

2026 TRAHA Jury Report

This year, the TRAHA jury, consisting of Jeanine Quené (Chair, RIAS), J.D. Schnepf (University of Groningen), George Blaustein (University of Amsterdam) and Maud Rijks (2025 TRAHA winner, Leiden University), reviewed ten exceptionally well-written and rigorously researched theses. All the finalists deserve recognition for their original insights and creative contributions, which collectively broaden the scope of US history and American Studies. The range of approaches and the relevance of the topics reflect the vibrancy of these disciplines in the Netherlands, while showcasing our students' ability to critically engage with North American social, political and cultural dynamics. Below is an overview of the finalists' thesis topics, in alphabetical order, accompanied by brief comments from the jury.

Aino Antinluoma (Leiden University) - Greenwashing Colonialism: Indigenous Voices in Green Energy Development

This thesis is a sophisticated, well-written and timely exploration of the entanglements between green energy development and ongoing settler colonialism. Demonstrating a mature grasp of both historical and contemporary dynamics, the author conceptualizes colonialism as a changing, adaptive process, and situates present-day “green capitalism” within a longer trajectory of extraction and dispossession. The project is grounded in a strong command of relevant scholarship and enriched by a carefully selected body of primary source material. By including both legal and extralegal documentation, the author incorporates otherwise under-represented points of views. Through a pertinent case study, the thesis offers an urgent and nuanced analysis of how extraction, colonialism and environmentalism intersect.

Auke van Meer (Radboud University Nijmegen) – Illiberal Democracy at Work: Practicing, Upholding, and Discussing Gerrymandering in the State of Missouri, 1891-1922

This thesis presents a rigorous and impressively detailed study of gerrymandering in Missouri during the Progressive Era, grounded in extensive analysis of complex source material. The author engages deeply with a broad swath of primary source material and quantitative data to construct a detailed case study. The jury particularly appreciated the use of (historical) maps and the author's ability to navigate intricate political systems alongside substantial bodies of evidence, resulting in a dedicated contribution to political history.

Bjarne Langkamp (Radboud University Nijmegen) – When Anti-Globalists Go Global: CPAC and the Formation of a Transatlantic Radical Right Alliance

This thesis offers a compelling analysis of the internationalization of conservative politics through the lens of CPAC's expansion. With an engaging opening and eloquent writing style, the author draws the reader into a nuanced exploration of transatlantic political dynamics. The work

stands out for its conceptual focus and selection of primary source material, including policy documents that illuminate the mechanics of political networking across borders. By incorporating a European perspective and emphasizing the process of cultural transfer, the thesis provides a valuable and timely account of contemporary right-wing transnationalism, culminating in a thoughtful and forward-looking conclusion.

Jille Aardoom (University of Groningen) – White Bikes Against the Pompous Car: Tracing Bikesharing from Provo to Citi Bike

This thesis presents an innovative study of the global history of bikesharing, standing out for its ambitious scope and confident authorial voice. Tracing the movement of ideas across time and space, the author offers a compelling narrative that connects grassroots activism to contemporary corporate models, demonstrating a strong command of both historical material and theoretical frameworks. The jury particularly appreciates the extension of transnational analysis to non-human actors and infrastructures, as well as the insightful engagement with concepts such as “structural recuperation.” In their view, this thesis’ originality and readability make it particularly well suited for publication in an intellectual magazine.

Lucy den Elzen (University of Groningen) – Shielding the Homeland: The Imperial Logic of Security through Civilian Response Training in Post-9/11 Detroit

This thesis is an exceptionally accomplished and original contribution, showcasing a masterful integration of theory, methodology, and research. Through a carefully constructed and engaging narrative, the author develops a sophisticated argument about the relationship between securitization, empire, and everyday life in the United States. The work demonstrates a deep understanding of complex theoretical debates and advances them through a richly detailed case study of civilian response training in Detroit. Particularly impressive is the author’s ability to connect micro-level practices to broader structures of power, as well as to resolve tensions within existing scholarship. In doing so, the author makes a meaningful contribution to ongoing scholarly debates.

