

Teaching About the Nanking Massacre



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Teaching About the Nanking Massacre to Middle School Students

Justin Villet

In 1937, the Japanese Empire declared war on China. That December, the Japanese Army invaded and captured the Chinese capital of Nanking (also “Nanjing”). In what can only be described as one of the most inhumane events in the modern world, more than 200,000 Chinese were killed and more than 20,000 women were raped in less than a year.¹

American public schools do not seem to devote much time to the Nanking Massacre, taking a much more Eurocentric view of World War II.

When I was in high school, the Japanese invasion of Nanking was still a new topic in the curriculum. I recall the eleventh grade English class looking at posters in the library that had been assembled by a civic group that wanted to promote awareness about the event.

After years of post-secondary work in history, I decided to teach this subject, not to eleventh graders, but to eighth graders in a world studies class. This decision led to some pedagogical questions:

- How could this episode be appropriately taught at the eighth-grade level?
- Are students sufficiently mature to consider this topic?
- Would the students get bogged down in background information, or distracted by the horrific nature of the crimes?

- How can instruction be used to avoid creating stereotypes?
- Would students be able to contextualize these events, or, to put it bluntly, would they care at all?

East Asian scholar Vera Schwarcz, in her contribution to the book *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*, wrote, “[O]nly by delving into the crevices of helplessness and dread will [people] be able to pass on the true gift of historical consciousness.”² Historical consciousness, however, should be balanced with a realization that subject matter can sometimes be hurtful to students, that material presented in class should be developmentally appropriate, and that teachers must be mindful of how to teach potentially upsetting subjects in order to help students compare historical events and to allow them to create their own philosophical constructs.

Witnesses Who Intervened

As the invasion of Nanking began, a group of foreigners struggled to establish a safe area inside the city to protect civilians and other refugees. I decided to focus this lesson on a few of these people and their wartime experiences. This approach allowed for a discussion of events without bringing in possibly inappropriate topics (e.g., rape) for eighth graders.

Most of the men and women who tried to create a safe zone had only their foreign standing for protection, although some

ON THE COVER:
Refugee Hospital
in Nanking with
staff and a few
patients in 1938.

background
pattern by
Casey Lapham

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Persons executed by the Japanese soldiers in various parts of the grounds of Ku Ling Temple, Nanking, after the fall of the city, December 12, 1937.

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Controversy Then and Now

Academic and political debates about Japanese aggression against people in and around Nanking rage on even today.

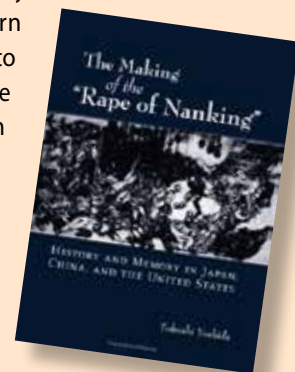
In his book *The Making of the “Rape of Nanking”: History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States*, Takashi Yoshida, an assistant professor of history at Western Michigan University, examines how views of the Nanking Massacre have evolved in history writing and public memory in Japan, China, and the United States (See note 3).

The question of how to treat the legacy of Nanking—whether to deplore it, sanitize it, rationalize it, or even ignore it—has aroused passions revolving around ethics, nationality, and historical meaning. Drawing on a rich analysis of Chinese, Japanese, and American history textbooks and newspapers, Yoshida traced in his book the evolving—and often conflicting—understandings of the event. He describes three general attitudes:

“Revisionists” tend to legitimize and, in some ways, downplay, Japanese aggression by drawing parallels with early modern western warfare. Their argument might be summarized as: *Imperialism was oppressive, and war is always horrible, of course. It is unfair to condemn the Japanese Army when European armies have been acting the same way for hundreds of years.*

“Traditionalists” seem to inflate the death toll of Nanking as, over the last 20 years, the episode has escalated to form a general Chinese consciousness due to academic studies as well as books for the general reader. Their argument might be summarized as: *The “Rape of Nanking” was a cruel and horrific event, but it was not an isolated incident in terms of what the Japanese did to China as a whole and to other occupied areas surrounding it.*

Many western, and specifically American, writers take the position that Nanking can be viewed as a “generalizing” event for World War II because of the level of brutality. Their argument might be summarized as: *We can learn much about human interaction in World War II, especially interactions between governments and people in Europe and the East, by studying this event.* While this may be a superficial view, Western history tends to relate events to westerners, which I do not believe is unreasonable, especially when introducing the subject in an American school.



had diplomatic privileges as well. These people wrote extensively to both the Chinese and Japanese armies, appealing for an end to hostilities.³ For example, John Rabe, a German businessman and leader of the Nazi party in Nanking, helped establish the Nanking Safety Zone, which succeeded in sheltering many Chinese from slaughter despite Japanese frustration and anger over “resistance,” which grew hourly.⁴ Rabe even wrote to Hitler and other international officials, explaining how terrible the situation was in Nanking, hoping that they might intervene.⁵ Rabe was a complex person who contradicts students’ impression of the cartoonish Nazi villain as portrayed in many movies today.

There were also easterners, such as Wellington Koo, a prominent diplomat under the Republic of China, who condemned the Nanking Massacre in international forums and tried to build international pressure to stop the mounting atrocities.

To Plan a Lesson

Although I do have an opinion concerning the historiography of the Nanking Massacre, discussing the event from an academic perspective was not my main objective in teaching this class (SIDEBAR). Nor was my objective to shock students or give them nightmares about the many atrocities that the Japanese Army perpetrated. I had three objectives:

1. For students to grasp the basic facts of the Nanking Massacre, to know when and where it happened, how it came about, and what major events transpired.
2. For students to examine how some foreigners who were in China did not flee the crisis, but stood up for others who could not stand up for themselves, even when faced with overwhelming odds and personal danger.
3. For students to place the massacre of Nanking into the larger context of the international conflict and violence that we call World War II.

