



RUTH J. SIMMONS
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF
SLAVERY AND JUSTICE
BROWN UNIVERSITY

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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Front Cover:
Brown President Emerita Ruth J. Simmons’ Commencement address, 2012
MIKE COHEA / BROWN UNIVERSITY

Director’s Note

There are years which pass that we do not vividly recall. Those kinds of years are not etched on our memories, they sit quietly settling as time passes. On the contrary, for the Center, last year was an extraordinary one. It was our tenth anniversary, and we marked it in many ways. In March, to an audience of over 500 at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, the center was renamed the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice (Simmons Center). In a conversation between Dr. Simmons, President Paxson and myself, we examined the ways in which Brown, under Dr. Simmons’ leadership, had pioneered the establishment of a university committee to examine the relationship of the university to the transatlantic slave trade and how Brown was a beneficiary. This committee and the subsequent report is now acclaimed as a pioneering document. Our decision to rename the center to honor Dr. Simmons was the recognition of that historic fact.

Over the years, the Center has become known for its scholarship and public humanities programs. A recent external review lauded it for its work in both these fields. So, with the renaming and its consolidation on the academic landscape of Brown, the Center decided to take the bold step of creating a distinctive and new MA in Public Humanities. Over the years, the Center has catalyzed many exhibitionary projects which have reimagined public history. Indeed our first major conference in 2013 was a joint collaboration between Yale’s Center for Slavery and Abolition and the National African American Museum of History and Culture. So coming out of both the external review and discussions at Brown, the Center has added on a new dimension to its work. While we celebrated our 10th anniversary we also took a new step forward.

All of this would simply not have been possible without the many donors—large and small—who have worked with the Center since its inception. Each contribution has been a valuable one for the growth of the Center. Then there have been the President’s Advisory Council members who have worked mightily to support the Center, advise, and, most importantly, served as key nodes of the Center’s outreach and internal support. There is the academic board as well as the many students who have worked at the Center supporting our programs and proposing new ones.

Our faculty associates and Research Cluster chairs have done outstanding work drawing from Brown’s faculty from across the campus. Prof. Augusto, one of the Center’s first faculty associates, almost single handedly created the Symbolic Slave Garden and Robert Farizer, our caretaker, looked after it with passionate loving care. But all of this work would not have been possible without the deep dedication of all the past and present staff members: Ruth Clark, Maiyah Rivers, Diane Straker, Catherine Van Amburgh, Kiku Langford McDonald, Desiree Obimpe, Bianca Pallo, Nada Samih-Rotondo, Africa Smith, and of course the founding staff member of the Center, Shana Weinberg. We also look forward to continuing this work with those joining our team in 2024: Sabina Griffin and Destiny Jones.

The Ruth J. Simmons Center has planted itself in the academic landscape of Brown University. It did so at a moment in American society when there are now growing attempts to assault the liberal university and its centrality to American life. As the Center grew, one of its missions was to confront our nation’s past, one that was complex but had at its core systems of racial slavery and indigenous dispossession. Confronting this past is difficult since, to paraphrase James Baldwin, we carry the past with us. This confrontation becomes a way for us to grapple with the present and carve out a different future.

The Simmons Center for a decade has attempted to engage in this confrontation because history and whatever narrative we tell ourselves about that past means that our present is profoundly shaped by that narrative. We find ourselves in an America that is under deep stress and in what many admit is a difficult time for liberal ideas and new histories. Our hope is that our Research Clusters and new Public Humanities program will work to reimagine America as a nation that is deeply-inclusive and one where equality and being human are the foundational grounds for the nation.

Anthony Bagues

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



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 the 2022–2023 academic year, the Center's work was organized around the following research clusters and projects:

RESEARCH CLUSTERS

Human Trafficking

This project explores contemporary forms of human bondage and engages in public programming around this issue.

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 will bring together the best scholars on this subject in the world. This is a three-year project co-led by the Simmons Center and the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam).

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.

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.

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.

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.

AFFILIATED STUDENT GROUP

Decolonization at Brown

Decolonization at Brown (DAB) is a student-led group that seeks to bring together students, staff, faculty, and local communities to resist colonialism in Brown's relationships, academics, and spaces. DAB's current focus is identifying and raising awareness of colonialism in Brown's structure and culture through task forces, bi-weekly general body meetings, mutual aid initiatives, teach-ins, campaigns, and more.

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 | Black Sonic: Heritage as Heresy

The Imagined New is an interdisciplinary platform for critical exchange and research around African and African Diasporic art practices as they relate to questions of history, archive, and the alternative imagination(s) of the Radical Black Tradition. This project is collaboratively presented by the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD), University of Johannesburg, Simmons Center, and the Brown Arts Initiative. Visit www.theimaginednew.org

This Life: Black Life and the Time of the Now

This Life: Black Life and the Time of the Now is a collaboration between the Simmons Center and the Miami Museum of Contemporary African Diaspora Art to create an experimental digital exhibition and an accompanying documentary with four Black artists.

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 (UC) initiative, 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's National Museum of African American History & Culture in partnership with museums around the world.

Unfinished Conversations Series

Unfinished Conversations 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 by the Abrams 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.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour

The Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour examines the history behind Brown University, the State of Rhode Island, and their roles in the transatlantic slave trade. New digital resources help students (K-12 & college) and adult groups think critically about the University and state histories.

Slavery in the Americas High School Curriculum Project

The Slavery in the Americas High School Curriculum Project is a collaborative project with The Choices Program at Brown. This curriculum fulfills part of the Simmons Center's mission to undertake public history projects which tell the story of racial slavery. This high school curriculum project sought to challenge myths and the current absences in how our schools teach the history of racial slavery. The project worked closely with youth and educators to discern their understanding of the topic, areas of interest, and classroom challenges. [View the curriculum online here.](#)

Black and Indigenous Summer Institute

The Black and Indigenous Summer Institute is a two-week immersive enrichment program for Rhode Island students who are juniors or seniors in high school. Participating students gain exposure to a simulated college experience, learn to conduct scholarly research, have access to renowned collections, make connections to scholars and community leaders, and have an opportunity to meet and collaborate with peers throughout New England to develop plans, strategies, or programs that enrich communities and seek more "Just Futures." The Summer Institute is sponsored by the Simmons Center and the Tomaquag Museum.

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 more widely 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 worked towards creating teams to work on a proposed curriculum during Summer 2022 with individuals focusing their work on research, curriculum development, or both. 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.

People

STAFF & ADMINISTRATION

Anthony Bogues
Director
Asa Messer Professor of
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Sabina Griffin
Center Manager, 2024

Destiny Jones
Program Assistant, 2024

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Center Manager, 2021–2023
Communications Manager, 2024

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2022–2023

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Global Curatorial Project Archivist

Nada Samih-Rotondo
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2021–2024
Events Coordinator, 2024

Shana Weinberg
Associate Director, Public
Humanities Programs

STUDENT WORKERS

Administrative Assistants

Allyssa Foster '25

Destiny Jones '23.5

Destiny Wilson '26

Special Projects Coordinator

Destiny Jones '23.5

Carceral State Reading Group

Justin Lang '25 Ph.D.

Sarah Ogundare '24

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Nevaeh Grimes '26

*Education Program
Coordinator*

Miya Matsuishi-Elhardt '23

*Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour
Guides*

Natalia Banos Delgado '26

Cole Francis '26

Roopa Duvvi '23

Iman Husain '23

**Alexandra "Yaya" Johnson '23
A.M.**

Traci Picard '23 A.M.

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*Symbolic Slave Garden
Caretakers*

Ralphina Andres '24

Helena Evans '24

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zuri arman '26 Ph.D.

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FACULTY ADVISORY BOARD

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**Isaac Sekyi Nana Mensah '23
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*Mapping Finance, Slavery and the
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Leonora Masini '22 Ph.D.
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Marcelo Rosanova Ferraro
*Simmons Center/Watson Institute
Joint Historical Injustice and
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REIMAGINING NEW ENGLAND HISTORIES VISITING FELLOW

Cheryll Holley
*Mellon Visiting Fellow in Slavery
and Justice, 2022–2023*

ACADEMIC AFFILIATES

Teo Wickland
*Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow,
Postdoctoral Research Associate in
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Simmons Center*

VISITING SCHOLARS

Claire Andrade-Watkins
Visiting Scholar 2022–2023

Pepijn Brandon
Visiting Scholar, 2020–2023

Akeia de Barros Gomes
Visiting Scholar, 2021–2023

Sylviane Diouf
Visiting Scholar, 2019–2023

Paul Gardullo
Visiting Scholar, 2020–2023

Naz Habtezghi
Visiting Scholar, 2020–2023

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Justin Lang '25 Ph.D.
*Graduate Associate Fellow,
2020–2023*



RESEARCH CLUSTERS AND SEMINAR SERIES

DESIREE OBIMPE

Research Clusters

HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESEARCH CLUSTER

In fall 2022, the Human Trafficking Research Cluster (HTRC) celebrated the publication of its inaugural volume. Co-edited by research cluster Director Elena Shih and Kamala Kempadoo (York University), [“White Supremacy, Racism, and the Coloniality of Anti-Trafficking”](#) (Routledge Press) features 18 essays that explore the various ways anti-trafficking efforts are rooted in systemic forms of power and influence. The book emerged from a 2017 HTRC conference “Whitewashing Abolition”—a two-day public convening in which many of the authors in the volume gathered to share ideas. The book celebrated its launch at the University of Toronto in November and again at Brown University in May, featuring comments by the co-editors and authors Samuel Okyere and Jose Miguel Nieto Olivar.

Throughout spring 2023, the HTRC co-hosted Brown’s Asian American Artist-in-Residence, Yin Q, a writer, documentary filmmaker, cultural activist, and core collective member of Red Canary Song (RCS), a grassroots coalition building worker organizing amongst Asian migrant massage workers in the Northeast. In March 2023, HTRC screened the Rhode

Island premier of RCS’ feature-length documentary, “Fly in Power,” (directed by Yin Q and Grace Yoon Na), featuring a Q &A with the directors and producers. [“Fly in Power”](#) follows the story of Charlotte, a Korean massage worker and core organizer of Red Canary Song. Through her story, we learn how the incarceration system is pitted against Asian migrant women and their survival. Other RCS members, including Khokhoi, a young body worker, and HTRC research cluster fellow Prof. Elena Shih, share powerful insights that debunk the myths of sex trafficking. “Fly in Power” is a glimpse into the intimate spaces that not only connect these workers, but is also a testament to the global advocacy of women’s rights to work and thrive.

Since 2020, RCS has worked as a community partner with the HTRC on an ongoing oral history project that documents the experiences of migrant Asian massage workers as they face labor exploitation, racialized poverty, and state sanctioned violence. Student research cluster members work closely with RCS and are thrilled to launch a policing of massage work mapping project, [Liberation Atlas](#), in July 2023.

