

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **THACKER WINS 2023 BLANCHARD DISSERTATION PRIZE FOR WORK ON UNACCOMPANIED IMMIGRANT CHILDREN**

The American Journalism Historians Association has announced Molly Thacker as the winner of the 2023 Margaret A. Blanchard Dissertation Prize.

The Blanchard Prize, which was given for the first time in 1997, is awarded annually for the best doctoral dissertation dealing with mass communication history. All four scholars will present their research at the Blanchard Dissertation Award Panel at the AJHA Conference in Columbus, Ohio, in September.

Thacker, who completed her dissertation at Georgetown University under the direction of Katherine Benton-Cohen, was recognized for “‘Are We Not Children, Too?’: Race, Media, and the Formative History of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children in the United States.”

“I am thrilled to receive the 2023 Blanchard Prize. It is an honor to have my scholarship recognized by such an esteemed organization as the AJHA,” Thacker said. “Modern media stories of unaccompanied immigrant children can generate outpourings of empathy or hysteria, a dynamic similarly chronicled in my research with historical newspaper coverage of these young migrants. My dissertation illustrates that this weighty connection between immigrants and journalism has a long and storied past--a multifaceted history that demands further investigation.”

Three other scholars received an honorable mention from the Blanchard Dissertation Prize Committee.

Autumn Lorimer Linford was recognized for her dissertation, “Extra! The History of America’s Girl Newsies,” completed under the direction of Barbara Friedman at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

“As a labor, gender, and journalism historian, my research focuses on the forgotten work of women and girls in newspaper history. This dissertation, which has been contracted with the University of Nebraska Press to be adapted into a book, focuses on the labor of newsgirls,” Linford said. “While historical literature and pop culture both memorialize the work of newsie boys, newsgirls have been all but forgotten, relegated to passing mentions and footnotes. In reality, a ‘horde’ of young newsgirls across the country sold newspapers on street corners alongside boys. This work discusses their contributions to news labor, the gender-specific disapproval and dangers of their work, and the eventual banning of newsgirls.”

Natascha Toft Roelsgaard earned her recognition for “‘The Offense of Blackness’: Race Women’s Counter Storytelling and Exposé of the Southern Convict Leasing Regime.” Roelsgaard completed her dissertation at Ohio University under the direction of Aimee Edmondson.

“I am very honored to have my scholarship recognized by AJHA, a community that has played a supportive role in my research journey since I first became a member in 2018,” said Roelsgaard. “I hope this recognition will lead to continued conversations about the socio-political significance of the trailblazing activists and social reformers of the NACW. These women employed the power of the press to challenge dominant racial stereotypes while exposing the inequalities of the criminal justice system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, laying the groundwork for activists who came after them. I am delighted that AJHA is recognizing the value of the NACW’s activism and historical significance.”

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Ashley Walter, who completed her dissertation at Pennsylvania State University under the direction of Ford Risley, was recognized for “‘We Didn’t Do It, and We Won’t Do It Again’: Class-Action Sex Discrimination Lawsuits at News Organizations in the 1970s.”

“I attended my first AJHA conference in 2017. I was nervous and unsure of my footing as a master’s student. However, I’ll never forget sheepishly walking into the Blanchard Prize panel and watching Matthew Pressman accept the award. This panel was my favorite, and I remember thinking, ‘I want to be there someday.’ I’ve had the same thought each year since,” Walter said. “It is really an honor to be recognized. I can’t wait to be on the other side of the podium this year.”

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Founded in 1981, the American Journalism Historians Association seeks to advance education and research in mass communication history. Members work to raise historical standards and ensure that all scholars and students recognize the vast importance of media history and apply this knowledge to the advancement of society. For more information on AJHA, visit <http://www.ajhaonline.org>.

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