TRAHA Jury Report 2022

The Theodore Roosevelt American History Award is awarded each year to the best MA thesis in American History or American Studies defended at a Dutch university. Initiated in 1987, the TRAHA has for decades constituted the most prestigious thesis award in our field in the Netherlands, and indeed one of the most prestigious in Europe. Designed to stimulate the study of US culture and society at the graduate level, it has long served as a platform for some of the most cutting-edge and innovative research in American Studies. Many TRAHA winners and nominees have gone on to do PhDs and develop careers in academia.

TRAHA winners not only receive eternal fame and the good graces of American history scholars throughout the country, but they are also announced in the press (specifically in *EW Magazine*) and are sent packing on a week-long trip to the Badlands, to Medora and Dickinson in North Dakota (sponsored by the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation), where they are provided an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of TR during his "cowboy years." A visit to Dickinson State University with its TR Center is also included in the program. This exciting is sponsored by the US Embassy in The Hague, to whom we are immensely grateful.

Each Dutch university is only allowed to nominate a max of two theses for the TRAHA each year. The submissions are carefully evaluated by an independent jury, which this year consisted of myself, Tim Jelfs (RUG), Heleen Blommers (VU), and Melanie van der Elsen (RU Nijmegen and last year's winner).

This year we received eight submissions, and *all* of them were truly excellent. The jury members were unanimous that all of the theses that were submitted could and should be published, and we highly encourage all of the nominees to do so, preferably as articles in the NASR. These were outstanding pieces of scholarship and we all learned a lot from them. It was supremely difficult to make a decision this year.

Before announcing the winner, we will first go down the list of the nominees, to highlight the diversity and creativity in the research topics that are currently being done in American Studies in this country.

Pauline Bewermeier from Radboud University Nijmegen submitted a fascinating and somewhat alarming thesis titled "Gunning for Office: Right-Wing Populism and Gender in the Congressional Campaigns of Lauren Boebert and Marjorie Taylor Greene".

Jonas Danen from the University of Amsterdam was nominated for his beautifully written (and illustrated) thesis titled "A Timeless Naturalist, Artist, and Philosopher: Mark Catesby and the Gardenization of the American Natural Landscape".

Sebastian Galea from the Erasmus University Rotterdam was nominated for his important and timely thesis "China: Challenging the United States? The Threat of Offensive Realism in the Age of Sino-American Rivalry".

Fieke van Houdt from Leiden University was nominated for her totally hip and undeniably cool thesis "Live Aid 1985 and the Rise of Celebrity Activism within Cultural Humanitarianism".

Meike Robaard from the University of Groningen was nominated for a beautifully written and innovative "Stitching Statecraft: Domesticity, Entanglement, and Biopolitics in Women's Literary Utopias, 1880-1915"

Eva Seuntjes from Radboud University Nijmegen was nominated for another timely study, especially considering the recent Biden anti-lynching legislation, titled "Hearing the Lion's Story: The Politics of Remembering and Making Lynching History Visible in the Public Sphere during the Trump Era"

Sabine Stroband from Leiden University was nominated for yet another timely investigation of Ruth Bader-Ginsburg's celebrity status, titled "The RBBG Paradox: The Strategic Navigation of the Impassionate Celebrity Figure and Dispassionate Supreme Court Justice in *On the Basis of Sex, RGB*, and *My Own Words*"

And last but certatinly not least, Nathaniel Weisberg from the University of Amsterdam was nominated for his truly unique and meticulously researched thesis titled "Fantastic Visions of Unfreedom: Reimagining Mythologies of Black Emancipation through the Works of William Wells Brown, 1848-1880".

This last thesis by Nathaniel Weisberg was chosen by this year's jury as the **winner**. Our warmest congratulations to Nathaniel! Nathaniel's thesis focuses on three mythologies of black emancipation through a meticulous analys of the works of William Wells Brown. Mobility and movement stand at the heart of his analysis: the movement of African Americans to Great Britain; movement to the northern US; and movement through time itself. Brown's works reimagine the notion of African-American freedom, and provide movement "counternarratives" full of disappointment, delay, repetition, and awe. Nathaniel's research reveals how Brown challenged American mythologies that emphasized liberty and linear progress, but rather provided African-American counter-mythologies that emphasized "cyclical" experiences with black unfreedom and disappointment with the thwarting of sacred American ideals.

Nathan's thesis is not only exceptionally well-written but also an absolute joy to read. The writing style is elegant and eloquent. It also constitutes an excellent example of interdisciplinary research at its best. The literary and historical analyses are woven together in a wonderful and readable narrative. This is a publishable piece of scholarship and it was a pleasure for us to read.

Congratulations once again to Nathaniel and to his supervisor, our friend George Blaustein at the University of Amsterdam. And we express our warmest gratitude to the generous sponsors of the TRAHA: the US Embassy, the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation, Dickinson State University, and EW Magazine.