Elena Shih

*Human Trafficking Research Cluster Faculty Fellow
Assistant Professor of American Studies and Ethnic Studies*

Human Trafficking Research Cluster premier of “Fly in Power”



ELENA SHIH

RACE, MEDICINE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH CLUSTER

“There was a transnational flow of medical knowledge about how disease spread that increased between 1756 and 1866 and transpired not only at familiar hubs of medical research but also at sites of imperialism, slavery, war, and dispossession.” (Downs, *Maladies of Empire*, p. 5)

Beginning with a public talk in 2014 by the renowned Dorothy Roberts, the primary aim of the Race, Medicine, and Social Justice Research Cluster at the Simmons Center was to cultivate a community of researchers and students committed to interdisciplinary discussions of race, racism, and a radical vision of social medicine that draws on but extends beyond limited notions of social determinants of disease. Comprised of faculty and students across the University, the Cluster has focused on contemporary controversies central to medicine and their societal impact. To broaden our understanding, we met several times a semester and invited a series of prominent speakers in the history and social studies of science to interrogate such key questions as: what is race, how is racist medical knowledge produced, and what are its legacies?

Pursuing the theme of social justice as it intersects with racism and facilitated by a Cluster participant, the group began the year by analyzing the controversy over the persistence of biological notions of race, as manifested in the current tendency to substitute genetic ancestry for race in research and clinical settings. Our featured speaker for the first semester, Associate Professor in Stanford University’s Department of Anthropology, Duana Fulwilley, gave

a compelling talk that built on the debate over genetic ancestry. Entitled “Ancestors and the Algorithmic Shadows: Ghost DNA and the Kinfolk of Today,” Fulwilley’s talk addressed issues from her Boston Review article on DNA and our ancestors and shared insights from her forthcoming book that probes the relationship of DNA sequences to kinship and the stories thus generated. Closing out the first semester and facilitated by another Cluster member, the group read classic articles from the Black radical tradition on institutional racism, its meaning, and its social context.

Second semester topics included medical activism at both the local and national level; knowledge production and its legacies; and physician unionization. One Cluster member shared his ongoing work with the Institute for Healing and Justice in Medicine, emphasizing the challenges posed to those who have attempted to tackle the persistence of racialized algorithms for centuries in pulmonary medicine, while another Cluster participant shared aspects of her long-term activism in bringing an understanding of social determinants of disease to the Rhode Island community.

Our featured speaker for the second semester was historian Jim Downs at Gettysburg College and the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University who spoke about his new book on the origins of the field of epidemiology. Entitled “*Maladies of Empire: How Colonialism, Slavery, and War Transformed Medicine*,” Downs’ lecture opened up new ways of thinking about the nature of knowledge and its legacies in a field of medicine and public health that shapes profoundly much of what we know about health. For the last session, the Research Cluster delved into the significance of the wave of physician

Health, Racial Inequities, and Power in American Medicine event



From left to right: Panelists Lundy Braun, Taneisha Wilson, Dannie Ritchie, and Eric T. Jones, at “Health, Racial Inequities, and Power in American Medicine” forum

unionization across the U.S. and the influence of physician unions on the healthcare system and patient care. The group discussed the history of physician organizations, the pressures on physicians, and the primary roles of physician unions in advocating for fair working conditions, compensation, and benefits for their members.

Thus, from discussions on genetic ancestry, to the history of the field of epidemiology and its foundation in racism, to sessions on activism and the role of unions in healthcare, during the 2022–2023 academic year, the Cluster generated rich and forward-thinking interdisciplinary conversations among members of the Brown community that has informed

research, clinical practice, and medical activism. In the past several years, members of the Research Cluster contributed to the work of the House Ways and Means Committee Staff Report on the (mis)use of race in clinical decision-making; engaged in activism related to race-based algorithms and questions of housing; and wrote several scholarly articles. Importantly, the Research Cluster has fostered discussions on contemporary debates at the intersection of race, medicine, and social justice.

Lundy Braun

*Race, Medicine, and Social Justice Research Cluster Faculty Fellow
Royce Family Professor in Teaching Excellence, Professor of Africana Studies and Medical Science*

Taneisha Wilson

*Race, Medicine, and Social Justice Research Cluster Faculty Fellow
Assistant Professor, Emergency Medicine*



RACE, SLAVERY, COLONIALISM AND CAPITALISM RESEARCH CLUSTER

This joint project between the Simmons Center and the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam seeks to further the development of an integrative transnational and global understanding of the connections between race, slavery, colonialism and capitalism. It brings together senior and more junior scholars who work on these connections in different continents and periods of time. The project started in 2021 and is intended to run to the end of 2024. So far, the working group has met three times (online in 2021 due to Covid, in Amsterdam; the Netherlands in 2022; and in Kingston, Jamaica in 2023).

The following questions have been guiding the work of this group of scholars:

1. How may we think about the significance of racial/plantation/colonial slavery not only to the economic transformation of Europe and various forms of dispossession practices of various European colonial regimes, but what were the technologies of rule of these colonial and slave based societies?

2. Was anti-black racism simply an ideological tool, or does it have a longer history which then became embedded in the social system? How did anti-black racism relate to other forms of racism (e.g. towards indigenous populations in the Americas or those enslaved in the Indian Ocean area)?
3. On a theoretical level, were slavery and colonial production relations themselves capitalist and if so what does this mean both for theoretical and historical understanding of capitalism and its history?
4. In what ways was the bio economy of slavery critical and how can we think about slavery, gender, race and reproductive labor?

The 2023 Jamaica workshop was characterized by intense and fruitful debate on the concept of racial capitalism, the multiplicity of forms of racialized social order that emerged in the last four centuries, transitions between regimes of racialized social control, and the meaning of these histories for the present.

Prof. Dr. Pepijn Brandon

*Professor of Global Economic and Social History
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*

Race, Slavery, Capitalism and the Making of the Modern World participants outside of the University of West Indies Regional Headquarters, Mona, Jamaica.



HISTORICAL INJUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY RESEARCH CLUSTER

As a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Simmons Center and the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, I have been anchoring the Historical Injustice and Democracy Research Cluster, a joint collaborative project between these institutions that focuses on the legacies of colonialism and racial slavery in the making of the modern world. This research cluster offered an undergraduate course and series of lectures about slavery, race, and resistance in Haiti, Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, and the United States in 2022; and organized a workshop titled “Slavery, Democracy, and Racial Violence in the Americas” in the spring of 2023. This event brought together scholars and political activists to discuss the making of distinct regimes of race and racial violence across the continent, connecting the history of colonialism and the

enslavement of Indigenous and African peoples to current dilemmas of contemporary societies like police brutality and mass incarceration. One of the main objectives of these initiatives was to move beyond the American paradigm of racial violence and offer a transnational and comparative perspective of this phenomenon by focusing on the historical experiences of slavery and racism in Latin America and the Caribbean. The seminar series and the workshop offered theoretical and analytical contributions to students, scholars, and political activists who wish to understand the past to resist the historical injustices of our time.

Marcelo Rosanova Ferraro

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



Marcelo Rosanova Ferraro



Aline Helg in discussion with Anthony Bogues at “Slavery, Democracy, and Racial Violence in the Americas” workshop

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. This research cluster serves an important purpose: bridging the research-based examination of mass incarceration in the United States with activists and system-impacted people shaping the dialogue around human rights, criminal justice reform and abolition. This Cluster works closely with the Mass Incarceration Lab and their ongoing efforts to build an archive dedicated to mass incarceration. The Lab's mission is centering incarcerated voices in the telling of the history of mass incarceration in America. This archival project is a central way that students contribute to the growing intellectual life around the study of mass incarceration and the mission to preserve the narratives and experiences of those impacted by incarceration and its violence. This initiative will be part of the John Hay Library's collecting initiative entitled, "Voices of Mass Incarceration," and will be preserved alongside the recently-acquired papers of Mumia Abu-Jamal, [an acquisition featured in the New York Times](#) (Aug 24, 2022). Thus far, the archive examines art, religion, healthcare and other facets of daily life defined by incarceration. The archive includes 100 letters and 100 oral histories from incarcerated people.

The 2022–2023 academic year was a dynamic year of programming and research that engaged undergraduates,

graduate students, activists and alumni. The Cluster hosted award-winning author and professor, Dr. Michael Walker, for a discussion about his book, "Indefinite: Doing Time in Jail." This path-breaking research explores the emotional landscape of American "jail time." Walker spoke to a packed audience and hosted a meet-and-greet for students post-event. The Cluster was also active with events and research activities aimed at building an archive on mass incarceration. This year, the Cluster focused on the issue of solitary confinement. We received a donation of 60 letters from OpenDoors RI written from people held in solitary confinement. Students digitized, preserved and curated these primary sources for the Mass Incarceration Lab's effort to build an archive that centers the voices of those incarcerated in the United States. Inspired by these letters, students advocated to reform solitary confinement (Rhode Island Bill So617) by testifying in front of the Rhode Island Senate hearing on March 21, 2023 and then, for the Rhode Island House Judiciary on April 4, 2023. Students read letters from those held in solitary and reinforced the message that those most affected by the inhumane conditions of solitary confinement should be able to have their voices heard. In the last three months alone, three people have died by suicide in Rhode Island prisons. The work of the Mass Incarceration Lab and its students shows how academic and archival research can transform into advocacy on some of the most pressing human rights issues of our time.

In addition to these efforts, the cluster, in conjunction with the Mass Incarceration Lab, did two LIVE oral history events. The first event featured Sean Washington, a 2020 Exoneree, who was wrongfully convicted and then exonerated by the

New Jersey Appellate Court in 2019. He told narratives of the brutal conditions in prison, the fight for his freedom and the hardships of reintegrating into society after decades of wrongful imprisonment.

In our second event, we hosted a LIVE oral history of three formerly-incarcerated activists who shared their first-hand testimony of the brutality of solitary confinement, their years recovering and reintegrating from the trauma associated with prison life, and the abusive treatment perpetuated by prison guards and staff. They shared advice for students, many of whom aspire to be lawyers and policymakers engaged in criminal justice reform. One of the formerly-incarcerated speakers, Eddie Franco, said that "idealists" are the types of students that will want to do the hard work of criminal justice reform. He urged them to "hold on" to their idealism so they could make an impact in the future.

Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve

Associate Professor of Sociology

Mass Incarceration and Punishment in America Research Cluster Fellow

EXPLORING INDIGENOUS SLAVERY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM: STOLEN RELATIONS

On January 4, 1775, an enslaved Indigenous man named Jo disappeared from the plantation of Stephen Hazzard in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. Hazzard immediately suspected that Jo had escaped to freedom, and so paid for a "runaway" ad in the Newport Mercury. As described in the ad, Jo was approximately twenty years old and was "part Spanish Indian," meaning at least one of his parents had been caught up in the Native American slave trade out of the Caribbean (or perhaps out of the Carolinas half a century earlier).