What I wanted to avoid was engendering guilt by association or racist attitudes in my students, that is, to lead them toward a generalized and unfavorable conclusion concerning an entire country. The historian Takashi Yoshida warns against falling into this trap (SIDEBAR). Such an attitude lay behind the United States’ imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II, which the United States has now recognized was a grave injustice against its own citizens.⁶ Racism was, most definitely, one causal factor in the atrocities of World War II. The Japanese regime engrained militaristic and grandiose ideas in school children through extraordinary stories of warfare, emphasizing glory, honor, and the superiority of the Japanese race. The Nazis used similar methods and propaganda.⁷

Most of all, I wanted to avoid horrific graphics and text. The invasion of Nanking has been described as the “Rape of Nanking”—a label that would be inappropriate to use in a middle school classroom. Therefore, I decided to approach this topic not from the general events surrounding the invasion, but from

one defined area within the invasion—the Nanking Safety Zone. Teachers, however, should be prepared to explain the terminology and concepts surrounding these events, such as “rape” or the “rape” of an entire city as a violent violation of people’s rights.

Gathering Background

In the early stages of lesson planning, I talked to other teachers and looked for ideas online for a way in which to teach this controversial topic. Some teachers advised me against attempting to teach this subject at all, although the State of Massachusetts mandates that the “Rape of Nanking” should be taught in both U.S. History II and World History II classes at the high school level.⁸ My world history class happened to be going over aspects of the Holocaust, and therefore the Japanese invasion of Nanking offered a different theater of events with similar themes which students could draw upon to make connections to other content they were learning.

I began compiling background information after speaking with David Fischer, a professor in Brandeis University’s Department of History. I also gathered primary source information from Suping Lu’s *They Were in Nanjing: The Nanjing Massacre Witnessed by American and British Nationals*,⁹ from letters compiled by Yale University’s “Nanking Massacre Project,”¹⁰ as well as from Iris Chang’s *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (a best seller in 1997) (See note 1). Chang was inspired, in part, by her own grandparents’ stories about their escape from the massacre, and she was credited with discovering two diaries written by westerners. Mainstream historians criticized some of Chang’s explanations for the massacre, which went beyond criticism of Japanese fanaticism (learned behavior) to include claims about “the Japanese psyche” (genetic causality). Suffering from depression, Chang took her own life in 2004 at the age of 36, and her name has since been added to some memorials to the victims of the Nanking Massacre.

Biographies and Discussion

I summarized the historical background on one a page (HANDOUT A, page 7) that students could read. Finally, I created four, one-page biographies (HANDOUTS B–E, pages 8–11), using the three sources listed above. The biographies describe:

1. **John Rabe**—a German businessman and leader of the Nazi Party in Nanking.
2. **Robert Wilson**—a Doctor at the Hospital at the University of Nanking.
3. **Wilhelmina “Minnie” Vautrin**—an educated American Missionary, Professor, and Dean at Ginling Women’s College in Nanking.
4. **Miner Searle Bates**—an American who became a Missionary and Professor of History at the University of Nanking in China.

A lesson plan follows this article. All students began by reading the background. Then, I gathered students into four groups, handed each group a different biography, allowed students 10 minutes to read and discuss quietly in their groups, and finally asked each group to choose one student to present the group’s biography to the class. Most importantly, I asked each speaker to only use notes their group compiled to present their biographies, preventing them from just robotically reading from the biography sheet itself.

Practicing New Skills

I was more concerned with the students’ ability to take notes from a speaker than with the presentation skills of whoever stepped forward to speak. Over the last couple months, I’d been working with classes on how to take notes, pulling out main ideas from paragraphs, and writing bulleted phrases on our white board. This lesson, however, was the first time in which students had to formally take notes in order to present and answer questions.

Instead of creating an assignment where students would need to formally copy down the “who, what, where, when, why and how,” I challenged the class to engage with the content directly, seeing each biography as a captivating story. Each student read silently and then worked with his or her peers, instead of simply following a teacher’s prepared outline.

This activity presented new content and introduced a new skill; I was surprised and proud that my students not only understood the content and objectives of the lesson, but also fully engaged with the materials, discussing them comprehensively in groups, asking insightful questions, and actually teaching the biographies to the class, rather than just reading off of their handouts.

Toward the end of the period, I had students answer six questions pertaining to the massacre, as shown on page 5. The last question especially, which was graded merely for completion, challenged them to think critically about what they had just learned in order to connect an emotional response to the content: “What would you have done if you had been a foreigner in Nanking at that time?”

Extension Activities

Instructional issues should be determined by priorities, and one main objective in this lesson was to show students that there were different theaters besides Europe during World War II in which moral actions and personal sacrifice were being exhibited. As a history teacher I’ve realized that there is never enough time for everything, but, if the unit allowed for more time to discuss this event, I would have begun with historical background and geography of the Eastern theater, introducing militaristic philosophies of the Japanese Empire, such as *Bushido*, contrasting it with Chinese Daoism. I might end with the controversial question: Should we today equate the Japanese invasion of China with the Holocaust? Inspired by reading Vera Schwarcz’s essay, I would have asked in later units (or possibly in another grade), “How did a ‘narrative of

victimization' play a role in nation building of various groups before, during, and after World War II?" For example, how were memories of suffering expressed in nationalist movements in the 20th century history of Germany, Japan, Israel, India, Pakistan, Russia, China, and the nations that were once republics of the Soviet Union?

