

The Annual Best Senior Seminar Paper Prize Contenders 2018–2019

The History Department has graduating seniors write extensive works of original research within the four to five senior seminars held each year. Every year, we review the top papers and award a prize to the best and publish that and the top runners-up. This year, the prize committee, made up of history faculty who had not taught one of the seminars, reviewed four strong contenders. Each was of gratifyingly high quality and you can read them here in our online annual journal.

“Arminius the Turbulator: Depicting Germanness and Combating Foreigners in German Collective Memory,” by Conor O’Riordan, won the departmental best seminar paper prize award for the 2018–2019 academic year. Faculty appreciated the thoroughness of his historiographical research in the ancient past, the compelling structure of his argument, and the ease with which he wove together his original research with cultural and political history context. . Ranging across centuries, Conor’s study of the construction of Arminius by Roman historians and later German nationalists presents skilled analysis of a range of sources. He developed fascinating arguments about history and memory/monuments and how the creation of one ethnic identity benefits from the creation of an oppositional (negative) one that the monument ‘battles.’ His topics were quite timely, as he constructed a sophisticated understanding of how a nation’s myth and history evolves on down through the commercialism of the present day. Check out his great ending bringing together Europeans. Conor was an impressive student who somehow completed a BS in Math and a minor in German in addition to his BA in history, despite how much writing and reading we piled on him. He is now working on a Master’s in Computer Science and building a Roman-history related database as one of his projects.

Nikki Donofrio’s senior seminar paper, and honors thesis, earned praise for its passionate articulation of past wrongs. Like Conor’s, her work was clearly influenced by contemporary concerns. These students effectively show the value in history as a means to elucidate the present. In “A Re-evaluation on Racism: How a Strong U.S. tradition of anti-Mexican Sentiment was Responsible for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Crisis,” Nikki traced who was responsible for forced deportation of Mexican-Americans in the Great Depression. She found various levels of society, from newspapers, to social relief organizations, to local and federal government agencies admitted to acting illegally to remove people of Mexican heritage from US soil. Her paper starkly

outlines the racism in individuals and society as a whole that led to the immoral and false depictions of Mexicans in culture and that encouraged a nation to carry out human rights crimes. Nikki graduated with an honors degree and is now enrolled in law school. We hope that her work to analyze illegal past actions and crimes against peoples' rights will motivate her in her future career.

“Anne Stuart Reexamined: Reconsidering Female Rule in the ‘Long’ Seventeenth Century, 1558–1714,” Jessica Minieri’s senior seminar paper, undertook an ambitious historiographical intervention into the history of Queen Anne. In this well-researched discussion of history’s record on the queen, Jessica reassessed Anne’s monarch (1702–14) and challenged the general neglect of her reign along with the historiography that does exist that tends to consider as a weak, physically traumatized sovereign with little interest in actually governing. She effectively critiques prior historians’ biographies and political studies of this ruler for falling into gendered tropes of evaluating her according to her physical or emotional attributes or her supposed weakness of mind and will. Jessica was particularly adept at presenting a strong argument and questioning interpretations. She added to her work a nice transnational comparison of historiographical examinations of queenship in general. This section raises multiple interesting arguments on the shifting cultural backgrounds that explain how queens were received in history. Jessica’s skills in questioning historiography and developing strong arguments bode well for her future. She certainly showed herself deserving of the department’s outstanding graduate award for the year. She has just started in the PhD program at Binghamton, where she intends to delve further into the nature of European queenship between circa 1350 and Anne’s rule.

Jade Mitchell’s senior seminar paper takes an original approach to the history of China’s Cultural Revolution by examining how children were targeted and how they were affected or shielded from the politics and violence of that era. Her research explores an impressive range of sources, from memoir through film and other cultural forms. Analyzing examples from China’s official media and analyzing questions of propaganda and agency are central to her work. The paper displays good research, varied and building arguments, and strong analysis of her sources. Jade also covers other historians’ contributions to the topic of children in the Cultural Revolution well. The empathy Jade displays in her attempts to understand children’s experience is admirable. We particularly praise this work for its attempts to connect to the people of the past. She will be presenting her paper at the 2019 New York Conference on Asian Studies.

We hope you enjoy the top senior seminar papers from history majors in the 2018–2019 academic year. We were impressed with our students’ range of topics, strong research and writing skills, and creative approaches.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Heather Morrison', with a stylized, cursive script.

Heather Morrison
Department of History