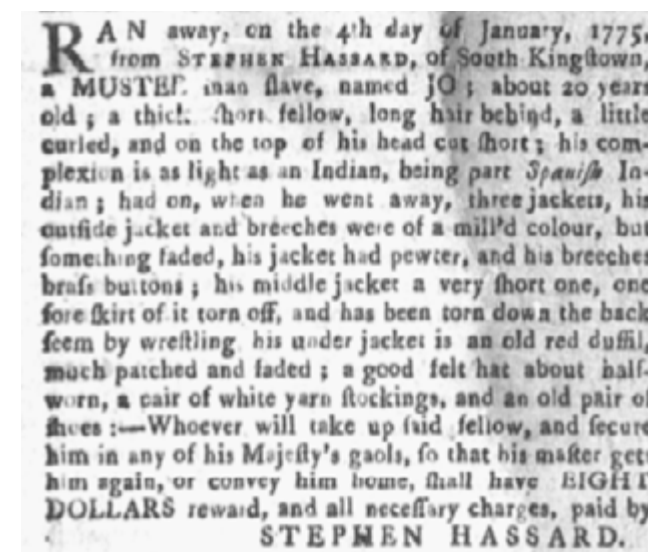
Stories like Jo's form the core of the Stolen Relations project at Brown University (www.stolenrelations.org). Together, the 6,500 records (and counting) of Indigenous enslavement and unfreedom reveal often overlooked dynamics of settler colonialism. In every single English colony and (after 1776), most American states, enslaved Native Americans labored in households, on ships, and on plantations, right alongside enslaved Africans.

Founded in 2015, this project has been housed at the Center for Digital Scholarship and, starting in 2019, has been collaborating directly with thirteen regional Native nations and communities in order to respectfully recover and interpret the stories contained in various colonial archives and documents.

With vital funding from the Simmons Center, for the past three years we have offered a summer institute for 6-8 tribal members, most of whom were from the New England region. The most recent one was offered in July 2023, and was co-led by Lydia Curliss (Nipmuc and University of Maryland PhD Student) and myself. We had eight participants representing various tribal nations and ages, which created the context for intense conversations about the database project and settler colonialism more generally. The Simmons Center also supports our Research Assistant Coordinator who works with approximately thirty high school, undergraduate, and graduate interns and research assistants each year. With a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities it received in 2022, Stolen Relations plans to go live in 2024.

Linford D. Fisher

Stolen Relations Research Cluster Faculty Fellow
Associate Professor of History



"Runaway" ad for Jo, an enslaved Indigenous man, in the Newport Mercury.

Seminar Series

CARCERAL STATE READING GROUP

In the 2022–2023 school year, the Carceral State Reading Group focused on building community with organizations on and off-campus committed to the study and struggle around issues related to the carceral state and the politicized nature of imprisonment. Much of our reading and conversations have been guided by Brown University’s acquisition of the papers of Mumia Abu-Jamal. We have tried to orient the group around what it means to have these papers on campus, and our reading discussions have focused on the history and thought of different political prisoners to establish a foundation for approaching the Mumia archive. Several members attended the “Sostre at 100: A Legacy of Action” conference in New York City to continue this study and also build relationships with organizations similarly struggling to uplift and liberate political prisoners. We also attended on-campus events such as a “Creator/Curator” conversation with Johanna Fernandez ’93 around the challenges of housing Mumia’s papers (and her own) on Brown’s campus, as well as the decision to do so in the first place. Given Fernandez’s history of activism on campus, we also gained helpful insight into her community-building and organizing strategies through this engagement.

We also continued to develop relationships with Brown student organizations such as Railroad and Sunrise at Brown around campaigns we all remain invested in, such as Stop Cop City—an ongoing effort to stand in solidarity with Rhode Island organizations. We joined Railroad’s ongoing effort to support currently incarcerated folks in Rhode Island and build inside-outside relationships. We collaborated with (De)cypher journal to examine the relationship between aesthetics and inside-outside study and organized a discussion around the exhibition “Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration.” Along with these student collaborations, we have focused on sustaining relationships with Providence community organizations. We look forward to continuing these partnerships through events in the next year and to continued fervor on campus around Mumia with the archive opening in the fall of 2023.

Sarah Ogundare ’24, Justin Lang Ph.D. ’25

Carceral State Reading Group Co-Facilitators

ADVANCED KNOWLEDGES

(De)Cypher: Black Notes on Culture and Criticism

(De)Cypher was inspired by Sylvia Wynter’s decipherment method—a critical intellectual praxis that seeks to interrogate what art does rather than simply what it means—and her “black paper” form of five to seven-page essays on culture. It asks “what do you think about how it feels?” to begin an interrogation of the structure in which feelings arise rather than accepting them at face value. Doing so avoids an unqualified optimism attributable to our eagerness for social transformation.

For the 2022–2023 academic year, (De)Cypher: Black Notes on Culture and Criticism led study groups and hosted a series of conversations with contemporary working-class performing artists. The aim of our journal is to find ways to engage with Black culture and aesthetics that reveal the way they function in the world, rather than a flat method of criticism that often amounts to a judgment of if a piece—and by extension, the artist—is good or bad. For the fall semester, we primarily focused on refining our methodology through biweekly meetings and viewing various types of media. This resulted in a methodological statement that will serve as the introduction to our second edition of the journal to be released this year. In the spring semester, (De)Cypher curated a series of multimedia conversations called “Cyphering While Black: Facing the Music, Confronting the Culture.” With the help of the Center, we were able to invite Jewelry Rap Production, a hip hop collective from Charlotte, NC. We talked about their experiences as independent artists, their philosophical approaches to their work, and most importantly, their relationship to music criticism. We also engaged in real-time decyphering, where we showed music videos or played songs from the artists before breaking in a discussion about the work that the art is doing against the world. The series was important because we were able to gain immediate feedback about decyphering and it was well received by both the artist and our audience.

zuri arman ’26 Ph.D.

Simmons Center Advanced Knowledges Working Group Facilitator



Cyphering While Black: Facing the Music, Confronting the Culture



Professor Winder and Azad Essa discuss the parallels between Indian and Israeli forms of occupation as part of the discussion on his book, *Hostile Homelands*

DECOLONIZATION AT BROWN (DAB)

The 2022–2023 academic year has been a whirlwind for DAB. Early in the year, the Steering Committee decided that some reform was necessary to ensure the organization’s long-term sustainability. As seniors were graduating and upperclassmen activists were experiencing burnout, DAB had to come together and strategize on how to proceed best. Parts of the conversations included the restructuring of the steering committee itself to better reflect the leadership of the various task forces, refocusing DAB’s efforts on the more popular/impactful events from its past, and recruiting new members.

At the beginning of the second semester, DAB was faced with several challenges. Primarily, the rejuvenation of the organization in the middle of the year impeded a lot of new faces from joining, and consequently, encouraging others to join became difficult as well. Fortunately, a small but dedicated group of DAB members were able to muster up the energy to host some general body meetings and end the semester with a viewing of one of DAB’s most iconic workshops, “What is this Place” (2020). The subsequent discussions were enlightening and helped frame DAB’s trajectory for the upcoming academic year.

Moreover, the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice was incredibly helpful in supporting various initiatives throughout our year of transition. An example was the funding the Center gave us in hosting Azad Essa’s discussion on his book “Hostile Homelands” in March where he described the relationship between Zionism and Hindutva ideologies. Moreover, the Center’s support in purchasing recording materials for the new Carte Blanche podcast and magazine, which focuses on anti-colonial cultural productions, has been crucial in continuing our message.

As we move into a new year, DAB hopes to maintain the burgeoning momentum it had established this semester. What that will look like remains entirely up in the air, but we know that the passion of the students involved in DAB—past, present, and future—will guide the organization to new zeniths.

Shazain Khan ’24

DAB Steering Committee Member



MAJOR EVENTS

Brown University renames Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice in honor of Ruth J. Simmons

In celebration of 10 years of impact and the exceptional generosity of its donors, the Center's new name honors Brown's president emerita, who sparked a landmark effort to uncover the University's historical ties to slavery.

WASHINGTON, D.C. [Brown University] — Ten years ago, the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice opened its doors on the Brown University campus, quickly emerging as a leader for research that is changing the way the world learns about the legacies of the slave trade.

Now, in recognition of that decade milestone and the exceptional generosity of Brown donors whose support established a \$10 million endowment for CSSJ, the University has named the center in honor of Brown President Emerita Ruth J. Simmons.

It was Simmons whose bold initiative to uncover the University's historical ties to racial slavery resulted in a landmark [2006 report](#) that led to the center's creation and inspired universities and other organizations around the world to take up the work of investigating their own ties to slavery.

Brown President Christina H. Paxson shared news of the renamed Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice at a 10th-anniversary celebration held on Thursday, March 30, at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

"Under President Simmons' leadership, Brown became one of the first universities to examine its ties to the transatlantic slave trade with academic rigor and with unflinching honesty," Paxson said before the event. "Ruth's bold, enlightened action paved the way for the center, one of the jewels of education and research at Brown, and there is no more fitting tribute than to name the center in her honor."

Paxson said the naming is a testament to Simmons' "high-impact leadership and also a recognition of dozens of generous donors who helped the center reach a \$10 million fundraising goal this year," creating an endowment that will provide sustainable financial support for the center's scholarship and outreach. The celebration at the Museum of African American History and Culture welcomed hundreds

of alumni, friends, donors and partners whose support for the center's mission has proven essential to its impact.

On the eve of the event, Simmons said she was surprised and humbled by the renaming. The former Brown leader, soon to become a president's distinguished fellow at Rice University and a senior adviser on engagement with historically Black colleges and universities at Harvard University, joined Paxson and center director Anthony Bogues at Thursday's celebration for a discussion on the CSSJ's decade of impactful scholarship and its bright future ahead.

"I have been immensely proud of all that the center has accomplished," Simmons said. "The wide array of research, scholarship and public discourse the center has generated has made it a resource for hundreds of individuals, institutions and nations. I hope that it will continue to interrogate the many forms of slavery and exploitation, serving as a continuing resource to those seeking to address historic wrongs."

A FOUNDATION OF SUPPORT

While the CSSJ was founded in the 2012–13 academic year, its beginnings date back to 2003—the year Simmons charged a committee of faculty, students and staff that confronted the full truth of Brown’s historical relationship to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

In 2006, following three years of extensive research and campus conversations, the committee shared its findings in the Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice. The authors described in detail how several of Brown’s founders and benefactors participated in and benefited from the slave trade, and recommended a series of actions the University could take to confront its history.

The committee’s report didn’t just inspire similar reckonings at dozens more colleges and universities. It also spurred the University—first under Simmons’ leadership, and since under Paxson’s—to commit to new historical commemorations, academic initiatives, community engagement initiatives and K–12 student support, all in the pursuit of greater diversity, equity and inclusion on College Hill and beyond.

The University committed, among other actions, to establishing the CSSJ, appointing Bogues as director. When the center opened, Simmons became chair of its advisory council.

“Ruth Simmons is an extraordinary educator,” Bogues said. “She understood very early that American universities can and should play a role in creating more just and equitable societies—and that that work begins with confronting history in all its complexity. Naming the CSSJ in her honor is deeply appropriate, since the center remains committed to the work she began.”



