

ME | HIS | STORY

Honors Symposium 2019



2019 History Department Honors Students

Niccolo Beltramo

The Changing Face of Individual Rights and National Security, 1789-1815:
The Myth of Common Meaning

Advisor: Jonathan Marwil

To better understand the scope of individual rights as the Founding Fathers intended them, this thesis analyzes the words and deeds of American political and legal elites in 1789-1815. This analysis shows a stark difference from modern understandings of those rights, a significant amount of which can be traced to evolution in public understanding and linguistic expression over the past two hundred years. This thesis explores how the meaning of these rights has shifted over the past two centuries, and what increasingly popular philosophies such as originalism could mean for application of these rights to the present day.

Sean Cantrell

“From the Dust of Ages”:
Identity and Ideology in the Historiography of Late Antiquity

Advisor: Paolo Squatriti

Few sources survive that describe the barbarian kingdoms of Late Antiquity, and even less come from those who claim a barbarian identity themselves. Those histories that we do have are romanticized narratives that blend history and myth, posing a problem for scholars studying post-Roman Europe. This study is an analysis of Late Antique histories as sources of contemporary barbarian identity and ideology, rather than purveyors of historical “fact.” It compares the socio-political contexts of two such accounts, Jordanes’s sixth-century *Getica* and Paul the Deacon’s eighth-century *Historia Langobardorum*, in order to pinpoint the biases of the historians that are reflected in each narrative. The pervasiveness and consistency of these biases suggest that the authors and their patrons exploited historical writing to propagate specific narratives of legitimacy and belonging for their barbarian kingdoms.

Will Carter

Siberian Reflections:

The Discursive Destruction of the Russo-American Relationship

Advisor: Ronald Suny

Russia and America had a cordial relationship towards the end of the nineteenth century. Common rivals, economic interests, technological exchange, the sale of Alaska, and a slew of other factors drove this friendly relationship. So, how did this kinship fall apart and end up in the realm of enemies during the twentieth century? This study aims to provide a part of the answer to that question by exploring the explosion of American literature on the Siberian Exile System during the late-nineteenth century. At center of this anti-Russian eruption was one book: George Kennan's *Siberia and the Exile System*.

Meghan Clark

Detoxifying the System:

DDT, Citizen Action, and the Efficacy of Multi-Approach Activism

Advisor: Matthew Lassiter

This thesis follows the political process leading to the banning of DDT in Michigan and across the United States, focusing on the influential collaboration of hobby birdwatchers, citizen activists, scientists, politicians, and legal experts. From growing awareness to court cases, from public hearings to the ultimate pivotal decision by the fledgling EPA, the anti-DDT movement helped inform the public about ecological systems and raise environmental consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite staunch opposition from industries that overemphasized the benefits of DDT, environmental organizations—new and old—worked to cleanse the political system of private interests and to detoxify ecosystems.

Dominic Coschino

“Because They Cannot Afford the Ransom Price of Bail”:
The Struggle for Humane Conditions in the Wayne County Jail,
Detroit, and the Limits of Legal Activism, 1967-1991

Advisor: Matthew Lassiter

The Wayne County Jail became massively overcrowded and inmates suffered under miserable conditions in the mid- to late 1960s. Despite liberal reforms, conditions in the jail worsened into the 1970s. Radical activist attorneys knew changing the jail required direct action. The radicals won, but the court addressed physical reform of the facility, and not the racism and classism inherent to the jail. By 1991, Wayne County jailed as many people as when the lawsuit began. The lawsuit brought limited physical changes to the jail but did not stop Detroit from jailing people due to race and poverty.

Gladys Gonzalez

The Cutter Disaster: Polio, Panic, and Politics

Advisor: Martin S. Pernick

The 1955 Cutter Disaster, the last polio outbreak of its kind to victimize hundreds of elementary-aged children and their families, was the result of several critical mistakes linked to a single source: Cutter Laboratories. But that is not the entire story. The Cutter Disaster, ultimately, was the product of an overwhelmed, inexperienced infrastructure. Cutter Laboratories may have been the company responsible for manufacturing the flawed vaccine, but their failure to create the vaccine alone was not to blame. Instead, it was the culmination of fear, pressure, and the gap between science and politics that led to disaster. Only by allowing greater federal intervention into the world of medical research was the disaster able to be contained, and modern vaccines able to be created.

James Lowell III

The Forgotten Years: The Beginning of the Federal Reserve System

Advisor: John Carson

The United States did not have a central bank until December 23, 1913, when Woodrow Wilson signed into the law the Federal Reserve Act. It is my position that this new bank was a modified version of the European central banks in England, France, and Germany. Because the United States could not look to its own past for a central bank, it needed to look elsewhere for a model to follow during the creation of a central banking system. This thesis will explain how the United States based the Federal Reserve System on those European banks.

