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The Tweet Speaks for Itself:
A Case Study of the “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter Account

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Abstract

Historians have long studied the concept of a “usable past,” understood as the selective application of the past to the present to establish identity or achieve a goal. In the twenty-first century, this concept has become pertinent to social media platforms, which have changed the way humans engage in activism. One important intersection of history, social media, and activism converges in a Twitter account titled “St. Louis Manifest.” The account is a curated site of memory, and as the most recent evolution of the story of the 1939 Jewish refugee ship, the M.S. St. Louis, it serves as a powerful case study of the impact of social media on activism. The account’s use of timing, text, and photographs are used to curate a unique space in which memory of the St. Louis penetrates dialogue about refugees in the present. The account first became active on January 27, 2017—International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the day President Trump’s “Muslim Ban” went into effect. Despite its politically-charged genesis, however, it has largely remained silent when presented with opportunities to draw parallels to the present-day refugee crisis at America’s southern border. In addition, the account was widely overlooked in the midst of the 80th anniversary of the M.S. St. Louis. This research presents a case study of the once-viral “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter account and, building on an original interview with the account’s creator, critically examines the limitations and potentialities of social media to affect present-day political issues.
**Introduction**

On June 17, 2019, U.S. House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recorded a live video to her Instagram account, in which she compared migrant detention along the U.S. southern border to the concentration camp system under Nazi Germany. She used key phrases linked to the Holocaust, such as “never again,” calling into question the legacy of the genocide in the present day. This live video provoked critical responses from fellow politicians, as well as academics and institutions of Holocaust memory. On June 24, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) published a press release stating that it “unequivocally rejects efforts to create analogies between the Holocaust and other events, whether historical or contemporary” (“Statement Regarding…”). The press release deferred to the USHMM’s official statement on Holocaust analogies, which claims that “Careless Holocaust analogies may demonize, demean, and intimidate their targets. But there is a cost for all of us because they distract from the real issues challenging our society, because they shut down productive, thoughtful discourse” (Friedberg). In response to this press release, a large cohort of Holocaust scholars signed “An Open Letter to the Director” of the USHMM, Sara J. Bloomfield, in which they effectively argued in support of Ocasio-Cortez and open public discourse.

This debate demonstrates the controversial nature of calling on history to affect the present—especially through the use of social media, which has changed the way humans engage in humanitarian culture and activism and increasingly plays a role in legitimate and illegitimate discussions about refugees. Just eleven days before Ocasio-Cortez recorded her controversial live video, another intersection of history, social media, and activism in the form of a Twitter account
passed by largely unnoticed. June 6, 2019 marked the 80th anniversary of the day in 1939 when
the Jewish refugee ship, the M.S. St. Louis, was denied entry to the United States and forced to
return to Europe. On June 6 of every year since 2017, in an act of remembrance a Twitter
account titled “St. Louis Manifest” has posted the names of all the St. Louis passengers who died
in the Holocaust. In 2017, the account went viral and was featured prominently by national
media outlets; by 2019, it had lost the spotlight and plateaued, to be followed eleven days later
by Ocasio-Cortez’s live Instagram video. Building on an extensive literature review and an
original interview with the account’s creator, this research presents a case study of the “St. Louis
Manifest” Twitter account, which provides insight into how people address history on social
media to affect present-day political issues, the affective techniques they use, and the limitations
and potentialities of social media activism.

**Evolution of a Manifest**

In order to understand the legacy of the St. Louis in the present, it is important to know
some history. On May 13, 1939, 937 passengers boarded the St. Louis in Hamburg, Germany.
Most of the passengers were Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. Just six months prior in early
November 1938, Jews in Germany were traumatized by the events of Kristallnacht, a night when
state-sponsored violence destroyed Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues. To the Jewish
passengers, the St. Louis was a symbol of hope in the face of tremendous loss. The ship was
bound for Havana, Cuba, whose lax entry rules had already made it a destination for refugees
from Europe. Many of the St. Louis passengers planned to wait there until they could immigrate
to the United States or elsewhere. But when the St. Louis arrived at Cuba’s coast two weeks after
setting sail the Cuban government refused to allow the passengers to disembark. Because of
Depression-era domestic politics and widespread animosity toward Jews and immigrants, the
passengers’ landing permits had been invalidated. When the *St. Louis* was ordered to leave Cuban waters on June 2, its captain, Gustav Schroeder, steered the ship north to the Florida coast with the hope that the United States would allow the passengers entry. Upon arrival the U.S. Coast Guard blocked the ship’s access to Florida ports. For the same reasons that the Cuban government denied the passengers, and because of U.S. immigration laws, the U.S. denied refuge to the passengers. On June 6, the *St. Louis* returned east and Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands agreed to provide temporary refuge to the passengers just months before the outbreak of World War II. The passengers disembarked in those countries, but 254 of them were eventually killed in the war and the Holocaust (Holocaust Encyclopedia, “Voyage of the St. Louis”).

