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CONTACT: Megan Massino: massino@wisc.edu; 608.890.0013

Award Helps Junior Faculty Reach Milestone Crucial to Achieving Tenure

For most assistant professors in the humanities, the key to tenure is publishing a major academic book. UW-Madison's **Center for the Humanities** provides a boost to junior faculty in this pivotal endeavor. The Center's competitive **First Book** program allows junior faculty to assemble a "dream team" of readers for their first academic book-in-progress. Winners get to invite leading scholars in their field to join an interdisciplinary group of reviewers from among the faculty at UW. All read the scholar's manuscript and meet together in Madison for a hands-on workshop to collectively devise strategies for improving the manuscript and placing the book with a top academic publisher.

The Center recently announced three recipients of the First Book Award for the 2016-17 academic year—scholar of American literature and critical race studies **Brigitte Fielder**, global environmental history researcher **Elizabeth Hennessey**, and historian of early America **Gloria Whiting**.

The goal of the program is to turn solid and promising manuscripts from UW-Madison humanities researchers into first-rate, field-shaping books. Fielder, Hennessey, and Whiting will expand their scholarly networks and draw on the expertise of readers within and outside of their own fields to ensure their work reaches broader audiences across disciplinary boundaries.



Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies **Brigitte Fielder's** First Book award-winning manuscript, "Relative Races: Genealogies of Interracial Kinship in Nineteenth-Century America," presents an alternative theory of how race is constructed. Contrary to notions of "downward" genealogies by which race is transmitted from parents to children, Fielder identifies and theorizes forms of racialization that follow other directions—through adoption, sexual kinship, and reflection from children to parents. Fielder's work on the "relative races" of

historical and literary figures in the nineteenth century effectively reimagines the relationship between race and family.



Elizabeth Hennessey, jointly appointed in the Department of History and Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies as Assistant Professor of World Environmental History, uses mixed archival and ethnographic methods in her work to engage with interdisciplinary traditions that cross history, geography, and science and technology studies. Her First Book seminar will bring together scholars from these disciplines and beyond to consider her manuscript, "On the Backs of Tortoises: The Past and Future of Evolution in the Galápagos Islands." The book

traces the history of the islands and their namesake species—the prehistoric-looking giant *galápagos*, or tortoises—that are paradoxically icons of the Darwinian theory of evolution and of the attempts of conservation to halt change. Hennessey’s project rethinks the Galápagos as a laboratory of *co*-evolution to find a way out of a conservation paradigm that depends on the unsustainable myth of pristine nature.



Assistant Professor of History **Gloria McCahon Whiting** explores the attempts of Africans, both enslaved and free, to create and maintain families in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England in her manuscript, “African Families, American Stories: Black Kin and Community in Early New England.” Overcoming significant archival challenges, Whiting’s study of the living situations, gendered relationships, and kin communities of early Afro-New Englanders expands our understanding of diasporic life and adaptation by bringing into fuller context the beleaguered intimacies, and creative strategies, of black families in a region where Africans were only a small minority.

Past recipients of the award have not only seen their work through to press but garnered major prizes for their books. The inaugural First Book seminar centered on the manuscript of Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, Merle Curti Associate Professor of History. Her book, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas*, received the American Historical Association John H. Dunning Prize, the Society for U.S. Intellectual History Annual Book Award, and the *Journal of the History of Ideas* Morris D. Forkosch Prize for the Best First Book in Intellectual History. First Book Award Winner Mitra Sharafi, Associate Professor of Law, received the 2015 Law and Society Association's J. Willard Hurst Prize for her book, *Law and Identity in Colonial South Asia: Parsi Legal Culture, 1772-1947*.

Initially funded by a short-term humanities programming grant from the A.W. Mellon Foundation, the Center’s First Book program is now supported by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education (with funding from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation) and the International Division. For seminars in 2016-17 and 2017-18, additional support has been provided by the Offices of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff and Vice Provost for Diversity and Climate.

A full list of past recipients and their projects, as well as information on how to apply for the award, can be found here: <http://humanities.wisc.edu/research/first-book>