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Professor Damian Pargas  
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Dear Damian:

Many thanks to you and to the entire Roosevelt Institute staff for an extraordinary month in Middelburg. My time at the RIAS was intellectually stimulating and enjoyable. I am writing now to reflect a bit on the conference, share some examples of the insights gleaned from the archives for my research, highlight key moments of the visit, and express my appreciation to the many RIAS colleagues who made my stay rewarding and productive.

The conference on *Environmental Justice in U.S. History* assembled noteworthy scholars who pushed forward our collective thinking on several key themes. As conference planners and organizers extraordinaire, Dario Fazzi and Gaetano Di Tommaso led this important initiative to place environmental justice at the center of international perspectives on this significant social movement in the U.S. The centrality of Indigenous activism among the presentations was an important and welcome feature of the conference. The breadth of topics covered was impressive. The talk by Erasmus University professor Daphina Misiedjan about the Kingdom of the Netherlands was most informative.

The residency allowed me to expand and refocus the research for my next book on the history of environmental justice advocacy in the U.S. South, placing that activism in a far more global context. The archival riches at the RIAS made it possible to access the wide-ranging influence of the Roosevelts and the microfilmed papers of W.E.B. DuBois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Robert F. Williams, SCLC, SNCC, and the NAACP. These materials provide a sweeping history of the Black freedom struggle. The papers also broaden our understanding of the reach of the conservation impulse during the interwar years, a period that is only recently receiving additional attention in the scholarship. For example, the Bethune papers reveal that, in her leadership role in the National Youth Administration, Bethune oversaw the expansion of youth work that involved young people in conservation, farm work, home gardening, neighborhood beautification, all areas of work that we would consider environmental activism today.

Another informative resource, the Declassified Documents Research Service (DDRS) was a source of useful information on the history of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in multiple contexts, including globally. There I found documents on diverse environmental concerns, including work in Micronesia by the Natural Resources Defense Council, toxic dumping in Guinea, salinity problems in rivers along the U.S.-Mexico border, and nuclear waste storage policy in the Nixon and Ford administrations.

My visit was enriched also by meeting with dedicated and smart graduate students at the RIAS and with Leiden history students. I look forward to hearing more about the exciting work by the graduate cohort, including innovative research on slavery and its legacies and on a little explored chapter of the ACLU's international history. The fellowship also supported travels around The Netherlands that introduced me to Zeeland's unique "blue history." I was able to tour the world's largest storm surge barrier at the Delta Works, to view the canal system in operation at Veere and the port at Vlissingen, and to meet a University of Technology water policy expert in Delft, all of which will be informative for my research and teaching.

The chance to engage with Nikole Hannah-Jones and to attend the reception in her honor at the residence of Deputy Minister of the U.S. Embassy Aleisha Woodward was a special highlight. Dr. Hannah-Jones had spent a month in Tuscaloosa when she was working on her article for May 2014 issue of *The Atlantic*, "Resegregation Now...", so it was great to connect. Meeting leaders engaged in racial reconciliation and social justice in The Netherlands during Black Appreciation Month at the Embassy event provided a link to work on race, slavery, and civil rights at the University of Alabama.

The value of the research support from the RIAS extended beyond my month in Middelburg. My travel route home from The Netherlands allowed me also to stop in London for an exploratory visit to the British National Archives. There I was able to view documents that will inform a future book project.

Abundant thanks are due to Leontien Joosse for the many, many things she did to welcome me to the RIAS and to make my stay in Middelburg easy and enjoyable. The comfortable accommodations at Edith Mutsaerts's gave me a lovely place to come home to each evening; Edith is a generous and delightful host. Paul Brennan also helped to orient me to Middelburg, giving travel advice for getting around Zeeland and the country. Niek Schilperoord deserves special thanks, too, for assistance throughout my visit. Giles Scott-Smith and Christine Crommelin gave me a gracious welcome.

I look forward to staying connected with new friends and colleagues at the RIAS.

With warm regards,



Ellen Griffith Spears, Ph.D.

cc: Dario Fazzi  
Gaetano di Tommaso  
Leontien Josse