Life

Graduate students highlight diverse topics in intriguing research conference

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A student walks past the exterior brick facade and green spaces of the Homer D. Babbidge Library on a clear day. The university building hosted the graduate student history event. PHOTO BY DAILY CAMPUS / STOCK

The University of Connecticut Department of History hosted its History Graduate Research Conference on Tuesday, Sept. 8 at the Class of 1947 Meeting Room at the Homer Babbidge Library. While audience members enjoyed brownies and cookies, six graduate students and an associate professor showcased their work.

The first presenter was Jacob Finegan, a third semester Master of Arts in history student. His project was a research paper titled "Fidelity Forgotten: Revisiting Honor, Duty and Burial at a Civil War State Park."

One of the project's main themes was the burial of perished troops from the Civil War. In the middle of his presentation, Finegan discussed the issue of unmarked graves for American soldiers.

"The existence of unmarked mass graves containing U.S. soldiers, including members of the U.S. Colored Troops, stands in direct contradiction of the federal statute's responsibilities and moral commitments articulated from 1867 up to 2016," Finegan said. "A careful review of these directives demonstrates the urgent need for state, local and department practices to align with a precise national policy."

To conclude his presentation, Finegan said we need to ensure that these soldiers are remembered.

"As historians, we are speakers for the dead," Finegan said.

The second presenter was Rahul Koonathara, a fifth semester doctorate in comparative literature and cultural studies student. Koonathara's project was "Tholpavakoothu in Colonial and Postcolonial Archives, 1930-2000."

According to Koonathara, Tholpavakoothu is a form of shadow puppetry based in India. In it, there are a lot of performances that serve as ritual offerings to the Mother Goddess Bhadrakali.

Koonathara discussed the evolution of Tholpavakoothu after India declared independence. He said that Tholpavakoothu entered national cultural archives along with documents and films. He also said that as Tholpavakoothu's recognition expanded, participation in the shows became broader and performances were condensed from lasting all day to one hour.

After Koonathara was Daniela Lilly-Rodiles, a third semester doctorate in history student. Her work was "Smoking Respectability: Turkish Smoking Parlors, Women and the Policing of Pleasure in Fin-de-Siècle New York."

Lilly-Rodiles began her presentation by showing an 1876 image titled, "Hasheesh Hell on Fifth Avenue." Published in the Illustrated Police News, it features five intoxicated women lying in a luxurious room. The image is significant because it represents the demonization that women faced from smoking hashish in the 1800s.

According to Lilly-Rodiles, hashish is a product made from the cannabis plant's trichomes. It was legal in the United States during the 19th century, and women used it in Turkish smoking parlors — places that gave them privacy and the ability to escape their husbands' supervision. The parlors eventually became subject to spectatorship, a process where they and their visitors were visible to the police.

The next project was "Analyzing La Prensa: An Interpretation of the Connections Between the Nicaraguan and Iranian Revolutions in 1979." The presenter was Valentina Bonansea, a third semester Master of Arts in history student.

In the beginning of her presentation, Bonansea said that La Prensa was a Nicaraguan magazine founded in 1926 by the Chamorro family. It encompasses multiple ideologies: republican, democratic and catholic. It was also a political factor in the Nicaraguan Revolution.

Bonansea expressed that the Iranian Revolution was a symbolic and meaningful influence to the Nicaraguan Revolution. She also mentioned that the Iranian Revolution was commonly cited in La Prensa, which contained graphics and political cartoons related to it.

The final graduate student to share their work was Brigitte Lewis, a third semester doctorate in history student. Her project was "Kwaku Walker's Life and Legal Legacy's Impact on De Jure Slavery's End and De Facto Slavery's Rise in Massachusetts, 1750-1830."

According to Lewis, Walker was an enslaved African American who was sued for being harshly beat up and not receiving his freedom after turning 25. Walker won his case and became a free man.

Besides sharing Walker's story, Lewis discussed the significance of slaves in Massachusetts.

"These people were a small portion of the population but were an essential part of that labor force," Lewis said.

Lewis also declared that Massachusetts became the first state to abolish slavery.

After the six graduate students showcased their work, the research conference concluded with Dan Royle's "The AIDS Practice is Not Over: AIDS Activism and the Politics of Memory." Royles is an associate history professor at Binghamton University.

Royles's work contained various elements about the HIV/AIDS outbreak along with some of its advocacy efforts. Royles showed some images of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, a series of panels with different signs and names related to AIDS activism. According to Royles, the quilt has about 50,000 panels and over 100,000 names.

Another topic that Royles discussed was the impact of the HIV/AIDS outbreak on gay communities.

"Even for those who weren't HIV-positive, the shadow of death hung over their lives," Royles said.

Royles discussed how AIDS makes Black gay men lives' difficult.

"It's still a crisis, especially in the Black communities in this country," Royles said.

Other things Royles shared were his book, "To Make the African American Struggle the Wounded Against HIV/AIDS Whole," and Philadelphia's Candlelight Walk, an AIDS activism event that took place in September 1986.

At the event's conclusion, audience members were given the opportunity to ask questions to the presenters. A few were asked, ranging from the project's context to its significance.

SUBOG Weekly Events:

September 13th - September 20th

Giants vs Cowboys Travel Trip – Details located on our Instagram

Suicide Prevention Week – A Talk with Chamique Holdsclaw – 7 pm – 8pm in SU Theatre

Dive Into SUBOG – 2 pm – 5pm – SU Mall

Six Flags Travel Trip – Details located on our Instagram

Any questions? Email subog@uconn.edu and check out @subogatuconn on Instagram for updates on our events!