent to which terminology and writing styles have changed over the past century. The problem may also have to do with the struggle of reading complex texts in a second or third language; frequently, when I ask students to explain significant terms, they are unable to do so, which shows that they don’t stop to look up unfamiliar terms (they are under pressure from courses in their majors and so economize time for electives like this one). I have a suspicion that the foregoing problems are exacerbated by the fact that texts are now usually read in a virtual format, and that relatively few students take notes or otherwise interact with the text as they read. Finally, there are the inevitable distractions of social media, which can subvert the concentration of even the most disciplined readers.

In spite of the aforesaid difficulties, the confrontation with these source-texts has many advantages, and is indispensable to circumventing inherited prejudices. First, it allows Jews to speak for themselves. Recovering historical Jewish voices, as both agents and victims, de-objectifies “the enemy” and disrupts the totalizing narrative of anti-Semitism. While I guide the students to understand the texts, I don’t defend or refute the Zionist case; they ponder for themselves whether or not they find Zionist arguments convincing. Second, it allows the students to see that, from its very beginnings, Zionism was not monolithic: it had diverse strands and lacerating divisions within it, and that some of its severest critics were Jews. Many students have heard of Herzl, and imagine him to be an iconic Jewish leader (as he is). But very few know of Ahad Ha’am, so there is relish in the revelation that Herzl’s most brilliant critic was a Russian Jew, a Zionist as well, but with a very different understanding of Zionism’s past attainments and proper purpose. A third reason for my dependence on primary sources is that I want the students to get accustomed to reading and analyzing such texts, anticipating the research component of the course, which requires the students to locate, collate, and analyze a small set of primary sources on a set topic within Zionist history, entirely on their own (see supporting documents).

It is perhaps appropriate to note here that, in structuring my syllabus, I follow the scholarly consensus that the appropriate context for understanding the rise of Zionism is the experience of the Ashkenazic Jewish communities in nineteenth-century Europe. Thus, our texts establish, as suggested above, that Zionism did not arise organically from Judaism but as a radical ideological departure from traditional Jewish spirituality. Zionism was, rather, a humanistic response informed by the ideals of nationalism, to the perception that anti-Semitism in Europe, especially in the Russian Empire, was jeopardizing Jewish life, livelihood, and identity, and that salvation lay in the creation of a Jewish sovereignty. But even before we come to the crossroads represented by the secular Zionism of Pinsker and Herzl, I ease students into modern Jewish history by supplying them with some readings that are decidedly non-Zionist. The first is “A Child of the Ghetto,” a fictional piece by Israel Zangwill, an enchanting

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22 M. Wolf and M. Barzillai, “The Importance of Deep Reading: What will it take for the next generation to read thoughtfully—both in print and online?,” *Educational Leadership*, 66.6, 1 March 2009. Available online at: <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-importance-of-deep-reading>. For a view sympathetic to student resistance to heavy reading loads, see Maha Bali, “To Read, or Not to Read . . . But That’s Not the Question!,” *New Chalk Talk* [AUC Center for Learning and Teaching], 11.2, 20 September 2011. Available online at: [https://documents.aucegypt.edu/docs/llt\\_clt\\_ChalkTalk/Volume%2011/Vol%2011%20Issue%202.pdf](https://documents.aucegypt.edu/docs/llt_clt_ChalkTalk/Volume%2011/Vol%2011%20Issue%202.pdf)

and allegorical portrait of Jewish life before and after Emancipation.<sup>23</sup> I also have them read sections of an article about Reform Judaism, written by a Reform Jew at a time when Zionism was still an embryonic movement.<sup>24</sup> Its value consists in its delineation of a Jewish identity that contrasts with Orthodox Judaism and Zionism (and one almost totally alien and unknown to my students). Since Reform Jews broke with Orthodox conceptions of Jewish history and eschatology, and have generally regarded their Jewishness as a confessional rather than ethnonational identity, they were, at first, anathematized by the Orthodox, while they in turn anathematized the Zionists. To be sure, an enormous shift in the Reform Jewish assessments of Zionism/Israel took place, especially after 1967, since most Reform Jews are now staunch defenders of Israel; this shift is discussed later in the course.<sup>25</sup> Although the situation is admittedly not so simple, the students begin to see that there are three different ways of being and remaining Jewish in the modern era. Reform Judaism can be interpreted as a response and adaptation to modernity.<sup>26</sup> And since it preceded and opposed Zionism, its existence demonstrates the variety of ways by which Jews negotiated their place in modern society.

A second pedagogical challenge arises from the fact that the course attracted a larger and more varied clientele than anticipated. Many students who had had little or no experience with the academic study of history enrolled in the course. But this was and is an upper-division course with a substantial writing component; so, inevitably, some of these unseasoned students, while perhaps interested in the topic, had great difficulty with essay examinations and the research assignment. Moreover, the bulk of the readings were translations of the writings of Jews and Zionists, which meant that students were listening in on conversations which had, for them, almost no context. While this was and is a problem, I don't think it's insurmountable; providing context, or rather *contexts*, is a big part of what a history teacher does when students read any document in any course. But it does call for heightened attentiveness on the part of the students: a quick and casual encounter with the text generally produces much confusion (as demonstrated, unfortunately, on many student essays); and while my attempts to provide context can help, they are intended to encourage "the slower, more cognitively demanding comprehension processes that go into the formation of deep reading and deep thinking."<sup>27</sup> To nurture these processes, I find that the successful teaching of this course depends, perhaps more than most other courses, on my willingness to invest time in individual consultations with the students, especially as they prepare their research papers.

A third challenge, also related to the alienness of Zionism's origins, has to do with the experiential constraints of AUC students, who interact within a relatively homogeneous student body. To explicate this point, I refer to the work of Shanna Kirschner, who published an insightful article in *Political Science* about teaching Middle East politics at Allegheny College (and with whom I taught a "connected course" in 2013, discussed below). Her article, subtitled "Pedagogy in the Charged Classroom," reflects on her experience of teaching at Allegheny, but contains, in spite of the very different backgrounds from which our students hail, observations that are relevant to what happens in teaching about Zionism at AUC. In both cases, at Allegheny and at AUC, instructors are teaching about peoples, cultures, and conflicts, about which many students hold strong opinions based on ideologically colored

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23 I. Zangwill, "A Child of the Ghetto" in *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1923), 1-20. Available online at: <https://archive.org/details/dreamersofghetto0000unse/page/n7/mode/2up>

24 Kaufmann Kohler et al, "Reform Judaism from the Point of View of the Reform Jew," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906, online edition.

25 American Jewish attitudes toward the state of Israel, including the attitudes of Reform Jews, were transformed by the events before, during, and after the Six Day War of 1967. This is a large subject in itself, but works that document and explicate the reality of that transformation include: Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 169-176; and Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 315-318. Glazer points out that American Jewish devotion to the state of Israel had been lukewarm prior to the 1967 crisis. Then, suddenly, even young Jewish radicals were "surprised and astonished by their own depth of feeling" toward what they perceived to be the Jewish state's existential peril, and its almost miraculous victory.

26 I have cribbed my description of Reform Judaism as a "response to modernity" from a standard work on the subject: Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995).

27 Wolf and Barzillai, "The Importance of Deep Reading."

data but generally formed in the absence of direct experience.<sup>28</sup> Just as Allegheny students crave knowledge of the Middle East that goes beyond stereotypes and media representations, so also my Egyptian and Arab students express a desire for a more objective and neutral view of Jews, Judaism, Zionism, and Israel, as I've indicated above. To put it succinctly, students in both places recognize much of what they have been fed is propaganda, and they acknowledge ignorance, positive intellectual moves that are foundational to critical thinking. So far so good. But militating against critical thinking in this regard is the absence of personal experience which would call into question simplistic generalizations to which they have been exposed. At Allegheny, most students aren't from the Middle East and haven't visited the region, so the "knowledge" they have is generally not triangulated with personal experience or relationships. Similarly for my students: very few have visited the state of Israel; and the Jewish community in Egypt is so small, it's unlikely they will ever encounter a Jewish person, let alone an Israeli, except perhaps when travelling in Europe or the U.S.<sup>29</sup> In such a situation, the influence of local Arabic media and the stereotyping perpetuated by family and community are magnified, sometimes producing questions—or assertions disguised as questions—that reflect a profound but unrecognized confusion and/or ignorance.<sup>30</sup>

Kirschner argues persuasively that the best way to deal with beliefs based on ignorance and lack of experience is not to suppress them, but to get students to "simultaneously question and defend their beliefs." I think this summarizes brilliantly the *raison d'être* of the university as a whole. We are not, or should not be, in the business of deriding students' beliefs, whatever we think of them; but we are obliged to disturb their dogmatic slumbers, by confronting them with the reality that other persons, groups, nations, religions, cultures, etc., hold different views and think they have good reasons for holding them. Actually, I believe that the attempt to defend an indefensible assertion will generally have a far greater impact on the student, than being "put down" by a professor or fellow student. I was gratified that one student who took this course commented as follows: "It's okay to be critical of Israel. . . . But in order to be critical about Israel, you have to truly know the Zionist narrative; you can't go on criticizing Israel without having a rational, objective and informed opinion. What Israel is, what it has been, what it's based on, how it was established."<sup>31</sup>

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28 For the following, cf. Shanna Kirschner, "Teaching the Middle East: Pedagogy in a Charged Classroom," *Political Science* (Oct. 2012), 753-758.

