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AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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Damian Pargas, Executive Director
Roosevelt Institute for American Studies
Middelburg, Netherlands

Dear Damian,

I am writing with great appreciation to report on my month as a Roosevelt Visiting Professor. It was an honor to be invited and a stimulating and productive visit.

As the Roosevelt Visiting Professor, I delivered the inaugural talk in the Seminar Series on Modern North American History, co-sponsored by the RIAS and the Sciences Po Center for History, with in-person attendees at the University of Leiden and remote attendees on both sides of the Atlantic. This gave me an opportunity to discuss my new research on the U.S. role in infrastructure building in the Circum-Caribbean at the advent of the petroleum age. I especially valued the feedback that I got on the environmental history aspect of this research, since this is a new direction for me.

I also delivered a lecture at Leiden University to students in Dario Fazzi's "A Water's History of the United States" class and several colleagues from the RIAS. It was super to talk about issues of common concern, share citations, and learn more about university education in the Netherlands.

At the RIAS I had a number of conversations with Dario Fazzi and Gaetano Di Tommaso about their environmental history research and Blue History initiative. I will help spread the word on the policy workshops that they have run and the virtual exchanges that they have organized, for these programs serve as models for public engagement and cross-border collaborative environmental education. I also learned more about the programming work of the RIAS by attending a presentation by Harry Stecopoulos on his recent book, *Telling America's Story to the World*, and the webinar "From Slavery to Freedom in the American South and Dutch Caribbean," co-sponsored by the RIAS and The Netherland-America Foundation.

It might seem strange to conduct research in U.S. State Department Records outside the United States, but the RIAS has a rare digital collection of records on Dutch-American diplomatic relations. I took advantage of that to read consular dispatches from Curaçao for my new book. In quieter moments I began to draft a chapter on engineering works and U.S. power in the years when U.S. policymakers strove to make the Caribbean an "American lake".

Much as I appreciated time to write, the highlight of my visit was getting to know the people of the RIAS. In addition to talking to you, Dario, and Gaetano in formal gatherings and informal *koffie* breaks, it was always a delight to chat with your wonderful PhD students – Manar Ellethy, Christine Mertens, and Marcella Schute – about their research on racial democracy. I will be keeping an eye out for their articles and books in the years to come.

I also enjoyed getting to know the staff of the RIAS, who were tremendously welcoming and helpful. I had the pleasure of meeting two interns (I arrived as Felix Straatsma completed his internship and Maaïke Siemes started hers) and Communications Officer Karen Kroese. Leontien Joosse deserves special mention since she did so much to ensure that I had a good stay in Middelburg. She was an expert source of local information and a generous provider of assistance and advice.

Finally, I learned a great deal from being in the Netherlands. Things that you no doubt take for granted, such as the recycling system and bicycle culture, were eye opening for me. As someone who has written on the role of Dutch immigrants in tiling and draining the wet prairies of the U.S. Midwest, it was fascinating to see the drainage ditches in the countryside of Walcheren. Given my current research on engineering works, I also relished the chance better grasp the magnitude of the Deltawerken by seeing them firsthand. And as the seas continue to rise, one of the most important takeaways for me was learning more about the Netherlands' proactive responses to climate change, including but not limited to the work of the RIAS.

I look forward to maintaining the connections that I have made with you and your colleagues.

Sincerely yours,



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