



Ruth J. Simmons Center for
the Study of Slavery & Justice
BROWN UNIVERSITY

2025 Annual Report

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On December 13, 2025, the Brown community experienced an act of senseless violence. The Simmons Center students, staff, and faculty are grateful to our community, which reached out to offer support during this challenging time. As we continue to work toward healing and recovery, we remain committed to advancing a wide range of ideas, perspectives, and experiences to advance knowledge and understanding.



Image from a ritual performance of “the cosmic matter of Black lives” by Cherise Morris ’16, 2022.

RYTHUM VINO BEN

Front Cover:

Viewers gaze at “The Tally (Voyage of the Slaving Brig Sally 1764–1765).”
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

Director’s Note

It has been a tumultuous time for the country. Conventions which seemed embedded in our society were and are regularly broken. The study of history has become a political football. The concept of academic excellence is being contested. Many programs feel embattled as the terrain shifts underneath them. For us at the Simmons Center, we observe these times and attempt to navigate a path which allows us to continue our mission — the study of racial slavery, its emergence, and how its structures have shaped many societies, including the American nation. We do this recognizing all the time that the study of this history demands rigor as well as an understanding that the telling of that history requires attention to many diverse publics.

In this regard, we note that one of the Center’s achievements was the formal opening in December 2024 of the co-curated exhibition, “In Slavery’s Wake: The Making of Black Freedom.” Working in partnership with the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Simmons Center, along with a team of international curators, created a major traveling exhibition. Hailed by many critics and already the winner of an award, the exhibition seeks to tell the complex story of racial slavery and colonialism through not only objects but through artwork and the voices and memories of those who were historically enslaved and colonized. The exhibition was the culmination of a decade-long series of meetings, debates, and conversations in the network that was catalyzed by the Center in 2014 — The Global Curatorial Project (GCP).

The unfolding of the project spawned another project: the collection of oral histories in Senegal, Brussels, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jamaica, Liverpool (UK), the Western Cape in South Africa, and Africatown in Alabama. This project, over time, came together as the “Unfinished Conversations Series” and is now a digital repository of major significance. The full archive is housed at the John Hay Library. As the Center, working with its international partners, collected these interviews, it became clear that there was the need for further storytelling, hence the creation of two documentaries to date: “The Unfinished Conversations Series: Telling New Stories,” and “Uncorking the Bitter Truth: Slavery’s Legacy in Cape Wine.” All this has meant that the Simmons Center has consolidated itself into a significant public humanities venue.

In this regard, we note our second achievement. Recognizing that our work in the field of public history had led us into other fields, particularly museum, documentary and curatorial studies, it became clear that the Simmons Center could now begin to create a teaching program which integrated museum studies, public history, and curatorial studies into an overarching public humanities program. Thus, a year ago, the Center became the venue for a revitalized MA in Public Humanities at Brown. The program, building upon our strengths, draws MA graduate students interested in art and history curation, museum studies, and public history. It operates from the standpoint that there is a “public good” in the work of museums. Brown has previously hosted a graduate Public Humanities program, and the current iteration of the program will build upon that record. In these tumultuous times, as an institution, we do what needs to be done to continue our mission in the Brown way — to make a difference in the world. We do so bearing in mind the complex histories of the making of the modern world and the decolonial requirements of the present.

We could not do these things without the fulsome support of all the members of our President’s Advisory Council and our academic advisory board, and so we say thanks to them for all their support. Then, there are the Center’s student workers and the graduate and undergraduate students who work with us, suggesting programs and projects. Of course, none of this could happen without the remarkable staff at the center: Africa Smith, Kiku Langford McDonald, Sabina Griffin, Shana Weinberg, Reina Thomas, Eli Scavuzzo-Duggan and Elena Shih. Our deep thanks as well to all the Center’s donors.

Today, as we look out at a world which seems to be out of joint, the Center will continue its mission — the confrontation of our past in order to build a more just world.

Anthony Bogues

Director of the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice

New Faculty Leadership



Brian Meeks

Acting Director for the Simmons Center and MA in Public Humanities

During the sabbatical semester of Simmons Center Inaugural Director Prof. Anthony Bogues (July–December 2025), the Simmons Center was left in the capable hands of Brian Meeks, Professor of Africana Studies at Brown University. Prof. Brian Meeks served as Acting Director for the Center and the Masters in Public Humanities Program.

Previously, Prof. Meeks served as Chair of Brown's Department of Africana Studies and Rites and Reason Theatre from 2015 to 2021. He has also served as Professor of Social and Political Change and Director of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica; taught at Michigan State University, Florida International University, and Anton de Kom University of Suriname; and has been a Visiting Scholar at Cambridge University and Stanford University.

Prof. Meeks has published twelve books and edited collections including "After the Postcolonial Caribbean: Memory, Imagination, Hope" (2023), "Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory" (2014), "Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory: an Assessment of Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada" (1993), "Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean" (2000) and "Envisioning Caribbean Futures: Jamaican Perspectives" (2007). His novel "Paint the Town Red" was published in 2003 and his volume of poems "The Coup Clock Clicks" was published in 2018.

Prof. Meeks has published twelve books and edited collections including "After the Postcolonial Caribbean: Memory, Imagination, Hope" (2023), "Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory" (2014), "Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory: an Assessment of Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada" (1993), "Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean" (2000) and "Envisioning Caribbean Futures: Jamaican Perspectives" (2007). His novel "Paint the Town Red" was published in 2003 and his volume of poems "The Coup Clock Clicks" was published in 2018.



Elena Shih

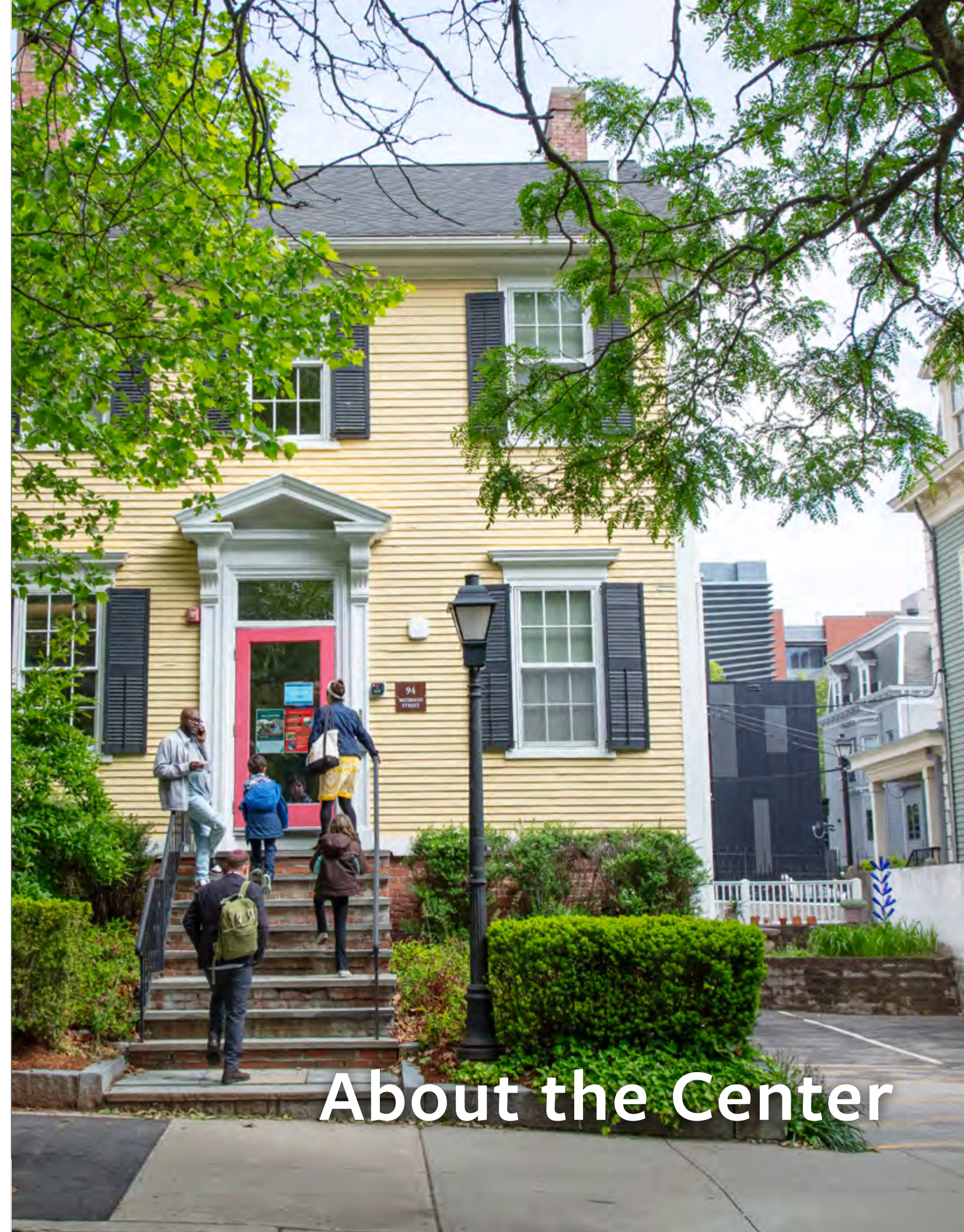
Associate Director of Academics and Director of Graduate Studies, MA in Public Humanities

Prof. Elena Shih joined the Simmons Center as Associate Director of Academics for a three-year appointment beginning July 1, 2025. In this capacity, she also serves as Director of Graduate Studies for the Masters in Public Humanities Program.

Elena Shih is Associate Professor of American Studies and Ethnic Studies at Brown University, where she has directed a Human Trafficking Research Cluster through the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice since 2015. Prof. Shih is a global expert on human trafficking, sex and migrant worker rights, and organizing in the US, China, and Thailand.

Prof. Shih's book, "Manufacturing Freedom: Sex Work, Anti-Trafficking Rehabilitation, and the Racial Wages of Rescue" (University of California Press, 2023), was awarded seven book awards, including the C.L.R. James Distinguished Book Award from the Working Class Studies Association. Her co-edited volume, "White Supremacy, Colonialism, and the Racism of Anti-Trafficking" (Routledge 2022), brought together activist and scholar voices based on the "Whitewashing Abolition" convening she hosted at the Simmons Center in 2017. Recent op-eds about her research and organizing as a core collective member of Red Canary Song appear in the New York Times, Providence Journal, openDemocracy, Al Jazeera, and Myanmar Times.

In the summer of 2025, Prof. Shih co-taught a class in Mexico City on the impact of the 2026 World Cup on issues of sex work, space, and social change, working closely with the Arkheia archives at UNAM MUAC (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo), encouraging students to draw connections to protest and resistance throughout the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. In 2025, Prof. Shih was appointed to a four-year term as Chair of the Rhode Island State Advisory Council to the US Commission on Civil Rights.



About the Center

Work of the Center

The Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice (Simmons Center) is a scholarly research center with a public humanities mission. Recognizing that racial and chattel slavery were central to the historical formation of the Americas and the modern world, the Simmons Center creates a space for the interdisciplinary study of the historical forms of slavery while also examining how these legacies shape our contemporary world.

For fall 2024 through the end of 2025, the Center's work was organized around the following research clusters and projects:

RESEARCH CLUSTERS

Historical Injustice and Democracy

The making of the modern world was in part constituted by the historical injustices of colonialism and racial slavery. This research cluster is a joint project between the Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs and the Simmons Center.

Human Trafficking

This project fosters collaborative critical inquiry into the study of human trafficking, as well as cultivates an intersectional framework that acknowledges the ways in which race, class, gender, nation, and sexual forms of power and inequality govern contemporary anti-trafficking efforts.

Mass Incarceration and Punishment in America

This research cluster seeks to examine punishment and the U.S. carceral state through an interdisciplinary lens. The cluster operates from the frame that race and anti-Black racism are cornerstones to understanding the vast leviathan of punishment in America.

Race, Medicine, and Social Justice

This research cluster explores the history and persistence of structural racism in biomedicine as it intersects with economic and social conditions. The cluster focuses on reimagining the knowledge we produce about race and health from a social justice perspective.

Race, Slavery, Colonialism, and Capitalism

This research cluster is reshaping scholars' understanding of the history and growth of capitalism and brings together the best scholars on this subject in the world. This three-year project is co-led by the Simmons Center and the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam).

Slavery and Finance

This endeavor to "follow the money" investigates the technologies of finance that facilitated the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Atlantic plantation complex by developing new perspectives on the financial mechanics of slaving operations and the trade's relationship to maritime insurance, commodity brokerage, currency arbitrage, banking, and other elements of the financial services industry.

Stolen Relations: Recovering Stories of Indigenous Enslavement in the Americas

This community-based project, housed at Brown University, is a collaborative effort to build a database of enslaved Indigenous people throughout time all across the Americas in order to promote greater understanding of the historical circumstances and ongoing trauma of settler colonialism.

PUBLIC HUMANITIES — MASTER'S IN INTEGRATIVE STUDIES

The Master's in Integrative Studies, focused in public humanities, provides students with an interdisciplinary exploration of issues surrounding race, decolonial practices and social justice with specific references to cultural work in museums and other cultural organizations. Students will gain the knowledge and tools to lead institutional change within their organizations.

PUBLIC HUMANITIES PROJECTS

Freedom Archive

This project creates an inventory of materials in Brown University Library's Special Collections related to racial slavery and abolition to help scholars more easily access these items. Through "The Unfinished Conversations Series," the Freedom Archive will also include memories of the afterlives of racial slavery and colonialism gathered from communities around the world.

Global Curatorial Project

This exhibition and curatorial project presents both the global interconnectedness of Atlantic slavery and the slave trade, as well as illuminates an alternative view about the history of our global "modernity." It is co-led by the Simmons Center and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture in partnership with museums around the world.

The Unfinished Conversations Series

"The Unfinished Conversations Series" is a new form of curatorial practice, public engagement, and programming to collect, give voice to, and provide a platform for untold histories, memories, and narratives related to the history of racialized slavery and its afterlives. Part of the Global Curatorial Project, it is a collaborative project with museums and communities around the world, with funding support from the Abrams Foundation and the Wyncote Foundation.

Creating a New World: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Film Project

With Firelight Media and filmmaker Stanley Nelson

This project involves creating a multi-part documentary series on the Atlantic slave trade, a digital learning platform, and a learning companion. One of the project's main objectives is to provide accessible educational tools to chart the economic and human costs of the slave trade across the Atlantic basin, underscoring how this system of violence and profit built the modern world.

Reimagining New England Histories

This project is organized by the Simmons Center in partnership with Williams College, Mystic Seaport Museum, Black community members, and tribal partners. Funded by the Mellon Foundation, the project aims to tell a different and more complete historical and contemporary understanding

of the lives, contributions, and everyday experiences of Black and Indigenous people in New England.

Symbolic Garden of the Enslaved

In small spaces beside their cabins and huts on the plantation, along marginalized hillsides, in swamps, gullies and forests, and in outdoor sanctuaries created to honor their dead and contemplate that ancestry, enslaved Africans and their descendants throughout the Americas "stole" back their own time and labor in snatches of the night, on Sundays or "holidays," to plant garden plots of use, beauty, and spiritual and physical refuge. Located behind and to the side of our 94 Waterman Street building, the Symbolic Garden of the Enslaved designed by Prof. Geri Augusto draws on that history. The garden renders imaginatively a small part of what the slaves knew and wrought, and what they might have thought as they created new landscapes against all odds. It is a work of cognitive justice and contemplation.

