

Library Award for Undergraduate Research Reflective Essay

Though my project was written for the course HIST208N: Historical Research and Methods Seminar; War and Society, my interest began prior. This summer, working as a Cataloging Intern at the Library of Congress, I utilized archival materials to write a historical essay about the Trans-Siberian Railway and its depiction in the Library's maps. Throughout this research I sifted through numerous drawers of uncataloged maps of Siberia that were inaccessible to the public. My research led me to discover how the railway changed over time, including the impact of Japan's imperial aspirations and local regional disputes.

My position was created to facilitate the creation of records for maps of Siberia that the Library had not yet cataloged or updated. Though the Library boasts an impressive and easily accessible collection of maps of the U.S., the same attention has not yet been devoted to maps of other countries. These maps remain harder to access for the public.

This is where my fall project began. History that is lost and ignored requires immense attention from contemporary historians. Drawing on the content from another class, HIST328K: Borders and Memory-Making in Times of War, where a UMD classroom connected with a classroom in Ukraine to discuss how history can be preserved during war, I understood the necessity of bringing attention to preserving historical memory.

As HIST208N began, I had two criteria for my research: I wanted to deepen my knowledge in regards to a new topic and contribute to the preservation of history for groups whose history faces active erasure; in other words, my project aimed to challenge the notion that history is written by victors. By telling the stories of oppressed groups, history can serve as a form of reclaiming power.

Fall semester also marked my increase in commitment to student activist groups like Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA). As the semester progressed and I learned more about activism through YDSA, I realized that, despite being such a critical subject in world politics, my knowledge of the Israel-Palestine conflict was limited. So, I began my research by finding a book in McKeldin library titled, *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: A Primer* by Phyllis Bennis. This book depicted scenes I was unaware of—border walls surrounding the West Bank, harsh security checkpoints enabling harassment for Palestinians and limited access to water—and I determined that the aim of my project would center this conflict to contribute to preserving historical memory that, like my search into forgotten Siberian maps, brought light to lost histories.

My research began with online library resources. I investigated the online UMD libraries catalog to find preliminary information about Palestine, focusing on the First and Second Intifada. Then, following further research into articles that featured keywords like “feminism” “woman” and “Intifada,” I found that the existing literature focused on the unique role that women were able to contribute in the First Intifada but did not address why it appeared to disappear or shrink significantly by the Second Intifada. In searching for the reasons behind this shift by comparing academic scholarship about the First and Second Intifadas, I uncovered a framework to understand women’s participation: the lens of mother, wife and daughter. Later, I was able to synthesize existing ideas about women's participation and deduce that the rigidity of these roles remained throughout both Intifadas. I used the library database search and JSTOR, through which I found the Journal of Palestine and Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies to further advance my research.

I initially evaluated the resources I found by focusing on research published within the last decade. However, I found that not many recent sources focused on a gendered analysis of Palestinian history. Instead, increasing violence and the existential threat to Palestinian society compelled historians to focus on defending the historical legitimacy of Palestine itself. Thus, I expanded my research to include historians writing in the 1990s during the First Intifada. From there, I focused on articles that addressed women's social roles during the Intifadas.

Additionally, during the fall in HIST208N, the class attended a field trip to Hornbake Library Special Collections and University Archives where I was able to sift through primary source documents ranging from photographs of student protests, to letters from soldiers at war. This inspired me to supplement my literature synthesis with primary source qualitative data and analysis.

Then, following a class visit to McKeldin Library, where Eric Lindquist discussed library resources and created a guide for primary sources about Palestine, I looked into the physical collections available at McKeldin. I checked out two primary sources related to my topic: an autobiography titled *Wind in My Hair* by Salwa Salem and *The Women Are Marching: the Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution* by Philippa Strum which consisted of interviews of Palestinian women during and after the First Intifada. Furthermore, utilizing the library guide, I explored the *Jerusalem Post* and further newspapers.

Additionally, after discussion with my professor, Lauren Cain, I was encouraged to examine the stakes of women's participation in the political movement. Thus, I began to research the stories of modern activists, moving away from library research into newspapers, journals and on social media from living activists telling their story. This redefined my search for primary sources; while previously I had focused on archival materials, I realized that testimonies

including “If I Die” statements and activist experiences of women that were the descendents of First Intifada activists were also vital resources for my research.

This research experience granted me several important skills and further knowledge that will be vital for my career. I plan to become a public interest lawyer focusing on reproductive justice. Learning about Palestinian women opened my eyes to the extensive history of female activism around the globe. Furthermore, by developing stronger research skills I will be able to find sources and create additional projects for academic research. In the future, I will reach out to librarians earlier in the research process and utilize more of Hornbake’s special collections to assist my research.