The Japanese invasion of Nanking ended in May of 1938, after hundreds of thousands of people had been terrorized, injured, and killed. The Nanking Massacre happened, and it is important for an overall understanding of history and humanity. I hope that teachers will include this event as they teach about World War II to help students compare different events of the 20th century. It's also important for students to learn about these notable citizen heroes. Those who built the Safety Zone decided to help others in need even when they themselves faced great danger. These heroes were not perfect beings, and they were not able to rescue everyone, but they did what they could to save lives despite hardships and risks to themselves. 🌐

Notes

1. Timothy Brook, ed., *Documents on the Rape of Nanking* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 2. Using 1946 court documentation, Brook concludes that 295,525 died. Higher estimates have generated controversy; Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 4. Chang relates that there are many debates, but, using IMTFC estimations, she concludes that more than 260,000 died. For this lesson, it was not necessary to find an exact figure, merely a conservative one to illustrate severity and extent.
2. Vera Schwarcz, "The 'Black Milk' of Historical Consciousness: Thinking About the Nanking Massacre in Light of Jewish Memory," in *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*, Fei Fei Li et al., eds. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 196.
3. Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking": History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) .
4. The term "resistance" in this sentence is difficult to define, depending on what "attitude" you ascribe to. The Chinese army had retreated before the approach of the Japanese army. Many soldiers who could not cross the river (which divided parts of Nanking) threw down their weapons and hid in parts of the city. When the Japanese army entered the city, any adult male was seen as a guerilla, and therefore, as a combattant.
5. Chang, 118-120.
6. Bill Clinton, "Presidential Letter of Apology" (October 1, 1993), www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/clinton.html.
7. Yoshida, 14-15: The Japanese regime, like the Nazis, engrained militaristic and grandiose ideas in schools. Dissenters were arrested and charged with violating the Peace Preservation Law (pp. 18-19, 35); Kasahara Tokushi, "Remembering the Nanking Massacre," in *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*, ed. Fei Fei Li et al. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 77, 79-80; Sun Zhaiwei, "Causes of the Nanking Massacre," in *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*, Fei Fei Li et al., eds. (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe., 2002), 41.
8. In Massachusetts, school districts are able to pick certain "tracks" from which to teach. Grade levels vary depending on the track chosen. *Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework* (2003), World History II Learning Standard 23B and US History II Learning Standard 15D. As we go to press, Massachusetts public schools are making a switch from "the Frameworks" to the "Common Core Standards."
9. Suping Lu, *They Were in Nanjing: The Nanjing Massacre Witnessed by American and British Nationals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).
10. "The Nanking Massacre Project," Yale University Divinity School, www.library.yale.edu/div/Nanking.

JUSTIN VILLET, taught this lesson at Watertown Middle School in Watertown, Massachusetts, while a graduate student at Brandeis University.

STUDENT DIRECTIONS

To Distribute with Handout A

Activity Directions

1. Form four groups, and read the Safety Zone leader's biography that has been given to your group.
2. Take notes about the biography that you read with bullet-points on a separate sheet of paper.
3. Elect a speaker from the group to present the group's biography to the class.
4. Listen to each group's presentation and take notes as they are speaking with bullet-points on a separate sheet of paper.
5. In the end, you should have detailed notes about one Safety Zone leader, and briefer notes about three other Zone leaders.
6. Answer the following questions for homework, using the notes you took in class. *Question 6 will be graded only for completion and explanation* . Please answer thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Activity Questions (Homework)

Use the notes that you took in class to answer the following questions. Please **label** your answers 1–6 and write at least three sentences for each question. **Answer questions on a separate sheet of paper.**

1. What were some things you noticed about the Safety Zone leaders, and how do you think these things were a benefit to the overall Zone?
2. Define what you believe "morality" to be, and describe how your definition can be seen in these events.
3. After hearing about these four people, do you think they did enough? Support your answers with examples of three specific actions or situations.
4. Some scholars have noted that the Japanese invasion of Nanking can be successfully compared with the German army's treatment of Jews during the Holocaust. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer using specific details from the presentations.
5. Why is the Japanese invasion of Nanking important for us to learn about today?
6. What would you have done if you were in the same situation as the people we learned about?

LESSON PLAN

The Japanese Invasion of Nanking and the Safety Zone

Topic, Class, and Level

Humanities, 8th Grade, 1–2 periods (50 minutes, with applicable extra time for presentations and debriefing).

Essential Questions

1. Why do people feel that they are able to justify atrocities?
2. How do different regional identities influence historical events?
3. To what degree are our views shaped by national, racial, political, religious, geographic, and economic backgrounds? Does this prevent consideration of other views?
4. What makes people “stand up” in a risky situation when logic implies that they should either hide or flee?

Teaching Objectives

1. To explain the events leading up to, and including, the Japanese invasion of Nanking.
2. To describe that, while there were atrocities, there were people, specifically foreigners, inside Nanking who risked their lives to stand up for “common decency” and humanity.
3. To relate this episode in the broader context of World War II, specifically in the pre-activity lecture, emphasizing that this was a war based on atrocities, providing this event as partial evidence.

Students Will Be Able To

1. Describe, through an assigned writing project on morality and conformity, the basic facts of the Nanking Massacre, how it came about, and what major events transpired.
2. Present a biography of one of the Safety Zone leaders to the class.
3. Answer questions posed about this event after taking notes during in-class presentations.

Assessment

Grade students’ written responses on the Activity Questions for homework (see the end of **HANDOUT A**, page 7). (This lesson is only a small part of a larger unit on the Holocaust. The essential questions and objectives would be reflected in the later unit formative assessment.)

