

Mahan Lecture Enlightens Remotely

The History Department's nineteenth annual Howard F. Mahan Lecture took place remotely on March 24. Dr. Asma Afsaruddin of Indiana University addressed a large Zoom audience on "Arguing the Caliphate: A Critique of the Views of ISIS." Dr. Afsaruddin's talk evaluated the scriptural basis for the claim made by ISIS (a.k.a. Islamic State) that its so-called caliphate represented a legitimate combination of religious and temporal power.

According to Dr. Afsaruddin, ISIS based its claim on a Quranic verse (2:124) in which God supposedly conferred upon Abraham a combined religious and political leadership status (*imama*). Deconstructing this assertion, Dr. Afsaruddin argued that Abraham's role as specified

in the Quran was understood to be religious only and did not extend to political rule. "Not a



Dr. Asma Afsaruddin

whiff of political authority," she concluded, "was attached to Abraham's leadership in religious matters." In fact, many conceptions of leadership that crystalized during the formative

stage of Islam, such as the idea of the *Khalifat Allah* or "deputy of God," were expressly limited to religious affairs and contained no political connotation. "Political administration was a worldly, pragmatic matter," Dr. Afsaruddin said, discounting the notion of religious involvement in it.

The upshot of Dr. Afsaruddin's findings was that ample distinction between religion and state has existed throughout Islamic history, despite some Western academics' (and Islamists') pronouncements to the contrary. This year's talk, though unconventional in format, met the highest ideals of the Mahan Lecture in providing a public forum for the discussion of groundbreaking historical inquiry.

Special Report: Award-Winning Efforts in Challenging Times

One of the more regrettable results of the coronavirus pandemic has been the cancellation of two annual award ceremonies, which in ordinary times are special opportunities for History students to be recognized for their hard work and studious attitudes. All of us in the History Department are especially sorry that our excellent students have been denied this meaningful experience for two consecutive years.

As a partial remedy, we are using the balance of this newsletter to recognize these students.



Although it's not as exciting as an in-person ceremony, we hope it's the next best way to celebrate their achievements and get to know them.

Therefore, let's now hear from our award winners, as they sum up what their History educations have meant to them and reveal their aspirations for the future. We are glad to have had these learners in our classes for the past few years and wish them all the very best.



Richard Whiting (Montgomery Carlton Stallworth Scholarship)

A native of Mobile, Richard Whiting reports to have been most inspired by Dr. McKiven's classes on Southern history. Consequently, Mr. Whiting became an "obsessed" history major with a "passion for historiography and the materialist forces that determine the course of society's past."

Mr. Whiting sees history as "more than just an analytical

tool for discussing or writing about the past." Rather, it can be "wielded to determine the course of the future, to inform our role in the present." Noting that many courses in the Department helped him master the technical aspects of historical research, he feels especially grateful to Dr. Urban, who "taught me an incredible amount and sharpened my ability to write."

After graduation, Mr. Whiting has his eyes on the Peace Corps and a career in public policy.

As Mr. Whiting concludes, "When it comes to the policy and movements that guide the very forces of humanity at the collective and individual level, the most valuable forms of analysis are found in the historical disciplines."



Kenneth D. Sims, Jr. (Macy Wims Reid Scholarship)

Mobilian Kenneth Sims has been getting the most out of Dr. Urban's classes on medical history, not least because he plans to obtain an MA in biomedical science after graduation, before proceeding to medical school. So why isn't Mr. Sims focusing on science as an undergraduate? Because he's a believer in the liberal arts.

As Mr. Sims explains, "Although I'm pursuing a ca-

reer in medicine, I understand that while studying history I have to take command of my own mind as I read, discuss, write, and question events and ideas that came from the past, and I know that I'm building a strong foundation for critical thinking and reasoning that will help me in the future as a physician when it's time to evaluate patients and take the best course of action possible for the patient's treatment."

Mr. Sims quotes Albert Einstein — "The value of an education is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think" — and he emphasizes that the most important lesson he's learned as a history student is "how to evaluate and interpret information." In today's information age, these words ring truer than ever.

Mr. Sims' long-term goal is to become an interventional cardiologist.

Rebecca Ardrey (Robert L. Brunhouse Award for Outstanding History Graduate Student)



Hailing all the way from Munith, Michigan, Rebecca Ardrey has been inspired by all her history coursework but gives pride of place to Dr. Brazy's directed studies on Twentieth Century Women's History.

Describing her Master's degree as a personal "Everest," Ms. Ardrey waxes even more

philosophical about history in general:

"Just because 'historians' spend their time in the past, doesn't mean that history isn't happening all around us. We are all students and participants in history, and if I have learned anything, perspective and diversity in the narrative is critical."

Ms. Ardrey currently resides in Ann Arbor and works for Old National Bank, where she recently won a "One Vision Award" for a community initiative she directed. "No, I am not using my History MA in the expected way," Ms. Ardrey says, "but I use the lessons that I learned in my studies every day."

Daniel Kalmar (Montgomery Carlton Stallworth Scholarship)**Kennedy Reese (Minnie Lee Wilkins Stallworth Scholarship)**

An arrival from Chicago, Daniel Kalmar has enjoyed Dr. Urban's class on immigration and Dr. Lombardo's on the Sixties. He became a history major "in order to better understand the complex challenges that society faces today." As Mr. Kalmar sees it, "the ability to place current day events into the proper historical context is paramount to having informed discussions about solutions and progress."

