

Interview with
Brandon Kinney,
2022-2023 Richard Immerman
Fellow



Brandon Kinney is currently a fifth-year History PhD candidate at Temple University and the recipient of the 2022-2023 Richard Immerman Research Award. Named after one of CENFAD's co-founders and former director, the award grants up to \$1,500 to a graduate student pursuing a research project congruent with the mission of CENFAD. Speaking of which, CENFAD is happy to announce that the Immerman Award will rise to up to \$2,000 in the 2023-2024 year. In this print-exclusive interview, Brandon Kinney discussed the award and the research project that it will support.

RL: First off, congratulations on receiving the Richard Immerman Research Award for the 2022-2023 academic year. How have you utilized the award funds?

BK: I was really fortunate to be one of those accepted for this award. It was used for three separate research trips to the National Archives in College Park, Maryland and the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. It was my first time at the National Archives, so it was a real eye-opening experience. I focused primarily on the documents of the High Commissioner of Germany, or the American military government in Germany after the Second World War. I've been particularly focused on the departments and individuals that are focused on the exchange of persons programs, which saw Americans and Germans traveling across the Atlantic in large numbers. And I've found a lot of sources and correspondence between American officials and private American organizations, on whom American officials relied for a substantial part of the rehabilitation and reconstruction of West Germany after the war.

RL: What project was this research for?

BK: This funding supported the research for my dissertation, which is about the role of private American organizations in helping to rebuild West Germany after the Second World War and reestablishing cultural diplomacy between the two countries. Officials in the American Military Government in Germany often relied on the expertise, networking connections, and funds of American organizations (many of whom had primarily German-American membership) to help with rehabilitation efforts. The thought was, though Germany could be physically and materially rebuilt, it would be meaningless if there wasn't a spiritual or cultural rebuild that happened at the same time. That's where these

organizations and cultural diplomacy came in: helping to reconstruct culturally significant landmarks, organizing CARE packages for destitute postwar Germans, staffing German universities with teachers, carrying out exchange of persons programs, and helping to cultivate civil society organizations in West Germany. From the point-of-view of these organizations, a central tenet of the re-establishment of cultural diplomacy was the power of individual interactions and person-to-person relationships (what one journalist called “this marvelous exercise in grass-roots diplomacy”) to soften prejudices and foster international cooperation.

The story of Cold War America and West Germany is often one that is told primarily on European soil: American power is projected outward, where it can be rejected, refashioned, or accepted by Germans or other Europeans. I want to tell this story a different way: as a transatlantic story, where people, ideas, and culture are flowing back and forth across the Atlantic.

RL: In addition to offering you the Immerman Award, how else has CENFAD influenced your research and your time at Temple?

BK: The Center and its faculty have been indispensable for my project, and it’s become increasingly clear that Temple University and CENFAD are a place that can help junior historians produce high quality research. Being able to talk with multiple members of CENFAD’s faculty, bounce ideas off of them, work out my plans in conversation – it has all helped me to think very clearly about my project and go about completing it. The moral

and intellectual support has been there every step of the way.

RL: Do you plan on taking advantage of any other funding opportunities? Do you have any advice for graduate students just starting their graduate careers?

BK: I have been applying to a few fellowships that I hope will defray the costs of researching and writing in the spring and summer. I am hoping to complete my research by the end of the summer, if all goes as planned (which it rarely does!).

I’m not sure I have too much advice outside

of the usual platitudes: treat it like your job, where you don’t get completely consumed by it. Outside hobbies are a crucial part of decompressing and keeping yourself from getting overwhelmed.

My major point of advice would be: once you get up and running, you should be trying to write as much as possible. When you are in graduate classes, treat

the final papers and projects like something you might be able to use eventually or submit to a peer-review journal. Write or revise every day. There’s no such thing as good writing, only good re-writing.

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