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EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY, MAY 16, 4 P.M.

**Society of American Historians Awards
Eric Foner, Nicole Eustace, and Bench Ansfield**

May 16, 2022, NEW YORK, N.Y.—Three prizes honoring historical work of exceptional literary merit are awarded today by the [Society of American Historians](#) (SAH) at Columbia University. The Society, founded in 1939 by Allan Nevins, an American journalist and historian, encourages and promotes literary distinction in the writing and presentation of American history. The Society's members – by invitation only – consist of scholars, independent historians, journalists, documentarians, filmmakers, essayists, novelists, public historians, biographers and poets.

●The third annual **Tony Horwitz Prize** honoring distinguished work in American history of wide appeal and enduring public significance is awarded to **Eric Foner**, DeWitt Clinton Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia University.



The word preeminent should be used sparingly, but it should not be spared in honoring Eric Foner. No historian has done more over the past fifty years to shape our understanding of the era of the Civil War.

From his early work on the ideological origins of the Republican Party (*Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 1970) to his magisterial *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (1988), to his nuanced portrait (*The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, 2010) of Lincoln's evolving political and moral imagination, to his

exposition of the post-war Constitutional amendments (*The Second Founding*; 2019), he has exerted enormous influence on public understanding of the American past.

If his impact as a scholar has been wide and deep, so, too, has been his influence as a teacher. History departments across the country are filled with his students, whose own scholarship

confirms not only the power of his example but also the breadth and openness of his mind. His students are not disciples or acolytes. They work in the spirit—not the shadow—of their mentor.

His generosity to undergraduate as well as graduate students; to colleagues and counterparts; to correspondents (who are often amazed by the alacrity of his response) is, to use another word that should be reserved for those who truly merit it, legendary.

In his subtly personal introduction to a reprint of his own mentor's first book, Richard Hofstadter's *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, he writes of Hofstadter's struggle to convey the complex interplay of ideas and their human context. Eric Foner's work rises to that same challenge—the challenge of writing about ideas without the illusion that they somehow live above the turmoil of social conflict, and about social and political history without dismissing ideas as mere pretexts for the exercise of power. This is a rare accomplishment, and it is especially rare to have accomplished it again and again.

The Horwitz prize, supported by **The Cedars Foundation**, honors the Society's treasured colleague and former president, **Tony Horwitz**, who died in 2019. Horwitz, a graduate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, was a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, a former staff writer for the *New Yorker*, and a distinguished historian whose distinctive voice was marked by surpassing humanity and grace. The 2022 jurors for the Horwitz prize were **Andrew Delbanco, Annette Gordon-Reed, and Megan Marshall**.

●The 65th annual Francis Parkman Prize honoring literary merit in the writing of history is given to **Nicole Eustace** for her book *Covered with Night: A Story of Murder and Indigenous Justice in Early America* (Liveright).



This is, quite simply, a brilliant work. *Covered with Night* artfully builds on the story of white colonists' murder of a Native person to construct a richly illuminating history of the clash of Native peoples' concepts of justice, reparations, and civility with those of the English colonials. The author's sensitivity to language in the archival record she examines so scrupulously is matched by the supple imaginativeness of her own writing. Deftly deploying a style that might be described as cinematic, or perhaps, mixing the metaphor, pointillist, Eustace exquisitely evokes the thought-and-sentiment worlds of both the indigenes and the colonists who compose her story. Readers come away with a significantly enhanced, deepened understanding of indigenous cultures and the nuances of settler-indigene interaction in 18th-century America. Eustace

builds to a robust assertion that the Albany Treaty of 1722, which concludes her story and still stands as “the oldest continuously recognized treaty in in the history of the United States,” can be seen as a foundational document in American history.

Eustace, Professor of History at New York University and the Director of the NYU Atlantic History Workshop, is the author or editor of three previous books.

The Francis Parkman Prize is awarded annually to a nonfiction work of history on an American theme published the previous year that is distinguished by its literary merit. The prize is named for Francis Parkman, whose monumental work, *France and England in North America* (7 vols., Boston: Little, Brown, 1865–92), was widely praised for its literary elegance as well as its historical importance. The 2022 jurors for the Parkman prize were **Thavolia Glymph**, **David M. Kennedy**, and **Patricia Limerick**.

●The 62nd annual Allan Nevins Prize for the best-written doctoral dissertation on a significant subject in American history is awarded to **Bench Ansfield** for their dissertation, “Born in Flames: Arson, Racial Capitalism, and the Reinsuring of the Bronx in the Late Twentieth Century” (Yale University).



This groundbreaking work examines the rush of arson-for-profit that ravaged the Bronx and dozens of other US cities in the 1970s. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the urban fires after the Civil Rights moment resulted not from neighborhood uprisings but from slum landlords emboldened by the expansion of federally supported fire insurance payouts. Complementing now-familiar explanations of how redlining in the property insurance market exacerbated racial inequality before 1968, Ansfield turns our attention to subprime insurance policies that subsequently flooded the rental insurance market in low-income communities—a practice Ansfield aptly terms “brownlining.” The public-private partnerships that promoted brownlining presented it as a progressive alternative to the discriminatory redlining practices of the past, yet ultimately they reinscribed racial segregation into the urban landscape and incentivized widespread

property destruction. Ansfield’s narrative thus fills a lacuna in the joint histories of deindustrialization and racial capitalism. Using an array of previously untapped government records, as well as archival repositories and oral history collections, Ansfield provides new insights into the growth of financial, insurance, and real estate industries, and the way marginalized communities negotiated their conditions under urban restructuring. For many years to come, scholars across the disciplines will turn to Ansfield’s exhaustively researched history as they analyze the public-private mechanisms that fueled racial inequality in the 1970s and

beyond. Readers will find an artfully structured and beautifully written book, with language that has both moral power and explanatory clarity.

Ansfield, who earned their Ph.D. at Yale University in May 2021 under the direction of Joanne Meyerowitz and Michael Denning, is currently an American Democracy Fellow in the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Harvard University.

The Allan Nevins Prize, named for the Society's founder, is awarded annually to a doctoral dissertation on an American subject that is distinguished by literary merit. The winning dissertation will be published by one of the publisher members of the Society. The 2022 jurors were **Jared Farmer** and **Elizabeth Hinton**.

● **Annette Gordon-Reed**, Carl M. Loeb University Professor at Harvard University, takes office as president of the Society for 2022-2023, succeeding **Andrew Delbanco**, Alexander Hamilton Professor of American Studies at Columbia University. Assuming the vice presidency is **Philip Deloria**, Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History at Harvard University.

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