It is clear that the story of the *St. Louis* is being resurrected in the present because of its relationship with immigration and refugee policies. Fifteen years prior to the ship’s voyage, in 1924, the U.S. Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act, which limited immigration on a quota system by country of origin (Holocaust Encyclopedia, “Immigration to the United States…”). This legislation remained in place for over four decades. The quota for people born in Germany (25,957) went unfilled from 1933 to 1938, even though there was a lengthy waiting list of ineligible Germans who could not afford to emigrate or could not acquire the proper paperwork. 1939 was the first year the U.S. government issued the maximum number of visas--and still, the waiting list continued to grow (*Americans and the Holocaust*, “How Many Refugees…”). It is important to note that the U.S. government did not have a *refugee* policy in place. Because of this, Jewish refugees were forced to seek entry as immigrants, despite the fact that they were stateless, vulnerable, and at risk of violence or worse in Nazi Germany (“Immigration to the United States…”).
Susan Welch, Professor of Political Science at Pennsylvania State University, argues that the legislative agenda under President Roosevelt was reactive to prewar public opinion toward Jews, which generally did not present a “unified or constant view” (Welch 632). The following excerpt is a summary of her research conclusions:

Most Americans held some anti-Semitic views, largely focused on the beliefs that Jews should not have so much power in business and should not expect to mingle socially. Relatively few supported the Nazi campaign against Jews and even fewer approved of starting a campaign against Jews here. But most did not want to bring Jewish refugees to the United States. (Welch 629)

In adjusting to the results of public opinion polls, the U.S. government did not seek to change the existing immigration legislation or implement new refugee policies. So, Jewish refugees were forced to adhere to existing legislation, which required them to file a visa application, birth certificate, and immigration visa, as well as arrange two American sponsors, a Certificate of Good Conduct, and evidence of having passed a physical exam—all in addition to the extensive documentation required for emigration from the German Reich (Holocaust Encyclopedia, “Documents Required…”).

Furthermore, the lack of a refugee policy in the U.S. also meant that refugees were placed on waiting lists alongside immigrants. Many of the St. Louis passengers had secured spots on the waiting list and were planning to wait in Cuba until they were called to immigrate to the U.S. After the ship was forced to leave Cuban waters, it headed north to seek entry to the U.S. through Florida. At that point, the passengers were still on the waiting list and there were other immigrants or refugees higher up on the list. Accepting the St. Louis passengers out of order may have created implications for other Jews fleeing the Nazi regime. In other words, it may have
created a domestically unfavorable precedent for entry to the U.S. An influential pre-war American journalist, Dorothy Thompson, argued, “If governments get the idea that they can expropriate their citizens and turn them loose on the kindness of the rest of the world, the business will never end” (Dwork and van Pelt 111). For these reasons as well as others, C. Paul Vincent argues that context must be considered in order to understand the *St. Louis* affair and clarify its legacy:

> It is understood that history should be written not as a tool to cast sweeping generalizations but as an exercise for reminding readers that human affairs, both past and present, are complicated. Yet, with respect to the *St. Louis*, a story has evolved that is at times as much myth as it is history. The goal in revisiting the Cuban chapter of the *St. Louis* story is not to overturn all that we believe we have understood to date, but to muddy the waters and demonstrate that the history of this episode—as with so much else—is a process that rarely produces final answers. (Vincent 265)