SEMINAR SERIES

Advanced Knowledges Working Group

The Advanced Knowledges Working Group is a seminar for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and other scholars affiliated with or working alongside the Simmons Center to come together to think critically about the legacies of racial slavery and boundaries of freedom across time and space.

Carceral State Reading Group

The Simmons Center facilitates a year-long reading group which focuses on historical and contemporary issues of imprisonment, incarceration, captivity, criminalization, and policing. The reading group is a collaboration between various sectors of the Providence community and the Center.

ARTS INITIATIVES

Heimark Artist in Residence

The Heimark Artist in Residence program brings to campus musicians, poets, visual artists, and performers whose work grapples with the legacies of racial slavery in our world today.

The Imagined New

"The Imagined New (or, what Happens when History is a Catastrophe?)" is a three-part project connecting African and African Diasporic critical thought and creative practices dealing with issues of historical and contemporary violence

and catastrophe. The project is a collaboration between the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD), University of Johannesburg, and the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice, Brown University, with a network of global partners. Volume III, “Confronting Violence and Catastrophe: Power, Grief and Hope,” includes collaboration with The Africa Institute, Global Studies University.

Reimagining New England Histories Artist Residency

The Reimagining New England Histories project (RNEH) aims to foreground the silenced stories of Indigenous and African American experiences of New England. Many rich stories about the complex history of New England remain hidden, oftentimes erased in the conventional dominant narrative histories which are told. The RNEH Artist in Residence explores these themes.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour

In the eighteenth century, racial slavery permeated every aspect of social and economic life in Rhode Island. The Slavery and Legacy Walking Tour invites guests to learn about the history and legacy of slavery as it pertains to Brown University and the state of Rhode Island. Major stops on this hour-long walking tour include the Ruth J. Simmons Quadrangle, Van Wickle Gates, University Hall (Nathanael Green Plaque), and the Slavery Memorial (Manning Hall).

Black and Indigenous Histories Summer Institute

A free summer program for Rhode Island students, the Black and Indigenous Histories Summer Institute (BIHSI) is designed for rising 9th graders through graduating 12th graders. Launched in 2022 in partnership with the Tomaquag Museum, BIHSI offers students a unique opportunity to explore the rich, often untold histories of Black and Indigenous communities in New England. It centers on a restorative justice framework that emphasizes self-reflection, critical thinking, and reading against the grain to reframe our understanding of history.

MET in the Text

MET in the Text is a partnership with the MET High School focused on increasing student literacy and fostering a love for reading. Students visit Brown’s campus twice a month to engage with a curated set of texts. Local guest speakers enrich their experience. The program connects local students to the University, helping them to envision a future at Brown and broadening pathways to higher education.

The Teach-Ins

The Teach-Ins are inspired by Brown’s Slavery & Justice Report’s recommendation to “use the resources of the University to help ensure a quality education for the children of Rhode Island.” This free annual series is an opportunity for local K–12 educators to learn the histories of Black and Indigenous peoples in New England while creating and modifying lessons on the subject to bring back to their classrooms.

Reimagining New England Histories K–12 Curriculum Project

The RNEH K–12 Curriculum aims to create curricula around particular themes and topics that educators could adapt for their classroom needs, as well as finding ways to share related curriculum units that have already been created. The K–12 Curriculum Committee consists of New England-based K–12 educators as well as tribal and community members. The Committee does not aim to create a comprehensive curriculum on New England history, but rather, to create thematic lesson plans that educators could easily adapt as needed based on school standards.

Racial Slavery in the Americas High School Curriculum Project, 2020–2022

Released in August 2020, this high school-level resource challenged myths and absences in how our schools teach the history of slavery. This curriculum fulfilled part of the Simmons Center’s mission to undertake public history projects which tell the story of racial slavery. In 2020–2022, free professional development webinars and in-person trainings were offered to assist educators in implementing the materials in their classrooms. This was a collaborative project with the previous Choices Program.

People

Faculty

Anthony Bogues

Director

Asa Messer Professor of Humanities and Africana Studies

Brian Meeks

Acting Director for the Simmons Center and MA in Public Humanities, July–December 2025

Professor of Africana Studies

Elena Shih

Associate Director of Academics

Director of Graduate Studies, MA in Public Humanities, 2025–2028

Associate Professor of American Studies

Administrative and Project Staff

Natasha Rosario DeChambeau

Financial and Administrative Coordinator, 2024–2025

Yannick Etoundi ’26 Ph.D.

Unfinished Conversations Student Researcher and Project Editor, 2022–present

Sabina Griffin

Center Manager

Kiku Langford McDonald

Communications Manager

Bianca Pallo

Global Curatorial Project Archivist, 2022–2024

Traci Picard

Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour Guide, 2021–present

Researcher, 2024

Eli Scavuzzo-Duggan

Finance and Administrative Coordinator, 2025–present

Africa Smith

Events Coordinator

Sydney Smith

RNEH Curriculum Coordinator 2022–2025

Unfinished Conversations Website Coordinator, 2025–2026

Reina Thomas

Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach

Shana Weinberg

Associate Director, Public Humanities Programs

President’s Advisory Council on the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice

Dr. Ruth J. Simmons

Founding Board Chair Emerita

Spencer Crew ’71

Chair, 2020–present

Rakim H. Brooks ’09

James T. Campbell

Emily Cavanagh ’91, 2021–2023

Lehidy L. Frias ’17

David Haas ’78

Libby Heimark ’76, P’11 ’14 ’17

Pablo Sorensen ’71, ScM’75, ’77 Ph.D., LHD’19 hon., P’06

Lisa Van Dusen ’76, P’13

Mary Vascellaro ’74, P’07

Faculty Advisory Board

Philip Gould

Israel J. Kapstein Professor of English

Matthew Pratt Guterl

L. Herbert Ballou University Professor of Africana Studies and American Studies

Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, 2025–present

Françoise N. Hamlin

Royce Family Associate Professor of Teaching Excellence in Africana Studies and History, 2021–2024

Associate Professor of Africana Studies and History

Juliet Hooker

Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence in Political Science, 2022–2025

Professor of Political Science

Kevin Quashie

Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence in English, 2023–2026

Professor of English

Seth Rockman

George L. Littlefield Professor of American History



L to R: Shana Weinberg, Sabina Griffin, Africa Smith, Traci Picard, Kiku Langford McDonald, and Reina Thomas

SIMMONS CENTER

Research Cluster Faculty Fellows

Linford Fisher

Stolen Relations Research Cluster Faculty Fellow

Associate Professor of History

Faculty Director for the Center for Digital Scholarship, 2025–present

Principal Investigator, Stolen Relations Project

Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve

Mass Incarceration and Punishment in America Research Cluster Faculty Fellow

Associate Professor of Sociology

Latoya Teague

Historical Injustice and Democracy Research Cluster Fellow, 2023–2025

Simmons Center/Watson Historical Injustice and Democracy Postdoctoral Research Associate, 2023–2025

Elena Shih

Human Trafficking Research Cluster Faculty Fellow

Associate Director of Academics

Director of Graduate Studies, MA in Public Humanities, 2025–2028

Associate Professor of American Studies

Taneisha Wilson, M.D., Sc.M.

Race, Medicine, and Social Justice Research Cluster Faculty Fellow

Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine

Attending Physician, Brown University Health

Director, Clinical Research, Brown Emergency Medicine

Affiliated Faculty

Linford Fisher

Stolen Relations Research Cluster Faculty Fellow

Associate Professor of History

Faculty Director for the Center for Digital Scholarship, 2025–present

Principal Investigator, Stolen Relations Project



Behind the scenes with students from the course “Decolonization of Museums” during their virtual conference “Complete Disorder,” (standing: Florence Blackwell ’26 A.M. and Monaye Johnson Ph.D. candidate, Africana Studies; seated: Christina Young ’26 A.M. and Claire Inouye ’26 A.M.).

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD

Emily Owens

Associate Professor of History

Faculty Associates

Geri Augusto

Senior Fellow in International and Public Affairs, Watson Institute

Rae Gould

Executive Director of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Initiative (NAISI), 2021–2025

Joseph S. Meisel

Joukowsky Family University Librarian

Visiting Faculty

Mack Scott

Visiting Assistant Professor of Slavery and Justice

Public Humanities Faculty

Anthony Bogues

Asa Messer Professor of Humanities and Africana Studies

Akea de Barros Gomes

Adjunct Lecturer in Slavery and Justice, 2024–present

Steven Lubar

Public Humanities Faculty Member, 2004–2025

Founding Director of the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage, 2004–2014

George L. Littlefield Professor of American History Emeritus, Department of American Studies

Marisa Mazria Katz

Adjunct Lecturer in Slavery and Justice, 2025–present

Elena Shih

Associate Director of Academics

Director of Graduate Studies, MA in Public Humanities, 2025–2028

Associate Professor of American Studies

Public Humanities Faculty Associates

Joshua Babcock

Assistant Professor of Anthropology

Katharina Galor

Hirschfeld Senior Lecturer in Judaic Studies

Yannis Hamilakis

Joukowsky Family Professor of Archaeology; Professor of Modern Greek Studies



Standing: Mack Scott; seated L to R: Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason, Emma Cape, Linford Fisher, Latoya Teague, and Rae Gould

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Christina J. Hodge

Associate Director of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology; Adjunct Lecturer in Anthropology

Steven Lubar

Public Humanities Faculty Member, 2004–2025

Founding Director of the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage, 2004–2014

George L. Littlefield Professor of American History Emeritus, Department of American Studies

madison moore

John Atwater and Diana Nelson Assistant Professor of the Arts

Shanti Morell-Hart

Associate Professor of Anthropology

Kiana T. Murphy

Assistant Professor of American Studies

Itohan Osayimwese

Chair and Professor, History of Art & Architecture

Robert W. Preucel

Professor of Anthropology

Director of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology

Thea Quiray Tagle

Associate Curator of The Bell Gallery, Brown Arts Institute, 2023–2026

Jordi Rivera Prince

Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow in Anthropology

Andrew Scherer

Director of the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World (JIAAW)

Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology

Holly Shaffer

Associate Professor of History of Art and Architecture

Susan Smulyan

Professor Emerita, American Studies

Parker VanValkenburgh

Associate Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology

Postdoctoral Fellows

Christopher Baldwin

Simmons Center/JCB Joint Postdoctoral Research Associate in Slavery and Justice, 2024–2025

Arielle Alterwaite

Simmons Center/JCB Joint Postdoctoral Research Associate in Slavery and Justice, 2025–2026

Latoya Teague

Simmons Center/Watson Institute Joint Historical Injustice and Democracy Postdoctoral Research Associate, 2023–2025

Reimagining New England Histories Artist in Residence

Sika Foyer

Simmons Center Artist in Residence, 2024–2025

Thawn Sherenté Harris

Reimagining New England Histories Artist in Residence, 2025–2026

Research Associates

Pepijn Brandon

Professor of Global Economic and Social History at the Vrije Universiteit

Paul Gardullo

Director, Center for the Study of Global Slavery and Supervisory Museum Curator at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture

Graduate Fellows

zuri arman ’26 Ph.D

Simmons Center Advanced Knowledges Working Group Facilitator, 2023–2024

Carceral State Reading Group Co-Facilitator, 2024–2025

Victoria Cheff ’26 Ph.D.

Reimagining New England Histories Project Publications Researcher

Zoë Clark ’28 Ph.D.

Slavery & Finance Graduate Proctor, 2024–2025

Yannick Etoundi ’26 Ph.D.

Interdisciplinary Graduate Dissertation Fellow, 2024–2025

Unfinished Conversations Student Researcher and Project Editor, 2022–2025

Ningxin Gao

Simmons Center Graduate Fellow, 2025

Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of History, 2025

Graduate School Visiting Scholar, 2025

Arlin Hill ’27 Ph.D.

Race, Slavery, Colonialism and Capitalism Graduate Proctor, 2024–2025

Melaine Ferdinand-King '25 Ph.D.
Co-Curatorial Fellow, Voices of Mass Incarceration, 2023–2024

Justin Lang '26 Ph.D.
Graduate Research Fellow, 2020–2025
Carceral State Reading Group
Co-Facilitator, 2020–2026

Zawdie Sandvliet
Simmons Center Graduate Fellow, 2025
John Carter Brown Library Fellow, 2025
Fulbright Research Scholar, 2025

Public Humanities Students

Florence Blackwell '26 A.M.

Tara Leninger '27 A.M.

Caleigh Lyons '27 A.M.

Ivie Orobato '27 A.M.

Claire Inouye Rothstein '26 A.M.

Jovanna Walker '27 A.M.

Alijah Webb '27 A.M.

Jun Ying (Jane) Wen '27 A.M.

Christina Young '26 A.M.

Ray Zhang '26 A.M.

Student Researchers

HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESEARCH CLUSTER

Arman Deendar '25

Shravya Sompalli '25

Sarath Suong '24.5

Amy Xiao '24

MASS INCARCERATION AND PUNISHMENT IN AMERICA

Julian Cohen '26

Katie Jain '25

Kate Kuli '25

Samuel Theoharis '24

RACE, MEDICINE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Eric Jones Ph.D. Candidate

REIMAGINING NEW ENGLAND HISTORIES

Victoria Cheff '26 Ph.D.

Jeamilett Martinez '28

STOLEN RELATIONS

Annette Lee '24 MPA

UNFINISHED CONVERSATIONS

Daniel Everton '24 A.M.

Yannick Etoundi '26 Ph.D.

zuri arman '26 Ph.D.

Gustav Hall '24

Nélari Alejandra Figueroa Torres '25

Dillon Stone '25

Laura Tamayo '25

Student Workers

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS

June Dike '27

Kadence Early '27

Allinson Morales '28

Layla Shell '25.5

Ramatoulaye Tall '28

Below: Students and Prof. Nicole Gonzales Van Cleve pose with Fernando Bermudez after his LIVE oral history event for the Mass Incarceration and Punishment in America Research Cluster.

RYTHUM VINO BEN



CARCERAL STATE READING GROUP FACILITATORS

zuri arman '26 Ph.D., 2024–2025

Matisse Doucet '26, 2024–2025

Justin Lang '26 Ph.D., 2023–2026

Naja Woodard '27, 2025–2026

COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATORS

Janelle Aponte '27

Felora Bellamy '26

Emily Rosenthal '26

Elizabeth Sepulveda '27

Taher Vahanvaty '27

SLAVERY & LEGACY WALKING TOUR GUIDES

Carlo Kim '27

John Modarres '25 M.S.

Ariel Nash '27

Danait Selamawi ScM '26

SYMBOLIC GARDEN OF THE ENSLAVED CARETAKERS

Kevin Carter '25

Allyssa Foster '25

Elizabeth Flores '27

Rayna Franklin '27

Amelia Holl '25

Ariel Montague '24, MPH '25

Telijah Patterson '26

Research Clusters & Seminar Series



Opening panel from the symposium "What They Don't Want You to Know About Walter Rodney: Black Power, Black Studies, and the Guerilla Intellectual." (L to R: Patricia Rodney Ph.D., MPH, SRN, Richard Small Esq., and Prof. Geri Augusto Ed.D.)