Materials

- Overview (**HANDOUT A**)
- Biographies (**HANDOUTS B–E**, page 8–11)
- A large map of China for use in discussion after students read **HANDOUT A**.

Procedures

1. Write the agenda on the board, distribute the Activity Questions, explain that the questions are to be answered for homework, and distribute Handout A to each student (1–2 minutes).
2. Students read Handout A individually, taking notes and highlighting when appropriate (5–8 minutes).
3. Give a brief description of subject matter (in lecture format), covering Japanese expansion into Asia, pointing out



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A group of worshippers at St. Paul's Church, Nanking, on February 20, 1938, the first time after the fall of the city that civilians were able to use our Church building with any degree of safety. A Christian Japanese soldier joined the worshippers that day.

applicable cities and geographical features on map, and answering applicable questions from students on subject matter (10–15 minutes).

4. Split students into four groups and explain that they will be reading an account of an individual who helped create The Nanking Safety Zone. Distribute Biographies (**HANDOUTS B–E**). Have students read them aloud within their groups and write down the main points using a bullet-point system (10–12 minutes).
5. In groups, students elect a speaker who will read the group's notes aloud to the entire class. Each group prepares a presentation that lasts no longer than 5 minutes.
6. Presenters from each of the four groups describe the experiences of a Safety Zone leaders while students in other groups take notes. Explain that students will need notes about all of the biographies to complete the homework.
7. Make sure to leave enough time to explain that Question #6 in the Activity Questions (p.5) will be graded on completion and explanation.
8. Debrief the activity and have students make connections between this lesson and previous lessons in a class-discussion format (5–10 minutes).

Skills to Emphasize:

1. Note-Taking (both analyzing texts and listening to speakers)
2. Group Cooperation
3. Public Speaking
4. Using historical information to contextualize and define individual and modern viewpoints

Connections to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (See note 8 in the article)

1. World History II, Learning Standard 23B
2. US History II, Learning Standard 15D

The Japanese Invasion of Nanking

Japan in the 1920s and 30s became increasingly militaristic. The natural resources on the islands of Japan are limited. It industrialized quickly and had to look elsewhere for oil, iron ore, rubber, and food. Officers in the Japanese Navy wanted to invade certain European colonies in the South Pacific, while the Army wanted to push further into Asia. In 1931, Japan invaded and conquered Manchuria (to the North), which was rich in iron ore and fertile land.

In 1936, Germany and Japan signed an alliance to protect each other against the Soviet Union. In 1937, two years before Hitler invaded Poland, Japan invaded Central China and constantly bombed cities, killing large numbers of civilians.

In December of 1937, the Japanese Army captured Nanking, which was then the capital of China, after the Chinese Army had retreated. Many Chinese soldiers who could not escape disarmed and disguised themselves as civilians in Nanking. After the city's capture, when the "resistance" would not surrender, Japanese soldiers murdered over 200,000 disarmed soldiers and civilians. The ways in which civilians were tortured and murdered were very cruel.

In this terrible invasion and occupation, however, there were some officials who tried to stop the aggression towards defenseless civilians. For example, Europeans and Americans who were living in Nanking tried to establish a safe area for civilians. Even though the "The Nanking Safety Zone" was meant to help foreigners and refugees, Zone leaders allowed Chinese residents of the city to take refuge there. The Zone was "protected"



Nanking, now Nanjing, was the capital of China in 1937.

only by laws of diplomacy and the nonviolent pleas and petitions of these foreigners, accommodating about 200,000 to 300,000 human beings.

The first refugees to enter the Zone were people who had lost their homes because of Japanese bombardments. As the Japanese Army advanced on the city, however, store clerks, businessmen, and retreating Chinese soldiers swarmed the Zone. The ordinary problems of providing for thousands of people, such as sanitation and protection, overwhelmed Zone leaders almost to the point of complete exhaustion. While the Zone did protect many people, it was by no means completely secure and the Japanese continued to harass and abduct citizens, raid Zone areas, and kill Zone refugees.

The Nanking Massacre ended in May of 1938 when "conditions became normal enough for the majority of refugees to move back into their homes..." but the Japanese continued to occupy parts of China for years to come.¹

Notes

1. Suping Lu, *They Were in Nanking: The Nanjing Massacre Witnessed by American and British Nationals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 96.

John Rabe

John Rabe was a German businessman and leader of the Nazi Party in Nanking, Nazi Germany and Japan were allies during World War II. When most of his fellow Germans left China, Rabe stayed behind to run The Nanking Safety Zone. When asked why he was staying, Rabe stated:

I have been living here in China for over thirty years. My kids and grandchildren were born here, and I am happy and successful here. I have always been treated well by the Chinese people, even during the war.¹ If I had spent thirty years in Japan and were treated just as well by the Japanese people, you can be assured that, in a time of emergency, such as the situation China faces, I would not leave the side of the people of Japan.²

Moreover, Rabe, being a businessman, felt responsible for his Chinese workers and did not want to leave them to the Japanese Army. Because he was the main leader of the Zone, Rabe was in constant contact with the Japanese and Chinese armies. The Chinese Army refused to evacuate the zone, setting up defensive positions within the Zone's borders. The Japanese refused to recognize the Zone's neutrality. During the attack on Nanking, Rabe tried to inform the Japanese embassy about the Japanese army's brutality. He even went so far as to set up straw huts on his own property to shelter women refugees. It was only after Rabe wrote to Adolf Hitler that the Japanese Army stopped its attack within the Zone.

