

2017 Graduate Prize Winner

Jon Connolly (Stanford University), “Indentured Free Labor: Legal Ideology in the Era of Emancipation”

This superb paper was delivered last year as part of the PCCBS Panel on “Labor and Liberty in the Atlantic World.” What a fascinating and important topic – the construction of relatively free labor in the post-emancipation British world. Mr. Connolly pursued a topic calling for serious revision and used impressively an impressive array of sources. This paper was well-argued, clear in its thesis, and accessible to both specialists and non-specialists. It bodes well for an important dissertation and monograph, which will ask us to rethink the debates over labor in the historical experiences of over one million South Asians. The key riddle: why and how did authorities and others come to perceive what was considered indentured labor as an acceptable form of ‘free labor.’ Answering that requires consideration of political, social and economic theory and practices; governmental and legal records; memoranda and correspondence in the India and Colonial Offices’ archives, among other treasure troves; tensions within the extensive and growing British World, and an appreciation of work itself: what it meant and did not mean, and to whom, and why. This is a thoughtful and articulate exploration of those central public policy questions for the Victorians and their descendants.