RYTHUM VINO BEN

Research Clusters

HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESEARCH CLUSTER

During the 2024–2025 academic year, the Human Trafficking Research Cluster (HTRC) advanced its ongoing partnership with Red Canary Song (RCS), a grassroots coalition of migrant Asian massage workers and sex workers, through the launch of [“body workers’ atlas: data justice for migrant massage workers”](#) — a landmark digital countermapping project. This initiative juxtaposes publicly accessible data from the NYPD and NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) on policing and evictions with oral histories gathered by RCS from Asian migrant workers who have borne the brunt of intensified surveillance and violence.

The “body workers’ atlas” emerged at a critical political moment, coinciding with NYC Mayor Eric Adams administration’s “Restore Roosevelt” campaign — a 90-day crackdown that heightened policing in specifically Queens, NY — and amid a broader resurgence of anti-immigrant and anti-worker rhetoric nationally under the Trump administration. The project offers a powerful spatial and narrative intervention against the criminalization of Asian massage work, exposing how DOB mechanisms are weaponized to target marginalized workers under the guise of public safety and code enforcement.



HTRC Book Launch event for Professor Shih’s “Manufacturing Freedom: Sex Work, Anti-Trafficking Rehab, and the Racial Wages of Rescue” (University of California Press 2023).

WATSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In response to the map’s findings and ongoing community advocacy, HTRC collaborated with RCS and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) to sue the New York City Department of Buildings (DOB) over their failure to respond to Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests to release documents related to inspections and enforcement against massage parlors. The research cluster’s work has found that discriminatory enforcement practices disproportionately harm Asian immigrant communities. This legal challenge underscores HTRC’s commitment to praxis-oriented research that amplifies community voices and translates data-driven analysis into tangible policy and legal interventions.

Elena Shih

Human Trafficking Research Cluster Faculty Fellow

Associate Director of Academics

Director of Graduate Studies, MA in Public Humanities, 2025–2028

Associate Professor of American Studies and Ethnic Studies



“body workers’ atlas” launch event featuring Jane Shim (AALDEF), Alejandro Ortiz (ACLU), Soniya Munshi (CUNY), Catherine D’Ignazio (MIT), Fran Yu (RCS), Lisa (RCS), Mei Mei (RCS) and HTRC Student Research Cluster Map designers, Shrayya Sompalli (ETHN ’25) & Arman Deendar (HIST ’25)

WATSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

RACE, MEDICINE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH CLUSTER

During the 2024–2025 academic year, the Race, Medicine & Social Justice Research Cluster continued its commitment to examining critical intersections between race, medicine and social justice. Central to our activities this year was honoring the remarkable legacy of Professor Lundy Braun, who created this cluster and whose scholarship and activism profoundly shaped our understanding of racism in medicine and its social implications.

In February 2025, we hosted a community reading of Professor Braun’s influential work, “Breathing Race into the Machine,” facilitating meaningful discussions about how racial biases became scientifically institutionalized through medical technology. This event underscored Professor Braun’s critical insights into how historically racialized medical practices continue to shape contemporary health inequities.

The highlight of our year was the symposium on March 21, 2025, co-hosted by Science, Technology and Society (STS). STS was, of course, co-founded by our very own Lundy Braun. This symposium aimed to celebrate Professor Braun’s legacy. Esteemed speakers, including Professor Evelynn Hammonds from Harvard, Professor Anthony Ryan Hatch from Wesleyan University and Professor Jenny Reardon from UC Santa Cruz, explored themes central to Braun’s work,

such as racial measurement, health inequity and social justice. Brown graduate student Eric Jones’ tribute was a testament to the longevity and impact of Lundy’s influence. These discussions not only honored Lundy’s scholarship but also sparked deeper conversations on how these issues continue to influence healthcare and policy.

Looking forward, the cluster remains dedicated to honoring Professor Braun’s vision. Upcoming events will build on the foundation and scaffolding she left. We aim to critically engage with topics such as private equity in healthcare, the role of artificial intelligence in perpetuating or mitigating health disparities and ongoing explorations of systemic racism in medical practices. Our goal remains clear: to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, inspire action toward healthcare equity and honor the enduring impact of Lundy Braun’s scholarship and advocacy.

Taneisha Wilson, M.D., Sc.M.

Race, Medicine, and Social Justice Research Cluster Faculty Fellow

Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine

Attending Physician, Brown University Health

Director, Clinical Research, Brown Emergency Medicine



Taneisha Wilson, MD, ScM

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER



Participants in the community reading of Professor Braun’s book “Breathing Race into the Machine.”

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

ANNUAL REPORT

RACE, SLAVERY, COLONIALISM AND CAPITALISM

Overall, working on the Race, Slavery, Colonialism and Capitalism Research Cluster has continued to be a uniquely enriching experience. Last fall, as a graduate fellow on the project, I was extended the opportunity to plan and participate in a two-day symposium concerning the life, ideas and revolutionary activism of Walter Rodney. The symposium was entitled “What They Don’t Want You to Know About Walter Rodney: Black Power, Black Studies, and the Guerilla Intellectual.”

We began the first day with a panel that featured panelists Patricia Rodney Ph.D., MPH, SRN, Prof. Emeritus Rupert Lewis, Prof. Geri Augusto, and Richard Small Esq., who came together for a moving conversation concerning the various transformations Walter Rodney underwent and the political currents in which he participated over the course of his life. In the second session, Prof. Brian Meeks, Dr. Matthew Smith, and Assistant Professor Bedour Alagraa delved more deeply into the thought of Walter Rodney with an eye to how his work speaks to contemporary discourse, as well as ways Rodney’s work may have shifted in light of the developments

of the last 40 years. Then, we rounded out the first day with a documentary screening of “Walter Rodney: What They Don’t Want You to Know,” which was followed by a Q&A moderated by Malcolm Thompson, Ph.D. candidate in Africana Studies, that featured Patricia Rodney, public health scholar and CEO of the Walter Rodney Foundation, and the father-son filmmaking duo, Arlen Harris and Daniyal Harris-Vajda.

The second day centered around a short documentary on the life of Richard Small Esq., followed by an intimate conversation with all of the panelists concerning its contents and development. By the symposium’s conclusion, the wealth of knowledge and experiences shared by the event’s honored guests rendered the event by far one of the most meaningful experiences in my academic life thus far.

Finally, the book *Race, Capitalism and Slavery*, edited by Anthony Bogues and Pepijn Brandon, is now undergoing revisions for publication in 2027.

Arlin Hill Ph.D. ’27

Race, Slavery, Colonialism and Capitalism Graduate Proctor, 2024-2025



Opening panel (L to R: Patricia Rodney Ph.D., MPH, SRN, Richard Small Esq., Prof. Geri Augusto, Prof. Emeritus Rupert Lewis, and Arlin Hill).
RYTHUM VINO BEN



Symposium participants watch the short documentary entitled “Wounded Activist.”
RYTHUM VINO BEN

MASS INCARCERATION AND PUNISHMENT IN AMERICA RESEARCH CLUSTER

The Mass Incarceration and Punishment in America Research Cluster examines the origins and consequences of mass incarceration and centers race and anti-Black racism as the cornerstones to understanding punishment in America. During the 2024–2025 academic year, we had a dynamic year of programming that engaged undergraduates, graduate students, activists and alumni. The cluster was active with events aimed at building an archive on mass incarceration through the Mass Incarceration Lab. The Lab’s mission centers on incorporating the voices of incarcerated individuals into the narrative of America’s history of mass incarceration. The cluster hosted a LIVE oral history event featuring Fernando Bermudez, a wrongfully convicted artist who was incarcerated in New York State maximum security prisons for 18 years. He was the first Latin-American male in the state of New York’s legal history to be exonerated on “actual

innocence” grounds. Bermudez’s narrative was an extremely impactful account of regaining legal innocence and reshaping his life as a free person.

Beyond this event, the cluster hosted two authors to discuss their books with students and community members in packed auditoriums. Professor Robin Bernstein, a historian and professor at Harvard University, talked about her new book, “The Freeman’s Challenge: The Murder That Shook America’s Original Prison,” in which she examines the morally complicated story of murder, greed, race, and the true origins of prison for profit. The second event was a discussion featuring Brittney Freedman, a Ph.D. assistant professor of sociology at the University of Southern California, and her new book, “Carceral Apartheid: How Lies and White Supremacists Run Our Prisons.” Her research focuses on the realm of social control and the underside of the government, such as prisons, courts, and treasuries. Both events included small seminar discussions where students interacted with the authors and shared their research ideas with these leading scholars.



Prof. Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve with Prof. Robin Bernstein.
FELORA BELLAMY/SIMMONS CENTER

Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve

Mass Incarceration and Punishment in America Research Cluster Faculty Fellow
Associate Professor of Sociology

Caroline Cordts ’28

Research Assistant

Phoebe Grace Aseoche ’26

Research Assistant



Brittney Freedman and Prof. Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve with students.
RYTHUM VINO BEN



Fernando Bermudez during his LIVE Oral History presentation.
RYTHUM VINO BEN

SLAVERY & FINANCE RESEARCH CLUSTER

The Slavery & Finance Research Cluster welcomed a dozen scholars to Providence in May 2025 for a mini-conference exploring new research on the networks of finance and commerce undergirding the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The event allowed historians to test out some of their working hypotheses with their fellow experts, as well as to establish the basis for future collaborative research. Brown University doctoral student Isaac Mensah presented his findings on the Bank of England's Caribbean investments alongside historians from Harvard Business School and Amsterdam's International Institute for Social History. Among the many insightful presentations, a scholar from Princeton University shared new research on the English coin called the "Guinea," a testament to the importance of West African gold, alongside West African captives, in the emergence of European commercial prosperity.

We were especially glad to have Rachel Swarns, journalism professor at NYU, deliver the keynote address on her research into Georgetown University's 1838 sale of several hundred enslaved men, women and children from Maryland to Louisiana. Swarns, whose award-winning book "The 272: The Families Who Were Enslaved and Sold to Build the American Catholic Church" was published in 2023, reminded

participants to never lose sight of people and families when analyzing dry financial records that depict slavery as an ordinary business practice. The workshop was also enhanced by the participation of several doctoral students from Morgan State University, who traveled to Providence under the auspices of an initiative in the Brown History Department to promote collaboration between our institution and students and faculty at HBCUs.

In the coming year, participants in the cluster will build upon the 2025 workshop to elaborate these research questions and findings. One thing seems abundantly clear: we've only begun to scratch the surface of what's discoverable in terms of slavery's financial history and the role of slavery in the development of the institutions of modern finance.

Seth Rockman

*Slavery & Finance Research Cluster Faculty Fellow
Associate Professor, Department of History*



May 2025 workshop participants.
ZOE CLARK



Rachel Swarns delivers the keynote address.
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

STOLEN RELATIONS RESEARCH CLUSTER

Recovering Stories of Indigenous Enslavement in the Americas

This year marked a wonderful, long-anticipated moment in the Stolen Relations project: the public launch! Founded in 2015 (and tribally collaborative since 2019), this project has been a careful, slow-moving work-in-progress with many layers. The team at the Center for Digital Scholarship (CDS) has been a long-term partner for the project as a whole, and the Simmons Center has likewise been a faithful supporter in ways big and small. A National Endowment for the Humanities grant from 2022–2025 allowed us to develop the new website and search interface, all in close collaboration with a team of a dozen tribal members and leaders from the region.



Project Director Linford Fisher provided an overview of the project.
BENJAMIN TYLER/BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



Lorén Spears (Narragansett), Director of the Tomaquag Museum, spoke about the collaborative nature of the project.
BENJAMIN TYLER/BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

We were incredibly grateful to be able to share this project with the world on May 10 of this year in a public symposium hosted at Brown. Even as the project went live (www.stolen-relations.org), the symposium featured three panels of tribal collaborators, CDS staff members, and students who worked on the site. This wonderful day of sharing and communing concluded with a keynote address by Professor Lisa Brooks of Amherst College. Additional pictures and videos of the event can be found on the Stolen Relations blog.

We are now gearing up for the next phase of our work as we continue to expand curricular and educational materials. We welcome collaborations at all levels, so feel free to reach out!

Linford Fisher

*Stolen Relations Research Cluster Faculty Fellow
Associate Professor of History
Faculty Director for the Center for Digital Scholarship, 2025–present
Principal Investigator, Stolen Relations Project*



Q&A with Panel Two: Rethinking History and Reframing the Narrative.
BENJAMIN TYLER/BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

HISTORICAL INJUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY RESEARCH CLUSTER

In September 2024, we launched the Freedom Literacy workshop and partnered with local Providence Public Schools.

During the morning session, we visited MLK Elementary where 125 first and second grade students attended an author talk by local author Oge Mora. Afterwards, she signed copies of her books, and each student was gifted a signed copy. One of our dear colleagues mentioned that her son brought the book home and was excited about potentially being an illustrator/author like Oge Mora. The teachers at MLK Elementary partnered to incorporate an art collage project and other curriculum activities to complement the teaching and learning. Afterwards, the students wrote thank you letters to the authors. Additionally, local author Autumn Allen gave a book talk of her debut novel, “All You Have To Do” for an African American studies course at Hope High School. Each of the students received a signed copy of her novel.

The afternoon session kicked off with a fabulous panel about intellectual freedom, literacy, storytelling and why keeping stories alive is vital for our moral, intellectual and communal health. I am forever grateful to the Simmons Center for their tireless efforts and support with organizing, event planning, and making sure that the legacies of literacy, storytelling, and justice remain at the forefront of our ongoing fight for freedom.

Latoya Teague

*Historical Injustice and Democracy Research Cluster Fellow
Simmons Center/Watson Historical Injustice and Democracy
Postdoctoral Research Associate*



Workshop moderator, organizer, and panelists (L to R: Prof. Kevin Quashie, Latoya Teague, Len Cabral, Dr. DaMaris B. Hill, Autumn Allen, and Dr. Shamari Reid).

AIYAH JOSIAH-FAEDUWOR@AREWEFREELANCE



Dr. DaMaris B. Hill speaks on a panel addressing intellectual freedom, literacy, and storytelling in the 21st century.

AIYAH JOSIAH-FAEDUWOR@AREWEFREELANCE



Storytelling Performance by Len Cabral.

AIYAH JOSIAH-FAEDUWOR@AREWEFREELANCE

Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

Seminar Series

CARCERAL STATE READING GROUP

Throughout the 2024–2025 academic year, the Carceral State Reading Group was centrally concerned with situating ourselves as Brown students and Providence residents relative to a range of interlocking conflicts across the globe. For the fall semester, we read political theory, watched documentaries, and engaged in discussions about communities facing persecution in the U.S., the African continent and the Middle East. During these discussions, members were able to develop their own ethical stance in a world that seems to be quickly devolving into chaos. In addition to intellectual growth, the space also functioned as a site of respite and reprieve in a community of others. Critical thought was framed by laughter and warm moments of community care.

During the spring semester, we explored how to expand our approach to communal study into new spaces beyond our regular group members and beyond the Brown community. Our public forum for this year, “Building Power to Pose the Question,” conceptually built upon last year’s symposium while allowing us to connect with new community partners. Through our discussion with a group of writers, artists and community organizers, “posing the question” became a useful heuristic for navigating present strictures, individually and as members of organizations doing community-facing work. We imagine that crafting creative questions — about the changing shape of the carceral state and the work of community engagement — will be a vital skill for these times.

zuri arman '26 Ph.D., Justin Lang '26 Ph.D.