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At the headquarters of the Nanking Safety Zone Committee. Left to right: Mr. Zial (Russian Tartar); Mr. Hatz (Austrian); Mr. Rabe (German, Chairman of the Safety Zone Committee); Rev. John Magee (American Church Mission); Mr. Cola Podshivaloff (White Russian) December 13, 1937.

When the Japanese finally recognized the neutrality of the Zone, Rabe constantly patrolled the streets, armed with only his Nazi armband, which the Japanese soldiers tended to respect. At first, when Chinese soldiers tried to enter the Safety Zone, Zone leaders refused them, saying that the zone was only for civilians. Eventually, Zone leaders gave in because of the large number of soldiers demanding to enter. Though the Japanese officials told Rabe that their army would spare the Chinese soldiers, the Japanese army constantly invaded the Zone and took Chinese soldiers to be executed. As head of the Safety Zone, Rabe wrote many letters begging the Japanese to protect the neutrality of the zone so the Zone officials could focus on feeding refugees and fixing shelter and sanitation issues.

Rabe fearlessly walked around Nanking to confront Japanese soldiers who were attacking women and stopping vandalism himself. During one of his visits, thousands of Chinese women threw themselves at Rabe's feet and begged for his personal protection. Even though he was a Nazi, Rabe was threatened countless times with death by Japanese soldiers. 🚫

Notes

1. The "war" Rabe was referring to was World War I, known then as "The Great War."
2. Iris Chang, page 110.

Robert Wilson

Robert Wilson was born in Nanking to parents who were Christian missionaries from the United States. After graduating from Harvard Medical School, Wilson became a doctor at the Hospital at the University of Nanking. When the Japanese began advancing on Nanking, Wilson sent his family back to the United States, but he decided to stay, stating that “the Chinese were his people.”¹ Most of his Chinese colleagues left as well, leaving Wilson and a few other doctors to run the entire hospital.

As a doctor and one of the leaders of the Nanking Safety Zone and his hospital, Wilson had his work cut out for him. Most of the doctors left Nanking before the Japanese entered into the city. The few who were left were spread out around the city. On top of this, the Japanese would try to bomb the hospitals despite the giant red crosses painted on roofs (a red cross indicates neutrality). On more than one occasion, bombs would explode either around or in the hospital while Wilson was operating.

As the Japanese advanced further and further into the city, Wilson found his hospital unable to keep up with the amount of wounded coming in. He was now also treating wounded Chinese soldiers as well as civilians. Wounded soldiers were patched up and sent back to the front. Soldiers unable to go back into battle were given two dollars and told

to go home. This order, of course, was impossible since, to travel home, soldiers would have to use the trains that were, for the most part, destroyed or controlled by the Japanese. Not to mention that two dollars would hardly cover the train fare. Largely abandoned by their leaders and disabled, these Chinese soldiers had nowhere to go.

The Japanese refused to allow doctors from outside the city to enter Nanking. Because of this, Wilson, together with a handful of other Zone officials, was responsible for the large part of medical treatment. Wilson never charged any money for his sur-

geries and worked close to 20 hours a day. When the attacks decreased, many of Nanking’s doctors left the city to get rest, but Wilson did not. Survivors 60 years later remember him for his bravery and compassion. 🇺🇸



Notes

1. Iris Chang, page 123.

Wilhelmina “Minnie” Vautrin

Wilhelmina “Minnie” Vautrin was an educated American missionary, stationed in Nanking at the time of the Japanese invasion. She was the head of the Education Department and Dean of Studies at Ginling Women’s College in Nanking.

When the Americans suggested that any European or American should flee from Nanking, Vautrin refused. Because most of the college’s faculty left, Vautrin was now in charge of preparing the campus for refugees. She distributed Safety Zone armbands to mark which people were refugees and hid refugee and college valuables. She even burnt military papers to disguise Chinese soldiers. Though she had only planned for the campus to hold 2,700 refugees, many thousands sought protection as conditions grew worse.¹

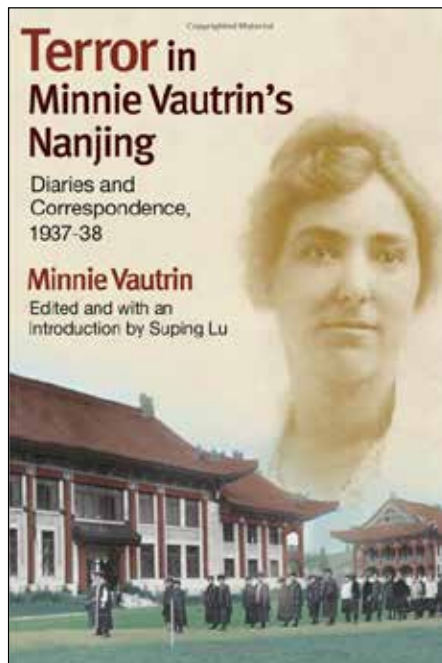
Even though the college was part of the Safety Zone, the Japanese watched over the college with machine guns. Because Ginling was a women’s college, the Japanese constantly targeted it, breaking in and capturing women. Vautrin constantly ran after women who were being abducted, even though she very rarely saved them. Japanese tactics of taken women became so bold that soldiers eventually drove up to the campus with a truck and asked Zone leaders for women.²

Though the Japanese constantly pressured Vautrin and physically broke into the campus, Vautrin still encouraged Chinese refugees not to give up. During the Japanese occupation, the Japanese Army tried to “Japanize” the Chinese

citizens, stating things that the Chinese could and could not do in accordance with Japanese customs. One day, a Chinese boy was wearing a Japanese armband. Vautrin stated that he should not wear it and that his country was not dead. It was this encouragement that kept many refugees going.

