

Selma Moidel Smith Student Writing Competition in California Legal History
The 2024 Winners
Laura Kalman and Sarah Barringer Gordon, co-chairs

1. Gabrielle Braxton, Stanford, “Guess Who’s Coming to Stanford? The Battle for Desegregation of an Elite Law School.” Only 3.5% of Black Americans held a bachelor’s degree in 1960. And SLS graduated no black students until 1968 and did not tenure an African American man until 1972 – and an African American woman until fifty years later. Based on painstaking archival research and oral histories, Braxton’s important study investigates the struggle, led by minority students and one associate and one assistant dean, to integrate the institution. This paper is a valuable contribution to the history of racial integration and legal education at California’s most eminent private law school.

2. Douglas Sangster, Berkeley, “The Codification of Independent Living.” As Sangster ably demonstrates, the work, first of 1960s student activists and later, of “student activists-turned bureaucrats,” proved crucial to the establishment of the University of California’s Physically Disabled Students Services Program and the creation of the first Center for Independent Living in Berkeley in 1972. These activists were also central to the passage of Assembly Bill No. 204 in 1979, which directly involved the state of California in the funding of independent state living centers. “The Codification of Independent Living” charts the challenges to the attitudes of and towards the disabled that enabled the social model of disability to take its place alongside, if not altogether to supplant, the medical model.

3. Caroline Lester, Berkeley, “Justice Denied and Forgotten: The Hidden History of Alaska’s World War II Internment Camps.” In this paper, Lester recovers a long overlooked, but important, parallel to the federal government’s removal and internment of Japanese Americans from California and other west coast states on the recommendation of Earl Warren, then attorney general of California. In the Territory of Alaska, Unanga’s Natives were equally brutally treated – and about 10 % died. This paper documents this process and its relationship to Japanese internment. Crucially, while the Japanese were finally granted a formal apology and financial compensation (however small), no apology was accorded to Aleutian Islands people and any funds were only held in trust. Both illuminating and disturbing, this paper illustrates the reverberations of the miscarriage of justice to Japanese Americans in California and its replication elsewhere.