



December 1, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with the greatest pleasure that I recommend Michelle Jones for your graduate program. As a scholar who has come to know Michelle Jones's work, and who has had the opportunity to comment on one of her papers for a panel at the annual meeting of the Association of American Historians, I am extremely enthusiastic about Michelle getting her PhD. I am confident that she will write a most important dissertation.

Michelle Jones is currently incarcerated at the Indiana Prison for Women and she, as well as some of the other women living there, have written quite extraordinary research papers for the classes they have taken on the inside with historians from Indiana University. These women have immersed themselves in the secondary literature on their topics with a keen and critical eye and then, once they were able to get access to primary materials, each wrote a detailed paper that upended a great deal that we have assumed about the lives of incarcerated women in various periods of Indiana's history. To a one these women's papers reframed our understanding of critical moments and issues in the past.

In fact, Michelle's Jones has done an extraordinary amount of research under some of the most repressive conditions imaginable, and yet she has insisted on learning from, and speaking to, scholars and the public on the outside even when it has meant suffering more repression on the inside. A recent example of this is that she gave an interview to NPR about her work and, as a result, experienced some serious disciplinary repercussions from prison officials. I mention this not to offer any excuses for the work she is submitting for consideration to join your graduate program. Indeed, her work is first rate and I believe shows more insight, a better grasp of historiographical debates, and better research skills, than most who apply to graduate school every year. I mention this because it suggests that Michelle's work is enriched by a unique and valuable knowledge of her historical subject and this means that she will contribute something truly valuable to broader work currently being done by scholars on gender and containment in America.

As Michelle puts it, she is interested in "excavating the voice of the subaltern in American History" and in deconstructing crucially important matters of sexual, gender, and epistemic violence that, together "actively suppress, derail and silence the subaltern." By focusing on something that she understands so well—women and women's prisons as spaces of containment—she hopes to bring a wholly different set of voices and perspectives into the existing literature on gender and violence and carcerality than currently exist. She seeks to offer a critique of women's prison history in terms of how race, sex, and gender intersect with criminality in ways that few have done or perhaps could do.

To that end, even before entering a graduate program Michelle has already presented her research in myriad venues such as the American Studies Association Conference, the Conference on Higher Education in Prison Conference, the International Qualitative Inquiry Conference, the Indiana Women's Bicentennial History Conference, the annual conference of the American Historical Association, and the annual conference of the American Correctional Association to mention just a few. She has also already published her work in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, in *Perspectives on History*, *Magazine of the American Historical Association*, and in, the *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences*. And, as impressively, Michelle's scholarship has won awards. She will soon receive the "Outstanding History Project Award" for the best Indiana history project; presented by the Indiana Historical Society during the bicentennial year and she has already received the "George C. Roberts Award" for the best paper published in the previous year's *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences*.

In closing Michelle Jones is a top candidate for your doctoral program and she would be an extraordinary addition to the incoming cohort of graduate students. Michelle is well trained, and she brings a powerful perspective to, as well as deep passion for, her work. As important, I am absolutely persuaded that Michelle Jones has what it takes to write a first-rate dissertation in your program. I offer her my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,



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