Unfortunately, the stress of protecting the college with limited success and the numerous atrocities finally got to Vautrin. Always thinking she could have

done more, she had a nervous breakdown in 1940 and had to travel back to the United States for medical treatment. In May of 1941, she wrote a note explaining her outlook and committed suicide. 🌐



Notes

1. Suping Lu, *They Were in Nanjing: The Nanjing Massacre Witnessed by American and British Nationals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), page 160;
2. Iris Chang, page 134.

Miner Searle Bates

Miner Searle Bates was an American who became a missionary and a professor of history at the University of Nanking in China. He was also an organizing member of the Nanking International Safety Zone Committee. Only two days after the fall of Nanking, Bates lodged his first protest letter to the Japanese Embassy and continued to do so throughout the invasion, writing over 100 letters. In fact, two days after the Japanese Army captured Nanking, Bates filed atrocity reports with the Japanese Embassy. Bates, as well as other members of the Zone, stood up to Japanese soldiers “on a daily basis,” stopped robberies and personal attacks.¹

Bates, who eventually was named chairman of the Emergency Committee in Nanking, spent countless hours talking with Japanese soldiers and officials to plead for the lenient treatment of his staff. In January 1938, Japanese soldiers took a Chinese interpreter from the Zone who had done nothing wrong. When Bates went to the Japanese officer who took him, soldiers treated Bates “roughly.”² Three days later, the interpreter escaped from Japanese custody and Bates allowed him to stay in his own house. Later that day, Japanese police entered Bates’ home illegally and seized the interpreter. What did Bates do? He sent a letter to the Japanese Embassy.



In Bates’ letters, he always said that he and the Zone would abide by Japanese searches on the property as long as common soldiers were not conducting them. While these searches and seizures of Zone workers did not stop, this abuse did not stop Bates. Because of his persistence, Japanese officials constantly accused Bates of spying and participating in military activities. Bates’ house was broken into on many occasions, and his workers were harassed nearly every day. Even though the Japanese had treated Bates harshly, Bates stayed in Nanking for five years, protesting immoral Japanese activities. After World War II, Bates testified about Japanese war crimes in numerous trials. 🌐

Notes

1. Suping Lu, *They Were in Nanjing: The Nanjing Massacre Witnessed by American and British Nationals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), page 90;
2. The Nanking Massacre Project, Yale University, www.library.yale.edu/div/Nanking.

The First War Hawks: The Invasion of Canada in 1812

Steven Sellers Lapham

Those who would like to start a war often employ falsehoods and fantasies to make their case.¹ One often-used claim is that invading another country will be easy. This lesson examines an example from the War of 1812—presenting some of the assertions made by one advocate for that war, the young Senator Henry Clay, and then comparing his claims with actual consequences of the conflict.

Canada “Placed at Your Feet”

The term “war hawk” was coined by Representative John Randolph to describe fellow congressmen who were eager for war with Great Britain.² The war hawks were not an official caucus, rather they comprised about a dozen members of the 12th U.S. Congress (1811–1813), mostly from southern and western (at that time, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee) states who argued in favor of armed conflict. This generation of men had grown up listening to stories told by veterans of the American Revolution. They were instilled with the values of Jefferson, Madison, and Paine. Randolph himself was from Virginia, but he doubted the wisdom of going to war with the world’s greatest naval power, and he questioned the reasoning of those who advocated invading Canada.

On the anniversary of George Washington’s birthday, February 22, 1810, a young senator from Kentucky gave a speech calling for war with Britain. The 32-year old Henry Clay predicted that U.S. soldiers would encounter only weak resistance if they marched across the border with the British colony of Canada and proclaimed that land to be part of the United States.

Have your students read a textbook overview of the War of 1812—with its description of causes, consequences, and major battles. Then read aloud to them a brief excerpt from Clay’s 1810 speech (HANDOUT A, page 14). Distribute the handout and allow a minute for students to read it. Then lead a discussion: Let’s list the reasons for going to war that Henry Clay mentions in this brief excerpt. Are there economic concerns among these reasons? Security concerns? Political concerns? Is each reason morally justifiable, in retrospect? Does each reason seem valid? What does Senator Clay predict about the difficulty of invading Canada? What would you have asked Senator Clay after the speech had you been in the senate chamber in 1810?

Canadians React to Invasion

In several attempts at invasion, U.S. soldiers met stiff resistance not only from British regulars, but from Native Americans and Canadian citizen-soldiers, such as Laura and James Secord.

Laura Ingersoll moved from Massachusetts to Canada following the American Revolution and married James Secord, a merchant and militia volunteer. James was seriously wounded in the battle of Queenston Heights and was still disabled a year later in 1813 when American forces occupied his farmhouse. Laura overheard the U.S. soldiers’ carelessly discussing their mission to occupy the village of Beaver Dam. She slipped away to warn the British who were at that location.

A Canadian postage stamp commemorates how Laura Secord lost her shoes and walked in darkness, barefoot, through the woods, finally running into a British patrol to warn them. (HANDOUT B, page 15) For Canadians today, Laura Secord is a remembered as a hero.

Battles fought on Canadian soil were sometimes won by U.S. forces. (TIMELINE, page 13) For example, U.S. troops occupied York (now called Toronto) for seven months in 1813 and captured Ft. George on the Canada-New York border. By the close of 1814, however, U.S. forces had withdrawn from Canada. Neither side gained any new territory in the war.

Estimating “Benefits and Injury”


The War of 1812 was fought on numerous fronts on land and sea, and had significance beyond U.S.-Canada relations. Yet it’s a fair to examine the specific war aim of annexing Canadian territory, and to ask whether trying to invade Canada was worth the cost.

