

# 1. Project Title: Superfluous injury and unnecessary suffering: Charting the genealogy of a legal concept in the US media from the United States Civil War to the first Hague Peace Conference of 1899

**Area: History**

## **Project Supervisor: Associate Professor Maartje Abbenhuis Project Description**

In 1868 the Tsar of Russia, Alexander II, called for the world's 'civilized' countries to sign a treaty forbidding the military use of a particular type of rifle bullet, namely one whose tip was filled with explosive or incendiary powder. The US Civil War (1861-1865) had shown that these bullets were useful for blowing up or setting fire to ammunition dumps, carts and other vehicles. But they could also be used to explode soldiers. Most militaries in the world had begun manufacturing these bullets by 1868. As commander-in-chief of the world's largest army, he imagined the bullets' impact on soldier morale and his (in)ability to win a war. Mobilising the language of humanitarianism but with pragmatic ends in mind, twelve foreign governments met in the Russian city of St Petersburg in 1868 to sign a declaration banning the bullets. In the process, they certified the legal principle that an armed force could not employ force that resulted in 'unnecessary suffering' (of soldiers) or 'superfluous injury' (to soldiers). These two concepts have influenced the course of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the laws of war ever since.

## **Researcher's Work**

Mobilising the extensive digital newspaper archives available in the University of Auckland's library, the successful scholar will undertake a media study of US newspaper coverage of the concepts of 'unnecessary suffering' and 'superfluous' injury before and after the signing of the St Petersburg Declaration. They will look for evidence of public engagement and/or debates on the acceptability of wounding – which weapons were deemed acceptable, which wounds were deemed necessary in time of war or state violence, which bodies could be injured – from the time of the US Civil War to the signing of the 1899 Hague Conventions (which sanctified these principles). They will augment this primary source research with wide reading in the history of the laws of war.

The project has three research outputs:

1. The student will compile a **research database** logging newspaper entries from 1861 to 1899 that speak to the parameters of the research project. Where applicable, the student will write a short analysis of the historical significance of articles as part of the database.

2. The student will create a **bibliography** of the key secondary texts that relate to the scope of the project.
3. In consultation with the supervisor, the student will devise an appropriate **research question** and write a 3,000-word **research essay** in answer to that question mobilising the primary and secondary sources they have encountered during the project.

The project offers an opportunity for the student to undertake a piece of original historical research and will hone their primary source research skills (particularly in using digitised newspaper sources), their historiographical understanding of the interconnections between law, war and political cultures, and offer an opportunity for the student to construct a research essay on a subject of their choosing.

### **Required Skills/Pre-requisites**

Students who have studied History, Legal Studies or Political Science courses at University level will be prioritised for this scholarship.