IMAGINE PHOTOGRAPHY

Brown President Emerita Ruth J. Simmons

Bogues said the generous donors who helped to establish the \$10 million endowment will prove instrumental in continuing to bring that commitment to life. A lead \$5 million gift came from the Wyncote Foundation and Waterman II Fund of the Philadelphia Foundation at the recommendation of David Haas, a 1978 Brown graduate. Haas recalled that when he learned about the Slavery and Justice Report, he felt pride in his alma mater.

“That intentional exploration of Brown’s legacy, done at a time when most universities weren’t doing anything similar, took such great courage,” Haas said. “I was impressed by Ruth Simmons’ deep passion and commitment to probing unresolved questions of history and working toward equity.”

As the CSSJ emerged as one enduring outcome of Brown’s Slavery and Justice Report, Haas said, he learned the full extent of the now 10-year-old center’s research, scholarship and community engagement under the leadership of Bogues.

“The center’s work is central to so many conversations across art, history, economics, literature and culture,” Haas said. “Tony understands how to reach across disciplines to address some of the biggest social issues of our time, including systemic inequality and anti-Black racism. I was moved to support the work he’s leading.”

Haas’ support inspired more than a dozen other gifts that ultimately established the \$10 million endowment. Among the supporters were Class of 1974 graduates and Brown parents Jerome and Mary Vascellaro, whose continual support over the last decade has helped fund slavery and justice research fellowships for graduate students, among other initiatives. Also supporting the endowment’s establishment were Joan Wernig Sorensen, a Class of 1972 graduate and a BrownTogether campaign co-chair, and E. Paul Sorensen, a Class of 1971 graduate and a member of the center’s advisory council. The pair are also Brown parents, and they received honorary degrees from the University in 2019.

Strong backing from alumni has fueled the center from the very beginning, Bogues said, and inspired gifts that directly supported the new endowment. In the CSSJ’s early years, Class of 1976 graduates and Brown parents Libby and Craig Heimark made gifts to launch the center’s work with an artist-in-residence, and they’ve continued to champion the center. Class of 1963 graduates Tom Bale and Ann Coles founded and co-chaired Friends of the Center, which has provided sustained financial support by raising awareness of CSSJ’s work among local and regional alumni groups. Bale and Coles’ advocacy has inspired gifts at all levels and across multiple generations of Brown graduates, including for the successful endowment fundraising in recent years.

Then and now, the center’s work has inspired Spencer Crew, a Class of 1971 graduate and Brown parent who contributed to the endowment, to lend his support. As a student at Brown, Crew advocated for increased representation of, and support for, Black students. Decades later, inspired by the University’s progress, Crew not only contributed to the CSSJ but also became chair of the center’s advisory council. The George Mason University history professor said he admires the center for its impactful partnerships both inside and outside of academia.

“The center hasn’t just reached the global academic community with its work,” Crew said. “It has forged connections in the Providence community through collaborative research projects and engagement with schools. It has engaged the public in conversations about history and race through plays and exhibitions, on and off campus. In the middle of the Black Lives Matter movement, the center organized compelling virtual conversations with scholars, artists and activists. The CSSJ’s commitment to engaging with the public is so important.”

A FORCE FOR TRUTH-TELLING

Chief among the CSSJ’s impactful partnerships, Bogues said, is its years-long collaboration with the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Bogues said the partnership is mutually beneficial: It allows both the center and the museum to generate new insights on the history of the slave trade and to share those insights with millions across the globe, something neither entity can do alone.

In 2014, the museum and center co-founded the Global Curatorial Project, a worldwide collective of museums and other institutions dedicated to gathering and sharing stories about the long shadow cast by racial slavery. The group, whose members span four continents, is now at work on an



IMAGINE PHOTOGRAPHY

Panel discussion between Simmons Center Director Anthony Bogues, Brown President Emerita Ruth J. Simmons and Brown President Christina H. Paxson

oral history project called “Unfinished Conversations,” a collection of recorded conversations, video narratives and audio interviews that shed light on how slavery and colonialism shaped certain communities and the world as a whole. Some of those stories will be included in a traveling exhibition tentatively titled “In Slavery’s Wake,” co-curated by the museum and opening in Washington in December 2024.

Holding the celebration at such a prominent partner institution in Washington, Simmons said, illustrated that one of the CSSJ’s greatest accomplishments thus far is its catalyzing force—its ability to kickstart bold new research and engage people across generations, races and borders in conversations about the history of slavery.

Underlying all of that work is a steadfast commitment to truth-telling, a tenet close to Simmons’ heart and a chief reason why she said she is proud the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice now bears her name.

“I believe that if one forecloses the possibility of learning the extensive consequences of human rights violations, such treatment is likely to continue in other and possibly more virulent forms,” Simmons said. “In our efforts to improve upon the human condition, truth is our ally and inspiration.”

Jill Kimball

Brown University Communications Manager and Writer for the Humanities and Social Sciences

Reflections on the Renaming of the Center

REFLECTING ON THE SLAVERY AND JUSTICE REPORT AND THE COMMITTEE’S WORK

I joined Brown University as Associate Provost and Director of Institutional Diversity in July of 2003 just a few months after President Simmons announced the formation of the Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice. The committee’s charge was to provide insight into issues surrounding the historical role of the transatlantic slave trade and its relationship to Brown. The method of this work was to engage a critical intellectual exploration using scholarly resources from a range of perspectives towards stimulating deep, serious and rigorous thought on the subject. The charge was, in President Simmons’ words, “to do what universities do.”

One of my first assignments was to staff the committee. Publically, this meant that my office would provide administrative support for the committee’s work. Privately, it quickly became apparent that I would be serving as arbitrator for the process. Primarily, the composition of the committee presented complications that required management. President Simmons wanted a range of perspectives represented. To achieve this, she appointed committee members from diverse disciplines, racial and ethnic groups, and genders. Disciplines represented included philosophers, historians, and behavioral scientists, to name a few. While the potential for diverse perspectives yielded from this configuration was great, it produced conflicts that required compromise. Two issues in particular threatened the progress of the committee from the outset. First, African Americanists on the committee embraced the notion that there is a relationship between the racial terror of slavery

and contemporary racial disparities. Other scholars from different perspectives questioned this assumption. Another challenge needing arbitration was whether to embrace the concept of crimes against humanity as descriptive of chattel slavery in the Americas. Some felt that the phrase was appropriate and fitting; others believed the concept was proprietary to different past atrocities. These issues impeded the early progress of the committee and required negotiation behind the scenes. For me this meant strategizing with the chair and the president on methods to move the conversation along including providing resources like books and lectures, listening and responding to all sides and convincing President Simmons to meet with the committee to provide her insight. Through these types of interventions, the committee was able to move past the conceptual barriers. Indeed, by the end of our work, the committee as a whole adopted both of the ideas as reflected in the final report.

The report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice is a model of excellence derived from inclusive, informed and rigorous deliberations. Some believe that such products can emerge organically by simply bringing smart motivated people together to solve a problem. President Simmons did not leave such an important task to chance. Like most of her decisions, appointing me to staff the committee was strategic. She anticipated the clashes in ideology and perspectives. She knew that the committee would need more than administrative support. She knew before we started that the committee would need a shepherd. That she trusted me to be that guide, is an honor that I hold dearly.

Dr. Brenda Allen

President of Lincoln University

Read Brown University’s Slavery and Justice Report at slaveryandjustice.brown.edu/report

A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP: DR. RUTH J. SIMMONS' IMPACT ON BROWN UNIVERSITY AND THE SIMMONS CENTER

I remember Craig Heimark '76, P'11, P'14, P'17 and I meeting the newly appointed President Simmons on her first trip to the West Coast. We met for lunch at the Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco. The three of us engaged in a pleasant conversation about our academic interests and our international career experiences. President Simmons shared her goals for Brown in the areas of need-blind admissions, faculty hiring and expansion. Craig pegged her as a skilled operational executive. We observed her as a quick study no-nonsense focused leader. Her decisiveness shone through her charming demeanor. It comes as no surprise that, under Dr. Simmons' leadership, Brown underwent a shift towards need-blind admissions for U.S. applicants, thanks to the funds raised by the Boldly Brown Campaign where Craig and I served as co-chairs on the West Coast.

Early in Dr. Simmons' tenure, she instituted Presidential Advisory Committees for which she would appoint interested and active alumni to participate. She asked me to serve on the Advisory Council on Admissions and later on the Presidential Leadership Council. In both these groups, I was able to see the impact of her quick insightful action and her ability to raise funds for the next set of goals. So when, as an Emerita, she reached out to ask if I would be interested in joining the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice's (CSSJ)—now known as the Simmons Center—advisory board, I said yes immediately. She and Debra Lee, her co-chair, in spite of their busy day jobs, managed to bring this new young council to life. They, with the talented Director Tony Bogues, were able to shine the light on the CSSJ origin story and garner national attention.

Our early efforts raised enormous awareness if not commensurate funds. The consortium of Universities Studying Slavery (USS) located at UVA has grown from a handful of institutional members in 2016 to currently listing 100 participating institutions in 2023. Dr. Simmons shared recently that more than one-third of the outreach she now receives involves the subjects of slavery and justice.

After completing my tenth year as a CSSJ Council member, I learned more of the origin story of the CSSJ during an address by Dr. Simmons at The Oprah Winfrey theater at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. The story actually began in 2001 when, as the

newly inducted President at Brown University, Dr. Simmons was asked to comment on the University's historic ties to the slave shipping businesses that funded and physically contributed to its construction. Her answer to that question was strong and provocative. She responded that Brown University is an institution of learning, research and scholarship. She committed that the question would first be explored through excellent research. The research would provide an important foundation for the Brown community to understand and grapple with its findings. What began as a probative question twenty years ago led us to the current moment where institutional self-studies are part of a movement at hundreds of academic institutions around the world.

Time has taught us that scholarly research properly done can provide missing links to questions unanswered. In this query we now know that this research would rescue historic truths that without attention could have been lost at sea. I will probably never know whether the omission of the origin story was an oversight or a purposeful decision. Regardless, the decisive manner in which Dr. Simmons responded to the 2001 question and her perseverance to have Brown self-study, present the findings, and grapple with its legacy is one of the most courageous moments any leader had to publicly manage. Imagine the moment—the first African American and the first woman to become an Ivy League President is questioned about Brown's part in slavery at her debut public discussion. With quick wit and decisive voice she challenges her new institution to face its previously unexplored history. Dr. Simmons gave us a lesson in courage, character and strategic vision. Not only was she a pragmatic operational executive, she is a force for truth and transparency—rare attributes especially in our current times. With the renaming of the CSSJ to the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, we honor her courage and foresight.

Libby Heimark '76, P'11 '14 '17

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

DOCUMENTING THE PAST, SHAPING THE FUTURE

I learned about the Slavery and Justice Report as an alumnus who hadn't been in regular touch with my alma mater. On hearing about this report I was extremely proud of Brown's intentional exploration of its founding legacy and relationship to the slave trade. This was a time when few universities or larger public institutions were doing anything of the kind. I was especially impressed by Dr. Ruth Simmons' deep passion, courage, commitment to probing unresolved questions of history, and her leadership in leading an ongoing institutional process of working toward equity.