Distribute a chart that compares some of Henry Clay’s assertions about the looming War of 1812 with some of the actual outcomes of the conflict (HANDOUT C, page 14). The data on the lower part of the chart give a very rough estimate of casualties of the war.

Invite your students to examine Handout C in detail, and then lead a brief discussion, asking: Did U.S. soldiers successfully invade and occupy Canada? How did Canadian citizens view the invasion? What were the human costs of the war, on all sides?

You could expand the discussion to include larger questions that cover the wider war. Were other stated goals of the war (such as the end of British impressment of U.S. sailors)

achieved? Might other strategies (e.g, diplomacy, noncooperation, or both) have been used in resolving the disputes between Americans and the British? Between white Americans and Native Americans?

Conclude by asking questions that are relevant today about rhetoric and the media in a time of international tensions. What kind of arguments can be mustered against predictions of how easy it will be to invade a sovereign nation? How can citizens assure that critical questions are included in media reports, raised in public forums, and considered critically and dispassionately when “patriotic” talk of starting a war is in the air?³ 

Notes

1. David Swanson, *War is a Lie* (Charlottesville, VA: D. Swanson, 2010).
2. Albert Marin, *1812: The War Nobody Won* (New York: Atheneum, 1985).
3. Roger Wilkins, “What Patriotism Means Today in the Wake of 9/11/2001,” *Social Education* 66, no. 6 (October 2002), 350-352.

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SIDEBAR: PERSPECTIVES ON THE WAR

A typical middle school American history class might spend one or two days on the War of 1812, emphasizing the origin of “The Star Spangled Banner.”

A teacher in Canada, however, might spend three weeks on the conflict,^(a) which was of “enormous significance” to Canadians.^(b) There was “a new sense of pride among the people, a pride in having defended their lands with courage and skill.” There was, too, a better understanding between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians, “for each had fought a common foe.”^(c) Many Canadians in 1814 regarded the burning of Washington, D.C. to be retaliation for U.S. invaders burning public buildings in York (present day Toronto) the previous year. In sum, the War of 1812 is central to Canadian’s story of nationhood.

For Native Americans, the war was a disaster. “Aboriginals fought on both sides of the conflict and paid a heavy price for that participation. Those who did not fight were not spared the impact of the conflict on their day-to-day lives.”^(d) Hopes were lost for an Indian Confederacy, sponsored by Britain, that could resist the westward expansion of white Americans.

In Britain today, the “Anglo-American War” of 1812–1814 is considered a minor chapter in the larger story of the Napoleonic Wars. “When Napoleon was defeated in 1814, there was nothing left to fight about.”^(e)

Notes

- a) “Teaching the War of 1812 Different in U.S., Canada,” *All Things Considered* (June 18, 2012), www.npr.org.
- b) Tony Brown, “Canada and the War of 1812” (Royal Philatelic Society of Canada), www.rpsc.org/Library/1812/warof1812.htm.
- c) The War of 1812 Website, www.warof1812.ca/summary.html.
- d) “Mark the War of 1812 on the St. Lawrence,” celebrate1812.ca/page/first-nations.
- e) “The Age of George III,” www.historyhome.co.uk/c-eight/france/ang-am.htm.

The Canadian Front During the War of 1812

NOTE: For timelines of the whole war, please refer to the sources listed below.

1812

- June 18: President James Madison signs a declaration of war against Great Britain.
- July 12: U.S. General William Hull invades Canada, aiming for Ft. Malden.
- July 17: British take U.S. Ft. Mackinac, Michigan Territory, forcing Hull to retreats back to Detroit.
- October 13: Battle of Queenston Heights, Canada. U.S. fails in its 2nd attempt to invade Canada.
- December 18: Battle of Mississinewa, Indiana Territory. U.S. burns villages, forcing Native Americans to flee to Ontario.

1813

- April 27: U.S. General Zebulon Pike captures York (Toronto), Canada, burns buildings, but is killed.
- May 27: U.S. captures Ft. George, Niagara, Canada.
- June 6: Battle of Stoney Creek, Canada, is a tactical draw.
- October 5: U.S. defeats the British at Battle of the Thames, Canada. Tecumseh dies in battle, shattering the Indian Confederacy.
- November 11: Battle of Chrysler’s Farm, Canada, forces a U.S. retreat.
- December 19: British retake Ft. George.

1814

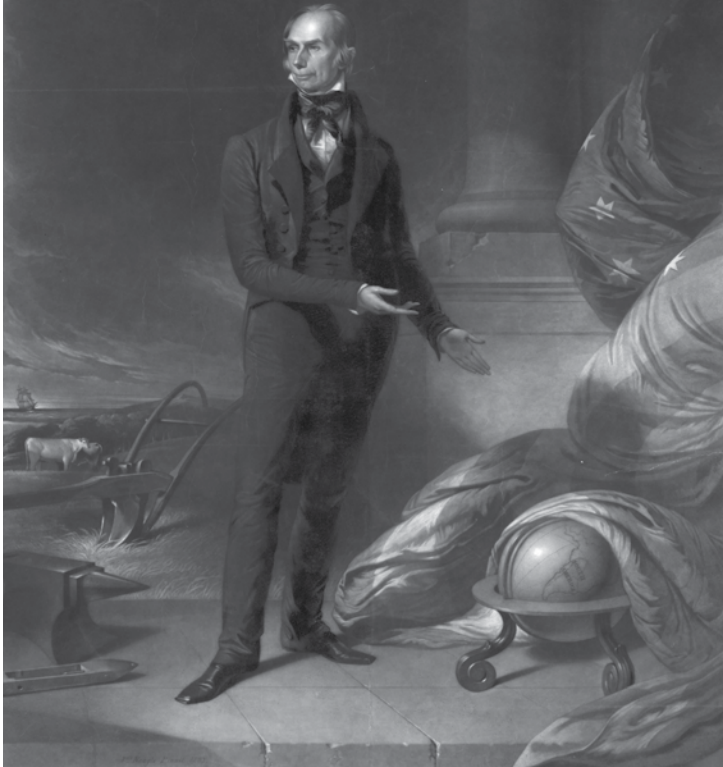
- March 4: Battle of Longwoods, Canada. U.S. raiders confront British, then return to Detroit.
- July 2–3: U.S. captures Ft. Erie, Canada.
- July 5: U.S. defeats British in the Battle of Chippewa, Canada.
- July 25: British defeat U.S. at Battle of Lundy’s Lane (a.k.a. Battle of Niagara Falls), Canada.
- August 2–September 21: British fail to retake Ft. Erie, Canada.
- December 24: Britain and U.S. sign Treaty of Ghent, officially ending the war.

