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# Authority of Knowledge: Historians on Wikipedia in higher education

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# My Context

Lecturer in Early Modern  
European History 2003-2022  
(The University of Sunderland)

Focus on Intellectual history  
16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century

Studying LISM programme  
Sheffield University

Attending #CALC 2021

Presentation by Diana Park  
and Lauri Bridges on  
developing a module about  
Wikipedia and information  
equity

# Participants – 8 academic historians – UK universities

## Type of institutions

**N.B.** Some of the participants placed their institution in two categories (Post-92+research intensive or Russell Group +Research intensive)

Post-92	Research intensive	Russel group
xxx	xxxxxx	xxxx

## Length of teaching:

5-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30
xx	xxx		xx	x

# Aims of the research

explore the relationship between history academics' conceptions of knowledge and authority in their fields of research and their assessment of Wikipedia's authority and credibility as a teaching resource

# Structure of the presentation

- The notion of authority in academic history in comparison to authority on Wikipedia
- The evaluation of Wikipedia by historians
- Historians' engagement with the notion of teaching with Wikipedia.

## Defining Authority

### Interviewee 7:

- Authority, I think is cultural and what counts as authority is very bound up with kind of cultural assumptions and social assumptions that we make.

# Evaluating Wikipedia

- Each participant was asked to read two Wikipedia entries:
- One on their broad area of research
- One on a specialised topic in their field

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for Charles Martel. The article title is "Charles Martel" and it is categorized as "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". The main text begins with "This article is about the Frankish ruler. For other uses, see Charles Martel (disambiguation)." and continues with "Charles Martel (c. 688 – 22 October 741) was a Frankish political and military leader who, as Duke and Prince of the Franks and Mayor of the Palace, was the de facto ruler of Francia from 718 until his death." A small image of a statue of Charles Martel is visible on the right side of the article.

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for Napoleon. The article title is "Napoleon" and it is categorized as "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". The main text begins with "This article is about Napoleon I. For other uses, see Napoleon (disambiguation) and Napoleon Bonaparte (disambiguation)." and continues with "Napoleon Bonaparte (born Napoleone Buonaparte; 15 August 1769 – 5 May 1821, later known by his regnal name Napoleon I) was a French military and political leader who rose to prominence during the French Revolution and led several successful campaigns during the Revolutionary Wars." A small image of Napoleon in military uniform is visible on the right side of the article.

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for British Raj. The article title is "British Raj" and it is categorized as "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (Redirected from British Raj)". The main text begins with "“British Empire in India” and “Indian Empire” redirect here. For other uses, see India (disambiguation). For other Indian empires, see History of India." and continues with "The British Raj (in Hindi: ब्रिटिश राज, rāj, "reign, state, or empire";[1]) was the rule of the British Crown on the Indian subcontinent.[2][3] It is also called Crown rule in India.[4] or Direct rule in India[5] and lasted from 1858 to 1947.[1][6] The region under British control was commonly called India in contemporaneous usage and included areas directly administered by the United Kingdom, which were collectively called British India, and areas ruled by indigenous rulers, but under British paramountcy, called the princely states. The region was sometimes called the Indian Empire, though not officially.[1][7]

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for July Column. The article title is "July Column" and it is categorized as "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". The main text begins with "This article or section should specify the language of its non-English content, using {{lang}} for transliterated languages, and {{IPA}} for phonetic transcriptions, with an appropriate ISO 639 code. Wikipedia's multilingual support templates may also be used. See why. (January 2022)" and continues with "The July Column (French: Colonne de Juillet) is a monumental column in Paris commemorating the Revolution of 1830. It stands in the center of the Place de la Bastille and celebrates the Trois Glorieuses – the three glorious days of 27–29 July 1830 that saw the fall of Charles X, King of France, and the commencement of the “July Monarchy” of Louis-Philippe, King of France. It was built between 1835 and 1840." A small image of the July Column is visible on the right side of the article.

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for Republicanism. The article title is "Republicanism" and it is categorized as "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". The main text begins with "For other uses, see Republic." and continues with "Republicanism is a political ideology centered on citizenship in a state organized as a republic. Historically, it emphasizes the idea of self-rule and ranges from the rule of a representative minority or oligarchy to popular sovereignty.[1] It has had different definitions and interpretations which vary significantly based on historical context and methodological approach." A table of contents is visible on the right side of the article.

The screenshot shows the Wikipedia article for Deism. The article title is "Deism" and it is categorized as "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". The main text begins with "For other uses, see Deism (disambiguation). Not to be confused with them." and continues with "Deism (/ˈdɛɪzəm/ DĒ-iz-əm[1][2] or /ˈdes.ɪzəm/ DAY-iz-əm; derived from the Latin deus, meaning "god"[3][4]) is the philosophical position and rationalistic theology[5] that generally rejects revelation as a source of divine knowledge, and asserts that empirical reason and observation of the natural world are exclusively logical, reliable, and sufficient to determine the existence of a Supreme Being as the creator of the universe.[6][7][8][9] Or more simply stated, Deism is the belief in the existence of God solely based on rational thought without any reliance on revealed religions or religious authority.[10][11][12] Deism emphasizes the concept of natural theology (that is, God's existence is revealed through nature).[13][14]

# Evaluating Wikipedia: factually accurate but

- Um, it was less about facts and more about the attention that was paid to certain things over others. And that my sense, as, [...] somebody who works on those areas is that it wasn't the right things that were being prioritised necessarily. [...] so that's inaccuracy, but it's not [...] not factual inaccuracy but it does kind of distort your sense of that topic. (interviewee 5)
- I point to them it's a kind of very 21st century method of sharing knowledge, but the knowledge it's sharing is not always 21st century if you see what I mean. [...] So often there are a few case studies we can say: You know this is a point of view from a 19th century which is now being propagated [...]digitally but actually [...] the framework is very old, right?

