

Abigail E Lewis, PhD Candidate, Department of History
IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award Report (2017)

Thanks to support from the Institute for Regional and International Studies, I spent eight weeks in Paris conducting follow-up research for my dissertation on photography and photojournalism under the Vichy Regime. My dissertation entitled “The Collaborationist Eye” investigates how the Germans in France and the Vichy Regime employed photography as a new form of propaganda that required the work of French photographers between 1940 and 1944. In particular, my dissertation examines how the Vichy Regime and the German propaganda authorities employed official photographers to document the war for propaganda. I found that through photography, I found that the Vichy Regime collaborated with the Germans over photographic policy, but also sought to construct an identity and ideology counter to Nazism. Furthermore, in exchange for their collaboration with propaganda authorities, both regimes gave authorized photographers the materials, access, and privileges necessary to continue their work. However, having empowered photographers with the right to document, they struggled to maintain control over what scenes photographers captured.

My first goal this summer was to explore the postwar debates regarding photographic collaboration and these images’ place in collective memory. First, I deepened my understanding of the police investigations and purge trials that took place between 1944-1949 of photographic agencies. I found that there were often discrepancies between the ways that the police, the purge commissions, and the courts judged collaboration cases. The commissions run by members of the resistance, closed and liquidated agencies with any German connections to help fund new press organs. The courts, however, tried to understand the intent and motivation of the accused. They looked to punish photographers who had display zeal in their collaboration with the Germans, and not those who worked under fear or duress or the need to survive. However, photographers’ accounts of their experiences and their wartime images did not provide the court with an easy method of revealing intention. Their defenses often highlighted their resistance to the Germans and their French patriotism despite and because of their relationship with propaganda officials.

In order to understand the context and stakes of the trials, I then consulted postwar state propaganda archives, police files, and archives related to memorializing the war. I studied the debates between the Resistance, collaborationist photographers, and the Ministry of Information over the punishment and liquidation of wartime agencies and who had the right to photograph the postwar. During the Liberation, resistance photographers forcibly closed wartime photo-agencies and they requisitioned the agencies’ studios, photographic materials, and employees to photograph the Liberation. Members of the resistance then staffed the purge commissions that conducted some of the first investigations of photographers. Through letters to the Ministry of Information, I found that that many of these photographers fought to continue working and at least initially, the Ministry of Information re-opened agencies in light of their illegal closure by the Resistance. Wartime photographers advocated for their right to play a part, arguing that their experience with French propaganda during the war made them uniquely prepared to take on the task after 1944. Some of these photographers provided their wartime images as documentation of war crimes to the traveling anti-Hitler exhibit and they published their images of the liberations across Europe. Photographers asserted their wartime work not as products of collaboration, but

documentation, essential to France's memory of the war and exposing Nazism. Therefore, this research suggested that a debate over who had the right to play a part in postwar photographic imperatives of de-Nazification and memorialization, in part influenced the push to identify collaboration in the photographic industry.

This summer, I also began research at the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC) on Jewish photographers and the use of photographs in promoting and combatting anti-Semitism. The CDJC has an extensive collection of private photographs from Jewish families during the war, images of violence against Jews, propaganda, and postwar exhibits that deepens my analysis of the roles that photographs played both in fostering anti-Semitism and combatting it. I also found information on Jewish photographers before and after the war. I currently have three case studies that allows me to analyze how the Germans purged Jews from the photographic industry in 1941, but also the contribution of Jewish photographers in southern France under the Vichy Regime. This aspect of my dissertation has opened doors for future research in France and at the US Holocaust Museum on the contribution of Jewish photographers in France during the war.

Thanks to this additional research, my dissertation will better be able to discuss the complex tensions between propaganda and documentation during the war, as well as collaboration and resistance that appear in the postwar debates. The fate of a "collaborationist" photographer and their images, depended not just on their wartime experiences but also on professional rivalries and their photographic work following the August 1944 liberation of Paris. I am very thankful to the Institute for Regional and International Studies for their generous support.