In more recent years, as the Center became more well known—thanks to Director Tony Bogues—I learned about the extent of the Center's research, scholarship and community engagement. Tony understands how to reach across disciplines to address some of the most significant social issues of our time. The work of the Simmons Center embodies qualities that are baked into the DNA of Brown and that drew me to go there as a student, namely a firm commitment to truly independent study and a cross-disciplinary, collaborative approach to inquiry and learning.

I became directly involved at the start of a notable documentary project that Wyncote Foundation has been

supporting, "Creating the New World: The Atlantic Slave Trade," directed by Stanley Nelson and his company, Firelight. This project related in a central way to the Simmons Center Work. This led Wyncote to support the Center in organizing four international convenings of leading researchers in the field to share their work and learn from each other.

What began as a significant scholarly initiative for the Center has at the same time become an invaluable resource for the documentary. The Center continues to work with Firelight to produce the study guide and curriculum for the film. Again, this has been a collaboration where the Simmons Center has contributed deep scholarship that enables much broader education and awareness of many important issues to reach a broader public.

More recently, I joined the Advisory Board of the Center and remain excited to participate in supporting efforts to grow the Center and the impact of its initiatives.

The Simmons Center's work, in collaboration with partners in different disciplines across Brown's curriculum as well as with other leading partners in the field, is central to so many conversations across art, history, economics, literature and culture today. The Center's naming after Dr. Ruth Simmons is a most fitting recognition of the importance of the work that the Center engenders, and at the same time honors her unique and irreplaceable leadership in the field.

David Haas '78

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

Members of the President's Advisory Council on the Simmons Center from left to right: Libby Heimark '76, P'11, P'14, P'17; Mary Vascellaro '74, P'07; Dr. Ruth J. Simmons, Founding Board Chair Emerita; Prof. Anthony Bogues; Pablo Sorensen '71, ScM'75, PhD'77, LHD'19 hon., P'06; Rakim H. Brooks '09; David Haas '78; Spencer Crew PhD. '71, P'00, P'04, Chair. Members not pictured include: James T. Campbell and Katherine Chon '02



Performances

the cosmic matter of Black lives

A ritual performance by Cherise Morris '16

As part of the Simmons Center's 10th Anniversary series of activities, the Center invited long-time friend and Brown alumna Cherise Morris, class of 2016, for the premiere of her new piece, "the cosmic matter of Black lives." In this ritual performance, anchored by writings from her forthcoming book, "the cosmic matter of Black lives," Cherise Morris explored the ways ancestral wisdoms and a reconnection with Indigenous and diasporic nature-based healing practice can guide us forward into a future of ecological harmony and racial justice. The performance was followed by a conversation and audience Q&A moderated by Rachel Christopher, Assistant Professor of the Practice in Acting.

Cherise Morris is an award-winning writer, interdisciplinary performance artist, ritualist, spirit worker and healer born and raised in rural Virginia and living in Detroit, MI. Merging writing, poetry, prayer, ritual and performance, Cherise's work strives to connect us through a shared sense of humanity and affirm and uplift us in our journeys of individual healing and collective transformation. Her writing and multidisciplinary performance work has been supported by a host of regional and national organizations, including the Knight Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, Red Bull Arts, Allied Media Projects, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Poets & Writers, and PEN America. Her essays have twice been recognized as notable works of literary nonfiction in Best American Essays 2018 and Best American Essays 2019.



Cherise Morris '16 performing a ritual



[Watch the performance](#)



"ON BEING ENSLAVED" A PERFORMANCE BY THE MARIAN ANDERSON STRING QUARTET

The mission of the Marian Anderson String Quartet (MASQ) has been deeply aligned with the Simmons Center since long before our first collaboration in 2013. Very much like our namesake Marian Anderson, the MASQ has devoted its 30 year career to exploring issues of equality, diversity and expression from the perspective of the classical performing artist. As an ensemble of African-American women, our programming reflects our very personal desire to use sound to dispel the silence around these important topics.

Our most recent visit, as part of the Center's 10th anniversary celebration, was centered around a recital entitled "On Being Enslaved" which chronicles the sojourn of the enslaved from

the auction block to the concert stage. It is a journey in sound that explores themes of freedom, transformation, and the healing power of music.

It was our incredible honor to present this work under the auspices of the Simmons Center and we are excited by our discussions for future collaborations.

Nicole Cherry, Prudence McDaniel,
Marianne Henry, and Diedra Lawrence

Marian Anderson String Quartet
2015 Heimark Artists in Residence

[Watch the performance](#)



Marian Anderson String Quartet recital of "On Being Enslaved"



PUBLIC HUMANITIES PROJECTS

Unfinished Conversations Summer 2023 Researcher Reflections

Unfinished Conversations (UC) 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. Inspired in part by cultural theorist Stuart Hall who believed that cultural identity and history are not fixed, but rather is the subject of an “ever-unfinished conversation,” Unfinished Conversations will initiate a series of workshops and programs in strategically chosen communities around the world.

In Summer 2023, graduate and undergraduate researchers reviewed Unfinished Conversations footage from interviews from communities in Freedom Villages of Senegal (the area between Saint-Louis and the Senegal River Valley); in Liverpool, UK, a port city that is home to the oldest Black community in Europe; in Africatown, USA a community founded by descendants of enslaved people who had been stolen from their home in Africa and brought to the U.S. aboard the slave ship Clotilda in 1860, decades after the 1807 Act prohibiting the importation of enslaved people; in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with community historians, scholars, activists

musicians, samba dancers, Afro-Brazilian and community religious leaders; in South Africa with scholars and activists at the Iziko Slave Lodge as well as with farm workers at the Groot Constantia Wine Estates who spoke frankly about their living and working conditions on various wine farms; and Afropean communities in Brussels, Belgium. During Summer 2023 the research team spent hours reviewing, editing, translating, summarizing, and cataloging these interviews both for the archive as well as to support the development of media pieces that will appear in the forthcoming traveling exhibition, “In Slavery’s Wake.”

The Unfinished Conversations project is funded through the generous support of the Abrams Foundation.

From left to right: GCP Archivist Bianca Pallo, UC researchers Yannick Etoundi, Laura Tamayo, Néleri Alejandra Figueroa Torres, Dillon Stone, and Simmons Center Associate Director of Public Humanities Programs, Shana Weinberg. Researchers not pictured include: zuri arman, Daniel Everton, and Gustav Hall.



JANELLE APONTE

THE VIOLENCE OF WITNESSING

Working on the Unfinished Conversations Project this summer allowed me the opportunity to draw connections and linkages across the African diaspora in ways I was previously not afforded. Beginning with viewing interviews from Africatown, I was immediately thrown into contexts different from my own yet whose contours were familiar to me. The interviewees reminded me of great aunts and uncles, grandparents, and cousins to whom I owe a visit. This familiarity, while comforting, also took a toll over time. Reviewing their experiences of precarity required I read between the lines of their resistance efforts to gather the ways they were still being subjected to discrimination and violence for their original “sin” of being Black and, consequently, captured against their will. Scholars in Black studies talk about the violence of the archive and I understood this sentiment in the abstract. But confronting this archive of the present gathered by Unfinished Conversations brought this violence into sharp relief for myself in ways beyond simple intellectual exercise or philosophical abstraction. Over the course of the summer, I began to feel these stories in my blood like they were sediment and my body a river flowing over the bank’s edge, perhaps the one Cudjoe Lewis arrived at in Alabama in 1860. Indeed, water—along with hands—was a common theme. Both allude to a certain type of tactility and movement, a movement that carried my consciousness across the Atlantic to South Africa for the second half of the summer. This archive was obviously unfamiliar in many ways, but because of the global catastrophe that is anti-Blackness, I still found myself resonating with some of these interviewees. The way one interviewee from South Africa, for example, spoke of her grandmother pushed me back from my desk and required I take a lap around my office. I was struck by the intimacy of her witnessing of her grandmother’s racialized strife and burdensome relation with capital and managerial labor that undoubtedly drained her vitality and dynamism—the costs of Blackness in the colonial context. These, too, are things I’ve witnessed. After this summer, I’m left with a question: after the witnessing is over, what do we owe to those whose suffering we just witnessed?

zuri arman ’26 Ph.D.

Unfinished Conversations Researcher

PARALLELS

I had the lovely privilege to work with the Unfinished Conversations program as an Archives Assistant. In a practical sense, I gained essential skills that expanded my knowledge in what is involved with digital preservation and working on a project with such a large and important initiative. I also gained significant insight into the Afro-Brazilian experience, which differs from my personal life experience with the Azorean-Cape Verdean context. I witnessed many parallels, differences, and the stories of people sharing the reality of racial slavery and its after effects. I also worked closely with the material from South Africa, where the testimonies of the vineyard workers stay with me to this day. I cannot thank the Center or the project team enough for this amazing opportunity.

Daniel Everton ’24 A.M

Unfinished Conversations Graduate Archivist

PRESERVING HUMANITY

At the intersection of archive and exhibition, the Global Curatorial Project informed me of the personal responsibility required to truthfully describe and represent oral histories. This issue emphasizes the need to strike a delicate balance between curatorship and ethics. While delving into interviews conducted in Senegal, a pattern of fluid exchanges—more akin to monologue than an interview—emerged. It is powerful to be faced with the challenge of curating and summarizing narratives devoid of a question-and-answer structure; that is, to pick apart material that is innately whole. Ultimately, it accentuates how recognizing patterns within historical narratives should operate without forcefully superimposing interpretations. It is about embracing the threads that weave materials together while upholding the intrinsic value of each individual account.

Being one of the few people to actively engage with large sums of this material has been the most authentic and brilliant way in which I have learned about colonialism and enslavement. Oral histories have the power to humanize historical accounts that are often devoid of accuracy and care—given how history is controlled by colonial institutions. Therefore, particularly acknowledging that this work is possible through Brown University—a colonial institution with deep ties to racial slavery—I aspire to prioritize sustaining the level of humanity intrinsic to the source material while condensing it into the written form and pondering about what it means to actively pursue ethical archival and curatorial practice.

Nélari Alejandra Figueroa Torres ’25

Unfinished Conversations Researcher

INSIGHT AND EXPRESSION

Spending my summer working on the Unfinished Conversations project has provided me with remarkable new insight on racial slavery’s impact within a global and cross-cultural context. Starting with Liverpool, I was able to delve into the rich Black community fostered by the city’s positioning as a hub of diasporic interaction. Each interviewee brought unique perspectives from their familial heritage, each providing a new lens through which to analyze racial slavery’s afterlives. Particularly captivating for me was the physical and facial expression of the interviewees. It was through these non-verbal modes of communication that a deeper understanding of the intimate ideas they were expressing was able to be reached. One interviewee from Liverpool, UK for example, found himself embracing an elder in a warm hug as the elder entered the mosque where his interview was being conducted. This came almost immediately after he expressed the importance of attaining education through one’s elders and ancestors. A similar dynamic was witnessed in the Brazil interviews, as interviewees frequently had physical outbursts of emotion to highlight their stories. In one of the most visually remarkable moments of Brazil’s interviews, a samba musician plays a song on his *cuíca*, looks towards the camera, and grins as the camera cuts to black. This intimate moment comes after the musician expresses the ways in which playing music connects him to his ancestors and Afro-Brazilian heritage. In short, these moments of visual engagement expanded my understanding of what it means to learn. Indeed, there will always be much to gain from textbooks, lectures, and essays. Emotional vulnerability and expression, however, serve as a foreground for educational engagement in unimaginably potent ways.