2024–2025 Carceral State Reading Group Co-Facilitators



2025–2026 Carceral State Reading Group Co-Facilitators Justin Lang and Naja Woodard.

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

Events



Sika Foyer gives a presentation at the end of her residency.
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

Simmons Center Fellows' Talks

MACK SCOTT – A PERNICIOUS INFLUENCE: THE PIONEERING ACT OF DETRIBALIZATION IN ROGUE ISLAND

October 7, 2024

Visiting Assistant Professor of Slavery and Justice Dr. Mack Scott III gave a talk examining Rhode Island's role in developing processes used by Euro-Americans to dispossess and detribalize Indigenous Nations, focusing on the 1880 effort to detribalize the Narragansett Nation. He highlighted how this history shapes ongoing struggles for recognition and justice.



LIZ SEPULVEDA/SIMMONS CENTER

LATOYA TEAGUE – RITUALS OF REFUSAL: AFRICAN DIASPORIC STORYTELLING, WRITING PRACTICES, AND RESISTIVE ACTS OF CARE

February 28, 2025

Simmons Center/Watson Institute Joint Historical Injustice and Democracy Postdoctoral Research Associate Latoya Teague presented her research exploring how marginalized communities use storytelling, writing and creation as tools to uplift and preserve collective memory. Her talk highlighted literary activism and the power of telling stories on one's own terms through reading, writing and narrative practices.



RAMATOULAYE TALL/SIMMONS CENTER

CHRISTOPHER BALDWIN – CHAINS OF CAPTIVITY: THE ATLANTIC ODYSSEY OF THE ST. JAMES SHIPMATES

March 3, 2025

Simmons Center/Watson Institute Joint Historical Injustice and Democracy Postdoctoral Research Associate Christopher Baldwin delivered a talk on the role of maritime warfare in shaping racial slavery and the African diaspora in the early modern Atlantic as part of the Simmons Center Fellows series. He presented a chapter from his book project tracing the forced migrations of twenty-six African captives, highlighting how repeated captivities and voyages forged survival networks across diverse ethnic and cultural groups.



BROWN MEDIA SERVICES

Selected Events

MATTHEW SMITH – BLACK SURVIVAL: UNFREEDOM AND THE COLLAPSE OF SLAVERY IN BRITISH JAMAICA

October 3, 2024

Professor Matthew J. Smith, director of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery at University College London, presented “Valuable Lives,” a new public history project exploring the last generation of enslaved people in late slavery Jamaica. Drawing on digitized registers from The National Archives in the UK, the project combines cutting-edge database technology, digital storytelling and Caribbean historiographical methods to shed light on how enslaved individuals survived and resisted.

PREMAL DHARIA – DISMANTLING MASS INCARCERATION WITH PREMAL DHARIAS

October 30, 2024

Executive Director of the Institute to End Mass Incarceration at Harvard Law School and Brown alumna, Premal Dharia '00, returned to campus to speak about mass incarceration and her new co-edited volume, “Dismantling Mass Incarceration: A Handbook for Change.” Drawing on her decades of work as a public defender and legal reformer, Dharia discussed the structural roots of the U.S. criminal legal system and strategies for transformative change.



Matthew Smith
JANELLE APONTE/
SIMMONS CENTER



Premal Dharia
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/
SIMMONS CENTER

SUSAN STARK – BEING RESPONSIBLE AND MAKING REPARATIONS: A PATH TO REPAIR OF THE PAST

November 4, 2024

Professor Susan Stark gave a talk proposing a hybrid framework for understanding reparations that combines backward-looking, forward-looking and structural approaches. Her talk emphasized the importance of centering the experiences of harmed communities when considering how to meaningfully repair historical injustices.

FRANCES BELL – MOBILITY AND THE LAW IN THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION ATLANTIC

November 11, 2024

As part of the Emerging Scholars series, Frances Bell, visiting assistant professor of history at Bates College, presented her research, which examines how enslaved migrants from Saint-Domingue used legal frameworks and mobility to resist re-enslavement after arriving in the U.S. during the Haitian Revolution.



Susan Stark
LIZ SEPULVEDA/SIMMONS CENTER



Frances Bell
LIZ SEPULVEDA/SIMMONS CENTER

Major Events

AS PALAVRAS DE RUBEL | THE WORDS OF RUBEL

October 8, 2024

“The Words of Rubel” event at Brown University marked a transformative moment for my Symbolic Reparations Project (SRP), a digital humanities initiative that emerged from my doctoral research exploring reparative narratives across Latin America and the Caribbean. The evening brought together nearly 100 attendees for an unprecedented collaboration between scholarship and artistic expression. I orchestrated this multifaceted project by inviting acclaimed Brazilian singer-songwriter Rubel to campus, where we embarked on an ambitious creative endeavor. Working alongside talented student musicians and local artists, I developed an English adaptation of Rubel’s “Torto Arado” — itself inspired by Itamar Vieira Júnior’s internationally celebrated novel that has sold over one million copies and been translated into more than twenty languages. The resulting piece, “Crooked Plow,” transforms Rubel’s original Portuguese composition into a jazz-inflected music video that demonstrates how academic research can be reimagined through collaborative, multimodal storytelling.

The SRP aims to bridge computational approaches with accessible cultural production. By curating narratives of reparative memory through both data-driven methodologies and creative media, the project challenges traditional boundaries between scholarship and public engagement. This event exemplified that vision, as the live performance and subsequent Q&A session created meaningful dialogue between academic inquiry and artistic practice. Recording “Crooked Plow” required careful coordination of diverse creative voices while maintaining the integrity of both the original source material and my research framework. The project’s significance extends beyond its artistic output to include its demonstration of how scholarly work can generate new forms of cultural conversation. The enthusiastic audience response confirmed that academic research, when thoughtfully translated into collaborative creative practice, can reach far beyond institutional walls to engage broader communities in essential discussions about race, reparation and social transformation.

Karyn Mota

Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies



Karyn Mota in conversation with Rubel.
LIZ SEPULVEDA/SIMMONS CENTER



Rubel performs during the concert portion of the event.
LIZ SEPULVEDA/SIMMONS CENTER

AMPLIFYING VOICES OF MASS INCARCERATION THROUGH MUSIC

October 25, 2024

Mumia Abu Jamal is a name known around the world as an outspoken proponent of justice. When I was asked to be a part of this project, I asked my dad about Mumia, knowing that he grew up in and around Philadelphia during the time of Mumia's radio broadcasts. He mentioned that he vividly remembers Mumia's prolific voice, adding that Mumia's broadcasts were through WRTI and Temple University, my alma mater. I felt fueled by this connection as I dove into the archive of Mumia's artistic voice; his art and music spoke in a different tone but with the same message: freedom and abolition.

With the guidance, trust and support of Christopher West and Melaine Ferdinand-King, '25 Ph.D. in Africana Studies and Co-Curatorial Fellow, Voices of Mass Incarceration, I took on the task of arranging [Mumia's "Panther Walk,"](#) an illustrious story of the history and triumphs of the Black Panther Party. My primary goal was to arrange this song as closely as possible to Mumia's original score while providing musical and

structural adjustments only when necessary. I then listened to hours of "Prison Nation" broadcasts recorded at the time Mumia composed this piece. I chose to arrange and record "Panther Walk" in a funk/soul feel, getting inspiration from Sly Stone, Bill Withers and Marvin Gaye. With contributions from my incredible band, including Kewku Aggrey '25 Ph.D., Dan Liperini, Tyreek KcDole and Camila Cortina, and my assistant Ryan Wyche, it came together better than I could have imagined.

Sharing insight on this process with guests in the gallery of the Simmons Center during Family Weekend was a humbling and rewarding experience. One guest asked what the most difficult part of the process was, and certainly that was arranging the song in a way that would make Mumia proud. After speaking with him, I am honored that we achieved that goal.

Marcus Grant

Ph.D. candidate in Musicology & Ethnomusicology



Prof. Anthony Bogues introduces Marcus Grant during his Family Weekend talk about his work for the exhibition "Art and the Freedom Struggle: The Works of Mumia Abu-Jamal."

FELORA BELLAMY/SIMMONS CENTER



Marcus Grant in the gallery next to a screen showing a photograph of Mumia Abu Jamal.

RYTHUM VINOGEN

NATIONAL HUMANITIES CONFERENCE

November 2024

Several Simmons Center faculty, staff and campus partners gave lectures and presentations at the 2024 National Humanities Conference (NHC), held in Providence, RI. The NHC is an annual conference that brings together representatives from various organizations to explore approaches to deepening the public's engagement with the humanities.

On November 15th, Simmons Center Visiting Assistant Professor of Slavery and Justice Mack Scott, and Simmons Center Adjunct Lecturer in Slavery and Justice Akeia de Barros Gomes, were part of the NHC Capps Lecture along with Simmons Center collaborators Associate Professor of History Linford Fisher and Executive Director of the Tomaquag Museum Lorén M. Spears. Drawing on the Reimagining New England Histories exhibition "Entwined: Freedom, Sovereignty, and the Sea," on view at the Mystic Seaport Museum from April 20, 2024, through January 19, 2026, and the Stolen Relations project, the speakers engaged in conversation focused on Black and Indigenous histories connected to water, the sea and cultural power as well as new approaches to research, interpretation and engagement.



Capps Lecture (L to R: Mack Scott, Lorén Spears, Linford Fisher, and Akeia de Barros Gomes).

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

The Simmons Center also hosted an NHC presentation about the Center's Symbolic Garden of the Enslaved on November 16th. The panel featured an overview of the Simmons Center's history and reflections from the garden's creator, Prof. Geri Augusto, Senior Fellow at the Watson Institute, along with Associate Professor Renee Ater, Garden Caretaker Allyssa Foster '25, and Simmons Center Communications Manager Kiku Langford McDonald.

On November 15th, Simmons Center Senior Research Assistant Traci Picard gave a talk entitled "The Power of Immersive Place-Based Learning To Make Waves," speaking about her process for bringing rich histories and perspectives to life through virtual tours and web resources.

It was an honor to be invited to present at and attend this important gathering that showcased some of the different areas of research and work that the Simmons Center community has been involved with for many years.

Kiku Langford McDonald

Communications Manager



Traci Picard

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER



Allyssa Foster

SABINA GRIFFIN/SIMMONS CENTER

“IMAGINED NEW” CONFERENCE IN SHARJAH, UAE

April 7–10, 2025

Hosted by The Africa Institute at Global Studies University in Sharjah, UAE, “The Imagined New (or, What Happens When History is a Catastrophe?)” gathered artists, scholars and students for its third installment, themed “Confronting Violence and Catastrophe: War, Grief and Hope.” Over three days, participants engaged in immersive lectures, performances and conversations exploring the intersections of violence, historical trauma and the political imagination, with the goal of creating space for radical dialogue and alternative futures. The conference was organized in collaboration with the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD) at the University of Johannesburg and the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice at Brown.

The opening night featured a keynote lecture by Simmons Center Director Prof. Anthony Bogues. Entitled “The Present Conjuncture: Illiberalism, War and Violence – A Perspective,” the talk examined the current political and social landscape, the emergence of what he called “death-worlds” and how other forms of life could be imagined. Drawing from African and African diaspora intellectual traditions, Bogues asked pressing questions about the meaning of being human in the face of ongoing catastrophe.



Professor Anthony Bogues speaks with Global African Studies M.A. students during an informal discussion following the day’s sessions.

THE AFRICA INSTITUTE



Binyam Sisay Mendisu, Associate Dean of The Africa Institute, delivers the welcome address to participants as the program opens.

THE AFRICA INSTITUTE

Bogues’ lecture was followed by a discussion with M.A. students in Global African Studies, who also had opportunities to engage with Leora Farber, director of VIAD, and other workshop participants. As Surafel Wondimu Abebe, assistant professor of Performance Studies and Theory at The Africa Institute, described, “Artists, scholars, and thinkers came together to hold intense, moving conversations around war, grief and hope — thinking through their deep historical entanglements without losing sight of specific, lived experiences from across the globe. We pushed beyond the boundaries of panels and lectures into truly dialogic thinking.”

The closing evening featured a powerful performance by the AlMultaqā Afro-Arab Harmonic Orchestra at The Africa Hall. Blending traditional and contemporary musical forms, the orchestra’s work served as an emotional and intellectual reflection on the themes of the conference.

“The Imagined New” is a multi-year, international collaboration between VIAD and the Simmons Center. Volume III’s convening in Sharjah marks the latest chapter in the project’s interdisciplinary exploration of history, memory and artistic practice.

Taher Vahanvaty

Communications Coordinator, 2025–2026



Participants gather for a session as a speaker delivers remarks at The Africa Institute.

THE AFRICA INSTITUTE



Members of the AlMultaqā Afro-Arab Harmonic Orchestra perform on the final night, seeking to engage with the feelings of violence, grief, and hope.

THE AFRICA INSTITUTE

LIBERAL EDUCATION AND THE CURRENT CRISIS – RUTH SIMMONS AND ANTHONY BOGUES IN CONVERSATION

April 14, 2025

On April 14, 2025, the Simmons Center in partnership with the Aydelotte Foundation at Swarthmore College, hosted the event “Liberal Education and the Current Crisis,” featuring Dr. Ruth J. Simmons and Prof. Anthony Bogues, Director of the Simmons Center. This important conversation held just a few months after the new administration took office served as an important and frank conversation between Dr. Simmons and Prof. Bogues about higher education and the current challenges it faces. The program drew many faculty, students and administrators both in person at Swarthmore and online.

Swarthmore Associate Professor Farid Azfar ’09 Ph.D., who served on the Slavery & Justice Committee during his graduate studies at Brown, welcomed everyone to the event and discussed the impetus for this critical conversation. Swarthmore President Valerie Smith introduced the discussion, noting that the current political climate — with its executive orders and potential legislation — has created “extremely challenging times,” that “threaten issues central to core values from academic freedom and freedom of

expression, to resources for research and financial aid, to the rights of immigrants and transgender individuals.”

Prof. Bogues then moderated a conversation with Dr. Simmons. Dr. Simmons described the current “systematic attack” by external forces seeking to take over every dimension of university life, from hiring to governance. She discussed the ways that universities share responsibility for their lack of public support, citing a damaging elitism, and failure to communicate effectively with the general public. Dr. Simmons advocated for a political and organized response that prioritizes institutional collaboration over competition.

She noted that the Brown University Committee on Slavery & Justice was a successful model for debate in the university. She explained the project’s lasting impact was secured by framing it around the core intellectual value of a commitment to truth, transparency, and rigorous scholarly examination in partnership with communities. This powerful conversation underlined the importance of the Simmons Center’s mission and institutional collaboration, particularly in this time as we seek to navigate the moral and political challenges confronting liberal education.

