

LEGAL HISTORY
WINNERS
RECOGNIZED
AT VIRTUAL
AWARDS CEREMONY



Top row, from left: Winners Gabrielle Braxton, Douglas Sangster, and Caroline Lester. Bottom row, from left: CSCHS President Daniel Kolkey, Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero, competition judges Professors Laura Kalman and Sarah Barringer Gordon.

BY DOUG SAUNDERS

DURING A VIRTUAL Zoom meeting on August 12, the California Supreme Court Historical Society congratulated the winners of its 2024 Selma Moidel Smith student writing competition.

The top three writers represented Stanford Law School and UC Berkeley School of Law. They read summaries of their papers to historical society members, including California Supreme Court Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero. This year's entries highlight key issues in California's legal landscape, including racial integration in legal education, disability rights, and civil liberties during World War II.

"It's really an honor to be here to congratulate these bright young minds of the future who have been judged by our very distinguished professors for these awards," Guerrero said before introducing each winner.

Stanford Law School student Gabrielle Braxton won first place for her article, "Guess Who's Coming to Stanford? The Battle for Desegregation of an Elite Law School." Braxton's project, which began as a writing assignment for a civil rights law history class, evolved into an in-depth study of racial integration at Stanford Law School.

Braxton initially intended to explore the integration of Black, Latino-American, and Asian-American students at Stanford. Her research involved extensive archival work, poring over memos from the 1960s and 1970s to identify students. She then conducted interviews with many alumni who remained in the Bay Area. Braxton will receive \$5,000.

UC Berkeley Law School graduate Douglas Sangster took the second-place prize for his paper, "The Codification of Independent Living." His work traces

the evolution of disability rights in California from the 1960s through the late 1970s. It highlights how student activists, and later those same individuals working within the system, were instrumental in establishing the University of California's Physically Disabled Students Services Program and Berkeley's pioneering Center for Independent Living in 1972. He will receive \$2,500.

UC Berkeley Law School graduate Caroline Lester took the third-place prize for her writing, "Justice Denied and Forgotten: The Hidden History of Alaska's World War II Internment Camps." Lester's paper sheds light on a lesser-known chapter of World War II internment history, drawing parallels between the widely documented internment of Japanese Americans and the equally brutal treatment of Unangax Natives in Alaska. Lester reveals that the Alaskan Native internment resulted in a devastating 10 percent mortality rate. She explores the origins of both internments and their respective redress movements. Her research relied heavily on oral histories from Unangax, elders. Lester will receive \$1,000.

The competition is named in honor of long-time society board member Selma Moidel Smith who initiated and directed it from 2007 to 2022.

The papers were judged by University of Pennsylvania Professor of Constitutional Law Sarah Barringer Gordon and University of California Santa Barbara Professor of Law Laura Kalman. The winning papers will appear in the forthcoming issue of *California Legal History*, on the California Supreme Court Historical Society webpage. ★

DOUG SAUNDERS is a reporter for the Daily Journal. A version of this story was published in the Los Angeles and San Francisco editions of the Daily Journal on Aug. 14, 2024. Reprinted with permission.