Gustav Hall ’24

Unfinished Conversations Researcher

IN SERVICE OF THE PRESENT

When Professor Bogues first outlined the origins of Unfinished Conversations and described the many years of work that had led to the development of “In Slavery’s Wake,” he shared the urgent request a group of persons who lived on the outskirts of Dakar. “Please tell our stories,” they said. Despite my previous research experience in the archives, I immediately felt the full weight of this incredible responsibility. In contrast to my past research experience, our task was not to bring the so-called expired narratives of the archive to life—to unearth them in service of the present—but instead to engage and represent the experiences of the still-living.

Among other things, I learned that the oral history method carries the possibility of immediate and long-term social impact for individuals and their communities. Some of the interviewees were at first hesitant to share certain parts of their life story. They seemed to distrust external actors. Malintention, exploitation, and neglect were such common threads across all of the UC site locations. But more often than not, as the interviews progressed, interviewees became more willing to share, in detail, the intimate stories that had informed their lives. For them, the experience not only offered an opportunity for catharsis but, more significantly, placed their personal reflections at the center of ongoing de-colonial and anti-colonial discourses and in service to a project of global significance. The last thing I’ll say: memory was constantly at work, either directly or indirectly, spoken or unspoken, throughout these interviews. I was continuously struck by how memory was operating in the oral-collection and how, for many interviewees, refusing to forget had become a crucial strategy (not a cure) for world-building and reimagining.

Dillon Stone ’25

Unfinished Conversations Researcher

DEEPER WISDOM

As Global Curatorial research assistant under the Unfinished Conversations project, I learned about the different ways that racial slavery’s legacies exist in locations such as Liverpool, UK and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. During interviews, each narrator shared with me wisdoms that I will never forget and revealed global systemic injustices that I had not previously been cognizant of as someone living in the U.S. It is the echoing of their words in my ears that guided my research presentations and interview summaries for the Global Curatorial Project exhibit, “In Slavery’s Wake.” As someone who enjoys museums and hopes to work within them, I know this position has permanently altered the way I operate in these institutions. I’ve come to realize there are questions that must be asked in every exhibition and every display of art: who decided; who led; who served; whose stories are being told; whose stories aren’t being told; how can we effectively pass the microphone around to each person who hopes to speak?

Laura Tamayo ’25

Unfinished Conversations Researcher

Reimagining New England Histories

REIMAGINING CULTURAL BELONGINGS AT TOMAQUAG MUSEUM

During this past academic year, the Simmons Center enabled me to continue working at the Tomaquag Museum, Rhode Island’s only Indigenous-led museum, located in Exeter. In the coming years, the Tomaquag Museum will be moving to a new location and storage facility adjacent to the campus of the University of Rhode Island. When I arrived at the museum in 2019, the majority of the collections were not formally inventoried, meaning they did not have photographs, location data, descriptions, or IDs. Without an inventory, keeping track of the collections during this move would not be possible. Beginning in 2021, I worked with interns from URI, Mystic Seaport, and Brown University to oversee and complete a formal inventory of the museum’s 10,000 cultural Belongings. With the help of Bridget Hall (A.M. in Public Humanities 2023, Brown University), I finalized this inventory in December 2022 and began the second stage of the project, which aims to enter the inventory data into the museum’s collections management system, PastPerfect.

Preparing for this data conversion required many hours of work, which included research on multiple Belongings in the collection to ensure their descriptions reflected their provenance as well as Indigenous knowledge about them. In most museums, collections are categorized using nomenclature systems that organize objects according to hierarchies. This nomenclature does not work for an Indigenous-led museum, as it does not reflect Indigenous knowledge about cultural Belongings as connected to people and other Belongings in the past, present, and future. In addition to data cleanup, we worked towards updating the PastPerfect nomenclature lexicon to reflect Indigenous categories for cultural Belongings, rather than Western hierarchies. While imperfect, this project has allowed us to create the foundation for future processes at the museum, such as creating and applying Traditional Knowledge (TK) Labels. With the help of Reimagining New England Histories interns from Mystic Seaport, we are now on track for the full inventory to be uploaded into PastPerfect in September 2023, right in time for the upcoming collections move.

Allyson LaForge ’24 Ph.D.

Reimagining New England Histories Collections Management Assistant

Symbolic Slave Garden

CULTIVATING LEGACY

During the 2022–2023 school year, the Symbolic Slave Garden Student Caretaker group was created to maintain and grow the Simmons Center Symbolic Slave Garden. The Garden was created almost ten years ago by Professor Geri Augusto and is now guided by Professor Renée Ater and Center Manager Kiku Langford McDonald. Students led the new direction of the garden as well as its reconstruction through dedicated research and physical care. Our approach to the project had to be balanced; we gained technical gardening knowledge of New England systems and knowledge of plants tied to the enslaved African experience in the United States.

Our starting place was researching gardens with a similar mission to represent the varied, rich relationships enslaved people formed with the land. We organized meetings with the *From Slavery to Freedom Garden* in Pittsburgh, PA and the *Sankofa Heritage Garden* at Colonial Williamsburg, VA to listen to their experiences and recommendations. We used the gathered knowledge about other practices and programs to inform new research, design, and goals for the future, and also built lasting, reciprocal bonds with other gardens for the enslaved. Along the way, a multitude of university and community events—for example the learning series “An

Indigenous Perspective on Indigenous Plants” with Lorén Spears—helped build a repertoire of place-based, Indigenous knowledge and the present-day legacies of Black and Indigenous land stewardship. In the same vein, the workshop “Herbalism Practices of Our Enslaved Ancestors” with Coco Dickerson was hosted by the Simmons Center in February 2023. Through these experiences we grew a collection of resource books within the Simmons Center’s Library for this project.

In the end, we decided to select new plants for the garden based on three designations: medicinal, carried, and bioregional. Medicinal plants were foraged and grown by enslaved Africans to provide physical and spiritual care that unreliable plantation medicine could not provide. The Work Projects Administration (WPA) Slave Narrative Collection was a huge source of information about medicinal plant remedies used in different communities. Carried plants refers to plants and practices that were brought to North America by enslaved Africans. Bioregional plants are those that would have been encountered by slaves in New England that are strongly tied to Narragansett livelihoods.



The next step was designing the garden. Students created a recommendation guide to keep track of the maintenance, priorities, and design of the garden going forward. In the spring, we visited two local nurseries to gather the plants. We were able to collaborate with the Brown University Greenhouse to care for seedlings before they were introduced to the garden and with Robert Farizer from University Facilities to learn about the history of the space between its creation and the student group’s start. There were many work days in the spring to get everything planted, to weed the garden, come up with a watering schedule to care for the new additions, and whitewash the garden wall. Throughout the year we have developed a working knowledge of gardening, enslaved gardens, and what it means to represent some of the experiences of enslaved Africans through plants and spiritual objects. We could not be more excited to begin more work on our list of new goals for the next school year.

Allyssa Foster '25

Symbolic Slave Garden Caretaker and Administrative Assistant



Symbolic Slave Garden Caretakers Cole Francis, Asha Baker, (with friend Mariah Masha), Helena Evans and Allyssa Foster, work to re-plant the garden in May 2023.



Serving a Plate Back Home Exhibition

This academic year I had the pleasure of working as the curator of the exhibition “Serving a Plate Back Home: Migration Stories of Latinx and Caribbean Restauranteurs in Providence, RI,” in collaboration with the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) and Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice. Based on interviews Dr. Krsiten Kolenz conducted with five restaurant owners, the exhibition explored how these spaces transcend the limits of geographical borders and expand the practice of storytelling into the culinary. While translating these interviews into a photo-based exhibition, I got to taste dishes from different parts of the world and learn how each owner carefully selects ingredients, prepares dishes, and curates an ambiance that reflects their commitment to a deeply personal and educational form of hospitality that reflects their identity. The exhibition featured the stories of Yveline Bontemp, the Haitian chef and owner of the Caribbean hideaway Garden of Eve; Joaquin Mesa, the owner and visionary behind the Oaxacan-style Mexican restaurant Dolores; Welbi Genao, the dominican chef of the Latin fusion food truck TrapBox PVD, Milena Pagán the owner of the puerto-rican cafe Little Sister, and Jenny Paiz Capron the co-owner of the neighborhood establishment Mi Guatemala.

My hope with the exhibition was to, first and foremost, inspire people to visit these restaurants and challenge the narrative of New England as a predominantly homogeneous white cultural landscape. But also I hoped that visitors who visit the exhibition learn—just as I learned in being a part of this project—that these restaurants are more than places to have a great meal. They are sites rich with innovation, imagination, and deeply personal stories of passionate entrepreneurs creating spaces of transnational gathering.

Kennedy Jones '23 A.M.

Graduate Fellow for the Study of the Public History of Slavery



Speculative Ecologies The Intimate Bond of Freedom and Green Exhibition

Nina Simone said “Freedom is a feeling...”

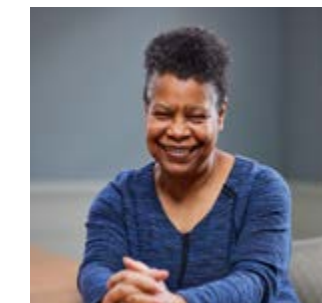
I am always thinking about what freedom looks and feels like: spiritually, emotionally, physically, metaphorically, spatially. My work explores questions that move from personal to collective memories of time, space and place. The answers (though entirely unpredictable) work themselves out on canvas. I love the beauty of unpredictability.

In “Speculative Ecologies The Intimate Bond of Freedom and Green,” I create a landscape of spiritual and physical freedom through the lens of history. This body of work is grounded in my research of the historic Maroon communities of the Dismal Swamp on the borders between Virginia and North Carolina. This vast ecosystem of black water, cyprus, and juniper stretched outwards and touched the communities on its perimeters. After the Civil War, the Maroon settlements disbanded and the freedom seekers integrated into the BIPOC communities on its borders where I grew up. This history is the cornerstone of Speculative Ecologies... My goal is to evoke and share the intangible feeling of “quitting slavery” and the personal power of “coming loose” from whatever binds us. I spend a lot of time thinking about and choosing color. The color leads me. My art making combines a variety of non-traditional methods. I use

carpenter tools, bamboo screens, sponges, large palette knives and brushes and hemp. Each painting is a series of layers, built up with acrylic paint and mediums. Again, this is all an intuitive experiment. I admit that it takes some courage to put it out there. Once that happens, whatever the outcome may be, I know when it’s done.