Shana Weinberg

Associate Director, Public Humanities Programs



Prof. Anthony Bogues and Dr. Ruth J. Simmons
ZACK KREINES, SWARTHMORE STUDENT



Prof. Anthony Bogues and Dr. Ruth J. Simmons
ZACK KREINES, SWARTHMORE STUDENT

Public Humanities Projects

David Firearrow demonstrates how his traditional wampum tools work during "Seeqan Sessions"

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/BROWN UNIVERSITY

At the Simmons Center

SYMBOLIC GARDEN OF THE ENSLAVED

This year, the Symbolic Garden of the Enslaved continued to grow as a living site of education, remembrance and community connection. Formerly known as the Symbolic Slave Garden, the new name reflects an ongoing commitment to language that honors the humanity of those represented in the space. A new raised bed, now blooming with African daisies, was erected before the onset of a long winter. We saved seeds from six culturally significant plants: giant sunflower, boneset, black cohosh, marigold, echinacea and black-eyed Susan. We welcomed the spring and summer season with the addition of ten new plant species, expanding the educational scope of the garden.

Equally important was the care shared among people. We said goodbye to three graduating student caretakers whose work has been foundational to the garden's resilience year after year. Their vision and labor helped root our garden's ethos and can be seen in the beauty of the garden today. In their honor, we will continue the practice of relationship-building, mutual care and grounded inquiry and research.

Throughout the year, the garden remained a space for joy and respite, welcoming visitors as part of the campus's quieter green spaces. Looking ahead, we're excited to continue the work of forming a website for the garden, one that will hopefully reflect our values, offer accessible plant knowledge and histories, resources, and invite the wider community into our growing archive. As the seasons pass, the student caretakers remain committed to cultivating a space where life, legacy and liberation take root.

Rayna Franklin '27 and Elizabeth Flores '27

Symbolic Garden of the Enslaved Caretakers



A bee visits the comfrey in the Symbolic Garden of the Enslaved.
ELIZABETH FLORES



Planting geraniums in the flower terrace.
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

Global Curatorial Project

The Global Curatorial Project (GCP) is a network of scholars, curators and community educators who are committed to creating critical new knowledges and innovative forms of public history about the historical experiences and the contemporary legacies of racial slavery and colonialism. The GCP creates exhibitions, public programming, academic workshops, and digital programs and seeks to collaborate and transform museum practice with international publics and audiences.

The GCP's primary focus has been to create an international exhibition in partnership with communities and a global network of museums, non-profits, and university partners focused on the history and legacies or afterlives of slavery from 2024-2028. The exhibition "In Slavery's Wake — Making Black Freedom in the World" opened at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2024 and traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2025. It will travel to Cape Town, South Africa in May, 2026; Dakar, Senegal in 2027; and Liverpool, United Kingdom in 2028. This traveling exhibition shifts the ways we think about, talk about, and represent the histories of slavery, race, and globalization and their continuing relevance to our world today.



Global Curatorial Project and Unfinished Conversations team members gathered at Brown during Commencement 2025 (L to R: Johanna Obenda A.M. '19, Bianca Pallo, Paul Gardullo, Africa Smith, Shana Weinberg, Anthony Bogues, Yannick Etoundi, Geri Augusto, and Karen Eberhart).

RYTHUM VINO BEN

PROVIDING ACCESS TO THE UNFINISHED CONVERSATIONS SERIES THROUGH THE BROWN DIGITAL REPOSITORY

The Brown University Library has a long-standing, robust online repository where special collections and other research materials that have been digitized are available to anyone anywhere in the world, especially those unable to visit the reading room in person. The Brown Digital Repository (BDR) is also ideal for hosting and sharing born-digital collections, including [the Global Curatorial Project: Unfinished Conversations oral histories and records](#).

In the final phases of my role as Project Archivist for the Global Curatorial Project, I not only supported the last curatorial push for the Simmons Center and Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture's joint exhibition, "In Slavery's Wake — Making Black Freedom in the World," but also considered how best to serve the patrons and project participants who would want easily findable and accessible versions of the oral history interviews. The most effective way to do that would be to focus on encoding rich metadata into the oral history records and creating proxy versions of interview materials.

Through the dedicated work of the student researchers across several semesters, I was provided with a variety of local and controlled subject headings that touched upon topics of interest within the oral histories. By consistently applying these headings to the files uploaded into the BDR, the searchability of the materials was increased. This way, users are able to search for the materials specifically, more general topics and connect them with materials across series within the collection, or locate them from a search engine like Google. Specific and rich metadata widens the targeted audience and expands how researchers find and share the collection.

Besides findability, the BDR offers patrons and participants the ability to reliably interact with the interviews and related materials in perpetuity. It is a springboard for researchers to delve deeper into the Global Curatorial Project: Unfinished Conversations oral histories and records (Ms.2022.010), as there are many more environmental materials and photographs available in the larger collection through request at hay@brown.edu.

Bianca Pallo

Global Curatorial Project Archivist, 2022–2025

Black History at Brown University Project Archivist, 2025–present

Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

CONNECTING THE DOTS: EDITORS OF "IN SLAVERY'S WAKE" DISCUSS SLAVERY'S GLOBAL LEGACY

May 24, 2025

This standing-room-only Commencement Forum featured the editors of "In Slavery's Wake: Making Black Freedom in the World," from Smithsonian Books, a companion to the exhibition of the same name, both of which debuted in 2024. Editors Prof. Anthony Bogues, Simmons Center director; Dr. Paul Gardullo, assistant director of history at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC); and Johanna Obenda A.M. '19, researcher and exhibition development specialist at NMAAHC, discussed the book's mission to frame the history of slavery as a global system and to move beyond "top down" narratives. The conversation was moderated by Shana Weinberg.

Prof. Bogues introduced the book's core methodology, which was born from the question: "how do we tell the stories from the perspective of those who were enslaved?" To achieve this, as Obenda explained, the team avoided trying to tell an "encyclopedic story," opting instead for powerful, personal "vignettes into this broader history" that are "really person-centred." She also noted that this approach helps audience members "make that person-to-person connection" and "break down this history, which often feels so impersonal because it's so vast."



Prof. Anthony Bogues addresses the crowded seminar room alongside moderator Shana Weinberg (left) and fellow panelists Johanna Obenda and Paul Gardullo (right).

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ANNUAL REPORT

Dr. Gardullo stressed the essential connective nature of stories around slavery and colonialism. He asserted, "we need to connect the dots, geographically, on a global scale. That is deeply important to understand that this is a story that has shaped our world locally, nationally and internationally — the Atlantic world, but well beyond the Atlantic world." Gardullo also noted the "resonance of themes across these different geographies," noting that "themes about systemic violence, themes about environmental injustice... but also themes about humanity," came up over and over again in conversations with communities across the Atlantic.

The panelists also stressed the continuing relevance of the global freedom struggle, which includes anti-colonial and equal rights movements. Gardullo emphasized that "the other thing is to connect the dots between the past and the present, because this history lives with us now." Prof. Bogues framed the project as an intervention in history, aiming to ensure that the "lines of humanity that were attempted to be erased are never erased." He concluded by quoting James Baldwin to underscore the deep impact of the past: "history travels in our bodies." Understanding this history, he argued, is vital "to begin to understand the present and to understand how we must never have these things happen again."

Kiku Langford McDonald

Communications Manager



The panelists signed books and interacted with audience members after the talk.

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CURATING THE UNFINISHED CONVERSATIONS SERIES

I was first introduced to [“The Unfinished Conversations Series”](#) in 2023. Little did I know that over the next few years, I would come to play such a pivotal role in shaping this digital archival project.

When I first joined a team of Brown University student researchers in the summer of 2023, we were tasked with drafting and reviewing interview materials for the Brown Digital Repository in addition to proposing content to be included in the traveling exhibition “In Slavery’s Wake: Making Black Freedom in the World.” Yet, it was at the end of spring 2024 that the most fortunate of opportunities came up. While seeking support to advance my dissertation project, I was ultimately accepted into the Interdisciplinary Opportunities Dissertation Fellowship program, with an appointment at the Simmons Center for the upcoming academic year. At the same time, “The Unfinished Conversations Series” oral history archive was in its final stages of production, and

Yannick Etoundi (center) in conversation with Shana Weinberg (left) and Anthony Bogues (right) during a Commencement 2025 screening of the documentary film, “The Unfinished Conversations Series: Telling New Stories.”

RYTHUM VINO BEN



simultaneously, discussions were underway around ways the Simmons Center could unveil this global archival project at Brown University and beyond. In many ways, I stepped into this role to help bring “The Unfinished Conversations Series” to the forefront.

A new round of filming brought me to New York City, Washington, D.C., and, importantly, Dakar, Senegal, where I had the opportunity to interview some of the curators of the Global Curatorial Project. As “The Unfinished Conversations Series” expanded in scope to include Caribbean voices, I traveled with a team to Jamaica, where we filmed a new set of interviews, including a particularly memorable one with the late colonel of the Charlestown Maroons. Stepping behind the camera gave me a deeper understanding of all the work that made this project possible: coordinating logistics for interviews and environmental filming, crafting interview questions, working with local film crews on location, reviewing audio/video material and collaborating closely with an editing team to produce the documentary. It was an incredible moment then to host a screening of the documentary “The Unfinished Conversations Series: Telling New Stories” alongside the official opening of “In Slavery’s Wake” at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture in December 2024.

When I was asked to curate a small exhibition at the Simmons Center about “The Unfinished Conversations Series,” I was able to draw on these past experiences as inspiration for my curatorial approach. It was an opportunity to engage with the archive from a different perspective, to explore some of the major themes that emerged across each location, to reference key moments from the interviews, and to put these stories in dialogue with one another. Creating an exhibition catalog enabled me to present a more comprehensive view of the project by incorporating essays, testimonies, photographs and objects, in addition to acknowledging all those who have made “The Unfinished Conversations Series” possible over the last decade. Looking back at this work, my fellowship year truly helped me gain a deeper understanding of the methods, practices and skill sets associated with public humanities.

As an architectural and art historian, my research examines histories of racial slavery and colonialism through the built environments and material cultures of the Black diaspora. Due to the nature of these areas of research, I often reflect on the ways that communities engage with these histories, particularly those who have long been excluded from the very institutions that have shaped my field of work. “The Unfinished Conversations Series,” as an interdisciplinary, multifaceted, and importantly, internationally collaborative



Yannick Etoundi gives remarks during the exhibition opening of “The Unfinished Conversations Series,” at the Simmons Center during the 2025 Commencement Weekend.

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project, has been enlightening in demonstrating that things can be done differently, that institutions can adopt better practices to tell more holistic stories of the past without reproducing its violence, and that communities that have been shaped by these histories can have their voices heard throughout this entire process.

The Interdisciplinary Opportunities Dissertation Fellowship was an immensely formative experience on both a professional and personal level, and I am deeply grateful to the staff of the Simmons Center for supporting me throughout this fellowship.

Yannick Etoundi ’26 Ph.D.

Ph.D. candidate in History of Art & Architecture

Interdisciplinary Graduate Dissertation Fellow, 2024–2025

Unfinished Conversations Student Researcher, 2022–2025



Johanna Obenda A.M. ’19 answers interview questions fielded by Yannick Etoundi during a curatorial reflection filming session at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture where Johanna serves as Researcher & Exhibition Development Specialist in the Center for the Study of Global Slavery.

GABRIEL SOYKA

Reimagining New England Histories

PARTNERING TO HONOR THE PROMISE OF SPRING

April 24–26, 2025

In spring 2025, the Simmons Center, together with the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center and Mystic Seaport Museum, presented “Seeqan Sessions: Light, Growth and Preservation,” a three-day convening centering conversations around conservation: waterways, culture, and resilience. Conservation involves the necessary pursuit of protection, preserving what we value for the next generations. It also can be a practice of exclusion, extraction, and division, reinforcing colonial constructs and systems of exploitative power. Together, we explored the conservation of land and water, of history and art, of community and youth, and more, through decolonizing methodologies.

“Seeqan Sessions was revitalizing — a chance to reflect deeply on the histories, ancestors, traditions and communities that have always shaped Mystic and its waterways, and an opportunity to strengthen and expand our relationships with the partner organizations, speakers and attendees.”

Bridget Hall '23 A.M. in Public Humanities

Associate Curator of Maritime Social History,
Mystic Seaport Museum, 2023–2025



Rashad Young kicked off the first evening with songs on his flute and drum.
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

We sought to honor the promise of spring by bringing together knowledge-bearers, scholars, advocates, artists, teachers, and youth from across the Dawnlands, with interested members of the public, for conversation, connection, and community. This gathering included traditional flute, drum, and singing performances, panel presentations, artist reflections, discussions, an Artist Fair, and shared meals. The first day was hosted by the Mystic Seaport Museum and days two and three were hosted by the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center.

“The original people of the northeast have kept alive the sacredness of our land and waters hidden within stories. Seeqan is the season of rebirth and renewal. Across Pequot homelands and ancestral waters, it is the season when the herring return home, new life blooms, and light burns away the darkness. During Seeqan, we come together to share stories, celebrate possibility, and rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of a better future.”

Joshua Carter

Executive Director,
Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center



David Firearrow, Traditional Artist and member of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, shows attendees the traditional tools he creates and uses in his wampumpeag practice.
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Highlights included access to the special exhibition at the Mystic Seaport Museum, “Entwined: Freedom, Sovereignty, and the Sea,” and a reception with food by Chef Sherry Pocknett of Sly Fox Den. We were honored to welcome St Clair “Brinky” Tucker and his son, Stephen Tucker, St. David’s Islanders and Native Community members, who spoke about how their community includes descendents of enslaved people from New England who were transported to Bermuda, and their ongoing efforts to reconnect with their ancestral traditions and relatives. Panelists represented a wide range of experience, from youth who are honing their crafts and working to preserve our world for their and future generations, to elders whose years of activism and hard work left a deep impression on the audience, urging us to take up their torches to continue to protect our waterways, traditions and communities.

Kiku Langford McDonald

Communications Manager



The “Conserving Waterways: Ocean Resiliency” panelists (L to R: Rahiem Eleazer, Environmental Liaison, Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation; Bettina Washington, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe of Gay Head; moderator Michael Johnson, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation; and David Weeden, Deputy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe).

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Presenters from the first evening (L to R: Rashad Young, traditional flute and drum performance; Michael Thomas, Member of Board of Directors, Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center; and keynote speakers Lorén Spears, Executive Director, Tomaquag Museum; and Dr. Akeia de Barros Gomes, Director, Edward W. Kane and Martha J. Wallace Center for Black History at the Newport Historical Society).

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SIKA FOYER AT THE CENTER

In 2024, the Simmons Center welcomed Togolese-American artist Sika Foyer as its inaugural Reimagining New England Histories (RNEH) Artist in Residence. A multidisciplinary artist whose work was also featured in the RNEH exhibition “Entwined” at Mystic Seaport Museum, Foyer’s work explores aesthetic abstraction in her West African Oral tradition, rite of passage ceremonies, and music and dance rituals, to create narratives that examine all forms of social injustice.

During Foyer’s 2024 RNEH residency, she explored her ancestral legacy and the narratives of enslaved people in New England. She initially planned to continue her previous work investigating sound and body movement as signs and a form of language, which she presented at her November 2024 talk at the Simmons Center entitled “The Need for Ancestral Legacy & Contemporaneity in African and African Diaspora Artistic Practices.” However, her focus shifted after she

discovered Occramer Marycoo, an enslaved African musician who was brought to Newport, RI in his early teens. She was particularly excited to discover Marycoo, as African traditions are primarily oral, making written records a rare and valuable find.