29 In this regard, students at Cairo University seem to have an advantage. Some students of modern Hebrew at CU obtain Hebrew language materials from the Israeli academic center in Cairo; some prefer to get their texts through other channels. According to Abukhadra, there has been an explosion of interest in "Oriental Languages" at CU, such that the resources available in Hebrew have proved insufficient to meet demand. See Abukhadra, "Israel Studies at Cairo University," 232-233. In addition, as Professor Abukhadra indicates, the internet has made access to resources for the study of Hebrew language and Israeli society vastly easier for her students (231).

It is appropriate to acknowledge here one of the major lacunae in my course at AUC, i.e., failure to give proper attention to the history of Jewish communities in the Middle East.

A few on-campus events have mitigated this failure, though only to a very limited extent. Ms. Magda Haroun, leader of the Egyptian Jewish community, has spoken at AUC several times; and the film "Jews of Egypt" (2012) has been shown on campus as well. The emphasis of these events has been on the loyalty to Egypt of Egyptian Jews, and their repudiation of Zionism (the latter being one reason why I've left them out of this course). But I'm painfully aware that the history of Middle Eastern Jewry is much larger and more complex, and deserves a course of its own.

30 Some examples: How can a person be Jewish and not believe in the Torah, or God? Weren't the Jews hated because they were greedy moneylenders? Was the discrimination against the Jews in Europe really so bad? How did the Jews get complete control over U.S. media? Why do the Jews hate the Muslims, since they were treated well by Islamic governments?

31 This is perhaps an appropriate place to insert a disclaimer concerning the course, which will appear in the current syllabus. The course deals with some aspects of the history of Israel after 1948. But it does not and cannot examine all aspects of Israeli politics and society, nor does it cover in detail the many wars fought between Israel and the Arab states, and the succession of conflicts between Israel and various Palestinian groups. However, it does seek to discern to what extent tendencies and tensions present in Zionism from before the formation of the state, continue to affect Israeli politics to the present day, and similarly with regard to Zionist views of and interactions with Palestinians and other Arabs.

One way in which AUC has sought to overcome the intellectual lethargy arising from the relative homogeneity of its student body, is by encouraging the enrollment of international students. In the first decade of the new century, AUC saw an uptick in “international students,” mostly students from the U.S. and Europe, taking a year or semester abroad. There were Jews as well as non-Jews among them; and a good number of these students took Zionist history. As my colleague Mark surmised, this was evidence that a course of this kind was not only a rarity in the Arab world, but that there seemed to be unmet demand for it in Western countries as well. Whatever our international students’ motivation for enrolling, the diversity of experience and opinion they brought was beneficial to class discussion. It simulated the ethnic and political pluralism which our students will have to deal throughout their lives, and it stimulated reasoned debate. This mixing of non-Egyptian/non-Arab students into our courses helped to raise the intellectual level of discussion, forcing our students to offer rational defenses of views that are simply taken for granted among Egyptians. Unfortunately, the flow of international students in AUC dried up over the last decade, and one student lamented the consequence: “There weren’t any strong discussions and, sadly so, because we only had one American in a class filled with Egyptians who more or less share similar views of Zionism. I think the class would be perfect if it enjoyed a mixture of Arabs and Americans, who then can discuss, challenge, criticize . . .”

Another way to overcome the lethargy induced by homogeneity, is to hold virtual discussions with classes in other countries. In 2013, Shanna Kirschner and I, with the support of the Global Liberal Arts Alliance, worked on setting up “connected courses,” although our curricula were so different we limited the “connectedness” to having our students talk to each other in a couple of videoconferences. They were assigned to read some common texts relating to Middle East politics, but the main benefit of the exercise was that it allowed the students to ask each other questions, and to see that there was diversity of opinion on both sides of the ocean. I recall the discussion of one question in particular, i.e., why the U.S. is so generous and unwavering in its support for the state of Israel—a topic of perennial interest and debate in the Arab Middle East. As one of my colleagues observed, when you have a couple of classes interacting in this way, they are usually very polite at first and the discussion boring; you have to wait for someone to say something outrageous for the discussion take off! In this case, one of the American students asserted that U.S. help to Israel grew out of a natural American sympathy for the “underdog.” That comment was enough to ignite a firestorm among my students, who were quick to point out that one can hardly characterize a state possessing the most powerful military in the region, and the only one with a nuclear arsenal, as an “underdog”—evidence of our students’ sensitivity to the asymmetry of power in the relationship between Israel and the Arabs, and in particular the Palestinians.

A fourth pedagogical challenge ties into Shanna Kirschner’s essay in another way, inasmuch as her article deals with the place of emotions in the “charged classroom.” I have gradually come to believe that the release of emotions in a classroom setting, while uncomfortable, is not necessarily to be avoided, though we cannot permit anger or hatred to be directed at individuals in the classroom. It’s certainly true that emotion can derail dialogue. But it can also remind us that our class discussions are not intellectual games. For many different reasons, discussion of the rise of Zionism and the consequent conflict between Arabs and Zionists/Israelis causes blood to boil on all sides.

I said above that few of my Egyptian and Arab students have had personal contact with Jews or Israelis, know very little about Judaism or Zionism, and almost no one has visited Israel. This is not the same as suggesting that Israel has had no impact on their lives or the lives of family members. Since I started teaching at AUC, I have had hundreds of students whose grandfathers or fathers, uncles, cousins, or other relations, fought in Egypt’s wars with Israel. I have also had a fair number of Palestinian students. Some are from families displaced in 1948; some experienced, and continue to experience, the Israeli occupation with its degradations both great and small; some have lived through aerial bombardment. For the latter groups in particular, Zionism and Israel are not remote historical abstractions, or objects of political calculation, but intrusive everyday realities.<sup>32</sup> It would be unrealistic,

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32 My former student, Yasmeen Elkhoudary, expresses eloquently how the history of Zionism haunts Palestinians: see her “The Balfour Declaration isn’t history, it’s an everyday reality for Palestinians,” *The Guardian (Opinion)*, 1 November 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/01/balfour-declaration-palestinian-arabs-palestine>

even inhuman, to exclude emotion from a classroom in the light of these experiences.

### **Modifications and Enhancements: Eschatology; Palestinian Voices; Balfour**

Over the years of teaching the course, I've become increasingly aware that, in emphasizing the essentially secular nature of Zionism and of the conflict between Arabs and Israelis, I am guilty of minimizing narratives which for a great many people give Zionism and the Palestine issue a meaning that transcends politics. I refer here to the fact that the history of the Jews, and especially the creation and expansion of the state of Israel in 1948 and 1967, are integral to the eschatological doctrines of many believers in the three Abrahamic religions. The war of 1967 in particular, wherein Israel seized control of the whole of Jerusalem, figures prominently in all these narratives.

In Egypt, as elsewhere, many Muslims and Christians believe we are living in the “end times,” and for them Israel plays a key role in the unfolding of a divinely appointed end-of-history apocalypse. The phenomenon of “Christian Zionism” has gotten a lot of press in recent years, so the fact that Israel is viewed by many Christians as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy is no longer a surprise, though the ways in which theology and politics are intertwined in the U.S.-Israel nexus are not so well known, and I assign a reading to open up the discussion of this subject.<sup>33</sup> Eschatological dogmas influence views of Israel in the Islamic world as well. In Muslim apocalypticism, the Jews are partisans of the Antichrist, who descends to rule from Jerusalem; in the climactic struggle that ensues, Israel is destroyed and the Jews are either annihilated or converted.<sup>34</sup> It is hard to determine to what extent such beliefs are the cause or the consequence of anti-Semitism; anyway, when I discuss this topic in class, students acknowledge that they have heard such ideas from a variety of sources. Christian Zionism, or “Crusaderism,” is an ally of Israel against Islam in this drama, so it comes as no surprise to Muslim believers that America is a stronghold of Christian Zionism. Of course, this analysis, in spite of its anti-Semitic features, is not so very far-fetched: Christian Zionist groups do see themselves in alliance with Israel against Islam, and, e.g., seek to emphasize the connection between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Palestinian militants.<sup>35</sup>

But since this is a course on Zionism and, secondarily, modern Judaism, I devote more time to the eschatological beliefs of Jews. I discovered a particularly useful text in this regard which was published in *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, in the aftermath of the 1967 war.<sup>36</sup> This symposium represents the views of Orthodox rabbis and intellectuals in Israel and the U.S. as they debate the purportedly revelatory aspects of this event. For several of the participants, the war was and is a fulfillment of prophecy and a sign that the messianic age has dawned. For others, awareness of the tragic recurrence of false messianism leads them to question the eschatological confidence of their fellow Jews.