Melanie Penning (Erasmus University Rotterdam) – Constructing Specialness: How Context and Ideational Factors Influenced the Anglo-American Cold War Special Relationship, 1947-1962

This thesis offers a clear, well-structured and thoroughly researched examination of the Anglo-American special relationship during the early Cold War. Demonstrating a strong command of international relations theory, the author carefully applies its conceptual tools to a well-defined historical period, producing a focused analysis. The work is particularly notable for its attention to detail, broad engagement with primary source material, and its clean and accessible writing style.

Nele Kersten (Leiden University) – Migration via the Red Star Line: A Liminal Journey?

This thesis is a well-executed and engaging study of migration experiences shaped by the Red Star Line, grounded in a rich and carefully curated set of primary sources. The author demonstrates a strong awareness of relevant historiography and theory, and aligns with current scholarship on how institutions produce citizens and affects in a transnational manner. With a clear theoretical framework and a rich and well-chosen source base, the thesis effectively demonstrates institutional literature's capacity to shape and form nascent identity.

Noor van Baarlen (Erasmus University Rotterdam) – Tweeting Scandals: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's Tweets on Watergate from a Constructivist Perspective

This thesis presents a clear, focused and methodologically consistent analysis of political discourse, combining critical discourse analysis with constructivist theory. The author demonstrates a strong grasp of both the theoretical framework and the relevant literature, and successfully applies these tools to a well-defined corpus of sources. The work is characterized by a clear argument and careful organization, effectively linking language use to broader political trends.

Sem van Rossum (University of Amsterdam) – Utopia Inc: Soul City, Black Capitalism, and Cooperative Community Organizing in the Civil Rights Movement

This thesis is a highly original and confidently argued study that brings a fresh perspective to the historiography of the Civil Rights Movement. By foregrounding Black entrepreneurialism and capital-driven utopianism, the author challenges conventional narratives and opens up new avenues for interpretation. The work is distinguished by its strong narrative flow, excellent use of primary sources, and ability to connect detailed case studies to broader theoretical and historical questions. Engaging thoughtfully with key figures and ideas, the thesis offers a nuanced and mature argument that reconsiders the relationship between capitalism and Black political thought.

Sophie Anna Carolina de Koning (University of Amsterdam) – From Nationalist Branding to Satirical Subversion: Reimagining "See America First" Throughout the Twentieth Century

This thesis presents an ambitious and creative exploration of the intersections between cultural and environmental history through the lens of tourism and satire. Drawing on a rich and diverse archive, the author traces the evolution of "See America First" across the twentieth century, offering insightful close readings supported by a solid theoretical framework. By examining how satire reshapes national narratives, the thesis contributes a fresh perspective, highlighting the complexity of cultural representation over time.

2026 TRAHA Award

After careful deliberation, the jury unanimously awards the 2026 Theodore Roosevelt American History Award to Lucy den Elzen for *Shielding the Homeland: The Imperial Logic of Security Through Civilian Response Training in Post-9/11 Detroit*.

This thesis distinguishes itself through its exceptional ability to integrate theoretical sophistication with original research. It offers a nuanced and incisive critique of power, illuminating the entanglements between domestic securitization, imperial logics, and everyday practices of citizenship in the post-9/11 United States. Through a carefully constructed case study, the author connects local developments in Detroit to broader national and transnational dynamics, while also intervening meaningfully in ongoing scholarly debates.

The jury was especially impressed by the author's command of complex theoretical frameworks and her ability to not only apply them, but also to critically engage with and refine them through her own findings. This results in a thesis that is both analytically rigorous and conceptually generative. With its essayistic style, which carefully links issues across levels of analysis, and its strong authorial voice, this thesis exemplifies the best of interdisciplinary American Studies and can be a model for future students.