Mr. Kalmar aspires to teach history at the middle or high school level. Whatever he undertakes, he will value the process of critical thinking. As he asserts, "Sorting

through a variety of information and drawing rational conclusions based on solid evidence is a mental process that I will carry with me for the rest of my life."

Coming to South from Madison, Alabama, Kennedy Reese was also intrigued by a course taught by Dr. Lombardo, one on the Seventies. In fact, Ms. Reese's interest in history is longstanding. "From a young age I loved learning about the past, and how consequences and actions in the past have influenced and shaped society today."

Ms. Reese's view of history contains an appreciation for its

"what ifs." As she explains, "I love learning and imagining the possibilities: If small nuances occurred or did not occur, the world could be completely different." Above all, though, Ms. Reese is driven by curiosity. "I enjoy learning about new things and imparting this knowledge to my peers, as I believe knowledge and curiosity make life all the more interesting."

Ms. Reese wants to move to Chicago to pursue a Ed.D. in educational administration and leadership. She hopes one day to become a high school principal or college dean.

**Abigayle Edler (Howard F. Mahan Award for Outstanding Graduating History Major)**

A resident of Gulf Shores before coming to South, Abigayle Edler has been most interested in European history classes taught by Drs. Meola, Messenger, and Cage. There's a reason for her fascination: "I spent some of my childhood in Europe surrounded by castles, old cathedrals, ruins, and other historic sites. Those places and the stories they told captured my imagination."

Accordingly, Ms. Edler is

most keenly attuned to the narrative quality of history. "I loved the wonderful stories that history told, and I wanted to learn more. I chose to study history to follow my childhood fascination."

As much as Ms. Edler is captivated by a good story, she has learned here at South that an absorbing yarn is only as good as its sources. To track them down, a skilled historian must develop

leads, like a detective. Building a practical foundation underneath the castles of her memories, Ms. Edler reports that "One of the most important lessons I have learned as a history major is that you should use footnotes and bibliographies to find additional sources."

Ms. Edler plans to put this passion and practical skill to work in a MA program in European history.

**Travis Cummins (Robert L. Brunhouse Award for Outstanding History Graduate Student)**

An Anaheim, California native, Travis Cummins attended South as an undergraduate and became hooked on history by Drs. Urban and Lombardo and their classes on Latin American and urban history. Wishing to continue his studies, Mr. Cummins embarked on our graduate program, where his favorite course so far has been Dr. Brazy's class on African-American women.

Mr. Cummins values history as "a weapon against white supremacy, capitalism, and other forms of oppression that plague our society today." As he elaborates, "Exploring the past enables us to see what worked for previous generations of activists, encourages us as we celebrate victories and heroes that the ruling class would like us to forget, and enlightens us on the evolution of the structures we seek to change."

Mr. Cummins rates critical thinking in the analysis of primary sources as the most important thing he's learned in our MA program. Upon completion, he may pursue a Master of Library and Information Science degree, with the goal of becoming an academic archivist.

Summarizing the value of history, Mr. Cummins quotes Malcolm X: "Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research."



Full List of Award Winners, 2019–20 and 2020–21

E. LEWIS B. CURTIS AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING SCHOLARSHIP

2020–21 Winners: Charles (Austin) Bond, Patricia Massey, Tia (Tianna) Nickens, Nicholas Peckey, Chanlar Quinn

2019–20 Winners: Ashely Arreola, Travis Cummins, Hadley Di-Forti, Shannon Lundgren, Courtney Tittle

W. ROBERT HOUSTON MILITARY HISTORY AWARD

2020–21 Winner: Matthew Lombard

2019–20 Winner: Nathan Appling

ROD HICKMAN SERVICE AWARD

2020–21 Winner: Skyler Oliveira-Khan

2019–20 Winner: Simeon Barbour

COLONIAL DAMES AWARD

2020–21 Winner: Kristen Katsoff

2019–20 Winner: Liam Hodges

ROBERT L. BRUNHOUSE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING HISTORY GRADUATE STUDENT

2020–21 Winner: Travis Cummins

2019–20 Winner: Rebecca Ardrey

HOWARD F. MAHAN AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING GRADUATING HISTORY MAJOR

2020–21 Winner: Abigayle Edler

2019–20 Winner: Candace Pickering

RICHARD M. MEIKLE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING JUNIOR HISTORY MAJOR

2020–21 Winner: Jon Gutknecht

2019–20 Winner: John Lightsey

CLARENCE MOHR PRIZE FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

2020–21 Winners: Liam Hodges, Benjamin Morris

2019–20 Winners: Richard Whiting, Josh Crowley

STEPHANIE HARDIN PRIZE FOR GRADUATE RESEARCH

2019–20 Winner: Victoria Watson

MACY WIMS REID SCHOLARSHIP

2020–21 Winner: Michael Young

2019–20 Winner: Kenneth Sims

STALLWORTH SCHOLARSHIPS

The Stallworths were the parents of N. Jack Stallworth who provided the funding, through the USA Foundation, for two scholarships and the N. Jack Stallworth Lecture in Southern History.

MONTGOMERY CARLTON STALLWORTH SCHOLARSHIP

2020–21 Winner: Daniel Kalmar

2019–20 Winner: Richard Whiting

MINNIE LEE WILKINS STALLWORTH SCHOLARSHIP

2020–21 Winner: Kennedy Reese

2019–20 Winner: Abigayle Edler



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