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33 Colin Shindler, “Likud and the Christian Dispensationalists: A Symbiotic Relationship,” *Israel Studies*, 5.1 (2000), 153-182.

34 For a fuller treatment, Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). Striking is Filiu's observation that “the extinction of the Jewish people following Jesus's reappearance on earth” is a point of agreement between Christian and Muslim millenarian sects. There is thus a “shared interest in the physical and spiritual annihilation of Judaism. . . It is for this reason that the hateful message of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and other Western anti-Semitic pamphlets migrates from one paranoid universe to the other and back again” (197).

35 Steven Fink, “Fear under Construction: Islamophobia within American Christian Zionism,” *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 2.1 (Spring 2014), 27-43. For example, “Christians United for Israel,” which claims ten million members, highlights news items linking Palestinians and the Islamic Republic. A search of “Islam” at CUFI's website (<https://cufi.org>) produced as its first result a *Times of Israel* article dated 16 June 2023 and titled “Iran's Khamenei hosts Palestinian Islamic Jihad's leaders in Tehran,” and subtitled: “Iranian leader says political unrest in Israel is sign of its nearing collapse, hails terror group's performance in conflict last month.”

36 “The Religious Meaning of the Six-Day War: A Symposium,” *Tradition*, 10.1 (Summer 1968), 5-20.

I've also modified the course in two ways in response to "discharges" from within the "charged classroom." One arose from recognition of the need to supply a reasoned Palestinian perspective on Zionism, the other from an argument over the meaning of the Balfour Declaration. In both cases, I learned something important from my students.

In an early iteration of the course, students became irascible as the semester wore on. They were willing to accept that the course, being about Zionism, gave Zionist texts precedence over others. But eventually some students rebelled against what they regarded as an utterly one-sided understanding of the conflict between Zionists/Israelis and the Palestinians. They felt as though, encased within a Zionist orientation toward Palestine, they were suffocating; not only because it was unfamiliar, but because it was unjust. A Palestinian student in that course counseled me that I could avert future rebellions by including one or two texts by respected Palestinians.<sup>37</sup> I followed her advice, and over the years I have assigned Edward Said's "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," and/or Yasser Arafat's speech at the U.N. in November 1974. I can see now that the incorporation of Palestinian voices, while positively useful in alleviating student discomfort—when students interpose Arab perspectives from the beginning, I am able to assure them that those perspectives will be represented by texts read later in the semester—is also empirically and ethically imperative. As I have argued elsewhere, concerning the European settler-colonial character of Zionism:

. . . [t]he situation in Palestine cannot be analyzed solely or even primarily on the basis of how the Zionists interpreted it (still less how they construe it today) but must reckon with the viewpoint of the land's indigenous population. . . . After World War I, the Arabs saw themselves as forced to accept the imposition of a European population by a European power on account of agreements made between European states, acting under the pressure of the European-based Zionist Organization.<sup>38</sup>

This brings me to the second classroom "discharge" which concerned the Balfour Declaration, since the European power just mentioned was Great Britain, which became the imperial sponsor of Zionism by its issuance of Balfour's famous promise. In this case, I had one student who insisted that the Balfour Declaration explicitly promised that Palestine would become a Jewish state, replacing the Arab state that allegedly existed there. For many years while teaching the course, I had almost passed over the Balfour Declaration inasmuch as it was not authored by Zionists—which is actually misleading, since the Zionists in Britain had not only lobbied for such a declaration but had proposed the precise wording they wanted approved. When I referred to it, I tended to minimize its importance because of its ambiguity. But I realized that my objecting student had a point. To be sure, no independent Arab state existed in Palestine when Balfour issued his pronouncement; it remained Ottoman territory, though it was soon to be captured by British forces. And the phraseology of the declaration was extremely vague and arguably self-contradictory. What is the "Palestine" referred to and how much of it is claimed for the Jewish "national home"? And what is a "national home" anyway? Who are the "existing non-Jewish communities" and what exactly are their "civil and religious rights"? Yet, in spite of the vagueness and contradictions, it was nonetheless monumentally significant, and was immediately recognized as such by people at the time, whatever their attitude toward Zionism. The emergence of the state of Israel in 1948 is inconceivable apart from the British commitment to Zionism expressed by the Balfour Declaration and inscribed in the Palestine Mandate. So I now devote at least one class session to the Balfour Declaration, and I divide the students into teams, to debate the question of whether or not the Declaration stated or implied that Palestine was to become a Jewish state. The

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<sup>37</sup> I owe the suggestion to Ms. Yasmeen Elkhoudary, a former student and now an independent researcher and journalist specializing in Palestinian history and culture; she has her M.A. in Cultural Heritage Studies from University College London. I have noted her article in *The Guardian* about the centenary of the Balfour Declaration above (note 32).

<sup>38</sup> Michael J. Reimer, *The First Zionist Congress: An Annotated Translation of the Proceedings* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2019), 28. This statement summarizes an argument elaborated by Elizabeth Thompson, "Moving Zionism to Asia: Texts and Tactics of Colonial Settlement, 1917-1921" in *Colonialism and the Jews*, ed. Ethan B. Katz et al (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 317-326.

debates are always lively and students become deeply engaged, so this is an excellent example of “productive conflict” in the classroom.<sup>39</sup>

### From Cairo to Colorado

Some years ago while on sabbatical leave, I had the privilege of teaching a modified version of this course at Colorado College, a small, elite, liberal-arts college in Colorado Springs. The experience was illuminating: both the differences and similarities surprised me.

The first surprise was that more than half my students (fourteen in all) self-identified as being Jewish or having some Jewish background (meaning, for instance, a parent or grandparent who was Jewish). But since Jewishness in the U.S. is fundamentally ethnic rather than religious, the students had extremely diverse religious and political orientations, and most weren’t well acquainted with either Jewish history or the history of Israel. I was nonetheless surprised at the proportion of students who self-identified as being in some sense Jewish; the topic of the course had obviously tilted the scale in terms of ethnicity. However, even before making this discovery, I made some changes to my syllabus, since I could not assume (as I did in Cairo) a general familiarity with modern Arab history. The trade-off for including readings about Ottoman Palestine and the evolution of Palestinian politics and identity, was that the course in the U.S. was focused somewhat less on issues of Jewish identity and more on the history of Arab-Zionist relations.<sup>40</sup>

A second surprise was the feeling of existential insecurity expressed by many of these Jewish students. While I was teaching this course the worst violent anti-Semitic incident in U.S. history occurred, a mass shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue, 27 October 2018—tragically, eleven people were killed and six injured. Since I’m not Jewish, I learned something important from the response to this atrocity. A student wrote in *The Catalyst*, a student newspaper, under the title “I Am Jewish and I Am Afraid”:

As a member of the Jewish community, this isn’t just another mass shooting for me. This was a targeted hate crime of a minority group that has never been welcomed in this country. As it has been throughout the history of discrimination against the Jewish people, I feel that we are never truly safe. Not even in the “Land of the Free” can Jews feel comfortable to go to a Shabbat service without worrying about their safety. . . Saturday confirmed that anti-Semitism is alive and well in this country and confirmed, for me, the necessity that is the Jewish state of Israel. While it is not a perfect country, it is a place where Jews can be generally safe. I am a Jew, and I am proud of my heritage and culture, but today I am afraid.<sup>41</sup>

The contrast between the emotional world of this fear-stricken American Jewish writer, and that of Arab students at AUC who don’t even distinguish between Israel and America, is obviously enormous. Yet this gulf between worldviews is something teaching in both places, in Egypt and America, must address. That contrast includes the consciousness of the Holocaust that informs not only Jewish, but American attitudes toward Israel, as opposed to the common doubt or denial about the Holocaust’s reality in Egypt and the Arab world. Americans in general believe that the state of Israel possesses an unassailable legitimacy, and its security is non-negotiable. Jewish Americans would go farther, insisting that Jews must renounce the political naivete that led them to disaster in the 1930s and 40s; and that a strong Israel is the best guarantee against the recurrence of disaster. Meanwhile, as we have seen above, many if not most Arabs question or deny even Israel’s right to exist. In such a situation,

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39 Freedman et al, “Teaching History after Identity-Based Conflicts,” 665. Debating the proper meaning of the Balfour Declaration is an example of “examining historical evidence and promoting productive conflicts that are part of critical thought.”