The complex story of the *St. Louis* has been told and retold intermittently since 1939, and it can be argued that each time the story is retold a new version of the ship’s manifest emerges. In maritime travel, a manifest is a list of the passengers, crew, and cargo on board. More generally, the word “manifest” can refer to how something makes itself visible or makes its existence known. Each time the story of the *St. Louis* is retold, a fresh audience gains a new understanding of the ship’s occupants, and the story manifests itself within a new context. This has been the case in the stories told about the *St. Louis* to date; each retelling is rooted in the context of the time when it was published and provokes the audience to consider the relationship between past and present. This process of retelling is referred to as the concept of a “usable past.”
In 1918, Pulitzer Prize winning historian Van Wyck Brooks published his seminal essay, “On Creating a Usable Past,” in which he argued for new interpretations of history that are relevant and productive in the present-day. He condemned the “university world” for having “no sort of desire to fertilize the present, but rather to shame the present with the example of the past” (Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past). Brooks believed that this shaming was not productive on its own. He encouraged people to instead ask, “What is important for us? What, out of all the multifarious achievements and impulses and desires of the American literary mind, ought we to elect to remember?” (Brooks). In this way, he suggested that individuals have agency in applying the past to the present and future. He argued, “Every people selects from the experience of every other people whatever contributes most vitally to its own development” (Brooks).

To create a usable past is to selectively apply the past to the present to establish identity or achieve a goal. For example, when Ocasio-Cortez compared migrant detention along the U.S. southern border to the concentration camp system under Nazi Germany, she referenced a historical fact in order to draw attention to a situation in the present and put that present situation into the context of a crime. Similarly, the story of the St. Louis has changed over time, and with each retelling of the story in different mediums (newspapers, radio, fiction and non-fiction books, film, and on social media), new “usable pasts” have been created.

The “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter Account as a Curated “Usable Past”

Russel Neiss’s Twitter account is one of the most recent evolutions of the St. Louis manifest, and as such, it is telling of how social media creates new spaces for memory and the application of history to the present. As social media has developed in the twenty-first century, it has become increasingly curated; social media platforms can tailor content based on user data,
and users have a high degree of control concerning how their content is viewed by others. The “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter account is significant because it is curated. The use of timing, text, and photographs are used to curate a unique space in which memory of the St. Louis penetrates dialogue about refugees in the present.

The timeline of the account’s activity is critical to understanding the ways in which it aims to engage in dialogue. The account was first active on January 27, 2017: International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the same day U.S. President Trump’s “Muslim Ban” went into effect as an executive order. The account has since been active six times: June 6, 2017; June 6, 2018; January 26, 2019; June 5-6, 2019; July 17-18, 2019; and January 27, 2020. It is clear that there are two regular dates when the account becomes active—International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27) and the day the St. Louis was rejected from the United States in 1939 (June 6). An outlier in the timeline of the account’s activity, however, occurred in mid-July, 2019. There are no widely-recognized Holocaust remembrance days or obvious World War II-related historical events that occurred during July 17-18. Popular news sources, however, were reporting on the “Send Her Back” movement. On July 17, supporters at a Greenville, N.C. Trump rally chanted “send her back” in response to the president’s racist remarks about House Representative Ilhan Omar, an immigrant from Somalia. A New York Times editorial summed up popular sentiment about what the chant establishes—that Trump “seeks to demonize those who oppose his policies as dangerous extremists out to destroy America” (The New York Times Editorial Board, “The Real Meaning…”). In the context of this debate centered on racism and xenophobia in the U.S., Neiss’s “St. Louis Manifest” account became active.

The text included in each Tweet is also critical to understanding the curation of the account. As previously mentioned, each image posted is accompanied by a text template. In
some cases, when there is no image, the Tweet is just text. It is important to note that the text template has changed over time. When the account was first created, it read: “My name is [name]. The US turned me away at the border in 1939. I was murdered at [place].” As the account became active again in June of 2017 and 2018, and January and June of 2019, new hashtags were included, such as #StLouisVigil, #NeverAgain, and #RefugeesWelcome. The hashtag, #RefugeesWelcome, gained popularity on Twitter in response to xenophobic, anti-refugee actions (Noman and Wendling, “Demand to open doors…”). It is used to show solidarity for refugees and those who are working to help them. When the “St. Louis Manifest” account was active in July 2019, the text read, “In 1939, the US sent me back.” This was a direct allusion to the concurrent Send Her Back chants and President Trump’s controversial Tweets. These changes to the text template link the account to the context in which it becomes active.

