



Roosevelt  
Institute for  
American  
Studies

## 2x PhD Scholarships

The Roosevelt Institute for American Studies ([www.roosevelt.nl](http://www.roosevelt.nl)) is pleased to offer 2x full PhD scholarships within the project “**In the Shadows of Slavery: Free Black Citizenship and Democracy in Antebellum America**,” sponsored by the Stichting Praesidium Libertatis I and supervised by Prof. dr. Damian Pargas, in conjunction with Leiden University. The scholarships will run from **1 January 2025 through 31 December 2028**.

### ***Project Description:***

In the “antebellum” period between the American Revolution and the US Civil War, practical and ideological understandings of citizenship and democracy—defined as a set of ethical ideals regarding popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality—were heavily influenced by the pressing issue of Black freedom. Whereas all of the northern states gradually abolished slavery within their jurisdictions between 1777 and 1804—slowly converting their slave populations into free Black populations—the southern states briefly increased manumissions—bolstering free Black communities within their borders—but subsequently redoubled their commitment to slavery, expanding it into the newly acquired territories of the trans-Appalachians. As the nation became bifurcated—with one half of the union committed to some version of Black “freedom” and the other half to slavery—disputes within states across the country arose regarding the rights and legal personhood of African Americans who were either legally free (through birth, manumission, or emancipation) or who were legally enslaved but had escaped to free soil.

How was the racial landscape of citizenship and democracy in antebellum America characterized, and how did free Black populations in various states navigate such landscapes? “In the Shadows of Slavery” explores the answers to these questions from a comparative and conceptually innovative perspective. It moves away from singular national narratives of American democracy and instead argues that various states in the early republic—north and south—developed different approaches to democracy, based on the ways in which local communities understood and experienced free Black citizenship. Specifically, this project examines the *spectrum* of democracy in antebellum America, advancing a new conceptualization and arguing that states in this period developed two distinct “varieties” of democracy, informed by their approaches to newly established communities of free Blacks within their borders, namely:

- 1) *civic democracies* (where free Blacks were considered *full citizens*);
- 2) *racial democracies* (where free Blacks were considered *non-citizens*); and
- 3) *hybrid democracies* (where free Blacks were considered *second-class citizens*).

At one end of the spectrum, a few northeastern states—most notably Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire—quickly developed in the direction of *civic democracies*, whereby free Black populations came to navigate legal, economic, judicial, and political landscapes from positions approaching *full citizenship*. Most laws and the execution of the justice system in these states throughout the antebellum period were theoretically color-blind, and the development of citizenship and civil society were not formally obstructed on the basis of race or racial exclusion. Although all-encompassing definitions of citizenship were not always codified into law, African Americans in civic democratic states like Massachusetts and Maine came to be essentially accorded most—indeed almost all—of the rights and privileges of other citizens. The few attempts to curtail African-Americans’ rights on the basis of racial exclusion in these states during the antebellum period were often successfully challenged by free Black communities and their White political allies—challenges that were only made possible by the existence of color-blind interpretations of certain civil rights. Residents of these states also fiercely resisted federal fugitive slave laws—widely perceived as unjust infringements on state-level citizenship rights for free African Americans—and authorities strove to apply habeas corpus principles to accused runaways from the southern states, conferring upon them the legal rights associated with citizenship and personhood until their status could be determined. African-American civil society and political participation (in particular as they related to abolitionism but also anti-segregation campaigns) flourished in civic democratic states.

Southern slave states, meanwhile, developed in the direction of *racial democracies*, conferring social and political rights on the basis of race and relegating free Black populations to navigate perilous landscapes of *non-citizenship*. Racial democracies were essentially *Herrenvolk* democracies—the term “racial” here is chosen deliberately to underscore the importance of *race* (rather than *ethnicity*) in the development of these republican societies. Although open to the liberalization of manumission laws in the revolutionary period, southern slave states had rapidly become overtly hostile to Black freedom by the opening decade of the nineteenth century, severely circumscribing rights and privileges for free Blacks, calling for forced White patronage, demanding self-expulsion of newly manumitted people, and even allowing for the legal re-enslavement and indentured servitude of Black people as punishment for certain crimes. These states furthermore excluded non-Whites from any form of political participation or expression (including prohibitions of assembly and press), curtailed their access to the justice system, and allowed free Black civil society only in non-politicized “mutual aid” and church societies. In southern racial democracies, Black freedom was essentially considered a *privilege* rather than a *right*—indeed, one that could be revoked by state authorities. Free African Americans in racial democratic states lacked many of the rights and privileges associated with legal personhood, were able to publicly organize only in severely limited manifestations of civil society, and often operated from positions of illegal residency and extreme dependency.