Her research, which included visits to the John Carter Brown (JCB) Library and the Newport Historical Society, focused on Marycoo’s journey and struggle to maintain his identity and culture while enslaved. Foyer connected with his resiliency, noting that enslaved people survived and rejuvenated their bodies and spirits through activities such as musicmaking, dancing, lamentation and laughter. Her research culminated in a draft play manuscript about Marycoo’s voyage and life. She presented a dramatic reading of the script alongside her son, George, as part of her March 2025 presentation entitled “Occramer Marycoo — Naming, Identity, Reliquary, and Resilience.”

Foyer was surprised by the freedom and independence this residency allowed, reflecting that “it opened me up in a way that I wasn’t expecting,” and pushed her further as an artist. The residency has also helped her think more critically about her current work on Riker’s Island. Through interactions with people in custody, she is investigating the correlations between historical experiences of slavery and contemporary experiences of people incarcerated (and in new forms of boundaries) in the United States.

Kiku Langford McDonald

Communications Manager



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Public Engagement & Education



Students in the Black and Indigenous Histories Summer Institute at an artist presentation.

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WALKING TOURS AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The Slavery & Legacy Walking Tours examine the histories of Brown University and the State of Rhode Island, and their roles in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and settler colonialism. Major stops on this hour-long walking tour include the Ruth J. Simmons Quadrangle, Bronze Bruno (Main Green), Van Wickle Gates, University Hall (Nathanael Greene Plaque) and the Slavery Memorial (Manning Hall).

In addition to individuals being able to schedule a walking tour, the Center now offers monthly community tours at different times of day and with weekend options to give more opportunities for participation.

Moving forward, we hope to revise the self-guided tour for visitors unable to join a community tour or schedule one with the Simmons Center. In addition, the Simmons Center is working to modify the tour for elementary-level students, develop a class version of the tour, and create a curriculum for the tour. Stay tuned for more details around these projects.

Reina Thomas

Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach



Reina Thomas stops at the Slavery Memorial by Manning Hall on a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour. University Hall can be seen in the background.

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Reina Thomas stops at the Van Wickle Gates on a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour.

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Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

MET IN THE TEXT WITH JASON REYNOLDS

“They have to be able to read and write. We all have to read and write so we can write about this... It has to be written.”

—from *“NightJohn”* by Gary Paulsen, 1993.

During the 2024–2025 academic year, the MET in the Text was conceived after a conversation in the summer between the Simmons Center’s Manager of Public Education and Community Outreach Reina Thomas and Advisors Maria Gonzalez and Meg Cresci from the MET (The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical School). Gonzalez and Cresci are responsible as advisors for partnering with mentors, parents/guardians, and students to build individualized learning plans for each student, while also providing students

with foundational skills like literacy and numeracy through broad-based subjects.

Since the primary focus at the MET is the students’ internships, we chose to collaborate on strengthening their literacy skills by designing a year-long literacy program. More importantly, we aimed to inspire a genuine passion for reading. Throughout the year, students engaged with texts by acclaimed young adult author Jason Reynolds, specifically “A Long Way Down” and “For Everyone,” supplemented by additional materials integrated into a curriculum built around his work. The program also featured visits from guest storyteller Marlon Carey of the Rhode Island Black Storytellers, as well as performances by poets Justice Ameer Gaines and Sage Morgan-Hubbard. The year concluded with a special visit from Jason Reynolds himself, made possible through the support of Brown University Libraries and the Providence Public School District.

With a structure in place from the 2024–2025 academic year, the Simmons Center is looking forward to welcoming Gonzalez and Cresci’s 9th grade advisees to MET in the Text this upcoming academic year.

Reina Thomas

Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach



L to R: Simmons Center Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach Reina Thomas, and MET Educators Latoya Watts, Meg Cresci, and Maria Gonzalez..

REINA THOMAS/SIMMONS CENTER



Students at Jason Reynolds’ talk.

REINA THOMAS/SIMMONS CENTER



Jason Reynolds signs books for MET in the Text students after his March 7, 2025 talk.

REINA THOMAS/SIMMONS CENTER

EDUCATION AS A PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

“Education is a practice of freedom,” writes scholar bell hooks, “in the act of teaching and learning, we can reclaim our voices, our ability to think critically and our right to transform the world.” This quote, which reflects the work of the Reimagining New England Histories (RNEH) K–12 Curriculum Committee, appears on the main landing page of the committee’s new educational resources website. The site features lessons that highlight often-silenced and overlooked histories and experiences of Black and Indigenous communities. Launched this year, it offers an initial set of standards-aligned lessons and supplementary resources that are fully accessible and customizable. Kiku Langford McDonald, Sydney Smith and Elizabeth Sepulveda contributed to the development and finalization of the website, ensuring that educators and students can easily navigate and access its resources.

In November, Mack Scott and Sofia Zepeda presented a poster outlining the curriculum development process and its focus at the National Council for Social Studies conference in Boston. There, they engaged with educators and curriculum developers from across the country. Soon after, on January 29, 2025, the committee celebrated the official launch of the website, introducing the materials to the public and seeking feedback from educators as they adapt the resources to their classrooms. Curriculum Committee



Poster session attendees were able to peruse printed copies of the curriculum lessons.

MACK SCOTT

members continued supporting the launch by collaborating with Reina Thomas, who designed full-day professional learning opportunities for local educators as part of the Teach-Ins.

These events not only introduced participants to the materials but also deepened their understanding of the topics involved. We remain confident that the website, professional learning opportunities and upcoming publications of additional lessons and resources will continue to foster greater freedom and enrich teachers and learners who aim to use education to “transform the world.”

Mack Scott

Reimagining New England Histories Project K–12 Curriculum Committee Co-Chair

Visiting Assistant Professor of Slavery and Justice, Brown University

Sofia Zepeda

Reimagining New England Histories Project K–12 Curriculum Committee Co-Chair

Assistant Professor of Maritime History, Williams-Mystic



Mack Scott and Sofia Zepeda at the 2024 National Council for Social Studies conference in Boston.

MACK SCOTT



Mack Scott and Sofia Zepeda at the curriculum website launch event.

LIZ SEPULVEDA/SIMMONS CENTER

CARE AND COLLABORATION: CREATING THE K–12 CURRICULUM GUIDE

In January 2025, the Reimagining New England Histories (RNEH) project launched its K–12 curriculum guide featuring the histories and experiences of the Dawnland’s Black and Indigenous communities. The website is the result of three years of collaborative lesson plan development by educators, scholars, humanities professionals and community members. I began working as the RNEH Curriculum Coordinator in 2022, helping to standardize lesson plans, research state standards, and draft resources for educators and students. One highlight of the digital curriculum guide is that the lesson plans have been adapted for each grade band, and educators can easily download and modify lessons to fit their specific classroom needs. At the launch event, many educators expressed gratitude and excitement for having resources that will empower them to teach diverse histories with rigor and care.

My experience working with the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice (first as an undergraduate at Brown in 2020) has profoundly shaped my professional and scholarly journey. Working for the Center has allowed me to build skills in interdisciplinary research, project management, graphic design and public speaking. The public-facing scholarship spearheaded by the Center inspired me to pursue a graduate certificate in public humanities as I work toward my doctorate in African American history. Most importantly, the Simmons Center has granted me a network of mentors and interlocutors with whom I can hone my commitment to engaged scholarship and find creative ways to reckon with our past and present.

Sydney Smith '22

RNEH Curriculum Coordinator, 2022–2025

Website Coordinator, The Unfinished Conversations Series Digital Humanities Website, 2025–2026

Ph.D. Student in African American History at Rutgers University–New Brunswick

RNEH K–12 Curriculum Committee members and organizers at the launch event (L to R: Sofia Zepeda, Sydney Smith, Emma York, and Mack Scott).

LIZ SEPULVEDA/SIMMONS CENTER



BLACK AND INDIGENOUS HISTORIES SUMMER INSTITUTE

The Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Initiative (NAISI) at Brown University, as well as our partners at the Tomaquag Museum, returned to hosting our free five-day program, the Black and Indigenous Histories Summer Institute. The program is for rising 9th grade to graduating 12th grade students in Rhode Island who are interested in learning more about local Black and Indigenous peoples's histories.

In 2025, we were able to welcome fifteen students from across the state who took three courses during the morning half of their days and heard from guest speakers in the afternoon. Their first course of the day was Black History in the Dawnland, which this year focused on the 13th Amendment to commemorate the 160th anniversary of its passage. It was taught by the Center's own Reina Thomas. In this course, students connected with scholars and artists such as Associate Professor Alain E. Roberts, Loki Karuna and Justice Melissa Long.

The second course, The War for the Dawnland, focused on King Philip's War and was taught by the Assistant Director of NAISI, Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason. Despite King Philip's War being the most significant war to take place in the region we now call New England, it is often forgotten by non-Indigenous peoples. With the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution taking center stage in upcoming national events, we decided to shine a light on a war that happened a hundred years earlier. While taking this course, students learned from scholars and culture bearers such as Linda Coombs, Crystal Mars Baker, Kim Toney, Stone Thomas, Stephan Pevar and Lisa Brooks.



Above: Justice Melissa Long speaks with the students about the Constitution, with particular emphasis on the 13th Amendment and the legal power that states also hold.

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Below: 2025 BIHSI students and educators at the end of the five-day program.

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Following each of these classes, students took a meditation course, where they reflected on the material they had just engaged with and also checked in with how their bodies were responding to these often traumatic histories — releasing what they needed to within that space. This course was led by one of the educators from our Teach-In series, Abigail Jefferson.

Reina Thomas

Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach



Above: Abigail Jefferson leads the altar ceremony to help ground the group at the start of the institute.

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BLACK AND INDIGENOUS HIGH SCHOOL SUMMER INSTITUTE ALUMNI REFLECTION

I currently work with the Simmons Center as a RNEH research assistant with Visiting Assistant Professor Mack Scott who was one of the facilitators of the Black and Indigenous Histories Summer Institute when I participated in 2022. Being in this summer program provided foundational knowledge on the communities in the surrounding areas and validated my interest in the intersection of environmental science and Indigenous studies. Getting to know Visiting Assistant Professor Scott and other Brown University professors, and learning that even some of my cohort members attended Brown, gave me confidence that I'd find a community here — which I did!

Jeamilett Martinez '28

Black and Indigenous High School Summer Institute Alumni

RNEH Research Assistant

Jeamilett Martinez during the 2022 BIHSI.

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RNEH CURRICULUM TEACH-INS

Inspired by the Reimagining New England Histories K-12 Curriculum Project, the Simmons Center's 2023 two-day symposium "In Conversation: Black and Indigenous Histories and Pedagogies," Rhode Island educational legislation, and the Providence Student Union's Ethnic Studies Campaign, the Simmons Center piloted a series of Teach-Ins for educators in 2025. We realized that our focus on public education is not limited to the students, but also applies to the educators, who want and need more opportunities to grow and expand their skillset and knowledge.

Our first Teach-In, "Beyond the Feast: Reinterpreting the Wampanoag-Plymouth Agreement," was focused on dismantling the myth of Thanksgiving that continues to circulate across the nation, while seeking to center the experiences and perspectives of the Indigenous nations of the Dawnland. To do so, we invited Steven Peters, a citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe, Bradford Lopes, a citizen of the Aquinnah Wôpanâak tribe, and Lorén Spears, an enrolled Narragansett Tribal Nation citizen. In addition, Emma York led educators through a lesson plan from the Reimagining New England Histories curriculum that allowed them to explore, evaluate and analyze primary sources to develop a clearer understanding of the relationships between English colonists and Indigenous peoples.

The second Teach-In, "Wading in the Waters: Black & Indigenous Voices of the Maritime Age," focused on centering the Black experience in the Americas within the context of the Atlantic world, specifically maritime history. Guest speaker Akeia de Barros Gomes set the scene by providing us with the African cosmology for understanding the experiences of enslaved Africans on the slaveships, but also to understand the spiritual relationship between African people and water to understand historical moments such as the Igbo Landing.



Panelists speak during the first Teach-In, "Beyond the Feast: Reinterpreting the Wampanoag-Plymouth Agreement," (L to R: Steven Peters, Lorén Spears, Reina Thomas, and Bradford Lopes).

LIZ SEPULVEDA/SIMMONS CENTER

Gomes was followed by Kevin Dawson, who spoke on the research from his book, "Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora." Dawson's presentation helped us to unpack the mythology surrounding Black people and their relationship even further by revealing that African people were surfing, swimming and battling maritime animals well before the Transatlantic Slave Trade, but also as part of the trade, as sugar plantations were being developed in the Americas. To conclude the day, educators were able to hear from Sofia Zepeda of Williams-Mystic Coastal and Ocean Studies, Sarah Cahill of the Mystic Seaport Museum, and Reina Thomas of the Simmons Center, who also shared primary sources and led discussions with the educators following the guest presenters.

The foundation created through this series of Teach-Ins has provided the framework and pedagogy for future Teach-Ins built in partnership with educators of our local community.

Reina Thomas

Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach



Akeia de Barros Gomes shared about her personal Transatlantic experiences.

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Participants engaged with each other during interactive discussions between presentations.

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

Collaboration Reflections

PRYSM COLLABORATION

It has been a full-circle moment for the Simmons Center and the [Providence Youth Student Movement \(PrYSM\)](#). In 2000, Sarah Suong and Kohei Ishihara, two Asian American students at Brown University, recruited local Black, Caribbean and Southeast Asian American students at other colleges in Providence to start a local youth group, Providence Youth-Student Movement, or PrYSM. The Simmons Center lore is that Ishihara met with Prof. Anthony Bogues, now the Director of the Simmons Center, while he and Suong were in the early stages of developing the organization. Building on that shared history, and as part of the Center's ongoing work to deepen relationships with the Providence and Greater Rhode Island community, Suonriaksmy Keo, Youth Engagement Director of PrYSM, and Reina Thomas from the Simmons Center came together to learn from one another. This exchange led to an evolving collaboration through which the Simmons Center has served as a space for PrYSM's Organizing Circle programming, including Liberation Training 101 in the fall and Nonviolent Direct Action (NVDA) training this past summer. We are hopeful that this is just the beginning as we find more ways to support our Providence community.

Reina Thomas

Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach



Miguel, Milly and Aiden learn about Southeast Asian Resilience and the impacts of deportation in the Southeast Asian community in Providence, RI. During a workshop facilitated by PrYSM's RICE (RI Civic Engagement) program, they walked through a timeline of the history of deportation.

REINA THOMAS

Professor Marco McWilliams teaches PrYSM students about Black History. In the activity, they went through introductions, learning each other's names, pronouns and facts about each other before delving into Black History during the Civil Rights Movement.

REINA THOMAS



“POWER AND THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY” SUMMER AT BROWN COURSE

The Summer@Brown course, “Power and the Production of History,” has had the privilege of collaborating with the Simmons Center for the past four years. This course examines relations of power, silences and erasures in historical narratives and archives, and legacies of violence and communal resistance across structures of colonialism, slavery and genocide. Each year, students note that a highlight of this class is our field trip to the Simmons Center. During these visits, students learn from Simmons staff and faculty who provide immersive guided tours and workshops about the center’s mission and projects. Students eagerly view the center’s archives and collections featuring annual exhibits of art and work like speculative fiction, maroon societies, and oral histories narrating the role of slavery and colonialism in

the making of modernity. As “Power and the Production of History” culminates in the creation of a collective exhibit, the Simmons Center offers a brilliant opportunity for students to actively engage with questions of power, the production of archives, and memorials and curatorial justice enacted by artists, intellectuals and organizers leaving students from across the nation and world inspired to further take up these pursuits in their lives, practices and careers. “Power and the Production of History” would not be possible without the Simmons Center and its critical activation of the public humanities, arts, and community-engaged scholarship.