In addition, Neiss programmed the account to write in the first-person, which is significant for several reasons. First, it signifies a break from the conventions of scholarly historical writing. There is no record that the passengers actually said or wrote the words included in each Tweet. In fact, it is impossible for them to have done so because they are speaking about their deaths, which occurred in the past. Neiss does not care about traditional, academic constraints because, as he said in an email interview, his project is “not meant to be a digital humanities research project for a CV, or to be a comprehensive history of these victims” (email interview with Russel Neiss, Sept. 20, 2019). Second, it feeds into popular conceptions of Holocaust victims and survivors as all-knowing, morally and historically unassailable eyewitnesses. Edward Linenthal notes that, as Holocaust remembrance emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, postwar American life saw “the transformation of the survivor’s status from unwanted guest to a witness whose testimony revealed terrible truths they would dare
not to forget” (Linenthal, *Preserving Memory* 7). Third, the use of quotation marks creates a sense of intimacy between the individual *St. Louis* passengers and the user. The implication is that each passenger is speaking to the user directly. Therefore, each Tweet can be perceived as a personal plea or call to action.

Alongside the text, the use of photographs creates an intense emotional encounter. Remembrance institutions have long relied on photographs to create meaning. The USHMM design team “was determined to personalize the Holocaust, since it wanted visitors to eschew forever the role of the bystander, and this, it was felt, could be accomplished effectively through the painful link with the faces of Holocaust victims” (Linenthal, *Preserving Memory* 171). For example, one of the towers in the USHMM permanent exhibition, titled “The Tower of Faces,” is devoted to the exterminated Jewish community in the Lithuanian town of Eisiskes. Previous to occupation by the German army, the Jewish community constituted the majority of the town. Only 29 Jews, however, survived the *Einsatzgruppen*, the paramilitary SS death squads. The Tower’s walls are covered by photographs of the Jewish community prior to the Holocaust. Ultimately, the photographs in this tower are “the hardest pictures in the exhibit, for you bring the knowledge of the future to these pictures that these people didn’t have. You see them in their innocence, and you know their fate” (Linenthal, *Preserving Memory* 185).

The “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter account has the same impact on its audience. The user sees the *St. Louis* passengers in their innocence, living their lives. Many photographs were captured prior to the *St. Louis*, during important life developments, such as the birth of a baby or a family gathering. Other photographs show the passengers enjoying the newfound pleasures of the *St. Louis*. Passengers are pictured socializing on-deck or in the ship’s dining room.
What makes the account powerful is the information the user knows that is unknown to the people pictured: the knowledge of when and where they died. This feature of the “St. Louis Manifest” creates a sense of shared humanity between the user and the passenger, and potentially strengthens the user’s personal commitment to refugees today. The Tweets that include a photograph of the passenger generally have more likes and retweets than those with only text.

**Discussion and Impacts of the “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter Account**

Neiss has remained tentative about drawing direct parallels to present-day issues; he is adamant that the account was created and continues to exist as a memorial. In a 2019 email interview, Neiss wrote, “In the Jewish community, there’s a ritual around Holocaust remembrance, where one of the things that happens is reading the names of the victims. This project was conceived in part to recreate this ritual for a digital age” (email interview with Russel Neiss, Sept. 20, 2019). However, the account itself hints, and sometimes bluntly points, at parallels to the present day.

The “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter account was created the night prior to when it first became active on January 27, 2017 (Rothman, “The Story Behind…”). However, Neiss had been thinking about how to recreate the Jewish ritual of reading names in the digital age for some time (Rothman, “The Story Behind…”). As previously noted, the account effectively went viral overnight and was featured extensively by prominent media outlets. The overall tone of the coverage was optimistic and indicated an increased interest in activism. In an interview conducted several days later on January 31, co-creator Rabbi Charlie Schwartz commented the following:

...we’ve been surprised about how the feed moved from the digital sphere to the action in the real world. We’re constantly getting tweets and emails about people who are using
the feed for signs at rallies, as templates for letters to congress [sic] and as motivation to do something. To be honest, the attention this account has received has shown us a depth of compassion from people around the world that affirms our sense of the goodness of humanity. (Bencks, “Memorializing the passengers…”)

Neiss states that he is “certain that this bot [“St. Louis Manifest”] changed the conversation around the way we talk about refugees in America” (email interview with Russel Neiss, Sept. 20, 2019). He notes that he has kept a list of politicians who have publicly engaged with the account on Twitter, and he has been contacted by several educators who have used the account to teach in their classrooms. The account is also followed by other verified, prominent accounts, such as those owned by Jenny Slate (comedian, Parks and Rec) as well as the Auschwitz Memorial. Neiss has also been asked to consult on a few digital humanities projects.