Each painting is its own narrative. I use a series of marks (that repeat throughout my work) to think about language, pictographs and mapping. These markings voice the silence of Maroons, Saints, Elders and others who are still with us. The Heimark Artist in Residency program has afforded me everything I advocate for all BIPOC artists: resources, time to experiment and develop, and most important—visibility.

Renée Elizabeth Neely-TANNER



[Explore the exhibition catalog](#)



Retrospective Exhibition

“Racial Slavery, Marronage, and Freedom: A 10th Anniversary Retrospective” featured artists Edouard Duval-Carrié, Jess Hill, and Rénoald Laurent. This retrospective exhibition, along with an accompanying catalog, was an integral part of the 10th anniversary of the Simmons Center.

Each artist showcased in the exhibition had established a long-standing relationship with the Center, with their individual works having been previously exhibited at the Simmons Center. To celebrate the Center’s 10th anniversary, these artists came together for a collaborative exhibition for the first time, creating new pieces in honor of this milestone. In addition to the exhibition, the Center hosted an “Artist Talk” event and conducted video interviews where artists shared thoughts about their artwork and their enduring relationships with the Simmons Center.



Artist Jess Hill pictured with quilt “Oh Say Can You See America and Its Birth, 2022”

“...one thing that I discovered is that enslaved people would use quilt patterns as quilt codes when they were running away. So I found that to be just so mind-blowing, that you can say, just through a pattern, you need to stay on this path, or you need to go northwest, or you need to zigzag so the hounds can’t trace you. But I think more people are coming to the understanding of how much history and tradition there is in quilting.”

Jess Hill

[Watch artist interviews](#)



Artist Edouard Duval-Carrié pictured with sculpture, “Cécile Fatiman, 2022”

“I’m an artist first of all, but my relationship with people like you [referring to Tony Bogues], and the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, has opened my mind and opened my interest to a history that has, first of all, been neglected—sometimes put under the carpet. I feel that it has become my duty to make sure that I try to develop some sort of visual language for it.”

Edouard Duval-Carrié

“So my work celebrated hope. Although my paintings do come from or are inspired by a period of darkness or what can be construed as being difficult. But also a little latent joy”

Rénoald Laurent
(translated from Haitian Creole)



Artist Rénoald Laurent pictured with “Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom, 2022”



Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States, 2022 by Rénoald Laurent

Center's New Art Acquisitions

The Simmons Center is honored to have acquired “Cécile Fatiman” by Edouard Duval-Carrié as a gift from the artist. The historic sculpture is on view in Norwood House, 82 Waterman Street.

The Center also acquired “Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States” by Rénoald Laurent. This vibrant painting now brightens the Seminar Room in the Simmons Center’s 94 Waterman Street building.

“Oh Say, Can You See: America and Its Birth” by Jess Hill was added to the John Hay Library permanent collection.

All three pieces were featured in the Center’s 10th anniversary retrospective exhibition “Racial Slavery, Marronage, and Freedom” in 2022.

Jess Hill in conversation with exhibition visitors



ARTISTS AND ARCHIVES

“Oh Say, Can You See: America and Its Birth” (2022) by Jess Hill has been accessioned into the John Hay Library’s permanent collections and is on display in the grand staircase. Since I arrived at Brown, the Simmons Center has been one of the Hay Library’s closest partners. It is an honor to display this quilt, which is so closely tied to the history of the Simmons Center and exemplifies the critical and transformative work that the Center catalyzes. The quilt is a centerpiece of the redesigned installation in the grand staircase, which now displays images from each of the areas of collecting distinction for the Hay as well as original art such as this quilt.

I saw this quilt at the opening of the Simmons Center’s 10th anniversary exhibition, *Racial Slavery Marronage & Freedom*.

It was a cold December day, dark in the way of early winter. The quilt was arresting in its burst of color and its scale. As I stood before it, the layers of texture and design spoke to me.

The careful choices of fabric—such as the map pattern—hinted to me of the layers of archival documents that the Hay Library preserves so that scholars and artists can create new knowledge, textual and visual. On a personal level, I was touched by the artistry of the quilt. My mother was a textile artist, and I grew up surrounded by thread and fabric. Quilts were the first windows I had into the world and were my original language for storytelling and meaning-making.

Amanda E. Strauss

Associate University Librarian for Special Collections and Director of the John Hay Library.

Edouard Duval-Carrié, Jess Hill, Anthony Bogues, Rénoald Laurent and Patrick Sylvain at “Artist Talk” event





PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

STUDENT ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

In the spring of 2023, the Simmons Center enrolled three Providence high school students to its Student Enrichment program to develop and implement community-based projects deeply rooted in social justice. Students have built knowledge of local Black and Indigenous history, gained hands-on research experience, and conducted interviews with community partners. This program has allowed us to grow our relationships with visiting school communities and support student work at the intersection of education and activism. Our first student, Hafsah, is a 10th grader from the MET School who is currently interested in creating a project about the history of African American fashion.

She has enjoyed participating in the Slavery & Legacy Walking Tours and is practicing to lead one for her advisor soon. Our second student, Demi, is an 11th grader from Classical High School who is currently researching youth activism in Providence for her junior research seminar. She is working on a 10–12 page research paper that involves both library research and interviews with community members with the support of our education team. Our third student, Emily, is a 12th grader from Classical High School researching Ethnic Studies implementation in medical school curricula.

Nada Samih-Rotondo

Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach

2022-2023 EDUCATION WORKSHOPS

Classical High School

11th and 12th graders explored the Brown family's involvement in the slave trade by analyzing a range of primary sources in an interactive workshop lead by the Simmons Center.

Brown's College Day

The Simmons Center welcomed students from School One, Shea High School and Mount Pleasant High School to the Center and presented information about educational resources and upcoming opportunities such as the Black & Indigenous Summer Institute.

Culture Remix Zine making

Brown and RISD students participated in a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour followed by a zine/art making workshop led by Nada Samih-Rotondo.

Inspiring Minds

The Simmons Center and tour guides hosted a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour for staff from Inspiring Minds as well as a post-tour reflection workshop.

Southside Charter Elementary School

5th graders along with their teachers took part in an educational workshop on the various connections between Rhode Island and the Caribbean along with a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour.

San Miguel School

The Simmons Center led a series of workshops for 5th–8th graders about the history of the Rhode Island trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Community Preparatory School

8th graders took part in a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour culminating in a post-tour reflection at the Center.

Staff Development Day

Brown University staff members participated in a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour and post-tour reflection workshop in June.

Swearer Center

Students in Theory and Practice of Engaged Scholarship, an introductory sociology course offered through the Swearer Center, participated in a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour followed by a reflection session co-facilitated by Carmine Perotti, Assistant Professor of Public and Community Service Studies at Providence College, and our education team. The reflection session explored the relationship between Brown and the city of Providence beginning with the University's founding and extending into the present.

Museum of Fine Arts Boston

We welcomed members of MFA Boston's Curators Circles for a presentation and Q&A session on our work and our mission. We presented research and information from the Slavery and Justice Report while also engaging in a discussion around the Center's goals and our priorities as an education team.

2023 BLACK AND INDIGENOUS SUMMER INSTITUTE

The Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery & Justice at Brown University, in partnership with the Tomaquag Museum, hosted a free 6-day Black & Indigenous Summer Institute (2023) for Rhode Island rising 10th–12th grade students (graduating 12th graders were eligible as well). The Summer Institute is designed within a restorative justice framework that centers self-reflection, critical thinking, and reading against the grain to reframe how we understand history and heal our communities. Students visited the Tomaquag Museum, the Mystic Seaport Museum, as well as other venues to uncover the hidden stories of Rhode Island’s communities of color. The week culminated with a celebratory visit to Martha’s Vineyard to visit the Aquinnah Cultural Center.

Program Objectives Included:

- Growth of student knowledge base of local Black, Indigenous and immigrant histories from the lens of historically oppressed groups
- Student reflection on themselves as learners and as representatives of historically impacted populations in joyful and affirming ways

Summer Institute students following a field trip with Haus of Glitter at the Esek Hopkins House in Providence, RI.



Student visit to the Mashantucket Pequot Museum

- Development of leadership skills through hands-on group activities, discussions, direct action training, and opportunities to express themselves
- Student collaboration, forming deep and meaningful supportive relationships with each other, facilitators, and community members in order to build interdependent communities of care

Nada Samih-Rotondo

Manager of Public Education Initiatives and Community Outreach



A summer institute student harvests healing herbs at the Haus of Glitter’s trip.

K-12 CURRICULUM COMMITTEE UPDATE

In 2022–2023, the Reimagining New England Histories K–12 Curriculum Committee (RNEHCC) worked with educators, community leaders, and scholars to plan and develop lessons that foreground the histories and experiences of Black and Indigenous communities throughout the Dawnland (New England). During the fall and spring, the committee met monthly for productive conversations about how best to structure, format, distribute, and implement the lessons we created. Many of our discussions built from our focus on educator experience to incorporate student experience, reflecting particularly on how to prepare educators to, in turn, prepare students for challenging and rewarding lessons that explored histories of dispossession, enslavement, resistance, and recovery. The RNEHCC evaluated, edited, and formatted curriculum materials that illuminate the experiences of Black and Indigenous mariners, created lessons that contextualized and recentered the Thanksgiving holiday and associated days of remembrance, and developed a podcast competition that challenged students to appraise and expand traditional colonial narratives. The committee has begun developing plans for addressing the social and emotional needs of students engaged in these lessons, both through materials that would accompany the lesson plans, and through professional development opportunities.

During the summer of 2023, the committee continued its work and began to develop lessons that align with and complement the RNEH-sponsored Mystic Seaport Museum exhibit “Entwined: The Sea, Sovereignty and Freedom.” The RNEHCC will also expand its mission to support educators by offering a professional development session where teachers can further develop the knowledge, skills, and materials that will enable them to meaningfully incorporate the histories and experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples into their lessons.

Mack Scott

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

Sofia Zepeda

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

Assistant Professor of Maritime History, Williams-Mystic





SENIORS AND FELLOWS

KIKU LANGFORD MCDONALD

Graduating Seniors

Slavery and Legacy Walking Tour Guide

As a guide for the Simmons Center’s Slavery and Legacy Walking Tour, I found space for a more detailed exploration of Brown’s histories of racial violence, as well as the opportunity to share these histories with Brown students, staff, Providence community members, and middle school students visiting campus. I was excited to build accessible and engaging public education around the university’s participation in racial slavery and colonialism, especially since my initial connection to the Simmons Center was through their support for student organizing which aligned with these goals. I view this work as a crucial step to demanding that Brown act on its histories and persisting legacies of racial violence in material ways. By staffing events such as the [“History, Justice, and Repair” reparations conference held in May 2022 by the Simmons Center](#), I had the opportunity to further engage with individuals in and beyond Brown committed to taking action following the public exposure of institutional violence. I look forward to drawing from the skills and experience I gained from my time as a student worker at the Simmons Center as I pursue work in health justice after graduation.