40 The U.S. iteration of this course was titled “A history of Arab-Zionist relations, 1882-1977” and included the following texts, which I don’t use in Cairo: Gudrun Krämer, *A History of Palestine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: the construction of modern national consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Philip Mattar, “The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Politics of Palestine,” *Middle East Journal*, 42.2 (Spring 1988), 227-240; Ted Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt (1936-1939),” in *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, Edmund Burke and Ira M. Lapidus, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 169-203.

41 Elias Asher, “I Am Jewish and I Am Afraid,” 2 November 2018, 14.

is dialogue really possible?<sup>42</sup> Against the vastness of these differences, my hope is that this course *humanizes by historicizing* Jews/Zionists and Arabs/Palestinians, making their motivations accessible and nuancing their interactions with one another and others in their own communities, in such a way that *dehumanizing and ahistorical* narratives become, in the literal sense, incredible. This can supply the condition for the emergence of an alternative moral vision, which can perhaps best be described as “moral realism,” which is “realist” inasmuch as it eschews revolutionary overbidding, yet remains “moral” by its unyielding insistence on confronting historic injustices.<sup>43</sup>

Evidence that students who have taken the course have moved in this direction may be briefly cited. First, in 2014, I was able, with generous funding from the Global Liberal Arts Alliance, to take three graduates of my AUC course to the Library of Congress, where we collaborated in a short but concentrated study of historical sources for the study of American Jewry. While in Washington D.C., we toured the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, attended a talk given by a Hungarian Holocaust survivor, and participated in an interfaith dialogue with a local rabbi. The students clearly gained an appreciation for the diversity of Jewry worldwide, and for the place of the Holocaust in world history and in the Jewish psyche, and for the role of American Jews in defending the state of Israel. One of these students went on to write her M.A. thesis on the Israel Lobby and its influence on U.S. foreign policy.<sup>44</sup> A second bit of evidence appeared in a response to some questions I posed to students in 2019, similar to the poll cited earlier. One of my most articulate and politically conscious students wrote several things worth quoting. While this student began the course with a reluctance to engage Zionist sources, she suggested that “the older the sources were, the more I could trust them, as they were less likely to match modern propagandistic discourse. I also began to accept more information when I found the sources expressing nuanced constructive criticism of the Zionist movement in its various branches and forms. That said, learning more about the European oppression of the Jews . . . encouraged me to think more openly about the reasons why more imperialist and urgent notions of Zionism (e.g., Pinsker, Herzl) would not only have been warranted, but also popular.” She concluded with the judgment that “in the application of the Zionist project in Palestine, the displacement of the Arab Palestinians should never have been an option. The Jewish immigrants and refugees should have been more aware of this than any other community, as they themselves had been displaced and oppressed in the past.”<sup>45</sup> It is perhaps not superfluous to point out that her comments about the inherently greater credibility of older documents, foregrounds the connection, emphasized above, between historicizing and humanizing the Other.

I close by observing one similarity that surprised me as I compared teaching this course in Cairo and Colorado. It’s the fact that my “audience” in these courses turned out to be not just the young people who enrolled, but family members as well. Jewish students in Colorado volunteered that, when they informed parents about the topic of the course, they avidly wanted to know more. My students gave me to understand that parents who previously had had little concern about instilling Jewish knowledge, now showed pride in their Jewish heritage and wanted to know how Israel was being portrayed in this class. When I returned to Cairo, I was interested to know if the same relational effect had been going on there, and I found that it was. One student shared that her family was interested, though anxious, about how this course might affect her political views, and that attempts to explain what she was learning led, unfortunately, to defensiveness and misunderstanding. Another mother told me, with obvious appreciation, that she felt like she was taking the course through her daughter. Anyway, it is encouraging, if also chastening, for historians to realize that we communicate to audiences that are hidden from view. The

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42 According to some Jews—even some who have taken part in dialogue and advocated for Palestinian rights—the answer is No. See David Blumenthal, “Beware of your beliefs” in *Anguished Hope: Holocaust Scholars confront the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 50-62.

43 Jaroslav Pelikan, “On the social uses of solitude,” *Scene (Bulletin of Pacific Lutheran University Alumni Association)*, June 1977, 46-48.

44 Heba Bahnassy, “Understanding the evolution of the Israel Lobby’s influence on U.S. foreign policy,” *Capstone and Graduation Projects (Spring 2016)*, AUC Knowledge Fountain, <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/capstone/4/>

45 I wish to thank Laila R. for permission to quote from her comments in an email to me, dated 23 January 2020.

impact of our teaching—whether it tends toward deepening distrust and division, or, by dismantling stereotypes, promotes empathy, dialogue, and justice—is extended and multiplied, as it is interpreted by our students to their families and communities.

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## Appendix A

### **Published Primary Sources for the Study of the History of Zionism/Israel, Modern Judaism, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

- Bunton, Martin, ed. *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine* (9 vols.). Cambridge: Cambridge Archive Editions, 2009.
- Destani, Beitullah, ed. *The Zionist Movement and the Foundation of Israel, 1839-1972* (10 vols.). Farnham Common, U.K.: Archive Editions, 2004.
- Dowty, Alan, ed. *The Israel/Palestine Reader*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2019.
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- Jarman, R.L., ed. *Israel: Political and Economic Reports, 1948-1953* (7 vols.). Cambridge: Cambridge Archive Editions, 2010.
- Kaplan, Eran and Penslar, Derek J., eds. *The Origins of Israel, 1882-1948*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.
- Khalidi, Walid, ed. *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948*. Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987.
- Laqueur, Walter and Schueftan, Dan, eds. *The Israel-Arab Reader: a documentary history of the Middle East conflict*. New York: Penguin, 2016.
- Reimer, Michael J. *The First Zionist Congress: An Annotated Translation of the Proceedings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019.
- Roberts, Priscilla. *Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Documentary and Reference Guide*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2017.

## Appendix B

### SYLLABUS: HIST3208/CREL3209 - Zionism and Modern Judaism

**Course objectives:** to understand Zionism as one response formulated by Jews as they confronted the intellectual and social challenges, and existential threats, of the modern era. Our first task is to survey briefly the premodern conditions of Jewish life in Europe, then examine some non-Zionist responses to challenges and threats posed by the advent of modernity. However, our primary focus is Zionism. Our aim is to understand the historical origins of the Zionist movement and reasons for its growth. Our approach is to consider Zionism *phenomenologically*, i.e., grasping its meaning to those who embraced it. We will also examine Zionism *polemically*, i.e., controversies aroused by Zionism, among Jews and non-Jews, and among Palestinians/Arabs.

Disclaimer: the course will *not* examine all aspects of Israeli politics and society, nor will it cover in detail the many wars fought between Israel and the Arab states, and the succession of conflicts between Israel and various Palestinian groups. We will, however, seek to discern to what extent tendencies and tensions present in Zionism from before the formation of the state, continue to affect Israeli politics to the present day, and similarly with regard to Zionist views of and interactions with Palestinians and other Arabs.

**Learning Outcomes:** the readings, discussions, and assignments in this course enable you to:

- a. Gain general knowledge of Jewish history and culture, especially Jewish life and thought in 19th- century Europe
- b. Distinguish between “old” and “new” anti-Semitism in modern Europe
- c. Distinguish between “religion” and “ideology”, and see why nationalist movements like Zionism have arisen in many ethnic and religious communities
- d. Understand why divisions arose within Zionism, and how certain factions came to predominate
- e. Explain why nationalist movements enlist the aid of outside actors, and relate Zionism to the colonial expansion of Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries
- f. Explain the Palestinian perception of Zionist immigration and its impact on Palestinians
- g. Explain the success of the Zionists in establishing the state of Israel, and its consequences for the Palestinian people and for Jews in the Diaspora
- h. Locate, read, and analyze *primary sources* in order to investigate significant events and episodes in the history of Zionism/Israel and modern Judaism

#### Useful online reference works:

[www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com) (online encyclopedia of Judaica, originally published ca. 1906)Encyclopaedia Judaica (2007 ed.), found at Gale Virtual Reference Library (AUC Library Databases)  
<https://yivoencyclopedia.org/> (YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, print-edition published by Yale University Press, 2008)\

#### Course Requirements, Grades, and Policies:

Two Essay Exams, Midterm and Final; the Midterm Exam counts 30% of the course grade, and the Final Exam 30%. (Extensions only for documented emergency or illness, at discretion of instructor.) There is one primary-source research project which has three components: Document Location (10%), Summary (10%), and Analysis (15%). The full value of the research project is thus 35% of your course grade. The remaining 5% will be determined by the quality of your written responses to sets of questions concerning readings and/or films.

