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Portfolio Intellectual Agenda
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Intellectual Agenda

My work on the three fields of my portfolio contributes to my proposed dissertation in a number of ways. First, understanding the environmental and military historiography of the two halves of U.S. and European history contributes to my future work since understanding what has already been written in these two larger fields can shape how I approach my dissertation. Second, exploring European military history through my portfolio work broadens my awareness of military thought and theory throughout modern European and American history. Third, reading the existing environmental historiography in both early and modern U.S. history allows me to place my own work on environmental-military history of the American Civil War into the broader existing concepts of environmental history. Finally, preparing the bibliographies and historiographies of both halves of the U.S. and European fields also gives me the opportunity to think about what books I would use for possible future courses and possible future projects related to my dissertation as well as other potential projects.

The most important piece of my portfolio work on both halves of U.S. history and European history is that knowing the existing historiography can influence how I approach my dissertation. My proposed dissertation would contribute to a new and rising field in U.S. historiography and one that does not seem to exist in the historiography of Europe. Using the campaign of Second Bull Run in the summer of 1862 as a case study, I hope to examine the relationship between the environment and warfare. Approaching military history through an environmental lens will, optimistically, show the complex relationship that humans have with their surroundings and how their environment impacted human actions. This is something that a few historians, primarily environmental historians rather than military or Civil War historians, have started to consider. Yet, using an environmental approach to the American Civil War, or

any conflict for that matter, I believe, can bring a number of new perspectives on other existing concepts to light. For example, through an environmental history of the Civil War, we may be able to increase our understanding of the relationship between armies in campaigns and the local populations. During the Civil War, many armies tended to live off the land in order to supplement their supplies. As a result, those soldiers came into contact with the local population on a number of occasions. I believe that looking at the environment could enlighten how commanders developed their policies toward civilians as they had to balance the needs of their soldiers with giving the local population, for the most part, the opportunity to remain in their homes and face only a certain amount of suffering. Although this specific example is a fairly small subset of the historiography on warfare, it is important to the larger history of the United States and Europe as the relations between armies and civilians influenced social changes as well.

From reading the broader historiography in both U.S. and European history, a number of questions arise that also could influence how I work on my dissertation. For example, a significant question that arises from a number of works is in what time period does the modern world, especially for warfare, emerge? A number of American historians would argue that the American Civil War was the first modern war and marked the shift from agrarianism to industrialization that indicates, for many Americans, modernity. Similarly, European military historians have debated how much the military revolution of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries contributes to our understanding of modernity. What does modernity mean to certain people? Is technology central to understanding this concept? How much does technology contribute to modernity? Do cultural and social concepts of what is “modern” transform the ways people understood the modern world? When did this modern world truly

emerge? I believe that looking at human's interaction with the environment, especially during a conflict, can provide some answers to these questions. From my preliminary research, it seems that the Civil War, although considered the first modern war, maintained a number of similarities to more archaic conflicts. Armies were still significantly tied to the landscape. Despite railroads being considered a major part of Union military movements during the war, in the early years, Abraham Lincoln's commanders failed to fully embrace the use of railroads; rather the armies were tied to the natural landscape instead of the built environment that includes railroads.

Similarly, exploring the connection between the environment and warfare can contribute to the debate in European history on the military revolution. Although most historians would not deny that Europeans developed the superior technology that allowed the European nations to emerge as world powers, the historical events and the debate over them brings about a number of questions about the legitimacy of this concept in history. For instance, gunpowder was first developed in China, but Chinese leaders did not embrace firearms until after European trade introduced less wieldy guns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Why did the Chinese give up on constructing and developing firearms prior to European trade? Was there a cultural reason for Europeans developing the technological innovations of the seventeenth century? Or was geography an important reason? How did the environment factor into the embracement of gunpowder and the growth of firearms in Europe? Although the U.S. Civil War occurred well after the accepted time period of the military revolution, understanding the historiographical debate over the military revolution and the remaining questions can shape how I approach the relationship between key changes in the conflict and the development of military thought during the period. Additionally, it could answer some of the questions related to how the physical environment and human perceptions of the environment contribute to military innovations.

Overall, these types of questions that emerge from understanding broader historiographical arguments can help me develop my dissertation in a way that contributes to additional fields outside of American environmental and military history in the mid-nineteenth century.

Along the same lines, reading European military history provides insight into some interesting concepts on changes in military theory and practices in the nineteenth century. The earlier military revolution dramatically transformed the tactical and strategic planning of army commanders, according to many historians, but innovations in technology and military thought did not end in the eighteenth century with the end of the military revolution. Instead, military theorists continued to change with the introduction of new weapons, training, and practices. While adapting to these innovations, military theorists also had to work within shifting social intellectual movements. For example, Enlightenment thinking and a turn to scientific methodologies rather than basing concepts on strictly historic examples influenced many theorists writing in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although seemingly obvious, military writers did not work in a vacuum. Instead, they also came in contact with Enlightenment ideas and methods as they wrote their works in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result, it is clear that social movements influenced even the concepts of military practices in Europe, something that could be transferred to military history of the United States. This is especially important when working on the nineteenth century. Many American officers learned from European practices and concepts as they studied the works of famous military theorists, primarily from France, such as Henri Jomini and Carl von Clausewitz. While learning from these writers, American officers consumed military theories that were influenced by the Enlightenment.