A third variety emerged in most of the northern free states, most notably (though not exclusively) in the states carved out of the Northwest Territory along the Ohio River borderlands, such as Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. These states developed in the direction of highly contested *hybrid democracies*, whereby antebellum free Black populations early on came to navigate legal, economic, judicial, and political landscapes of *second-class citizenship*—although they tirelessly fought for full citizenship in these states, to varying degrees of success. Hybrid democratic states prohibited slavery and allowed runaway slaves access to limited legal rights until it could be proven that they were runaways. However, they also barred African Americans from political participation and implemented “Black laws” that denied important citizenship rights for free Blacks, imposed draconian residency laws, and circumscribed their participation in local economies. The main distinction between the status of free African Americans in racial and hybrid democratic states lie in the fact that legal personhood (i.e., freedom from enslavement) for free Blacks in hybrid democracies constituted a guaranteed right (runaway slaves constituting an exception, as dictated by federal law), whereas in racial democracies it was considered a privilege that could be revoked. Another distinction between racial and hybrid democratic states lie in the level of coordinated activism and overt resistance to “Black laws” and political exclusion, as well as the degree of success achieved in achieving full inclusion. Although denied the vote and office-holding, free Black civil society and political activism flourished in hybrid democratic states and was aimed at acquiring full citizenship rights and privileges—with limited success by the end of the antebellum period—as well as advancing the cause of abolition in the South. In some states, most notably Ohio, coordinated biracial activism succeeded in slowly pushing hybrid democratic states in the direction of civic democracies by the late antebellum period.

The project will consist of 2x full PhD scholarships (for *contractpromovendi*), each of which will finance in-depth investigations of various case studies that relate to the overarching theme during a period of 4x years. The PhD candidates will defend their dissertations at Leiden University and will be incorporated into the PhD program at the Institute for History (as well as a national *onderzoeksschool*), but will conduct their research and be based at the archives of the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies in Middelburg (with which Leiden University has a strategic partnership). The RIAS will provide the PhD candidates with office space and full access to its archival collections, as well as a (limited) travel budget for research trips and conference attendance. The project will be supervised by prof. dr. Damian Pargas, the Leiden University Chair of North American History & Culture and the Director of the RIAS.

**Prospective candidates are invited to develop a “pre-proposal,”** or preliminary research proposal (roughly 1 page), that connects with the general theme of the project. All relevant proposals will be considered, but particular preference will be given to proposals that explore the experiences of free Black communities (in any state or region) with:

- a) legal freedom and protection from (re-)enslavement;
- b) property and economic rights;
- c) crime and punishment; and/or
- d) participation in civil society and the body politic.

### ***We offer:***

- A full scholarship for 4x years, with a stop/go evaluation at the end of the first year. (Each scholarship will amount to roughly €2.854,16 gross per month.)
- Office space and access to RIAS archival collections.
- A small annual travel fund for research trips and conference participation.
- Individual supervision and collective PhD training at both the RIAS and Leiden University, one of the best-ranked universities for humanities in Europe.
- The opportunity to be closely involved in RIAS activities, including conferences and seminars.

### ***Tasks:***

- Writing a PhD dissertation in English within 4 years.
- Actively participating in the RIAS PhD program, including attending and co-organizing seminars and conferences.
- Actively helping and participating in RIAS activities, both academic events and public outreach.
- Participating in the Leiden University Graduate Program for PhDs and fulfilling the university's requirements for obtaining a PhD [<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/humanities/graduate-school/prospective-phd-candidates>].
- Participating in a national graduate school (such as Research School for Political History [OPG], the Posthumus Institute for Social and Economic History, or the Huizinga Institute for Cultural History, depending on the topic).
- Submitting research results for publication in international peer-reviewed academic journals.
- Presenting papers at conferences and workshops.

### ***Requirements:***

- MA degree in History, North American Studies, or related discipline.
- Thorough knowledge and understanding of American history and relevant academic debates.
- Fluency in English (spoken and written).
- Experience in working with American source material.
- Ability to work independently and as part of a team.

NB: The scholarship conditions require that candidates must be from an EU member state or have legal residence in the Netherlands. *Candidates are expected to be based at the RIAS.*

### ***Application Procedure:***

Applications should be submitted in English and should include:

- A cover letter stating your motivation for this scholarship.
- A curriculum vitae.
- A “pre-proposal” or preliminary research proposal (max. 1 page) that broadly outlines your project, how it connects to the general theme of the project, and how it may draw from RIAS archival sources.
- Your MA grade transcript.
- A copy of your MA thesis (in PDF).
- The contact information of two references (including telephone numbers and emails). References will be contacted directly by the search committee.

The above documents should be submitted in PDF format to [info@roosevelt.nl](mailto:info@roosevelt.nl) by **1 November 2024 at 17:00 CET**. Please include in the subject heading “**Shadows of Slavery PhD.**” Interviews will be held in late November, either in person or via Zoom.

For questions or more information please contact Damian Pargas ([d.a.pargas@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:d.a.pargas@hum.leidenuniv.nl) or [da.pargas@roosevelt.nl](mailto:da.pargas@roosevelt.nl)).