# Yet

- I think it's incredibly valuable. [...] And I just, I like the idea of collective responsibility [...] for the knowledge that we have available to us. It seems to work. (interviewee 7)

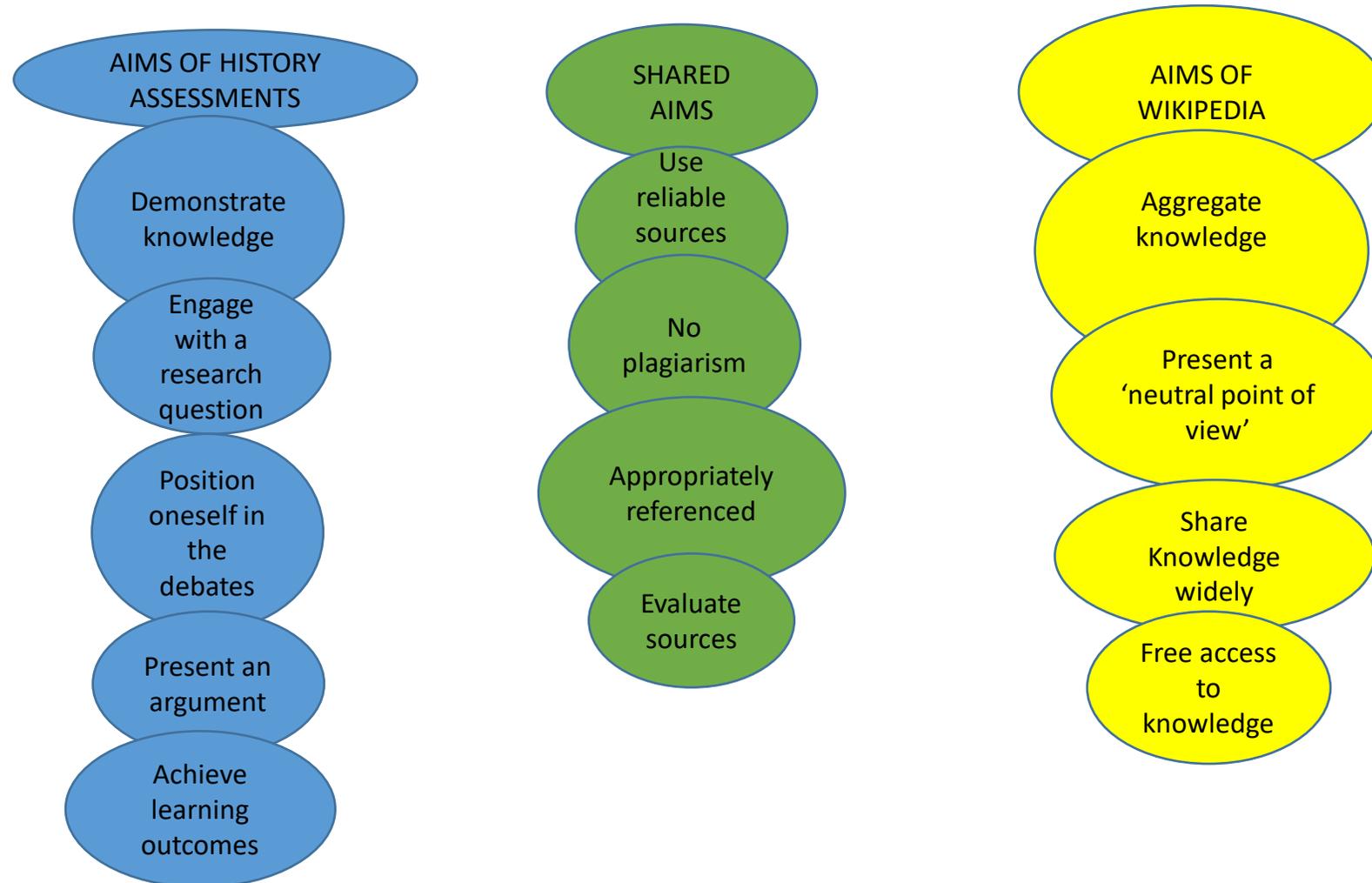
# Teaching With Wikipedia?



**WIKIPEDIA**  
The Free Encyclopedia

# Wikipedia and assessments: tensions and commonality

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# Bridging the gap?



**WIKIPEDIA**  
The Free Encyclopedia

# Wikipedia as a teaching tool or assessment

## **Would help with**

- Referencing appropriate sources
- Evaluating different kinds of information
- Writing for a range of audience

## **But some reservations**

- The fact that Wikipedia does not contribute to writing a sustained argument
- The problem of student expertise to make effective editors
- Editing might not encourage evaluation of digital resources such as Wikipedia.

Questions/ Comments?



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