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Department of History

RIAS Fellowship June/July 2021 Report

I want to thank the researchers and staff at the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies in Middelburg for making my stay there a wonderful experience. My monthlong residency was both extraordinarily productive and intellectually stimulating. This was the second summer of the Covid pandemic and we were just emerging from over a year of forced isolation, interacting with colleagues in our field only through remote access. My stay coincided with a first easing of restrictions, making a stay in Middelburg possible and allowing me to meet in person with the members of the Institute. It made me realize how important these in-person exchanges were for the kind of work we do. I learned a lot from my conversations with the directors, the researchers, and the PhD students at the Institute.

I had visited the Institute once before, in December 2017, for a conference on the Rooseveltian Century. It was then that I first got to know Giles Scott-Smith, one of the institute's directors, as well as Dario Fazzi, one of its postdoctoral fellows. It was through the connections I made during that visit, that I became interested in returning for a longer period to the institute. I was therefore extremely happy when Giles invited me for the summer of 2021, giving me an opportunity to get to know the professors, postdoctoral researchers and doctoral fellows and learn more about their work. The breadth of the projects underway at the Institute is truly impressive.

I was already familiar with and admired Giles' and Dario's work, which aligns quite closely with my own interests in transnational, global, and cultural history in the twentieth century. But from Cees Heere I learned more about Dutch imperial entanglements within global context in the early twentieth century; from Damian Pargas about the broad sweep of "racial democracy" within the United States and the incredible network of scholars at European institutions who work on similar topics; and from PhD students on progressive reform in the early twentieth century, race and American literary history, racial policies in the pre-civil-war era, and many other topics.

My first "act" at the Institute was to participate in the International PhD Symposium occurring virtually between June 9-11. It featured PhD candidates from all over Europe and the United States, and the quality

of the papers as well as the comments was phenomenal! The session I chaired featured two deeply researched presentations on female black writers and artists. RIAS PhD fellow Celia Nijdam's comment on the papers was insightful and spot on, facilitating the ensuing lively open discussion. It showed how deeply all participants in the PhD symposium were engaging with each of the papers. It also revealed the tremendous creative talent gathered at the meeting. I could not have had a better introduction to the institute.

I also presented a public lecture at the RIAS on the United States' conflicted relationship with globalization in the Age of Covid. The talk grew out of my interest in the history of cultural globalization. It also allowed me to think about the relevance of my current book project (*International History: A Cultural Approach*, co-authored with Akira Iriye) for our contemporary era. The Roosevelt Institute proved to be the perfect place to make the final revisions on the manuscript and sharpen some of its core arguments. I was able to complete the revisions during my stay at the RIAS, and it was in no small part thanks to the incredibly welcoming and supportive atmosphere at the Institute. Time operates differently at the RIAS, it seems to expand; there was much more time to do my own work, and yet there was also much more time to engage in conversations with the fellows who happen to be at the institute at any given time.

No report is complete without mentioning the incredible support coming from the staff, above all Leontien Jooisse, who makes everything run smoothly and has answers to whatever question you might have. Neither the institute, nor the fellowship program could run without her. She is the soul of RIAS.

With best wishes and in hopes of a return in the not-too-distant future,

Petra



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