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The AJHA Margaret A. Blanchard Doctoral Dissertation Prize, established in 1997 and named in 2003, is awarded annually for the best doctoral dissertation on media history. Named in honor of the late Professor Margaret A. Blanchard of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—superb scholar and the source of guidance and inspiration for generations of doctoral students of journalism history—the prize is accompanied by an honorarium of five hundred dollars. A two-hundred-dollar honorarium is awarded to each honorable mention.

2017 AJHA ANNUAL CONVENTION
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Denise Hill, “Public Relations, Racial Injustice, and the 1958 North Carolina Kissing Case.” This dissertation is concerned with a particular mechanism in the performance of identity: self-representation in mass media. Four historical markers of Indian identity in the century under examination all involve Native American resistance to white supremacy, and in each instance, media played an operative role in portraying common themes that linked these historical eras, suggesting that intertextuality recirculates narratives back to the community, and that journalism itself becomes a formation of memory. The purpose here is to gain insight into agency and the process of transcultralization as it applies to self-representation. A fundamental assumption is that journalism is a narrative form, seeking to impose structure on the chaos of reality. A parallel premise is the notion of cultural scripts, continuous templates that imbue the Native American landscape of the present with felt attachments to the past. The question this research poses is how a racial isolate appropriated and subverted journalism narratives for the purpose of autonomy and as sites of memory.

Denise Hill, “Public Relations, Racial Injustice, and the 1958 North Carolina Kissing Case.” This dissertation examines how public relations was used by the Committee to Combat Racial Injustice (CCRI), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), North Carolina Governor Luther Hodges, and the United States Information Agency (USIA) in regards to the 1958 kissing case. The kissing case occurred in Monroe, North Carolina when a group of children were playing, including two African American boys, age nine and eight, and a seven-year-old white girl. During the game, the nine-year-old boy and the girl exchanged a kiss. As a result, the police later arrested both boys and charged them with assaulting and molesting the girl. They were sentenced to a reformatory, with possible release for good behavior at age 21. The CCRI launched a public relations campaign to gain the boys’ freedom, and the NAACP implemented public relations tactics on the boys’ behalf. News of the kissing case spread overseas, drawing unwanted international attention to US racial problems at a time when the country was promoting worldwide democracy. In response, Gov. Hodges launched a public relations campaign to defend the actions of North Carolina authorities, and the USIA employed public relations tactics to manage the country’s reputation overseas. This dissertation analyzes the public relations campaigns of the CCRI and Gov. Hodges, focusing on public relations strategies and tactics, as well as public relations outputs and public relations outcomes. This dissertation also analyzes the public relations tactics implemented by the NAACP and USIA.

Rianne Subijanto, “Media of Resistance: A Communication History of Anti-Colonial Movements in the Dutch East Indies, 1920-1926.” This dissertation is a communication history of the early communist anti-colonial movement in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) in 1920-1926. While for three centuries struggles against Dutch imperialism had been sporadic, local, and traditional in character, in this period people organized themselves for the first time in a radical, national, and global revolutionary movement. Rather than resort to weapons and warfare, the resistance movement developed collective actions around new emerging communicative technologies and practices—“media of resistance”—that included schools, public debates, popular journalism, arts, and literature. The dissertation examines the processes by which ordinary people produced these media of resistance as a new way of organizing and mobilizing. The aim is twofold: first, to reveal the centrality of communicative sociotechnical systems (practices, processes, and technologies) in the emergence, development, success, and demise of a social movement; and, second, to highlight the roles of ordinary people in that process, a focus hidden in the previous historiography due to leader-, party-, and formal event-centered narratives.