## Summary of due dates for all examinations and submissions to Google Drive and Turnitin.com:

29 Sept - Midterm Essay Exam (30%)

24 Oct - Document Location Component of Research Assignment (10%)

7 Nov - Summary Component of Research Assignment (10%)

21 Nov - Analysis Component of Research Assignment (15%)

Week of Final Examinations - Final Essay Examination (30%)

A short answer assignment (response to an assigned film) will be added to this list during the semester.

## Schedule of lecture/discussion topics and assigned texts (readings, films, etc.)

*NB Some additional documents may be introduced in class; updates concerning these will appear on Bb. Please note that everything done in class is “on the record” and may feature in examinations.*

*Part I - Survey of Jewish history; Emancipation and Assimilation; modern anti-Semitism; the 19th-century formulation of the Zionist project; Theodor Herzl and Congress-Zionism; settlement in Palestine before the Balfour Declaration*

### FILMS HIGHLIGHTED\*\*\*\*\*

5 Sept – Defining Zionism; Big Questions in the historiography of Zionism; Survey of Jewish history; Jewish life before Emancipation. READ: Israel Zangwill, “Child of the Ghetto,” ch. 1 in his *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (1898). <https://archive.org/details/dreamersofghetto0000unse/mode/2up>

8 Sept - Emancipation and Assimilation; Resurgence of anti-Semitism in late 19th century Europe; Reform Judaism. READ: Max Nordau’s speech on Jewish history and society at the First Zionist Congress, 1897 (links/texts on Bb); READ: “Reform Judaism from the Point of View of the Reform Jew” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906 (read sections entitled “The Center Principle,” “Relation to Nationalism,” and “Its Negations”).

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/address-by-max-nordau-at-the-first-zionist-congress>

<https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12634-reform-judaism-from-the-point-of-view-of-the-reform-jew>

12 Sept – Pogroms in Russia, 1881. READ: “Persecution of the Jews,” *Economist*, 29 April 1882, 500-501 (AUC Library Databases); READ: Leo Pinsker’s *Autoemancipation* (links to 2 editions on Bb). <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-auto-emancipation-quot-leon-pinsker>

\*13 Sept – Pinsker’s leadership of Hovevei Zion; the First Aliya. READ: Alan Dowty, “Much Ado about Little: Ahad Ha’am’s ‘Truth from Eretz Yisrael,’ Zionism, and the Arabs,” *Israel Studies* (2000), 5:2, 154-181, esp. 160-179 (search Journals, AUC Library).

15 Sept - Herzlian Zionism; *Der Judenstaat [The Jewish State]*; the Zionist Congress and Organization. READ: *Jewish State* (Preface, chs. 1-2, 5-6). [http://www.zionism-israel.com/js/Jewish\\_State\\_tc.html](http://www.zionism-israel.com/js/Jewish_State_tc.html).

19 Sept – Herzl and the First Zionist Congress. \*\*\*\*\*WATCH: “Theodor Herzl: A Living Portrait,” Spielberg Jewish Film Archive (Youtube). Discuss Herzl’s life and work. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWi3pV8\\_XQY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWi3pV8_XQY)

\*20 Sept - First Aliya and Second Aliya; Role of Women in early Zionism. READ: Ran Aaronsohn, “Through the Eyes of a Settler’s Wife: Letters from the Moshava,” in *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel*, Deborah S. Bernstein, ed.; and Rachel Katznelson-Shazar, ed. *The Plough Woman: Memoirs of the Pioneer Women of Palestine* (texts on Bb).

22 Sept - Ahad Ha’am’s criticisms of Herzl and alternative views; “cultural Zionism.” READ: “The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem” <http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/js/source/Zionism/haam2.html>

26 Sept – Impact of early Zionist settlement on the Palestine Arabs. READ: Alan Dowty, “‘A Question That Outweighs All Others’: Yitzhak Epstein and Zionist Recognition of the Arab Issue,” *Israel Studies* (2001), 6.1, 34-54, esp. 39-53 (search Journals, AUC Library).

**29 Sept - First Exam**

**Part II - Socialist and Religious Zionism; World War I and the Balfour Declaration; Evolution of the Yishuv under the Mandate; Zionism and the Palestinian Arabs; the Holocaust and the birth of Israel; Israeli politics and Zionism; the 1967 war; the post-1967 settler movement; the triumph of Revisionist Zionism**

- 3 Oct – Socialist/Labor Zionism and Religious Zionism. READ: Nachman Syrkin, “The Jewish Problem and the Socialist Jewish State” (1898). READ: Mohilewer’s letter to the First Zionist Congress, 1897 (text on Bb). <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-jewish-problem-and-the-socialist-jewish-state-quot-nachman-syrkin>.
- 6 Oct - ARMED FORCES DAY HOLIDAY.
- 10 Oct – Library research session. **Receive Research Assignment.**
- 13 Oct – Balfour Declaration and British Mandate: realities and illusions. READ: Text of the Balfour Declaration (See *The Times*, 9 Nov 1917); Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, 42-66 (on Anglo-Zionist relations, text on Bb).
- 17 Oct – History of the Palestine Mandate and Expansion of the Yishuv.
- 20 Oct – Foundations of Revisionist Zionism. READ: Vladimir Jabotinsky, “Thou Shalt Not Wear *Sha’atnez*”: available from [www.infocenters.co.il/jabo](http://www.infocenters.co.il/jabo), article subtitled “Thoughts on Betar Monism”; READ: Vladimir Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall.” <http://www.saveisrael.com/jabo/jabowall.htm>
- 24 OCT - DOCUMENT LOCATION COMPONENT OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT DUE (10%, SUBMIT DOCUMENTS IN PDF FORMAT TO GOOGLE DRIVE).**
- 27 Oct - Judah Magnes and binationalism. READ: “Like All the Nations?” and “A Solution through Force?” (texts on Bb).
- 31 Oct - Labor Zionist thinking in the 1930s. READ: Chaim Arlosoroff, “The Future of Zionist policy,” (1932, text on Bb).
- 3 Nov - Debate over the Peel Commission recommendations: “partition” and “transfer”; the Great Rebellion, 1936-39; British White Paper of 1939. READ: David Ben-Gurion’s letter to his son, 1937. <http://www.palestineremembered.com/download/B-G%20LetterTranslation.pdf>  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/brwh1939.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/brwh1939.asp)
- 7 NOV - SUMMARY COMPONENT OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT DUE (10%, SUBMIT TO TURNITIN.COM).**
- 7 Nov - \*\*\*\*\*WATCH: “The Path to Nazi Genocide, 1942-1945” (US Holocaust Memorial Museum Production, available on Youtube); Discuss Holocaust. READ: Amos Elon, “An Open Wound” (ch. 8 of his book, *The Israelis*, text on Bb).
- 10 Nov - Interpreting the Holocaust. READ: *History in Dispute: The Holocaust*, “Was the Holocaust a decisive factor in the creation of the modern state of Israel?”, pp. 120-127, text on Bb.
- 14 Nov - Zionist extremism: Etzel and Lehi. READ: “The Ideology of the Lehi,” [www.saveisrael.com](http://www.saveisrael.com); essays on Etzel from Etzel’s point of view, <http://www.etzel.org.il/english/index.html> (“The Establishment of Irgun,” “The Revolt is Proclaimed,” “The Bombing of the King David Hotel,” “Deir Yassin”).
- 17 Nov - the 1948 war: traditional vs. revisionist views. READ: Ben-Gurion speeches during the 1948 war (19 May & 3 June); Avi Shlaim, “Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948” (texts on Bb). <https://jcpa.org/publication/israel-at-war-primary-sources/#WOI>
- 21 NOV - ANALYSIS COMPONENT OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT DUE (15%, SUBMIT TO TURNITIN.COM).**
- 21 Nov - Palestinian responses to Zionism; the Question of Terrorism. READ: Yasser Arafat, speech to the U.N., November 1974. <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/A238EC7A3E13EED18525624A007697EC>.
- 24 Nov - THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY.

28 Nov – Palestinian responses to Zionism (continued). READ: Edward Said, excerpts from “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims” (1979).

<http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~ikalmar/illustex/said%20zionism.htm>

1 Dec – The Six-Day War, 1967; consequences for Israelis and Palestinians. READ: Levi Eshkol speech, 12 June 1967.

[http://jcpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Israel\\_Wins\\_the\\_Six-Day\\_War.pdf](http://jcpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Israel_Wins_the_Six-Day_War.pdf); Israeli settlement in the Occupied Territories. READ: “The Religious Meaning of the Six-Day War: A Symposium,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 10.1 (Summer 1968), 5-20.