The initial response to the account was immediate and overwhelmingly positive because the story of the St. Louis resonated with Americans in January 2020. Users embraced the story as a perfect historical analogy for what they saw unfolding in front of them: President Trump’s “Muslim Ban” and increasing xenophobia and racism at home and around the world. The story of the St. Louis is largely regarded as an American failure. By comparing present-day refugees and migrants to the passengers of the St. Louis, users placed themselves on the “right” side of history. The analogy also allowed anti-Trump activists to compare President Trump’s administration to Hitler’s Nazi regime.

It is important to note, however, that the function and impact of the account have evolved over time. Now, in April 2020, the Twitter account has approximately 65,900 followers, slightly fewer than after the first week of its existence. It has only been active on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the anniversary of the rejection of the St. Louis, and one other select time
(during the Send Her Back movement). The account has remained notably silent when presented with clear opportunities for impact and activism. Since the account became active in January 2017, U.S. refugee policy has become increasingly restrictive under President Trump, despite an increase in the flow of refugees worldwide. According to the American Immigration Council, “For Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, the ceiling was set at an all-time low of 30,000, down from the previous all-time low of 45,000 set in FY 2018 — although the number of refugees admitted in 2018 was only half of that number (22,415)” (American Immigration Council, “An Overview…”). In addition to increasing restrictions placed on refugees, the Trump administration has fought to limit immigration in general from select countries (notably, with large Black or non-White populations), such as Nigeria, Tanzania, Sudan, and Myanmar (Sacchetti et al., “Trump expands…”).

These developments have all generated significant conversation and activity amongst refugee supporters and opponents. Despite its optimistic, activist beginnings, however, the “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter account has largely remained silent when presented with opportunities to engage. It has continued its regular activity on International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the anniversary of the rejection of the St. Louis from the Americas, but it has rarely interjected in response to current events. The account’s popularity has waned as well, and its followership has plateaued.

In part, this plateau is due to the way Twitter works as a platform. According to Jose van Dijck, “The ideal of an open and free twitterverse in reality comes closer to a public dialogue ruled by a small number of hyperconnected influencers skilled at handling large numbers of followers” (van Dijck 7). While Twitter was originally conceived by its creators as a democratic, utilitarian tool that allowed all users a voice, its algorithms have evolved to weight users and
Tweets unevenly. Established humanitarian organizations or public figures who engage in activism may engage with material published by refugees and migrants themselves, but individual refugee and migrant accounts rarely seem to garner significant, widespread attention. Despite popular misconceptions, asylum migrants and refugees do own and use smart phones and other mobile technology. In a 2018 study of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands, researchers found that, despite challenges to using smart phones (including technical issues, lack of internet, and surveillance), asylum migrants and refugees relied on social media and “mainly appreciated [it] for the wealth of information that is available, the timeliness of the information, and specifically for information that is based on personal experiences” (Dekker et al. 5). Dekker et al. found that, for these reasons, asylum migrants and refugees use social media as a tool to make important travel decisions. However, because of the way Twitter works as a platform, there is little evidence of asylum migrants and refugees using Twitter to affect humanitarian discourse and activism in real time. Rather, they use Twitter as a source of information that helps them make decisions about how to meet their immediate needs.

Kaarina Nikunen’s research explores how the social media environment has affected political discourse and action in regard to the European refugee crisis. She explores the use of social media by anti-immigrant movements compared to solidarity groups, and argues that researching affective practice “shows how emotions are experienced, managed, mobilised and geared in the context of social media and how particular emotions carry particular kinds of moral force. In addition, affective practices are significantly shaped by technologies and economies of social media” (Nikunen 11). So, while it is clear that social media has changed activism in the twenty-first century, the nature and extent of this change is widely debated. It appears that social media is able to generate short-term, emotional responses, but more research is needed to
understand if immediate responses develop into long-term behavior change. In a literature review of social media and activism, Bradley Allsop outlines three competing perspectives academics hold toward the role of social media in activism: the “slacktivism” perspective, the “paradigm shifter” perspective, and the “facilitator” perspective (Allsop 35-38). The “slacktivism” perspective argues that easy, minimal engagement on social media has replaced real, effective activism, and “only really serve the egotistical needs of those participating in them” (Allsop 35). On the other hand, the “paradigm shifter” perspective argues that social media has profoundly changed activism, usually for the better. Finally, the “facilitator” perspective argues that social media works hand-in-hand with traditional activism, rather than displacing it or altering it completely.

