Winning Essays Focus on Complexities of Religion, Land and Government | Biological Engineering

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Chad Nielsen took first prize at the 2016 Arrington Writing Awards.

The complex attitude of religious adherents toward land and government captivated this year’s selection committee in naming two winners of the 2016 Arrington Writing Awards.

First prize went to Chad Nielsen, who received $1,000 in cash for his essay “Damned Rascals and the Constitution: The Paradox of Mormon Attitudes Towards Government.” Kirtan Patel received a $500 cash prize for second place for his essay “Postcolonial Trauma: Indian Devotion to the Land.”

The annual competition is held in conjunction with the Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture at Utah State University. The two award recipients were announced April 6 at the spring lecture of the Friends of Merrill-Cazier Library.

The writing competition is open to university students studying at any of the region’s universities. The lecture was held in the fall of 2016 and featured Patty Limerick, professor of history, faculty director and chair of the Board of the Center of the American West at the University of Colorado. The winning essays were in response to, and expanded upon, the lecture Limerick delivered in the Logan Tabernacle entitled “Hair-Raising Tales from the Department of the Interior.”

Nielsen is a freelance Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) studies researcher. He is from the Ogden, Utah area. He is currently pursuing a master’s in biological engineering at USU, specializing in synthetic biology. He says his true passion, however, is studying Mormon history and theology, and he often works on freelance research projects in his spare time. In addition, he posts in his own corner of the Mormon Bloggernacle. Outside of his avocation in Mormon studies and his vocation in the life sciences, Nielsen is also a musician, gardener, avid Star Wars fan and a board game enthusiast.

Patel completed a bachelor’s in history in 2015 at the University of Oxford. He was born and raised in London, England. Following his studies at Oxford, he went on to study Sanskrit in India for nine months. Currently he is pursuing a graduate degree in history at USU and is interested in the development of religious traditions in colonial Gujarat, particularly the ways in which religious authority is negotiated. Patel is the Charles Redd Fellow and Research Assistant to Professor Ravi M. Gupta.

Nielsen’s winning essay is available on the University Libraries Digital Commons site. To read it, along with previous winning essays, go to the University Library’s Digital Commons tab and search “Arrington.”

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