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Reports of atrocities have brought forth international outcry about the Russian invasion of Ukraine. War crimes. Crimes against humanity. The Ukrainian government and some observers have argued that the conduct of the invasion amounts to a policy of genocide.

Member states of the International Criminal Court have called upon the prosecutor to [open an investigation](#) into these atrocity crimes. The United States has supported this investigation, although the U.S. itself is among those who have refused to ratify the treaty that established this court. The norms that hold these atrocities unacceptable evolved--and continue to evolve--out of an intergenerational movement for Peace through Law that seeks to humanize and ultimately abolish war. Former CMU President E.C. Warriner saw educators as playing a vital role in these processes of democratization and global citizenship. His notes lay out three ways that educators can contribute: (1) lose no opportunity to teach the horrors of war; (2) observe Peace Day, and (3) praise the heroes of peace.

Warriner's framework would have us hold both the heroes and the horrors. As we learn about the heroes of peace, we discover them to be people much like ourselves who are not outside or above the systems of war and domination but inside them, even complicit in those systems as they work to dismantle them.

To foster a culture of accountability to prevent atrocities, we need to learn the horrors and celebrate the heroes. In my remarks, I would like to turn the eye inward and reflect a bit on how accountability in this place is connected to accountability in the wider world.

In the years following the Second World War, the new United Nations provided a framework for developing human rights protections through international agreements and treaties. Some of the earliest initiatives were direct responses to the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. The role of the United States in negotiating these human rights agreements reflected the unresolved split in the country's identity between democracy and domination. Consider one of the earliest U.N. initiatives to create accountability for atrocity crimes: the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Despite the U.S. playing an influential role in the drafting, support for the conventions [met with deep resistance](#) within the country.

During the negotiations of the Genocide Convention, the U.S. led opposition to including prohibitions on cultural genocide, or policies aimed at destroying a group by eliminating the group's culture. Why? Horrors. Domestically, the United States government had been actively promoting a policy of cultural destruction of Native American nations through the removal of indigenous children from their families and internment in so-called boarding schools. Boarding schools, such as the one founded here in Mount Pleasant just miles from our campus imposed rigid discipline on Native children, suppressed the practice of tribal religions, physically punished children for speaking in indigenous languages, inculcated children into forms of white dress and behavior, and indoctrinated them into Christianity. This program of cultural destruction

was continuous with previous policies of forced assimilation and physical genocide through centuries of colonial warfare, removal, and massacre. In the forming of norms against cultural genocide internationally, the U.S. government could not join with the victims of horrors elsewhere because we had not dealt with the horrors of the country's own making. With the provision on cultural genocide removed, the U.S. ultimately did sign the Genocide Convention in 1948.

Ratification, however, would face concerted opposition within the country. The Senate was so divided on the question of ratifying the Genocide Convention that, on the behalf of the opposition, Ohio Senator John Bricker introduced an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would curtail the president's authority to make international treaties in the future. Opposition to the convention was rooted in fears within the county's white power structure that human rights enforcement would empower Black Americans in the fight to end the country's Jim Crow system of racial segregation. The post-war years had seen rising democratic forces in the United States as Black Americans mobilized for civil and human rights. The Genocide Conventions recognized the crime of attempting to destroy a people through systematic killing or imposing conditions calculated to bring out the group's destruction in whole or part. The early 20th century had seen the peak of mob violence to uphold white supremacy in the form of thousands of lynchings and race massacres, often sponsored or condoned by state officials. The Bricker amendment ultimately failed to pass in 1954, a year before the lynching murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till outraged and galvanized a new generation of human rights activists. The Genocide Convention, however, also failed to be ratified in the U.S. until 40 years later.

Horrors and heroes.

As we remember the heroes of peace, we can learn about the group of Black Americans who saw the Genocide Convention as an ally in liberation as it came into force in 1951. The group documented 152 recent killings of unarmed Black Americans and petitioned the U.N. Human Rights Committee to hold the United States accountable for acts of genocide. You can research this story by searching for the petition, titled "We Charge Genocide."

A truthful reckoning with the horrors carried out on the land we occupy is the only basis upon which we can enter into an honest dialogue through which we can continue to build a pluralistic and multiracial democracy. It is the only basis upon which we can play our part in upholding accountability for human rights internationally.

Horrors and heroes.

As we gather here today on the ancestral lands of the Council of Three Fires--the Ojibwa, Odawa, and Bodewadmi--I would like to honor the indigenous people of this land and acknowledge the violence of colonization and genocide that shapes the relationship of every person in this country to this land. Every summer, members of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe organize a day of ceremonies, education, and fellowship on the anniversary of the closing of the [Mount Pleasant Industrial Indian Boarding School](#). This day of Honoring, Healing, and Remembering recognizes the suffering, strength, and resilience of the approximately 225 students that perished while at the institution. Under horrific conditions, there is often heroism in

the struggle to survive and heal. If you are here over the summer, you can participate in this communal truth-telling and peace building at the beginning of June.