Aine McGehee Marley

Slave Food to Southern Food: The Appropriation of West African Foodways into White Culture

Advisor: Jason Young

“Slave Food to Southern Food” tracks the ways that West African women brought their unique food culture across the Atlantic Ocean during the slave trade. Instead of the popularized idea of West African culture being lost, these women continued their traditions through their cooking. Black women usually worked in the plantation kitchens and thus creolized elite white Southern food. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, white women appropriated this culinary knowledge through the publication of Southern regional cookbooks. Further, these cookbooks silenced black women through demeaning caricature. This thesis argues that counteremory, implemented by black women, works to redefine the narrative of Southern cuisine.

Anne O’Connell

The American Civil Crusade: Religious Abolitionists in Michigan

Advisor: Matthew Spooner

This thesis is about the relationship between religion and the abolitionist movement, particularly in Michigan. The chapters correspond to the three ways in which religion was used to satisfy the political vision of emancipation: it was used to “rewrite” American understanding of slavery and American principle, it was used to “regroup” and extend the support for the abolitionist movement, and finally, abolitionists “reimagined” a novel form of Christianity that was intolerant towards slavery. It ultimately argues that due to the high saturation of religious language, it is much more fitting to label the Civil War as America’s own Civil Crusade.

Alexander Raveane

“A Stew That Is Quite Indigestible”: The Conflicting Perspectives of the US Embassy in Beirut and the State Department During the Chaotic Lebanese Civil War

Advisor: Juan Cole

This thesis analyzes the roles of the US Embassy in Beirut and the State Department during the first phase of Lebanon’s Civil War (1975 to 1977), claiming that US diplomacy was not simply top-down. The embassy’s perceptions were crucial to US mediation and its eventual decision to disengage diplomatically. The key argument is that the embassy’s positions were adaptable while the State Department consistently demonstrated shortsightedness and static views. The thesis cites telegrams between the embassy and Washington detailing perceptions and diplomatic actions of both institutions, as well as the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), to analyze discussions at the State Department.

Avraham Sholkoff

“Is This Any Way for Nice Jewish Boys to Behave?”:
American Jewish Masculinity and the Jewish Defense League

Advisor: Deborah Dash Moore

This thesis discusses the Jewish Defense League, an organization dedicated to publicly and often violently combating antisemitism in New York City in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I argue that in addition to its mission of fighting antisemitism, the JDL sought to reconstruct and reframe modern ideas of American Jewish masculinity from a timid, bookish individual to a militant, tough Jewish man. I detail the role that changing New York City neighborhoods, increasing suburbanization of American Jewry, and assimilation play in the formation of the JDL. Ultimately, using books written by JDL founder Meir Kahane as well as analyzing newspaper coverage of the era, I examine how the JDL represented American Jewish masculinity and the actions it took to implement its ideology.

Madeline Turner

“Between Iraq and a Hard Place”:
Jordan and the Consequences of American Exceptionalism, 1990-2015

Advisor: Hakem Al-Rustom

My thesis examines the relationship between the United States and Jordan during three different events in their recent history—the 1991 Gulf War, Jordan’s peace negotiations with Israel in the 1990s, and the 2003 Iraq War. I argue that as a means of advancing its own foreign policy goals, the US has used its political and economic influence over Jordan to sway Jordan’s foreign policy decisions in US favor, resulting in Jordan aligning with the US during the Iraq War. I also argue that because US foreign policy throughout these events was built on the ideological framework of American exceptionalism, Jordan has faced negative political, economic, and social consequences not only when opposing, but when supporting US military operations in the Middle East.

Alexander Votta

Sub-Federal Police and Immigration Enforcement: The Role of Federalism in the Development of Limited Cooperation Policies

Advisor: Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof

This thesis explores how the United States federalist system structured the development of what we call sanctuary jurisdiction. Using newspapers, congressional debates, campaign materials, court cases, and government reports, I demonstrate that the division of law enforcement authority between different levels initially fostered limited cooperation by granting sub-federal governments discretion over public safety policy. However, this began to reverse after 1996 because the federal government merged the daily activities required of police under the federalist system with immigration enforcement. Therefore, I conclude that over time the federalist system played two opposing roles in the development of limited cooperation policies.

Gabrielle Xilas

Tuskegee in Two Narratives: Revisiting a Crucial Moment of Medical Racism

Advisor: Alexandra Minna Stern

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study, conducted from 1932 to 1972 by the United States Public Health Service in Tuskegee, Alabama, is one of the most prominent instances of racist medical discrimination in America. This thesis explores the media portrayal of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study by evaluating articles from a set of prominent black newspapers and the *New York Times*. After examining these articles, it became apparent that two distinct narratives emerged: the indignant narrative of the black newspapers and the centrist narrative of the *New York Times*. Both of these narratives helped shaped future understandings of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.

