

Florida State University Libraries

2017

Wikipedia: Facts, Bias, and Critical Thinking

Nathan Stoltzfus, Michela Sieman and Shelby Young





Wikipedia: Facts, Bias, and Critical Thinking



Dr. Nathan Stoltzfus, Michela Sieman, and Shelby Young

Introduction

As a part of Florida State’s Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP), students Michela Sieman and Shelby Young were two among a group of research assistants who worked with Dr. Nathan Stoltzfus in fulfilling what he deemed as a project on current-day historical representations in digital media. The project explores the representations of the Nazi regime in digital media today. By analyzing English Wikipedia pages related to Nazi Germany, this project aims to examine this relationship in terms of discovering biases behind editors and editing trends. With the prevalence of digital media and technology in today’s society and information now at everyone’s fingertips, it is important that this information is represented truthfully and with no hint of personal bias or unsupported claims.

Despite the inability to produce conclusive results, the project has already identified trends of Wikipedia editing, the types of editors on the Nazi Germany pages, and some reasons that pages are being changed. This work is holding Wikipedia to its own fair standards in hopes to further present reliable information about the Nazi regime. Through a year of communication and working in various settings, this research group was able to explore a research area as well as open up pathways of research for all parties involved.

Acknowledgements

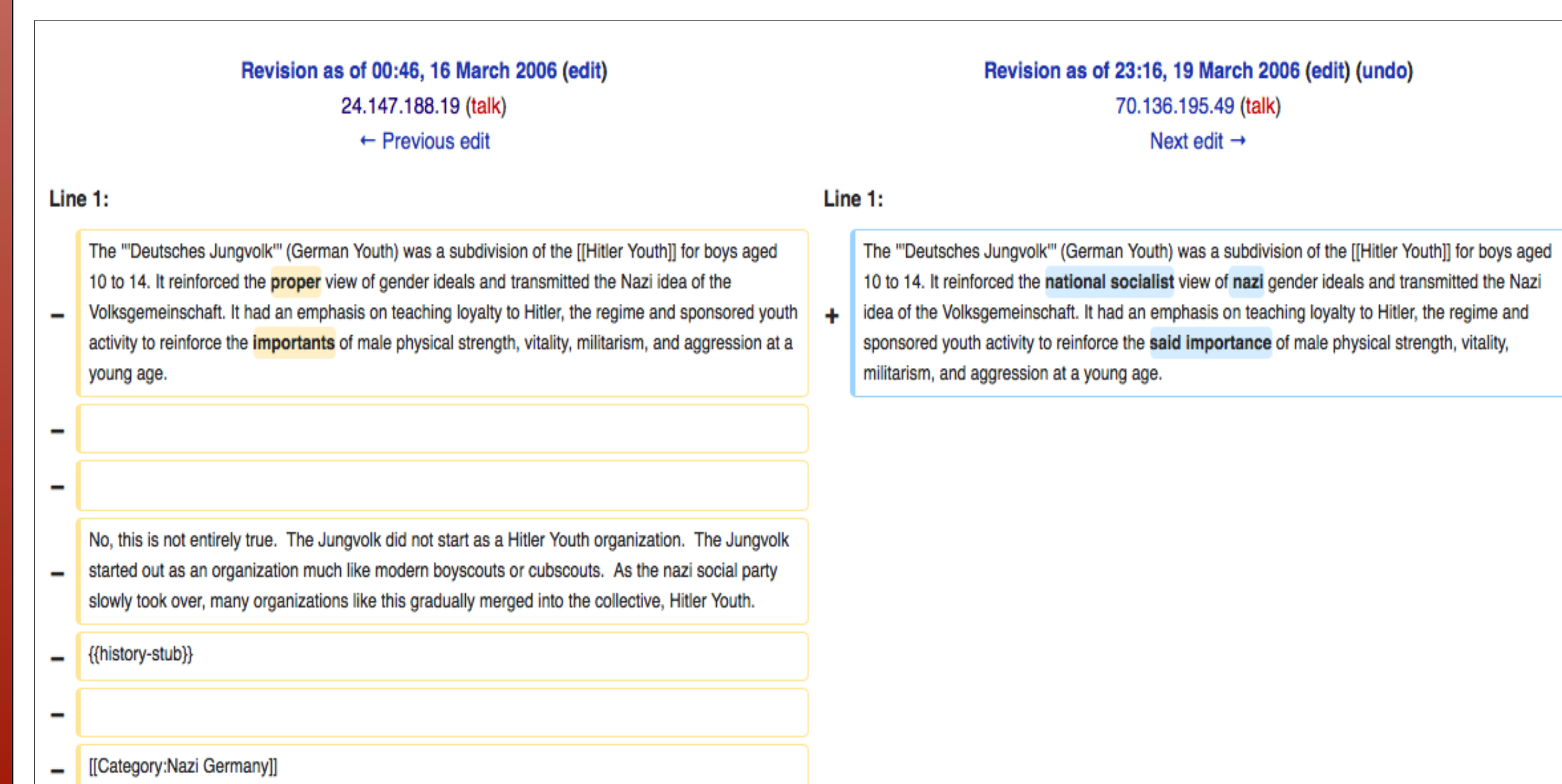
Ms. Danielle Wirsansky, BA in Theater and BA in Creative Writing, Florida State University

Eliza Chase, Research Assistant, Florida State University

Methodology

- ❖ **Group Meetings** – During weekly meetings among the research assistants and Dr. Stoltzfus, each team member reported on what they had found throughout the week relating to the editing patterns of the Nazi-related pages. The meetings facilitated group collaboration through suggestions and support from each assistant and Dr. Stoltzfus to successfully maintain a unified trajectory for the project.
- ❖ **Research Assistant Cooperation** – While each assistant took distinct paths in their analysis and work on the project, we very often excelled in helping facilitate each other’s spheres of work. Our strong collaboration efforts allowed us to embark on notable endeavors, such as presenting at the Florida Undergraduate Research Conference and the Amnesty International Human Rights Conference at the FSU College of Law, both in 2017.
- ❖ **Technology** – We utilized tools through Wikipedia like page statistics and revision comparisons. Below is an example of a revision comparison we used to identify changes made in the rhetoric of the page.

Figure 1



Screenshot of revision to the Deutsches Jungvolk Wikipedia page

Conclusion

Overall, through this project students were able to become inspired and progress their own interests in research. Skills like reading, writing, communication, and cooperation are some of the most important developments one can receive in his/her undergraduate career.

Due to her research endeavors under Dr. Stoltzfus, Michela was selected to be an Undergraduate Research Ambassador for the 2017-2018 school year. She also conducts research with archival material at the Institute on World War II and the Human Experience in the FSU History Department. She is now looking toward the future in developing her own research project concerning the culture and history of Italy, hoping to use the project to complete an undergraduate thesis next year.

Thanks to this research exposure, Shelby is now continuing research under this Wikipedia project while also having received an IDEA Grant and conducted independent research with the guidance of Dr. Stoltzfus on identity issues within Alsace, France. She is currently interning for a U.S. Senator where she plans to gain the knowledge to help her identify American-centered identity issues. In addition, she plans to study and research in Martinique this Spring and return in the Fall to begin her Honors in the Major Thesis for Florida State.

Dr. Nathan Stoltzfus...