Istifaa Ahmed A.M. '22 in Public Humanities

*Instructor, Power and the Production of History
Summer@Brown Course*

Ph.D. Candidate in American Studies

Students in the Power and the Production of History Summer@Brown Course visit the Brown University Slavery Memorial.

ISTIFAA AHMED



Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

Academic Program: Public Humanities



First year Public Humanities M.A. students (L to R: Ray Zhang '26 A.M., Florence Blackwell '26 A.M., Christina Young '26 A.M., and Claire Inouye Rothstein '26 A.M.).
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

First Year Reflections

FALL 2025: INAUGURAL INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES COHORT

The first cohort for the Simmons Center's Interdisciplinary Studies/Public Humanities program was a group of four graduate students who came from around the country with a wealth of different experiences, disciplines, and interests. My course, PHUM 2011, "Curatorial Practice and Change," focused on understanding the racial, colonial, and "othering" foundations of museum practice, focused on acknowledging community voice as authoritative history, validated ways of knowing, and expanded curatorial practice beyond a focus on "objects." There was a heavy focus on reciprocal relationship-building as the center of curatorial practice. The four students in the cohort and a design student from Rhode Island School of Design collaborated during each class with fruitful conversation, transformational site-visits, and during the creation of their final project.

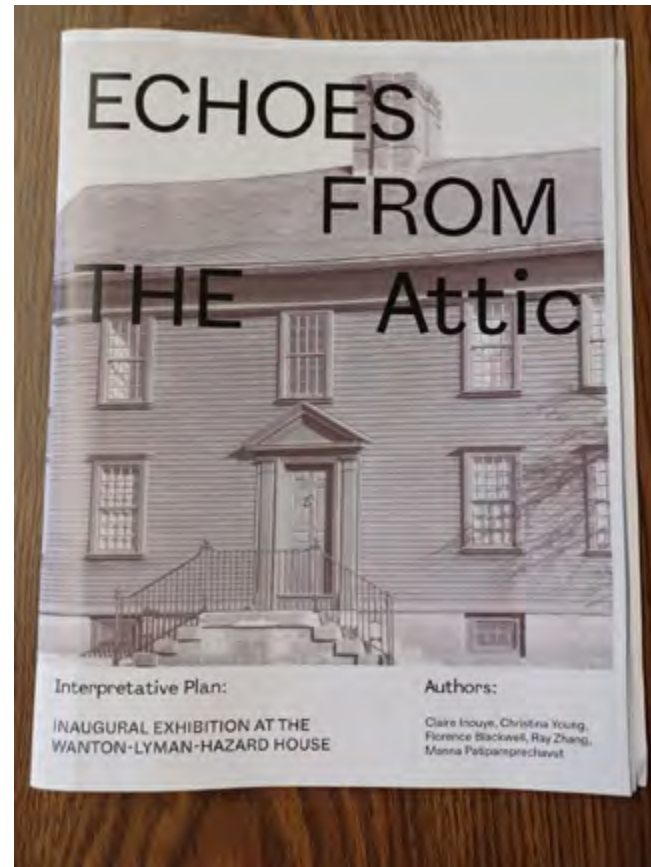
The assigned final project was to create an exhibition for the Edward W. Kane and Martha J. Wallace Center for Black History in Newport, RI. Unbeknownst to me, this group of insightful and innovative students had a charette and presented me with a different idea for their final project — to work together and use each of their strengths to create an interpretive plan for the entire Center for Black History. Their project truly defined "interdisciplinary studies," and they developed an interpretive plan that included a mission statement, design, visitor outcomes, learning initiatives, public programming, community outreach, historical narratives, and contemporary art activations.

If the inaugural cohort is any sign of what's in store for the future of this program, it is one that will continue to draw top thinkers and practitioners in Public Humanities. More importantly, the program will redefine Public Humanities practice. The cohort continues to find success in their scholarship and practice, continues to engage with community, and is an example of critical thinking in scholarship and practice within the framework and mission of the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice.

Akeia de Barros Gomes, Ph.D.

Simmons Center Adjunct Lecturer

Director, Edward W. Kane and Martha J. Wallace Center for Black History at the Newport Historical Society



"Echoes from the Attic," proposed interpretive plan for the Center for Black History at the Newport Historical Society created by students in PHUM 2011, "Curatorial Practice and Change."

TEACHING PUBLIC HUMANITIES PRACTICE

In the spring semester, I taught Introduction to Public Humanities. The challenge: public humanities institutions are changing rapidly. They are critiqued both for being too colonial and too focused on telling new stories. So, how best to prepare students to work in institutions that are changing? I think it is important to know the old rules, the traditional ways of working that are still necessary for much of this work, as well as to understand why those ways are lacking, and how they need to change.

A straight academic course can do critique. A public humanities course has to go beyond critique: to build on it and explore changing practice.

To do that, it's important to have a project as part of a course, ideally a project that both requires traditional expertise but also opens up new approaches. The part of the museum world where this kind of work is most advanced is in museums of Indigenous art, culture and history, and we were fortunate to have two excellent projects close at hand. Students in the course developed plans for two exhibits. For the Tomaquag Museum, they reimagined exhibits to put Narragansett history into the context of the Semiquincentary. For the Simmons Center, they created plans for an exhibit of the Stolen Relations: Recovering Stories of Indigenous Enslavement in the Americas project.



"Recovered Stories, Stolen Relations" exhibit proposal by Eldoris Cai, Macie Clerkley, Drew Jepson, and Katherine Zeng.

Critical to learning practical work is learning to work with others. Students were fortunate to work with co-teachers Associate Professor Linford Fisher and Ph.D. candidate Ally LaForge, experts on Indigenous slavery and Indigenous museology. The exhibits were jointly created with students in an Advanced Design Studio course at RISD, co-taught by Francesca Liuni and the Tomaquag Museum Assistant Director, Silvermoon LaRose.

Public humanities work needs to be useful, and these projects were, both for the students and the institutions they worked with. I'm looking forward to seeing them turned from plans to productions.

Steven Lubar

Public Humanities Faculty Member, 2004-2025

Founding Director of the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage, 2004-2014

George L. Littlefield Professor of American History Emeritus, Department of American Studies



"Woven by the Sea: Native American Stories from the Northeast to Bermuda" exhibit proposal by Ye Chen, Pilar Rivera, Rachel Zou, Claire Rothstein '26 A.M., Audrey Wijono, and Ray Zhang '26 A.M..

REFLECTION ON FIRST YEAR

The public humanities program is a broad framework that allows for each of us to engage our individual humanities-related research and projects through the public humanities lens. Within that broad umbrella, my specialization is modern/contemporary art and curatorial practice. As the program has been taken on by the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice, it has taken a distinctly critical, anti-colonial, justice-oriented approach. So, what that means for my particular research is that I am invested in reworking the foundational blocks of art history and curation, breaking them out of the traditional strictures that were predicated on Western-centrism and envisioning alternative art historical, aesthetic and curatorial methodologies. Through the open format of the program, I have been able to build an interdisciplinary education tailored to these specific interests and do independent and original research through the thesis.

Through the attached fellowship work, I have been able to work at Brown Arts Institute as an exhibitions fellow. Under the mentorship of Thea Quiray Tagle, associate curator of the Bell Gallery at the Brown Arts Institute (2023–2026), I have had the opportunity to dive into the ethics and processes of contemporary exhibition-making. The professional development funding allowed me to go to France to expand my research-related contacts and connect with archives crucial to my work, such as the Bibliotheque Kandinsky Archive at the Centre Pompidou. The “Complete Disorder” conference which I organized with my peers allowed us each to engage directly with leading practitioners in the fields that we are invested in.

Christina Young '26 A.M.

Public Humanities M.A.a Student

Behind the scenes during the “Complete Disorder” virtual conference (L to R: Christina Young and Claire Inouye).

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER



Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

2024–2025 Public Humanities Courses

FALL 2024

PHUM 2011, Curatorial Practice and Change

Instructor: Akeia de Barros Gomes

This course engages in theoretical and practical aspects of engaging in public histories and curating exhibitions. We will explore various methodologies for creating exhibitions and engage in institutional critique. We will also look at community practice, and museum and historical projects in public contexts. Through readings, discussion, assignments, museum trips, public history tours, and guest lectures, we will critically analyze the role of curators and curatorial practice.

PHUM 2020, Methods in Public Humanities

Instructor: Anthony Bogues

Public Humanities is an emerging interdisciplinary field. This course will pay close attention both to the history and the methodological issues of the field. The course will cover the following areas: methods; theory and practice; history of the field; museums and history in relation to Public Humanities; and doing public art.

SPRING 2025

PHUM 2010, Introduction to Public Humanities

Instructors: Steve Lubar and Lin Fisher

This course provides an introduction to public humanities work focusing on the institutions and communities within which public humanists work. This course is useful to students interested in careers in museums and in public humanities more generally. It focuses on the practical components of public work with communities and audiences.

PHUM 2023, Decolonization of Museums: Nations, Museums, Anti Colonialism and the Contemporary Moment

Instructor: Anthony Bogues

Museums are spaces of collection and representation. They are also keepers of knowledge. Museum collections and knowledge are constructed through distinctive power relations. There are of course different kinds of museums, but the ethnographic museum has been one centerpiece of colonial collections. This course examines how the collections of many museums were established and explore the contemporary debates and practices of various attempts to decolonize museums.

New Public Humanities Students



TARA LEININGER

Tara Leininger (she/her) is a University of Illinois alumna, current administrative staff member at Brown University and cat mom. With an academic background in classics and history and professional experience in museum

collections, event planning and student affairs administration, she is passionate about all forms of public engagement and hopes to learn more about how to responsibly engage with historical and cultural artifacts to spark meaningful dialogue. Tara is very grateful to join the public humanities program and looks forward to opportunities for collaboration, mentorship and friendship.



CALEIGH LYONS

Caleigh Lyons grew up outside of Boston, Massachusetts and this past spring graduated from Oberlin College majoring in English, and cinema and media studies, and minoring in gender sexuality and feminist studies. At Oberlin she was

introduced to the public humanities by participating in an oral history project in which local Indigenous people shared what it meant to be Indigenous today. This experience taught her that she wanted to spend her time helping to share untold stories and fighting for social justice.



IVIE OROBATON

Ivie Orobaton graduated from the College of William & Mary with a double major in history and anthropology. Her historical training was on African American and European history in the 18th and 19th centuries. Her anthropological

training was in biological anthropology with a concentration in infectious disease. She has worked in the museum world for five years in various positions across the Smithsonian. Her first role was a research and exhibition specialist at the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the global traveling exhibition, “In Slavery’s Wake.” Before coming to Brown, she served as the inaugural human dignity coordinator at the National Museum of Natural History.



JOVANNA WALKER

Jovanna Walker was born and raised in Boston, MA, and received her B.A. in sociology and history from George Washington University in 2024. During her time at GW, she specialized in the study of African diasporic social

movements. She is particularly interested in the ideology of Pan-Africanism and how its principles are communicated to members of the global Black community. Upon graduation, she was a visitor assistant at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, where she learned more about the importance of accessible educational programming in museums and the necessity for justice-affirming cultural institutions.



ALIJAH WEBB

Alijah Webb holds a double B.A. in anthropology and art & art history (with a concentration in critical curatorial studies) from the College of William & Mary. As the program associate at the Foundation for Contemporary Arts (FCA),

she helped manage five distinct grant programs dedicated to supporting experimental artists across disciplines. Prior to FCA, she worked as an art educator, prioritizing inquiry-based learning, and culturally responsive pedagogical practices while serving elementary-aged students in Brooklyn, NY. As an independent curator, she presented two exhibitions, “Dreams and Nightmares” (2019) and “Phosphene” (2017) while working toward her undergraduate degree.

Her artistic practice is rooted in diaristic zinemaking, which she began as a teenager in rural Virginia. She later hosted “Never Too Much” on Radio Free Brooklyn for three years, which explored the relationship between media and personal catharsis. During this time, she also organized monthly community events in Brooklyn, fostering spaces for creative expression and dialogue. In 2023, she co-founded Perennial Mag, a digital zine where she writes and publishes work that reflects her lived experiences, embracing the messiness, sweetness and discomfort.



JUN YING (JANE) WEN

Jun Ying Wen was born in southern China. She recently graduated from the University of Toronto, where she studied English and peace, conflict and justice. She is concerned with the medium of narrative

and intent on putting her knowledge into practice in curatorial and editorial settings, as well as in public policy more generally. As a poet and writer, her work can be found in Acta Victoriana and Empty House Press, among other places.



Students, Fellows & Staff

Simmons Center Graduate Fellow Melaine Ferdinand-King at the opening of her exhibition “Art and the Freedom Struggle,” with Simmons Center Staff (L to R: Center Manager Sabina Griffin, Melaine Ferdinand-King and Communications Manager Kiku Langford McDonald).

RYTHUM VINOBN

Graduating Student Reflections

HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESEARCH CLUSTER



Working as a research assistant with the Human Trafficking Research Cluster was truly one of the most transformative and rewarding aspects of my undergraduate experience. Working on a community-centered digital map in partnership with Red

Canary Song allowed me to combine my multidisciplinary interests across computer science, urban history, data journalism and Asian American studies. The opportunities and experiences I had through this position helped me grasp what it means to straddle academic, activist and policy spaces that will remain with me beyond my time at Brown.

Arman Deendar '25

Human Trafficking Research Cluster Student Researcher



The work I did as a research assistant for the Human Trafficking Research Cluster (HTRC) was one of the most impactful experiences I had in my time at Brown. Co-designing a digital mapping project and sharing it in academic, policy and community settings

with Red Canary Song transformed my understanding of what research could constitute, and introduced me to a multitude of other brilliant scholars, organizers and community members. This expanded vision of research in HTRC enabled me to see the potential of bringing my concentrations in computer science and ethnic studies together as I pursue work in applied data science and sociotechnical systems research.

Shravya Sompalli '25

Human Trafficking Research Cluster Student Researcher

GRADUATE FELLOW



My tenure with the Simmons Center has profoundly shaped my academic and professional development. As a Ph.D. student, I curated two Center-sponsored exhibitions, "Art and the Freedom Struggle: The Works of Mumia Abu-Jamal," at the

Simmons Center and "Black Sonics: Heritage as Heresy," in Johannesburg, South Africa. I also drafted a K-12 curriculum for the "Creating the New World" project and co-organized the "Black Historical Aesthetics" reading group while hosting education workshops for New England educators. Through these experiences, I contributed to the Center's essential mission of connecting scholarship with Providence and global communities. These opportunities strengthened my competencies in project management, community organizing, art curation and critical theory application. The Simmons Center provided invaluable opportunities to bridge theory with practical implementation, preparing me for future work as a lifelong scholar of culture and society.

