

Number of Dead and Injured in Sharpeville Massacre Vastly Underestimated, Research Finds

In a new telling of the Sharpeville Massacre which focuses on overlooked material and first-person accounts, historians center the narratives of the victims.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, USA, November 13, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Number of Dead and Injured in Sharpeville Massacre Vastly Underestimated, Research Suggests



In a hurry to find an explanation for the horror, the world failed to stop and ask the people of Sharpeville what the event meant to them.”

Nancy L Clark

[NEW YORK – 11/13] Extensive [new research](#), including thorough reviews of medical records and police documents, drastically increases the number of dead and injured in the Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa by at least a third.

This research, published in a new book [Voices of](#)

[Sharpeville](#), also prompted an update to the Wall of Names memorial at Freedom Park, Pretoria, to include the names of additional victims of the massacre who have been identified.

The book centers the voices of the victims of the 1960 massacre and gives agency to the Sharpeville people themselves rather than focus on those who carried out the killings. These accounts have been compiled and written up by historians Nancy L Clark, Dean of the Honors College and Professor of History Emeritus at Louisiana State University, and William H Worger, Professor of History Emeritus at the University of California Los Angeles.

“The Sharpeville Massacre is known as the event that prompted an international movement calling for the end of apartheid, and racial discrimination around the world,” Clark explains. “But this isn’t just a news story or moment in history, it is also about people and a community that is holding on to these memories, and it is important that those voices are represented.”

The new examination of South Africa’s township of Sharpeville painstakingly traces the history of the local community beyond the massacre it has become famed for during apartheid.

Much of what has been written about Sharpeville to-date hinges on the massacre, when police

opened fire on an unarmed crowd of protestors in the township, killing at least 91 people and injuring over 238 more.

While critical, the context and history of Sharpeville's community has often been lost, with the South African resistance against apartheid taking a dominant and narrative-shaping role.

"Although the people of Sharpeville have tried to tell their story, mourn their dead, and repair their community, they were muted by the government in the direct aftermath of the massacre and slowly forgotten over the years as the event more than the victims," Clark explains, "became an iconic symbol in the fight against racism and apartheid, while individual stories were lost."

"In the government's rush to bury the victims, none of the families were able to attend to the preparation and burial of their loved ones or perform the rituals that normally accompany death. In a hurry to find an explanation for the horror, the world failed to stop and ask the people of Sharpeville what the event meant to them."

New material

Using new material that has previously been censored, overlooked or ignored, including previously unused police records and interviews with survivors and their families, Clark and Worger turn the official record on its head by intentionally placing Sharpeville's community and their histories at the center of this narrative.

Such new material includes:

- Official maps and diagrams illustrating the racial engineering used in creating African "townships."
- Aerial photographs from the 1930s to the 1960s illustrating the growth of Sharpeville.
- Over 400 contemporaneous statements by African witnesses to the massacre.
- Police testimonies (many originally in Afrikaans) verifying that an official order was given to machine-gun the crowd.
- Autopsy and medical records detailing the exact causes of death and injury for the over 300 victims.

"While a lot of people know of apartheid, not everyone understands the depth of the systemic oppression that ruled over the lives of Black South Africans for generations," Worger explains. "And in this landscape, we can see the stories that have been either deliberately ignored or simply overlooked."

The authors thoughtfully guide the reader through Sharpeville's chronology, as they unravel the different contributing factors to Sharpeville's critical role, not only during apartheid, but as a crucial area for South Africa's growing industrial transformation throughout the 20th century.

Further information

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