Spring 2026 calendar looks promising, and I hope to see everyone there!

Lastly, I invite faculty and graduate students who would like their work or accomplishments to be featured in the next issue of *Strategic Visions* (to be published in May 2026) to contact me by e-mail.

In the meantime, I wish everyone a restful winter break and a joyful holiday season.

Sincerely,

Marcella Aline Toledo

2025 Winner of Edwin H. Sherman Prize

Georgette Uwera Nyiraneza, Yale University

Georgette Uwera Nyiraneza is the recipient of the 2025 Edwin H. Sherman Prize for Undergraduate Scholarship in Force and Diplomacy. In this issue, she reflects on the development of her award-winning paper, "Abolition, Development, and the Sub-Saharan African Spring."

I often describe my intellectual life as beginning long before I had the vocabulary for it. Growing up in Rwanda, in the aftermath of catastrophic violence, I learned early that power is not abstract. It lives in institutions, in stories, and in the silences people inherit, as well as the ones they choose. My academic path in Global Affairs at Yale was, as a result, shaped by a preoccupation with how power operates: how it justifies itself, how it structures the world, and how ordinary people resist or reimagine its pressures. When I joined the 2024 cohort of the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy, I wanted to explore these questions within contemporary Africa. I was drawn to the internal power architecture of post-colonial countries, often vested in the

state and constrained by unequal integration into the global order. At the same time, I was captivated by an emergent and subversive counter-current: the youth-led movement known as the 2024 Sub-Saharan African Spring, which was sweeping across the continent and renegotiating incumbent political failures.

As I worked on this project, the shortcomings of liberal internationalism were already painfully evident. The war in Ukraine, devastation in Gaza, humanitarian crises in Sudan and the DRC, and the anti-Western turn across the Sahel all signaled a profound crisis of legitimacy for the global order. Even so, the need for an alternative felt newly urgent within the groundswell of a politically conscious, globally connected African youth that was boldly demanding both domestic change and international reckoning. I hoped to document this moment through a critique of development – the vocabulary that has defined African progress since independence – and to help imagine an intellectual coalition capable of sustaining this "revolution."

Methodologically, the project drew on three strands: historical excavation, fieldwork, and contemporary political analysis. I traced the genealogy of development ideology from colonial governance and Cold War alignments to the neoliberal consensus that shaped post-independence Africa. Drawing on thinkers like Walter Rodney and Kwame Nkrumah, alongside contemporary critics of the international development apparatus like Issa G. Shivji, I argued that "development" had never been a politically neutral, scientific theory of progress, but rather a technique of governance, steeped in racial hierarchy and external dependency.

Fieldwork in Accra, Dar es Salaam, and Cape Town brought me into conversation with a vibrant ecosystem of Pan-African thinkers, cooperativists, organizers, and youth activists. It was from them that I encountered the most compelling visions of "self-determination," a concept I borrow from Audre Lorde as "the decision to define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak ourselves." Through their cooperatives, feminist organizing, and community education projects, I came to understand the Sub-Saharan Spring as strategic intervention: organized, imaginative, and deeply informed acts of refusal in a global order that had failed its youngest citizens. These insights formed the basis of my paper, "Abolition, Development, and the Sub-Saharan African Spring," which I submitted both to the Grand Strategy Program and the Yale Undergraduate Research Journal.

In 2025, a professor in the Grand Strategy Program and former member of the Edwin H. Sherman Family Prize committee encouraged me to submit my work to CENFAD. I was initially unsure how my paper fit within the study of force and diplomacy, but reading past prize winners revealed a

community that treated both concepts not as narrow tools of statecraft, but as complex, lived, and contested processes. That expansive vision resonated deeply.

The global upheavals of 2025 further sharpened my sense of urgency. The retrenchment of USAID and the broader aid infrastructure exposed the fragility of systems long treated as indispensable. Multilateral institutions struggled, and often failed, to respond to humanitarian catastrophes in Sudan, Gaza, and the DRC. Norms presented for decades as pillars of liberal internationalism: civilian protection, humanitarian neutrality, the responsibility to prevent mass atrocity, proved far more contingent than many hoped. Meanwhile, the world was moving decisively toward multipolarity, with new centers of power challenging longstanding Western dominance.

"African communities, movements, and thinkers have long theorized alternatives, often ignored in mainstream politics"

In this moment, I felt a responsibility to articulate a critique of liberal internationalism precisely at the moment they were most visible. Without such scrutiny, I worried that institutional paralysis would push policymakers back into familiar reflexes: paternalistic aid, militarized "stabilization," and development agendas that reproduce dependency. I revised my paper for the Sherman Prize with this in mind, strengthening its argument that development is not merely a policy framework but an ideological project that has constrained African agency for decades. I drew explicit connections between Africa's experience of conditionality and structural adjustment and the contemporary unravelling of the very institutions that once imposed them. If the old development consensus was collapsing, I argued, then this rupture must be seized, not survived.

It was here that my methodological choice to treat grand strategy as co-creation became central. Traditional narratives attribute strategic change to singular leaders or elite policymakers. My research, particularly in African contexts, challenged this view. Whether examining Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction, youth protests in Kenya, or cross-border Pan-African organizing, the pattern was consistent: strategy is never authored alone. It emerges from leaders, institutions, social conditions, and the masses who decide, collectively, whether to cooperate, resist, or imagine alternatives.

Indeed the present disruptions demand a reckoning in international relations with the limits of the existing order, but they must also open space for new strategic imaginations elsewhere. African communities,

movements, and thinkers have long theorized alternatives, often ignored in mainstream politics. My paper argues that we can no longer overlook them, especially as we move toward a multipolar world that demands new forms of self-sufficiency and political imagination.

Winning the Edwin H. Sherman Family Prize was profoundly meaningful. It affirmed that the questions animating my work, and their grounding in African experience and mass politics, belong squarely within the study of force and diplomacy. CENFAD's intellectual community gave me both the confidence and the analytical tools to treat African struggles for self-determination as legitimate sites of strategic inquiry. I am deeply grateful to CENFAD for providing a home for this kind of work, and for affirming, through this prize, that the future of force and diplomacy will be shaped as much by those at the margins as by those at the center. My hope is that this essay, and the project behind it, contributes in some small way to that broader conversation.

In Conversation with Faculty:

Dr. Christina Baker, Director of the Center for the Humanities at Temple (CHAT)

This edition features a conversation with Dr. Christina Baker, Director of the Center for the Humanities at Temple (CHAT), who shared insights on the Center's mission, upcoming projects, and its role in promoting interdisciplinary dialogue across campus.

Marcella Aline Toledo: Hello Dr. Baker, thank you for taking the time to speak with me! To start, could you please introduce yourself, your current role, and your main academic interests?