Melaine Ferdinand-King '25 Ph.D. in Africana Studies

Co-Curatorial Fellow, Voices of Mass Incarceration, 2023-2024

GARDEN CARETAKER



Working at the Simmons Center provided the means for me to establish a mutualistic relationship with the Center and the garden as a garden caretaker. I provided my time, ideas and labor, and was granted community, knowledge, experience,

serenity and refuge. The garden's purpose resonated with my interest in Black and Indigenous environmentalism and histories, and made my everyday work feel impactful beyond money or aesthetics. From the staff to the events to my fellow caretakers, the Simmons Center always felt less like a place where I worked and more like a space where I belonged.

Kevin Carter '25

Caretaker for the Symbolic Garden of the Enslaved

UNFINISHED CONVERSATIONS SERIES STUDENT RESEARCHERS

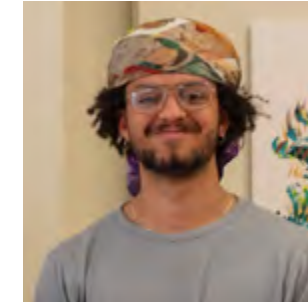


I definitely see "The Unfinished Conversation Series" fitting into my future work. I think it affirmed my belief in archival work and how it intersects with art in such a wonderful way, and how that has a capacity to express histories in such a unique way.

Working with these first-hand accounts, but also engaging in this artistic practice and the curatorial practice has been very key to my formation. As someone entering my career in this way, I've had such an amazing time in the process.

Néleri Figueroa Torres '25

Unfinished Conversations Series Student Researcher

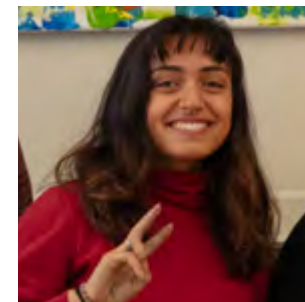


All the work that I've done in the past is about people and a certain love for people and an attempt to articulate or excavate something about the lives of people. My experience working on "The Unfinished Conversations Series" was illuminating because it gave

me a taste of one of the ways in which that kind of love, that kind of passion and that ethical sense of responsibility, can be carried out. I think I'm someone who is interested in theory, but I'm just as interested in being more dedicated and more self-conscious in a practice. I think that that's what it means to work in the public humanities and what working on this project really does or bridges.

Dillon Stone '25

Unfinished Conversations Series Student Researcher



It was a really great experience being part of "The Unfinished Conversations Series" project. I didn't think in my college career I'd be able to work on something so global. Especially the fact that it's going to South Africa, it's going to Liverpool, and it's reaching all

these audiences that will learn about these stories through lines that then connect them to this place that they actually, in an individual sense, don't really have any connections to. It's a really important thing to universalize something, to make people care and to make people understand without generalizing.

Laurie Tamayo '25

Unfinished Conversations Series Student Researcher

Postdoctoral Fellow Reflections

EMPIRE, MEMORY, AND JUSTICE: REFLECTIONS FROM THE SIMMONS CENTER

My year at the Simmons Center has offered a wonderful opportunity to grow, exchange ideas and reflect as a member of its unique scholarly community. The Center's support has been instrumental in advancing my book project, "An Empire of Plunder: Conquest and Enslavement in the British Caribbean, 1700–1770." It has provided an ideal scholarly home — one that supports research on transnational histories of enslavement while remaining grounded in their contemporary implications.

A particular highlight was the October symposium on the Walter Rodney Riots, which reflected the Center's commitment to justice through both historical and transnational perspectives. Featuring a powerful conversation with Patricia Rodney, public health scholar and CEO of the Walter Rodney Foundation, the event brought together scholars, activists and community leaders to reflect on Rodney's legacy and broader Caribbean movements for Black liberation. The symposium highlighted firsthand accounts of resistance and solidarity that reflected the Center's values and that I hope to further in my own research.

My postdoctoral fellowship, jointly sponsored by the John Carter Brown Library, has deepened the Center's engagement with Atlantic histories. I explored archival materials documenting Rhode Island's ties to the Caribbean, including the Brown family, uncovering networks of enslavement, maritime trade and resistance. I hope this research will support new scholarly and public-facing initiatives dedicated to historical understanding and reparative justice.

Christopher Baldwin

Simmons Center/JCB Joint Postdoctoral Research Associate in Slavery and Justice, 2024–2025

TWO YEARS OF INVESTMENT, LIFELONG COMMITMENT

Much gratitude to the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice and the Watson Institute for investing in my intellectual and professional growth during my time as a historical injustice postdoctoral research fellow. For the past two years, I wrote and published a couple of articles including, "Re(cover)ing Revelations: Black Ancestral Text Analysis in Education Research" published in the International Journal of Qualitative Methods and "Epistolary Labor: Letter Writing Activism" published with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History in the Black History Bulletin. Additionally, I was awarded the Princeton University Press Supporting Diverse Voices book proposal development fellowship. These accolades were made possible because of the time and investment of the Historical Injustice Fellowship in cultivating a space to build an intellectual community and to articulate a research paradigm that reflects a robust commitment to freedom, literacy and justice for all. The gift of time to critically chart a pathway forward was invaluable. Networking and learning alongside a vigorous Brown community made it all possible. A special shout out to my campus mentor, Emily Owens, who generously gifted her time in my professional growth forward. I am forever grateful.

Latoya M. Teague

Historical Injustice and Democracy Research Cluster Fellow, 2023–2025

Simmons Center/Watson Historical Injustice and Democracy Postdoctoral Research Associate



Latoya Teague and Christopher Baldwin
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

Visiting Fellow Reflections

ZAWDIE SANDVLIET

My advisor at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, Professor Pepijn Brandon, summarized my time at Brown best when I talked to him about my experiences during my fellowship. He pointed out that the work I had done might not make it into my dissertation, but that it changed me as an intellectual. The independent study with Professor Bogues during my semester at Brown was especially life changing. To be able to read, think and write from a Black Caribbean perspective with a scholar of his stature has added valuable intellectual baggage to my further development as a Black man in and outside of academia.

Zawdie Sandvliet

Simmons Center Graduate Fellow

John Carter Brown Library Fellow

Fulbright Research Scholar

Ph.D. candidate at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam



NINGXIN GAO

I am profoundly grateful to the Department of History and the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice for their generous support during my fellowship. Participating in the Center's rich academic events deepened my understanding of Brown's leadership in confronting the legacies of slavery and broadened my perspective on antislavery politics. I especially want to thank Professor Seth Rockman for his invaluable guidance and Brown's exceptional library resources, which greatly enhanced my research.

Ningxin Gao

Simmons Center Graduate Fellow

Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of History

Graduate School Visiting Scholar

Ph.D. candidate in American history at Wuhan University, China



New Fellows

ARIELLE ALTERWAITE

Simmons Center/JCB Joint Postdoctoral Research Associate in Slavery and Justice

Arielle Alterwaite is a historian who studies slavery, emancipation and political economy in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe with a particular focus on France and its empire. Her research broadly explores how financial speculation and sovereign debt shaped imperial expansion and became key elements of the early modern and modern world. Before coming to Brown, she defended her Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently working on a book manuscript that addresses the specific case of the 1825 Haitian Indemnity, the debt imposed by France on Haiti as a condition for recognizing its sovereignty. The project uses manuscript, published and material sources from more than thirty public and private archives and libraries in Europe, North America and the Caribbean to tell a new, archivally grounded history of finance and empire. In it, she takes the particular case of Haiti's sovereign debt in the long nineteenth century and argues for the international significance of the debt for private banks, monetary systems, nation-making, abolitionist programs and political thought in Europe and the rest of the world.

Insofar as Alterwaite's work is broadly engaged with global conversations on reparations, representation and repatriation, she is also interested in curatorial and artistic practices that link the economic histories of slavery and emancipation to the visual cultures of modernity. Her writing about art and history has been published in *The American Historical Review*, *History and Theory*, and *Slavery & Abolition*, among other fora.



New Simmons Center Staff

ELI SCAVUZZO-DUGGAN

Finance and Administrative Coordinator

Eli Scavuzzo-Duggan (They/Them) is an administrative professional with nearly a decade of experience in case management in social services, primarily. They had previously worked for the shelter coordination team and the Rent Relief team at Crossroads of Rhode Island, and in support coordination at Resources for Human Development, an arts-based day program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Eli first came to Brown in 2023 to provide administrative coordination for the Choices Program, which was based in the History Department. The Choices Program underscored the need for academic integrity as an accessible public tool, and Eli is excited to continue to be part of these efforts with the Simmons Center.

Aside from experience in social and academic services, Eli continues to stay connected with the greater community in Providence, volunteering with a group of peers each Monday night to distribute harm reduction supplies, meals, and toiletries in Kennedy Plaza. Eli is currently working to finish their undergraduate degree at College Unbound, and plans to attend nursing school following that, with the hope of eventually being able to pursue a master's degree in social and public health research as a healthcare provider in underserved communities.



Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

Acknowledgements



The Rhode Island premiere of the documentary film "The Unfinished Conversations Series: Telling New Stories," during Commencement Weekend.
KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD/SIMMONS CENTER

New Art Acquisitions

PAMELA PIKE GORDINIER’S “THE TALLY,” AND “VOICES FROM THE MIDDLE PASSAGE”

The Simmons Center was honored to receive a donation of two major artworks by artist Pamela Pike Gordinier in December 2024. Created as part of a years-long social justice project in collaboration with Adjunct Lecturer in Slavery and Justice Akeia de Barros Gomes, these pieces use history and art to promote dialogue, healing, and change by illuminating the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

“The Tally (Voyage of the Slaving Brig Sally 1764–1765),” reveals an ominous portrait of history while bringing light to the memories of the enslaved people of the Slaving Brig Sally, owned by Nicholas Brown and Co. Inspired by the ship’s Account Book, Gordinier used charcoal tally marks on the canvas to represent the 196 enslaved people itemized in the Account Book.

The construction of the piece reveals the human cost of the voyage: the 87 people who survived are represented by dark marks, while the 109 people who died from insurrection, disease, or despair are represented by erased marks. Gordinier described the process of making and erasing the marks as difficult, feeling that the act of “obliterating the charcoal line — but more than that — a human life,” embodied the tragedy. The work incorporates materials that would have been used in slave ships: various woods, rope, canvas, and shackles, which were donated by Mystic Seaport Museum.

Gordinier also generously donated another work, “Voices from the Middle Passage” (2022), which depicts the devastating second leg of the Triangle Slave Trade. The relief painting features a protruding ship hull and a background filled with the bodies of enslaved people: a visualisation based on historical documents.

These two powerful pieces are now on view at the Simmons Center, enriching our permanent collection.

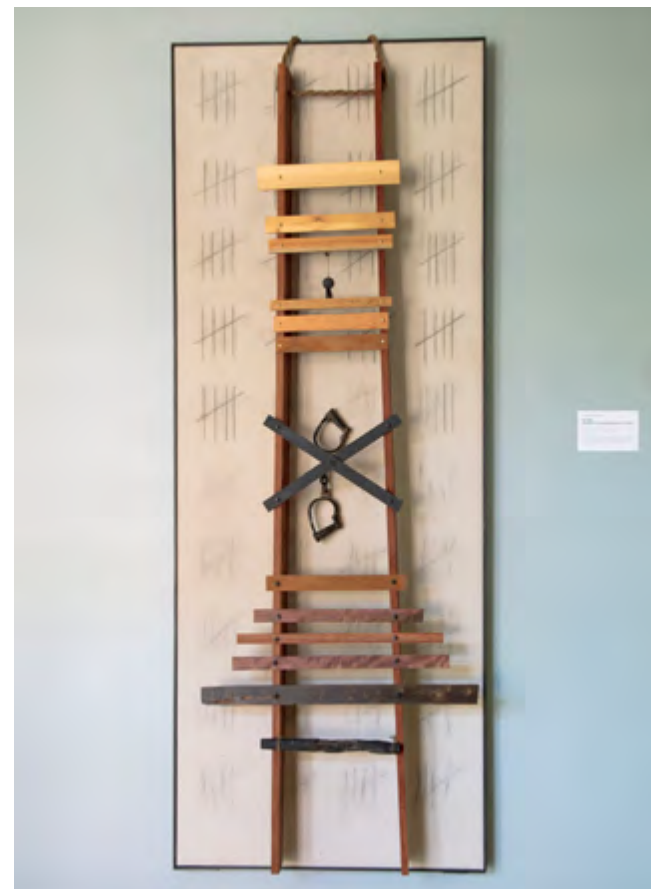
Kiku Langford McDonald

Communications Manager

At Right: Pamela Pike Gordinier, “The Tally (Voyage of the Slaving Brig Sally 1764-1765),” 2022, 3D Charcoal on Canvas, Woods from the Age of Sail, Iron handcrafted nails, Shackles, Brass screws, 30" wide x 80" tall



Pamela Pike Gordinier, “Voices from the Middle Passage,” 2022, 3D Acrylic on Board, Charcoal, 20" wide x 30" tall



Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice

ROBERTO LUGO PLATE DONATION

After seeing the exhibition “Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room,” at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2021, Amy Abrams was moved by the work of Philadelphia-based ceramic artist Roberto Lugo (American, b. 1981) whose work was featured prominently in the exhibition. In 2024, she generously donated three of his ceramic plates to the Simmons Center.

Now on display in the Center’s Seminar Room, Lugo’s “Ida B. Wells Plate,” “Sojourner Truth Plate,” and “James Baldwin Plate” (2020, glazed stoneware, slip, and overglazed paint) honor politicians, activists, and literary figures who have been important to Black History and Black Culture. Lugo embellishes their portraits with graffiti and kente prestige cloth patterns.

Lugo’s plates round out a robust display of works the Center has acquired over the years. These pieces by contemporary artists — including Edouard Duval Carrié, Renold Laurent, Joseph Holston, Geri Augusto and Pamela Pike Gordinier — reflect on the history and legacies of racial slavery through a variety of representational and abstract paintings, assemblages, and sculptural works. All of these offer visitors a variety of ways to think about and engage with this often painful and inaccessible history.

Kiku Langford McDonald

Communications Manager



Top: Roberto Lugo, “Ida B. Wells Plate,” 2020, glazed stoneware, slip, and overglazed paint

Middle: Roberto Lugo, “James Baldwin Plate,” 2020, glazed stoneware, slip, and overglazed paint

Bottom: Roberto Lugo, “Sojourner Truth Plate,” 2020, glazed stoneware, slip, and overglazed paint

Gratitude to All Our Supporters

The work of the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice would not be possible without the support of the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, the Office of the Dean of the Faculty, and the Office of the Dean of the College. Thank you to all the dedicated individuals on the President's Advisory Council on the Simmons Center and the Faculty Advisory Board who continue to provide guidance for our work.

The Simmons Center would like to sincerely thank our major donors for their support:

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Edited by Kiku Langford McDonald
Editorial Assistance by Taher Vahanvaty '27

Graphic design by Elise Kirk
and Erin Wells Design

CONTACT US

Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice
Brown University
Box 1895
Providence, RI 02912

Phone: 401-863-5099
Email: slaveryjustice@brown.edu
simmonscenter.brown.edu

Back Cover: At the start of the third annual Black and Indigenous Histories Summer Institute in 2025, Abigail Jefferson led the high school students in an altar ceremony to help ground the group. The altar held personal and significant items that students and instructors brought in to share.

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82 and 94 Waterman Street,
Providence, Rhode Island
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