It is important to understand how people engage in dialogue about refugees because there is an immediate need for change. Betts and Collier argue that international policy toward refugees, established by the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees—a convention brought about by the international refugee crisis World War II created—is outdated and ineffective when applied to refugees in the twenty-first century. The authors write that, “Conventionally, there have been three recognized ‘durable solutions’—repatriation when the conflict ends or there is a political transition; resettlement to a third country; a local integration if the host country is prepared to offer a pathway to citizenship” (Betts and Collier 8). As a result, “these three options represent the impossible choice with which we present refugees: long-term encampment, urban destitution, or perilous journeys” (Betts and Collier 9). Due to the failures of international refugee policy, “most countries fail to comply with the 1951 Convention” (Betts and Collier 42). And while productive dialogue about refugees has proven to be a difficult process, it is important. Betts and Collier warn that “The number of people seeking refuge is likely to increase
over time. Although not inevitable, the dynamics of conflict, climate change, and state fragility strongly imply that displacement--and survival migration--will be a defining feature of the twenty-first century and beyond. The question is not so much whether it will happen but how we will manage it” (Betts and Collier 134).

Conclusion

On June 6, 2019, there was relatively little media coverage of the 80th anniversary of the rejection of the St. Louis from the U.S. It was overshadowed by another, more popular event: the 75th anniversary of D-Day. Major U.S. publications followed President Trump’s visit to the American cemetery in Normandy to recognize the anniversary with President Emmanuel Macron of France. At the ceremony, President Trump honored veterans in attendance and praised the Allied forces and their collaboration. Addressing the American front, President Trump stated, “They came from the farms of a vast heartland, the streets of glowing cities and the forges of mighty industrial towns . . . Before the war, many had never ventured beyond their own community. Now, they had come to offer their lives halfway across the world” (Landler et al., “D-Day Remembrance…”). This glowing picture of wartime Americans and their integrity overseas presents a fractured memory of America’s role in World War II. It is idealistic and selective and ignores the role of the U.S. as bystander just five years earlier.

The intense media coverage of D-Day on June 6, 2019, alongside the near-total forgetfulness that marked the 80th anniversary of the St. Louis’s departure from American waters, is telling of American identity and selective forgetfulness. Both D-Day and the plight of the St. Louis are historical events with the potential to be leveraged in creating usable pasts. On June 6, D-Day won out over the St. Louis because its story is uplifting and affirms America’s ideals and self-image. It contributes to a positive identity, which permeates politics, economics,
and society in various ways. The *St. Louis* lends itself to a more sobering reflection on America’s role in World War II, and therefore is less favorable to a positive American identity.

The use of history to affect the present is complex, and more so with the integration of social media platforms, which disperse select information in new ways. Sean Spicer, former Press Secretary in the Trump administration, relied heavily on the phrase, “The Tweet speaks for itself.” Spicer was criticized by the press for “responding to a question confidently without actually answering it” (Bierman, “‘The tweet speaks for itself’…”). The phrase was used as a way to justify Trump’s ambiguous, often contradictory Tweets. When asked on email about the direct parallels between the text included in the “St. Louis Manifest” account’s Tweets, Russel Neiss responded, “As the former press secretary used to say, ‘The tweet speaks for itself’” (email interview with Russel Neiss, Sept. 20, 2019). He followed up, “This project has always primarily been a Holocaust Remembrance project, but it is impossible to ignore the political realities we find ourselves in today” (email interview with Russel Neiss, Sept. 20, 2019).

The “St. Louis Manifest” Twitter account climaxed in January 2017, when it was created and immediately went viral. In the following years, the account’s followership plateaued. During the 80th anniversary of the rejection of the *St. Louis* from American waters, the account was neglected; it failed to gain significant media attention, and was overshadowed by commemorations of D-Day. The lifespan of the account therefore raises important questions. What is the role of social media in presenting history to the public? How does social media affect what people consider in their day-to-day lives? In addition, the affective practices of the account raise important questions. How are social media spaces curated to affect their audience? Do immediate emotional encounters develop into long-term behavioral change? While this research does not offer conclusive answers to these questions, it recognizes the importance of asking
them. In the words of Linenthal and Engelhardt, it is the historian’s responsibility to “begin to make some sense of the ways in which the past lives with and within us” (Lindenthal and Engelhardt 6).

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