5 Dec - Likud victory, 1977; Likud and the Christian Zionists. READ: Colin Shindler, “Likud and the Christian Dispensationalists: A Symbiotic Relationship,” *Israel Studies*, 5:1 (2000), 153-182 (search AUC Library); \*\*\*\*\*WATCH: Netanyahu Speech to Christians United for Israel (2012, link on Bb to Youtube).

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Youtube+Netanyahu+speech+to+CUFI#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:9fad2e65,vid:HqgDKbGUdT0>

8 Dec – Internal Critiques of Zionism and Israel: Liberal Zionism and Post-Zionism. READ: Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates*, chs. 2 & 4 (text on Bb). MAPS: B’Tselem maps of Israeli settlement in the West Bank. \*\*\*\*\*WATCH: “The Settlers” (Shimon Dotan, 2016 - available on DVD in library)

12 Dec - Review for Final Exam

**FINAL ESSAY EXAM (DURING FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD)**

## Appendix C

### Heuristic questions for exploring the historiography of Zionism.

These questions are formulated to explicate paradoxes and debates that recur in Zionist historiography. Some of these questions are, in my opinion, inadequately addressed in existing surveys of Zionism, and so are intended to stimulate further research.

1. Was Zionism primarily a response to anti-Semitism or to assimilation? Was it a program of rescue for Jews facing material deprivation and physical destruction, OR a program of saving Jewish identity by means of cultural renewal?
2. Why did the early Zionist movement grow and spread, considering that it was a movement led by secular and Western/Westernized Jews, at a time when most Jews had a traditional/religious orientation and resided in Eastern Europe?
3. Herzl's premature death in 1904 produced an immediate question of succession. But it also produced a profounder question of succession, since a claim to his legacy arose among the Zionist factions that developed in the decades following his death. Who was Herzl's rightful successor, in terms of political orientation and ideology?
4. How did the balance of power within the Zionist movement shift from the Zionist Organization based in Europe, to the Jewish Agency based in Palestine? When and why did this transition take place?
5. Zionism seems a hybrid of ethno-nationalism and settler-colonialism. How are these elements interrelated, and which aspect predominates?
6. Given the weakness of the Yishuv in the 1920s and its demographic inferiority at both the local and regional level throughout the Mandate period, how did it prevail against both the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states, in military and political conflicts in the period 1947-1967? How did Israel attain unchallengeable military supremacy in the Middle East by the 1980s?
7. How and why did the success of Zionism/welfare of Israel become a major concern of Jews in the Diaspora, especially in the U.S.?

## Appendix D

### HIST 3208 – “Zionism and Modern Judaism” – Primary-source Research Paper

#### Approved research topics and sources:

1. Problems of Jews in Tsarist Russia before 1914
2. Causes/consequences of the 1881 pogroms in Russia
3. Press coverage of the first Zionist congress, 1897
4. Debate at the First Zionist Congress over the *Program*
5. Debate at First Zionist Congress over *Colonization*
6. East-West Tensions at the First Zionist Congress
7. Causes and Manifestations of Jewish suffering: reports at the First Zionist Congress
8. Language, literature, and Hebrew culture at the First Zionist Congress
9. Press coverage of *any* Zionist Congress before establishment of Israel (22 Congresses to 1948)
10. American Jewish attitudes toward Zionism *before* the Balfour Declaration (1917)
11. Jewish settlement and institution-building in Palestine in Second and/or Third Aliya (1904-1914 or 1919-1923)
12. Zionist activism during World War I (1914-1918)
13. Anglo-Zionist relations/the Balfour Declaration, origins OR reactions
14. Jewish and non-Jewish responses to the Balfour Declaration (from 1917) (may include Arab responses)
15. Zionism at the Paris Peace Conference, Paris 1919
16. Jerusalem Riots, April 1920/Palin Commission Report
17. Jaffa Riots, May 1921/Haycraft Commission Report
18. Growth of the new Yishuv in Palestine, 1920-1929: immigration, institutions, achievements, conflicts
19. Wailing Wall Riots (1929): causes/consequences
20. Immigration issues in Palestine during the Mandate (1920-1948)
21. Land transfers and land policies during the Mandate
22. Zionist reactions to the Royal (Peel) Commission, 1937
23. U.S. Jews' reaction to Nazism, 1930s
24. Anti-Semitism in the U.S., 1939-1962
25. Jewish/Zionist reactions to the 1939 White Paper
26. Jewish/Zionist advocacy during World War II (Shoah/Holocaust)
27. The issue of DPs after World War II/Jewish demands for free immigration to Palestine/British and Arab responses
28. Zionist militancy in Palestine, 1945-1947
29. Arab relations with Jews in Palestine, 1946-1947
30. U.S. Jews and the campaign for “partition” (U.N. vote in Nov. 1947)
31. Education in Israel, 1948-1953
32. Immigration to Israel, 1949 and after: “absorption” of Sephardim and Mizrachim in the decade after 1948
33. External funding of Israel, 1948-1953, esp. German reparations
34. U.S. Jews' relations with Israel, 1948-67
35. Status of Jerusalem after 1948: Israeli/Jewish views (can be compared with Arab views)
36. The Six Day War (1967): Israeli/Jewish Perspectives; Israel's Foreign Relations before, during, and after the war, etc.
37. U.S. Jews' support for Israel, October 1973
38. “Zionism is a form of racism”: UNGA Res. 3379 (1975): Israeli/Jewish responses to the proposed resolution and its passage

39. Likud Bloc victory in the 1977 elections
40. Settlers in the Occupied Territories after 1977
41. The Israeli response to the First Intifada, 1987-1993
42. Russian immigration to Israel in 1990s
43. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, 1995
44. Historical Context of Atrocities/Terrorist Attacks: Deir Yassin, April 1948/Hadassah Medical Convoy, April 1948/Qibya, October 1953/Kfar Qasim, October 1956/Munich Olympics, September 1972/Ma'alot, May 1974/Sabra and Shatila, September 1982/Cave of the Patriarchs, February 1994/Beit Lid, January 1995/Muhammad al-Durrah, September 2000/Netanya Passover, March 2002

N.B. In your preparation of your paper you may refer to class discussions including primary sources we discussed in class; **however, you may not use any reading assigned for the entire class as one of the primary sources analyzed in your paper.**

Not all of the topics given above are "equal": documentation exists for all of them, but the abundance and accessibility of the documentation varies.

The following are some online sources you may consult for these topics:

1. London Times (Times Digital Archive at AUC)
2. New York Times (AUC)
3. Washington Post (AUC)
4. The Economist (AUC)
5. The Palestine Post (NLI – with access to Historical Jewish Press)
6. American Jewish Committee Archives (AJC Archives)
7. Hansards Parliamentary Debates (Historic Hansards)
8. Arabic newspapers through the AUC library website: <http://libguides.aucegypt.edu/mesources/news>
9. The Maccabean: A Zionist Magazine (1902-1920):  
<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbinserial?id=maccabean>
10. United Press International Archive
11. Yad Chaim Weizmann (archives of the Chaim Weizmann organization)

AND ONLINE HISTORICAL NEWSPAPERS IN DATABASES SUCH AS <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/tel4/newspapers> AND OTHERS FOUND IN THE HISTORY LIBGUIDE OF THE AUC LIBRARY. SEE THE SUBJECT GUIDES OF THE AUC LIBRARY.

### **PRINTED PRIMARY SOURCES (some available as ebooks)**

- B. Destani, ed. *The Zionist Movement and the Foundation of Israel, 1839-1972*. (10 vols.)
- R.L. Jarman, ed. *Israel: Political and Economic Reports, 1948-1953*. (7 vols.)
- Martin Bunton, ed. *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*.
- Chaeran Y. Freeze and Jay M. Harris, eds. *Everyday Jewish Life in Imperial Russia: select documents, 1772-1914*.
- Michael J. Reimer, *The First Zionist Congress: An Annotated Translation of the Proceedings*.
- Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*.
- Eran Kaplan and Derek J. Penslar, *The Origins of Israel, 1882-1948*.
- Alan Dowty, *The Israel/Palestine Reader*.
- Priscilla Roberts, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Documentary and Reference Guide*.

## **NB: EXCLUSIONS—SOME KINDS OF DOCUMENTS YOU MAY NOT USE**

There are certain categories of documents that are *excluded* from consideration for this assignment. Any document that contains footnotes/endnotes is, almost by definition, NOT a primary source. Two categories of such documents I also exclude are: most articles in legal journals; MA theses and PhD dissertations. Another exclusion: book or film reviews. While I accept that all such documents can be very useful, they cannot be used to fulfill this assignment.

