

Amerikanistendag 2022 – Report - RIAS

On Friday 3 June 2022 the NASA and RIAS hosted the 27th annual Amerikanistendag, a student academic conference designed to showcase the breadth and depth of American Studies in the Netherlands. This year the program included a broad array of talks, presentations, and discussions on topics as diverse as the field itself.

The proceedings began with words of welcome by Damian Pargas, Director of the RIAS, and Markha Valenta, President of the NASA. A cordial welcome was also extended by the editor of the Netherlands American Studies Review (NASR), Debby Esmeé de Vlugt, who encouraged speakers and students submit some of their best work for publication in this unique academic journal (<http://www.netherlands-america.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/NASR-Call-for-Papers.pdf>)

A captivating keynote talk titled “#Free Renty: Lanier v. Harvard and the Future of the Photographic Archive” was given by Jessie Morgan-Owens, the new assistant professor of Literary Studies at Leiden University and author of the widely acclaimed book *Girl in Black and White: The Story of Mary Mildred Williams and the Abolition Movement* (March 2019, W.W. Norton). Jessie delved into the current controversy surrounding the recent lawsuit brought by Tamara Lanier against Harvard University concerning the famous daguerreotypes of her enslaved ancestors, taken by Louis Agassiz in 1850 and held by the Peabody Museum.

The conference then continued with two stimulating panels of student presentations by Alish Lalor (Leiden University); Lisette Brussee (Radboud University Nijmegen); Stijn Berendsen (Leiden University); Jelle Rietveld (Leiden University); and Karla Kiefer (Radboud University Nijmegen and currently the RIAS intern). The topics covered by these excellent presentations included the back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s; transatlantic cooperation in the 1953 flooding of Zeeland and Hurricane Katrina; the Overseas Private Investment Organization; antebellum southern and frontier literature; and the forced displacement of a free African-American community in 1850s New York to create Central Park.

The student presentations were followed by the presentation of the annual Theodore Roosevelt American History Award, presented for the best American Studies MA thesis defended at a Dutch university in 2021. This event was presided over by the TRAHA jury members but included the participation of the honorable US Consul to the Netherlands, Jennifer Walsh. Ms. Walsh handed out the certificates to all eight of the nominees this year and who personally congratulated the winner, Nathaniel Weisberg (University of Amsterdam), for his truly illuminating and beautifully written thesis “‘Fantastic Visions of Unfreedom: Reimagining Mythologies of Black Emancipation through the Works of William Wells Brown, 1848-1880’”. The RIAS extends its warmest congratulations to Nathaniel and to all of the nominees!

The Amerikanistendag concluded with two unique events. First, Albertine Bloemendal and Jorrit van den Berk (both from the Radboud University Nijmegen) presented their recently published special issue of *Geschiedenis Magazine*, devoted to the 75th anniversary of the Marshall Plan in the Netherlands. The very first copy was ceremoniously presented to Madam Consul Walsh, who spoke a few words about the importance of the transatlantic partnership in the postwar era.

And finally, the day was concluded with a stimulating roundtable discussion with students, hosted by Markha Valenta, on the issue of women’s rights and the culture wars in contemporary America. The roundtable was inspired in the wake of recent revelations that the US Supreme Court is likely to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in the near future. Student representatives Cristina Pessina (Leiden University); Aino Kangas (Leiden University); Pip van der Zanden (Groningen University); Jorrit Lettinga (Groningen University); Kai Hopen (Groningen University); David van Gool (Radboud University Nijmegen); and Bjarne Langkamp (Radboud University Nijmegen) engaged in a sincere and illuminating discussion

about the potential consequences of overturning Roe v. Wade for the future of women's rights and civil rights more generally.

We would like to thank all speakers and guests for making this year's Amerikanistendag such a lovely event and we look forward to seeing you at the Amerikanistendag 2023!