The 2019 Barbara Harlow Prize for Excellence in Graduate Research
Winning essay: Mary Owusu's "Cosmopolitan Nationalism on the Gold Coast 1887-1920."

Owusu's essay conducts an historical analysis of the early 20th century West African intellectuals and elites ("merchant princes") and their pragmatic and self-interested attempts at liberal colonial reform. Owusu examines the ways in which the British-educated colonized elites aimed to reform British colonial administration by synthesizing the local culture and its traditions with international governmental and policy debates. What is most impressive about the essay is its depth of research into the world of West African and British journalism and print culture. Owusu uses the archive to examine the era's print culture as a space of mediation and amelioration, rather than outright anticolonial nationalism and revolutionary protest. The essay’s examination of the West African intellectuals' dialogical encounters with British and French African travelers, administrators, and journalists, Edmund Morel, and the West African lawyers, clergymen, and journalists' John Mensah Sarbah, Attoh Ahuma, and Reverend Carl Christian Reindorf, etc., highlights a complicated example of cosmopolitanism-an example of Appiah's "intelligent engagement with difference."

What is noteworthy about the history that Owusu examines is that this particular example of colonized subjects' religious, administrative, and mercantile investments reveals the ways in which an historiography that highlights and primarily champions/celebrates the history of anticolonial nationalism elides some of the paradoxes of the colonial encounter and processes of colonial reform. It's not a heroic story of Third World nationalism, but it is one that might help us to better understand the intersecting interests of colonized elites and colonizing reforms, as well as the contradictions of liberalism, governance, and government.
Mary Owusu, Dalhousie University PhD African Studies, received The 2019 Barbara Harlow Prize in Graduate Research at the 19th Annual Africa Conference at The University of Texas at Austin on March 30th.

The Prize panelists were Ma Carter, Timothy Neville Hoad and Brian Doherty, all from the Department of English, The University of Texas at Austin on March 30th.

The 2019 Africa Conference critically examined the highly intricate and contested processes of identity formation and its significance for African societies. The conference engaged with discussions on identities that are intimately linked to notions of African diaspora across the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean. The primary aim of the conference was to reflect on the varying and varied forms of social practices and processes through which identities are constructed, contested, negotiated, and reconfigured in relation to one another. Simultaneously, the conference intention was to create an intellectual space for examining the politics of identity that systematically marginalizes, excludes, disempowers, and denudes certain social groups. Beyond the specific emphasis on Africa, the overarching focus of the conference was to engage with different theoretical inflections that have emerged in the existing scholarship on imbricated identities as well as to probe into the ways in which they have been challenged and reformulated within the academia.

For the past eighteen years, the Africa Conference has encouraged an interdisciplinary dialogue about the African continent for scholars from around the world.

Congratulations from the History Department Mary!