You should not use any source derived from other venues UNLESS you clear the source with me. If you use inappropriate sources, you will suffer loss of credit and may fail. You should not proceed with the second and third stages of the project UNTIL you have satisfied me that you have identified appropriate sources for your subject.

Instructions for doing the primary-source research paper (which is broken up into 3 segments with 3 different due dates - see syllabus for dates)

### **1. Selecting a topic**

**Your research involves only *primary sources*.** These are documents which were contemporary, or nearly contemporary, with the personalities or events or conflicts or institutions which they describe. In some cases, they may be reports which are made some years after the event, if these record the experiences of participants. Bear in mind that primary documents are not necessarily accurate. However, they do reflect the attitudes, beliefs, values, anxieties, and assumptions of people “on the spot,” and they always offer insight into the moral and material realities of the situation they portray.

Access to online sources may also be interrupted (e.g., if there is a power cut). However, late papers will suffer loss of credit, regardless of the reason for the lateness.

Although you should work on one of the topics given above, you may find that you need to refine the period you’re covering or otherwise **narrow the scope of the investigation**. This is fine. But please consult with me as you get into your research. The most important thing is to find a coherent set of sources from around the same period of time that will lead you to a deeper understanding of your topic.

### **2. Three elements of the paper: document location; document summary; document analysis.**

#### **a. Locating your documents.**

**You need to find three to five *substantive* periodical articles and/or other kinds of documents that pertain to your topic. And you must have three different publications and/or “venues” represented by your sources, i.e., you must get your sources from different publications, preferably from different countries.** If a source is particularly long and rich, it may count as 2 of your sources, but you must check with me before you submit it as such. You will collect the articles and **arrange them in chronological order**. You should write a very brief introduction to your subject, and also a very brief introduction to each article you submit, suggesting how it relates to your study. You will submit all articles you have collected to me; each article must be in a format I can access. PDF is the preferred format for these documents. I will grade you on the relevance and quality of the articles you located, their authenticity (did you find the article in its original form?), the diversity of the documents in terms of venue and perspective, and whether or not you have followed the directions I have just given. This element counts 10% of your course grade.

## b. Summarizing your documents.

You will read your documents and summarize their content, document by document. **You must supply proper bibliographical data for each article at the beginning of each summary.** As for the summary itself: you cannot repeat everything said in the article, so you should read it through carefully and select those things which are most important for the understanding of the subject under investigation. You may quote the article, but be selective with your quotations and do not quote anything without explaining its meaning and significance. **Be sure to present your documents in chronological order.** This element counts 10% of your course grade.

## c. Analyzing the articles.

Your last task is to analyze each article, and then compare them with one another in order to draw tentative conclusions about your subject. **As with the summaries, you should supply proper bibliographical data for each source at the beginning of each analysis, and they should be presented in chronological order.** Analysis should consider things like: the venue of the article; the author (if given in the article and/or easily analyzed); the title; structure of the article; quality of the reporting (give reasons why you think the reporting is accurate or inaccurate); objectivity; omissions; the presence or absence of historical context; etc. If the article contains an argument of some kind, you should restate the argument and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses (and don't call it "bias"). Indeed, I would advise you *not* to use the words "bias" or any synonyms. Articles will have a *point of view*, and you should state what the point of view is and supply evidence for your assertion. After you have written three analyses, turn to comparisons and conclusions. Comparison may include highlighting themes which run through the documents, and explaining how the data contribute (or fail to contribute) to an understanding of your subject. Suggest reasons for the similarities and differences in the documents, especially discrepancies between them, i.e., *make a critical comparison of your documents*. The conclusion should also suggest how your study helps us to understand the history of Zionism, Judaism, and Jewry as a whole. This element counts 15% of your course grade.

## ADDENDUM TO BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Jewish Chronicle now available!!!

The oldest continuously published Jewish journal, London's *Jewish Chronicle*, is now available to this class, including its entire archive, extending back to 1841. You are strongly encouraged to make use of it for your research projects.

## Review: Emilie Amt, *Black Antietam: African Americans and the Civil War in Sharpsburg*

Samuel J. Richards

International School of Kenya

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**Emilie Amt, *Black Antietam: African Americans and the Civil War in Sharpsburg*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2022. Kindle Pp. 218. \$11.49. ASIN B0BFVRD82B**

Sharpsburg is a picturesque mountain town in Maryland. Passersby might easily imagine that its quaint brick and stone churches, symmetrical Georgian-style homes, and town square have not changed much since Confederate general Robert E. Lee's failed attempt to conquer the area in the Battle of Antietam. Historian Emilie Amt demolishes these nostalgic notions by recovering forgotten Black experiences. In doing so, Amt joins other Appalachian scholars who have resisted "Affrilachian" erasure. In *Black Antietam: African Americans and the Civil War in Sharpsburg* she capably shows how nineteenth-century Sharpsburg was far more diverse than the predominately white town it is today. In 1860, approximately 1 in 7 Sharpsburg residents were Black, a far cry from the 97.9% white, non-Hispanic population documented by the 2020 census. In this way, *Black Antietam* contributes to growing Affrilachian scholarship challenging stereotypes of historic Appalachia as a white monoculture while recovering Black experiences that are often underrepresented on library shelves laden with countless titles about politics, economics, and military maneuvers during the U.S. Civil War. In short, Amt's *Black Antietam* offers something new by investigating the U.S. Civil War's September 1862 Battle of Antietam from the perspective of Black men, women, and children.

In the post-war era, African Americans in Sharpsburg founded civic organizations and constructed their own Methodist Church that also hosted a Freedman's Bureau school. However, the Black population in Sharpsburg and its environs dwindled during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Until now, historians took little notice. Black perspectives went missing in white-centered narratives and were further obscured by "Lost Cause" propaganda. In Amt's words, "Such neglect and erasure of Black memories of Antietam in the written record means that most of them are now irretrievable." (157) Thankfully, her skillful research recovers some African American perspectives while her talented storytelling makes *Black Antietam* accessible to a wide range of readers.

Amt is well-positioned to write this study. Yet, her path to recovering lost voices in the Maryland hills is unusual if not inspiring for telling local history. Amt trained as a medievalist with a specialty in women religious—abbesses, prioresses, and nuns—in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century England. With a long career as a history professor at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, Amt turned her investigative talents to her neighborhood around 2010. She wanted to know more about the enslaved Black people who once worshipped where she does at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Lappans, a hamlet just a few miles from Sharpsburg. Amt has since painstakingly reconstructed the Black experience in Washington County by combing newspapers, personal journals, land records, census records, and even preserved store ledgers. Despite the breadth and depth of her research, there are occasions when no primary sources remain. In those instances, Amt's familiarity with this region allows her to draw on circumstantial evidence. She reasonably considers parallels from the nearby market towns of Williamsport along the C&O Canal and Boonsboro along the original National Road (U.S. Rt. 40) to show ways vibrant Black communities existed in each of these places. *Black Antietam* exemplifies the ways by which clever researchers can recover forgotten communities.

Amt is a talented writer. In six chronologically ordered chapters, she threads together multiple human accounts to create a cohesive narrative. Her style is that of a storyteller who can easily quote primary sources without disrupting the flow of a captivating—and troubling—account. This approach makes her somewhat similar

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to popular historians like the late David McCullough whose true gift was synthesizing academic studies in a way that made them accessible to a general audience. However, Amt is even more rare. She is an academic historian capable of writing a study of first impression that offers useful signposts to fellow scholars while also being a good read for non-specialists wanting to understand local history.

From the very first page, *Black Antietam* humanizes the Affrilachian experience. It first introduces Hannah Arter and her twelve-year-old son Jared as they watch Confederates march past their one-room log cabin in Harpers Ferry *en route* to Sharpsburg. Other perspectives include the Rev. Daniel Ridout, a circuit riding pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church who ministered in the region around South Mountain; spouses Hilary and Christina Watson; and the county's wealthiest Black man, Thomas Barnum. Photographs from the Library of Congress and Sharpsburgh Museum of History enhance Amt's superb storytelling helping illustrate historic sites in authentic rather than romanticized ways.

Readers unfamiliar with the region learn about unique challenges free and enslaved Black people faced before, during, and after the Battle of Antietam while living in a border state. Amt takes time to contextualize small scale slavery in mountain Maryland as distinct from more familiar accounts of plantation life on the coastal plains of the cotton South. For instance, though most white residents in the Sharpsburg area were Union loyalists, a prominent white minority supported the Confederacy. Furthermore, freed Black people were constantly terrorized by the fear of kidnapping or being claimed as allegedly escaped slaves to be transported south. Washington County's sheriff based in nearby Hagerstown continued to arrest and jail alleged fugitive slaves even after the practice was outlawed by Congress. The variety of sources used to illuminate the Black experience are the fruits of over a decade of research.