This could also have a significant impact on the relationship between the environment and warfare in the American Civil War. Just as important as the physical interaction between people and their environment, perceptions of nature, especially in the United States, could alter how officers developed battle plans as well as adapted to fighting as battles progressed. For example, the natural phenomenon of acoustic shadows, the inability to hear sounds from fighting at a close proximity, could completely dismantle an officer's plan. Similarly, when exploring the connection between the landscape and military campaigns, an understanding of military theory and the history of those theories could further inform how officers and their soldiers dealt with their surroundings. Also, it could provide insight into how military theorists and the officers who learned from them perceived the environment. Was it something they could physically overcome? Was it something they had to embrace and incorporate into their planning? Did theorists and officers even consider the environment, other than physical geographic features like hills and ridges, an important part of their planning? Since officers tended to base their planning and operations on concepts espoused by military theorists, knowing the history of military thought both in Europe and the United States is important to studying the operations of Civil War armies.

Additionally, having a broad knowledge of American and European historiography, both dealing specifically with military history and other subfields, allows me to think about how my dissertation could contribute to these fields more generally. Most obvious, my work would need to contribute to the fields of military and environmental history. Although a rising field, few historians have fully explored the environmental history of warfare, both in the United States and in Europe. For most historians, the environment has been a peripheral part of any conflict. Yet, as some historians have already shown, the natural landscape can have a significant impact on

how wars are fought and won. In the process, we can gain a better understanding of both military campaigning and the perception of the environment.

Yet, my dissertation could also contribute to other fields as exploring the environmental history of Northern Virginia in the Civil War provides the opportunity to ask broader questions about the relationship between war and society. As mentioned earlier, the relationship between armies and civilians can be further explored through an environmental perspective of military campaigns. Soldiers and civilians had to share the landscape, which led to a complex and intricate relationship between armies and non-combatants in the nineteenth century. Similarly, it could lead to further questions about the relationship between governments and citizens. During the Civil War, for example, an environmental history of the northern states between 1861 and 1865 could show how the government controlled and maintained production during the conflict. Although this might not be a part of my dissertation in the end, it does provide an opportunity to add to current studies on the relationship between the federal government and the nation as a whole, something that many historians emphasize during the New Deal but have focused on little outside of that era.

In addition, knowing the historiography of these three fields, both halves of U.S. history and European history, could contribute to how I approach teaching. Most obviously, having read a diverse expanse of books and looking at how they fit into my dissertation can influence the way I approach possible courses. Writing annotated bibliographies and historiographical papers allowed me to think about how the books contribute to the existing fields as well as which ones would be most appropriate for different levels of coursework. Many of these books are important for historians to use, but not all of them would be suitable for undergraduate courses. Therefore, having an awareness of the larger historiographical arguments as well as the quality of the works,

I have been able to think about what readings would be best for teaching specific courses at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Similarly, although I would most likely teach specifically courses on American history, having even a cursory knowledge of European historiography can give me the opportunity to show the global connections of historical events. Many of the arguments in European history can be applied to studies in American history. Similarly, many of the debates over events in American history can be applied to European history. Most importantly for this concept, however, is to show students that historical events do not take place in a vacuum. To use the Civil War as an example, in order to fully understand the importance of the conflict, it is necessary to explore both the battlefield and the home front while also looking at the relationship between domestic events and foreign relations. Taking a broad perspective like this, based on the historiographic knowledge gained while working on my portfolio, can provide a fuller picture for the students and also show them that many modern-day concepts of globalization actually existed prior to the twentieth and twenty first centuries.

In the end, centering my portfolio on both halves of U.S. history and European history has provided the opportunity to broaden my own perceptions of my dissertation and how it can fit into the broader historiography. Understanding European military history helps me develop further questions about the Civil War and my own research as it can contribute to a transnational understanding of warfare in the nineteenth century. Also, acknowledging the relationship between European military theory and American officers' approaches to warfare shows the importance of European military history to the United States and create further questions about the relationship between the environment and warfare. Taking this broader approach could help develop my dissertation further by looking at how the relationship between humans and their environment contribute to different historical events. Also, approach a classic field, military

history, through an environmental lens provides the opportunity to ask old questions in a new way. Additionally, approaching the Civil War opens possibilities to explore additional events important to American environmental history, like the relationship between the Homestead Act and Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and the American landscape. The ability to explore such a diverse historiography provides the opportunity to develop a broad perspective on both my dissertation and how to approach course I may teach in the future.