SOURCES FOR THE TIMELINE:

“Timeline of the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars,” www.1812heritagetrail.org.
Albert Marrin, *1812: The War Nobody Won* (New York: Atheneum, 1985).
War of 1812 Timeline, www.historicplaces.ca.

Reasons to Invade Canada

By the time this engraving was made in 1843, Henry Clay was a presidential candidate. He opposed U.S. war with Mexico, but as a younger man, he had favored the invasion of Canada.
(Library of Congress)



lights up Indian warfare? Is it nothing to gain the entire fur trade connected with Canada?

Britain stands out in her outrage on us, by her violation of the sacred personal rights of American freemen, in the arbitrary and lawless imprisonment of our seamen....

It is said, however, that it is hopeless to go to war with Great Britain. If we go to war, we are to estimate not only the benefit to be gained for ourselves, but the injury to be done the enemy. The conquest of Canada is in your power. I trust I shall not be thought to be bold when I state that I truly believe that the militia of Kentucky are alone competent to place Montreal and Upper Canada at your feet.

Is it nothing to the pride of the King, to have the last of the immense North American possessions held by him in the beginning of his reign taken from him? Is it nothing to us to put out the torch that

—Senator Henry Clay, 1811

Sources

Read a longer excerpt of this speech at www.ecusd7.org/.../PS-War_Hawk_Demands-Henry_Clay.doc.

The whole speech can be found in *Sources in American History: A Book of Readings* (Chicago, IL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 92-93.c

Laura Secord, Canadian Hero



Everyone who buys chocolates in Canada is familiar with the brand name “Laura Secord.” But not everyone is aware that there was a real Canadian heroine named Laura Secord.

Laura Ingersoll was born in 1775 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. She moved to Canada with her family in 1795 where she met and married local Queenston merchant James Secord. The good times began to fade with the War of 1812 between the U.S. and Great Britain.

On June 21, 1813, U.S. invaders overtook her home and town. Overhearing the soldiers’ careless chatter about their mission to occupy the village of Beaver Dam, she decided she had to warn the British garrison there. Since the roads would be too dangerous, she undertook a 20-mile trek by swamp, riverbank, and woods.

Following many near-fatal mishaps, Laura encountered a band of Caughnawaga Indians who guided her the rest of the way. She reached the garrison and told her story.

The U.S. invaders (some 570 men) were by this time facing Indian ambush, Canadian militia attack, and the approaching British. They surrendered to Lieutenant James Fitzgibbon when he arrived on the scene.

Visible in the background of the stamp are the figures of Indians, who were preparing to ambush the Americans and whom she met along the way. This stamp, issued in 1992, is part of the Canadian folklore series, which focuses on “Canadian heroes whose feats have taken on legendary proportions.”

Sources

Canadian Postal Archives Database, “Laura Secord, Legendary Patriot.” (Library and Archives of Canada,) www.collectionscanada.gc.ca.
 Tony Brown, “Canada and the War of 1812” (Royal Philatelic Society of Canada), www.rpsc.org/Library/1812/warof1812.htm.

War of 1812: Goals and Outcomes

Henry Clay's Goals for War with Britain	Actual Consequences, 1812–1814
Stop the "impressment of [U.S.] seamen" into the British Navy	When Britain's war with France ended in 1814, the British then had no need to seize U.S. sailors. The Treaty of Ghent, signed on December 24, 1814, ended the War of 1812. It did not address the problem of impressment. ^(a)
Gain territory and "the entire fur trade" through "the conquest of Canada"	Neither side gained territory. Canadians helped British regulars repel U.S. attacks and remained loyal to the British Crown.
End British support for "Indian warfare"	Tecumseh's death in battle and Jackson's defeat of the Creek nation ended the prospect of a British-sponsored Indian confederacy.

Approximate Human Costs of the War of 1812^(b)

Britain ^(c)	Canada	Native American	United States ^(d)
8,600 soldiers killed, wounded, or missing	Unknown	Deaths and injuries are unknown. Thousands of refugees. The war was a disaster for the First Nation.	2,260 Battle deaths 4,505 Wounds not mortal

Notes

(a) Albert Marrin, *1812: The War Nobody Won* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 167.

(b) These numbers are approximations. Records kept by many militia units were neither complete nor accurate. Figures are unknowable of civilian casualties and deaths by disease, of refugees and displaced persons, but probably in the thousands.

(c) The War of 1812 Website. www.warof1812.ca/summary.html.

(d) "American War and Military Operations Casualties," www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/RL32492_05142008.pdf (Updated 2008).