The possibilities for teaching *Black Antietam* are numerous. Amt's methodology in researching Sharpsburg history offers a model for APUSH students also enrolled in AP Capstone considering projects based in local history research. The chapters alone offer a treasure trove of potential excerpts for teachers constructing practice document-based questions for AP or Paper 1 prompts for IB History of the Americas. One of the book's appendices provides a driving tour itinerary for historic sites around Sharpsburg. This is an excellent resource for schools in the greater Washington, DC region: teachers could plan a field trip using Amt's outline as a starting itinerary complemented by other regional resources such as the U.S. Park Service staff at Antietam Battlefield. However, strangely no maps are included—a noticeable oversight throughout the book. Teachers might supplement this shortcoming or could turn it into a creative and practical opportunity to develop geography skills by having students construct maps of their own. Other appendices preserve rare primary sources increasing accessibility to researchers and teachers.

Each summer, hundreds of tourists traverse the hills and mountains around Sharpsburg. They visit historic Harpers Ferry and Shepherdstown in West Virginia, hike segments of the Appalachian Trail, and oftentimes visit Antietam National Battlefield. There they may encounter ongoing public debates surrounding an inaccurate statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee erected by wealthy Marylander William F. Chaney in 2003. However, visitors are unlikely to find much about historic Black communities in the area. Fortunately, *Black Antietam* succeeds in Amt's stated goal to recover the experience of African Americans in Sharpsburg. This well-written book makes new contributions to Affrilachian and Civil War scholarship. It is a welcome resource for regional history teachers and should be required reading for park rangers at Antietam National Battlefield.

# Review: Michael Bronski, adapted by Richie Chevat, *A Queer History of the United States for Young People*

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## **Michael Bronski, adapted by Richie Chevat, *A Queer History of the United States for Young People*. Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2019. Pp. 336. \$18.95**

In Michael Bronski's 2019 book, *A Queer History of the United States for Young People*, the author offers a deeply humanizing, robust, and accessible account of LGBTQ+ history through biographical profiles of queer and transgender\*<sup>1</sup> people. In my experience as a teacher of social studies and special education with expertise in queer theory (who is also queer and Disabled), this book offers something special for young people that I do not often see: content that gives teachers a chance to develop curriculum that grounds students' identities in connection with everyday queer and transgender\* people from the past. In a political moment full of newly passed anti-queer legislation, it is comforting to have a queer history that is joyful and affirmational.

Bronski starts with an excellent disclaimer about needing to frame queerness as the disruption of "normal" ideas about gender and sexuality (1) and writes a heartening and informative discussion about pronoun usage (9). The level of care Bronski offers is also evident in the book's glossary, which includes student-centered definitions of LGBTQ+ terminology and key vocabulary. Taken together, Bronski has provided teachers with a solid toolkit for teaching queer history. Throughout the book, Bronski is measured and careful about not employing a lens of queer presentism (projecting modern conceptions about LGBTQ+ identity onto the past). The book offers a counter-narrative to a common trope often seen in LGBTQ+ history and U.S. history (when LGBTQ+ people are included at all): that queer/trans\* historical figures overcame some huge struggle in spite of – or maybe because of – their queerness to go on to do some monumental thing. Macro-level historical stories, like Stonewall (xii-xx, 259), have value but emphasizing the successes and struggles of everyday non-activist LGBTQ+ folks, as Bronski does, is also important. For many LGBTQ+ people, living authentically as your truest self has been and continues to be challenging because of cultural norms and social pressures. However, Bronski's book offers tangible examples of how everyday LGBTQ+ people from the past lived as their authentic selves and often in community with one another. In a time when many LGBTQ+ youth do not grow up immersed in their culture, turning towards LGBTQ+ historical figures as an example of how to be themselves is powerful – just as powerful as learning about pivotal movements like Stonewall. We see, for instance, love letters between Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown, two Black queer women writing to each other in 1859 (83-87). We learn about the stories behind selecting clothes LGBTQ+ folks felt would express their authentic selves, as seen in Gladys Bentley, a renowned Black queer Blues performer (119-128).

Bronski's book captures the historical breadcrumbs that queer and trans\* elders left us about their lives, and which offers hope and optimism for a younger generation. It grounds us in their neighborhoods, for instance, pointing to how in 1920s and 1930s many leaders in Harlem were queer and their community welcomed them with open arms (126-128). For queer and trans\* readers – youthful and older – the book gives historical insight

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<sup>1</sup> I draw upon the work of Dr. Jack Halberstam, scholar of queer theory, gender studies and cultural studies, in my spelling and definition of "transgender\*" here to denote the umbrella usage of the term enveloping anyone who does not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth and encompassing the identities of gender-expansive and non-binary people. See Halberstam's work, *Trans\*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*.

to deeply personal experiences that are often misunderstood, in the past and the present. Bronski, for instance, emphasizes the experiences of trans\* people who medically transitioned with gender affirming care as well as trans\* people who only socially transitioned. Take the remarkable life of Alfred D. J. Cashier, a transgender man born in 1843 and who was a Union hero of the Civil War. Bronski writes that Cashier lived peacefully as a transgender man for fifty years after a successful career as a soldier. When Cashier was outed in 1915, many of the veterans he fought with chose to stand by and accept him for who he was. Queer and trans\* students (and most folks) know that outing someone is a violent act that is done against a person's will, and they will likely find the story of Cashier, a trans\* elder living in the early twentieth century, and the group of friends who stood by him after he was outed heartening because of the display of allyship (62-67). We also learn about groundbreaking figures whose stories have been historically overlooked, like Bayard Rustin, a Black gay man who worked as a close collaborator with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the details that humanize and make them relatable to students. Readers learn, for example, that Rustin had a large family that loved him dearly, how Rustin published poetry in high school, and the sports he played – track and football (164-171). Bronski writes about LGBTQ+ people from the past, famous and not so famous, in a way that makes the reader feel a sense of strong familiarity because of the details about their lives that are included; these people could be their neighbors, their coworkers, or their friends.

There are moments in the text that teachers will need to further contextualize for young readers. For instance, some historical terms, although accurate, will not land well in the present due to evolved cultural meanings. Though Bronski included an important discussion early in the book on usage of terms, especially the need to use the ones LGBTQ+ people used themselves, there are some instances in which teachers will need to have complementary discussions with students about language. One passage that illustrates this is the story of Julian Eltinge, who Bronski identifies as a “The Most Famous Cross-Dresser in America” (106). Bronski introduces Eltinge by saying that “The exact details of the early years of William Julian Dalton are foggy... All of this confusion, or mystery, is fitting because in his later life William Julian Dalton spent a lot of time confusing people. At a very early age, Bill – who eventually took the stage name Julian Eltinge – was an extraordinary and very talented female impersonator. That is, he performed on stage dressed in female characters. By the 1920s, he was internationally famous and critically praised on the stage and in films as a man who played female characters” (106). While I believe Bronski's intent was to be approachable and conversational, describing Eltinge as “confusing people” falls short. It implies that playing with gender performance is confusing and reinforces the idea that normative gender performance is “correct.” Also, the term “cross-dressing” is generally not used now in the LGBTQ+ community because it is widely considered offensive and generally has not been reclaimed in the same way as terms like “queer.” Language, in other words, continues to evolve in important ways for the community. Teachers can supplement Bronski's passage on Eltinge, which includes helpful pictures and the history of playing with gender performance in performance spaces (107-109), with modern teachings from drag pedagogy to explain how LGBTQ+ people and many other people play with gender presentation all the time. This passage also could have been helped by a reminder to the reader of why Bronski chose to use this term and guidance on how to approach this conversation with students about historical vocabulary and playing with gender performance.

Another place for growth is in the way Bronski writes about disability, a topic on which the Non-Disabled public is not well-informed, and especially as it pertains to the personal narratives of Disabled people from the past. Bronski, for instance, writes that Jane Addams, queer herself and a founding member of the social work field, saw herself as othered because of her disability but offered no further context. This conjecture was disappointing to read because it offered little evidence to support the claim and left the reader – especially someone like me, who is a Disabled writer and academic researcher – with a lot of questions, as it upheld a deficit view of disability (98). Teachers could remedy this shortcoming by reading about how Disabled people counter deficit ideas about disability. Alice Wong's work, a celebrated disability activist who writes for public audiences, is an excellent primer on the topic.

Overall, I would recommend Bronski's book because it does the important and much-needed work of documenting the legacy of everyday queer and transgender\* excellence. The profiles themselves, coupled with

Bronski's expertise in teaching queer history at the college level, offers clear and insightful accounts of LGBTQ+ perspectives in an exciting way. As such, Bronski's book is a welcome publication for social studies teachers hoping to add LGBTQ+ stories to their U.S. history curriculum.