Roopa Duvvi ’23

English and Biology



above: Roopa Duvvi ’23 (middle) co-leading Slavery and Legacy Walking Tour

at right: Iman Husain ’23 leading Slavery and Legacy Walking Tour

Slavery and Legacy Walking Tour Guide

There is certainly a lot of buzz surrounding all kinds of research and scholarship being done across Brown’s campus—but no scholarly space ever felt more welcoming and more necessary to me during my years at Brown than the Simmons Center. I joined the Center’s staff as a Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour guide halfway through my time at Brown, and left with the wish that I had joined sooner. The work of the students, staff, and fellows at the Simmons Center is not only deeply impressive, but multifaceted in every way: there is the meticulous historical research into the various legacies of racial slavery as they shape our current reality; there are the public engagement programs, like walking tours, that engage with the community both within and outside the university; the thoughtfully curated art exhibitions and performances; and, perhaps most importantly, what pervades all of the work is a true dedication to care and community. The welcoming spirit and openness of the space (as created and upheld by all of the lovely people who are part of it) allows for the cultivation of the kinds of conversations that acknowledge both history and lived experience. Examining and reckoning with the past matters. What we can do to intervene in the present matters. And what we do now in order to imagine and shape a more just future matters.

It was an honor to work with all of the lovely people at the Simmons Center and to be part of a center of scholarship that not only does its research—and trust me, some really dedicated staff, researchers, and fellows are in fact doing the research—but also prioritizes the needs and wishes of the marginalized communities who, as subjects of colonial violence, must navigate the heaviness of harmful colonial legacies we must all work to mitigate.

Thank you to the amazing staff for making my time at the Center so valuable.

Iman Husain ’23

American Studies



Graduate Fellows

Reimagining New England Histories Graduate Proctor

As a Ph.D. candidate in the History department, my proctorship with the Reimagining New England Histories (RNEH) project has been an invaluable part of my graduate experience here at Brown. While I was able to touch base with the exhibition and education components of the project, I worked primarily with the publications committee to get the print and digital publication off the ground. As a graduate student, getting exposure to the backend work that goes into making a publication can be rare. Over the course of this academic year, I was able to support the creation of the RNEH publication from drafting the call for contributors, narrowing down the list of editors, and proposing avenues for community outreach. I cannot emphasize enough on the genuine sense of shared purpose fostered by the Simmons Center & community stakeholders. Everyone involved in the publication and the RNEH project as a whole has worked with the knowledge that our work has the potential to play a significant role in shaping a fuller, resilient, and vibrant history for New England. History is, at its core, a storytelling profession. To be able to be part of the creation of a platform for the Black, Indigenous, and Afro-Indigenous stories of New England has been a precious thing.

Imen Boussayoud '26 Ph.D.

Reimagining New England Histories Graduate Proctor

Slavery and Legacy Walking Tour Guide

The moment I saw the call, I knew I wanted to join the Simmons Center tour guide team. Having previously given tours about racial slavery in Providence, I find it a great way to push myself to communicate better. Public historians like myself bring archival research to a public audience, with a strong emphasis on creating clear, engaging dialogue on challenging subjects. It requires flexibility; the ability to pivot according to the audience's needs. This is a great example of that work; there is preparation, there is writing, and then there is the conversation. Standing there with a group next to the landscape of history, the bricks, the plaques, the documents, and pulling stories out makes the many hours of research and editing worthwhile. The questions people ask help me continue to improve the tour. And even more gratifying is when I hear how others are using what they learned during our tours, taking it in another direction, and the ways that these conversations have afterlives.

It can be challenging talking over lawnmowers, dodging frisbees and getting wet from the rain. But it has been a great privilege to engage others in these onsite dialogues about the history of racial slavery and justice at Brown and beyond. Understanding the ways our present moment was built, over time, and how echoes of the past are still with us today adds to my life and work, and I am thankful to do it.

Traci Picard '23 A.M.

Slavery & Legacy Walking Tour Guide



Traci Picard '23 A.M. leading Slavery and Legacy Walking Tour

Postdoctoral Fellows

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

I am deeply grateful to the Simmons Center and the John Carter Brown Library for a rich, productive, and inspiring year. The faculty, staff, and fellows at both institutions bring a uniquely interdisciplinary and international perspective to the study of racial slavery and its legacies in the Americas. It has been extremely generative and thought provoking to be in conversation with this remarkable group of scholars, and I already see the seeds for numerous future collaborations. It has surely enriched my research and writing, and will continue to do so into the future.

My dissertation took a structural approach to the changing legal landscape of Jamaican racial slavery and the implications of those changes for enslaved people's strategies of survival and resistance. During my time at the Center, I have been restructuring and rewriting my manuscript to instead take a microhistorical approach to enslaved people's quotidian practices of resistance and survival. This work shares an archival foundation and some lines of argument with the dissertation, but also adds new texture, detail, and insights more accessible at this granular scale. I anticipate the final book will consist of an introduction, six body chapters, and a conclusion, and I have been able to draft four body chapters to date. I hope to complete the introduction, an additional chapter, and a prospectus over the summer, with plans to pitch the book to university presses beginning in the fall.

I have additionally been making progress on several related but distinct articles. I have finally submitted for review a journal article articulating a more critical reading practice for engaging slave inventories, using the records of a specific Jamaican sugar plantation as a case study. I will be submitting a second piece which examines how intimacy and proximity within a single household shapes the resistance strategies of enslaved women working as domestic servants. This post-doctoral fellowship has also provided the opportunity for me to begin a new article project with an Africanist historian colleague examining ethnographic knowledge production about Igbo land in the immediate wake of the publication of Olaudah Equiano's famous autobiography.

Michael Becker

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

ANNUAL REPORT

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

My fellow presentation "Slave Resistance, Criminal Law, and Regimes of Racial Violence in the Americas: Brazil, Cuba, and the United States (1820–1850)" was inspired by the first two chapters of my book project, provisionally titled "The Politics of Racial Violence in the Americas: Slavery, Citizenship, and Criminal Law in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States, 1776–1912." The preservation of public order in these countries demanded special laws and legal procedures that compromised the rule of law principle and transformed their justice systems into instruments of racial order. Yet there were important differences between these regimes of racial violence. Each country had their own justice system and technologies of punishment. Furthermore, violence was more explicitly racialized in the United States and Cuba than in Brazil. At the same time, mob violence was more common in North America than in Latin America. And the state was more violent against Blacks in Cuba than anywhere else.

These differences were the consequence of distinct political systems and regimes of law, citizenship and race. Democracy and white supremacy in the United States encouraged the common white man not only to vote, but also to conduct parallel forms of justice like lynching. In contrast, the Brazilian monarchy reinforced oligarchical powers and extralegal violence was rarely a mob action. The prerogative of violence and justice was essentially a privilege of the planter class that was predominately white and subordinated free and enslaved people of color. Finally, the presence of a colonial military government reinforced the state prerogative of violence in Cuba. Slaveholders were the main authorities on the plantations, but the preservation of the racial order depended on the Spanish imperial state. The politics of racial violence were distinct but equally effective in subjugating people of African descent in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States.

Marcelo Rosanova Ferraro

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

Postdoctoral Research Associate in Slavery and the Public Humanities

As the Simmons Center Postdoctoral Research Associate in Slavery and the Public Humanities, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from the Center and Firelight Media on the Transatlantic Slave Trade Film Curriculum Project.

I have been able to bring my experience as a digital editor and research interests in constructions of race in documentary films to my work at the Simmons Center. I am working on the Film Curriculum Project using the [four-documentary film series](#) by Stanley Nelson, “Creating the New World: The Transatlantic Slave Trade.” Alongside project management, I have worked on and designed the first draft of the curriculum accompanying the film series. The platform hosts original didactic materials aimed at using the films in the K–12 classroom to teach the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade from a non-Eurocentric perspective. During the spring semester, I organized a two-screening

film event, “How We Remember: Colonialism and Slavery in Contemporary Nonfiction Films.”

This work complements my book-project, “To Educate is to Civilize: Educational Campaigns through Cinema in British and Italian Colonial Rules (1910–1945),” which examines and compares a selection of educational nonfiction films constructing racialized colonial subjects from British and Italian African territories. Educational films from the colonial period were pro-imperial propaganda tools released and distributed by the colonial governments promoting the “civilizing mission” accomplished in the occupied territories. My study’s comparative approach allows an understanding of the similarities and differences in the colonial imaginaries that the British and Italians constructed over 45 years of colonial rule as they depicted the oppression of different African communities as humanitarian intervention.

Leonora Masini ’22 Ph.D.

Postdoctoral Research Associate in Slavery and the Public Humanities

Film screening event “How We Remember: Colonialism and Slavery in Contemporary Nonfiction Films” at Simmons Center Seminar Room



New Fellows

ALYCIA HALL

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

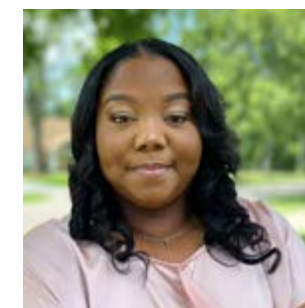


Alycia Hall is a historian of the African Diaspora with a focus on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Caribbean. In particular, she examines Jamaican Maroon communities in the plantation matrix from the 1790s through the 1890s. She will receive her

Ph.D. in African American Studies and History from Yale University in December 2023. Her manuscript, tentatively titled “Strategic Ties: Family, Land, and Plantation Connections in Maroon Jamaica,” examines the formation of five Jamaican Maroon communities and their interactions with other peoples and groups in Jamaica from the Second Maroon War of the 1790s to the 1890s. Parsing through intricate relationalities, Hall’s work traces how Maroon communities navigated a changing social, political, and economic world as Jamaica transitioned from slavery to free labor.

LATOYA M. TEAGUE

Simmons Center/Watson Institute Joint Historical Injustice and Democracy Postdoctoral Research Associate



Latoya M. Teague is a Critical Black Literacy Scholar specializing in qualitative research methods, archival analysis, narrative inquiry, and Black storytelling. She joins us from the University of Texas at Austin, where she earned her Ph.D. in African and African

Diaspora Studies. Her dissertation engaged historical and literary re-memory, looking at the enslaved resistance as a form of literacy. Latoya approaches her research, having taught English language arts and reading for over ten years. She also worked as a high school librarian and media specialist. She is currently working on a book manuscript about literacy resistance and slavery.

ISAAC SEKYI MENSAB

Mapping Finance, Slavery and the Atlantic Slave Trade Proctor



Isaac Sekyi Nana Mensah is a Ph.D. student at the Department of History and recipient of the John Lax Memorial Graduate Fellowship. Isaac received his Bachelor’s degree from the University of Cape Coast and his master’s in African Studies at the

University of Ghana (Kwame Nkrumah’s Institute of African Studies). Before joining Brown, Isaac was the 2020–2022 recipient of the McKeown Fellowship at Columbia University in New York and the London School of Economics and Political Science. At Columbia and LSE, Isaac examined the plantation business of Jesuit slaveholders of Georgetown College (Georgetown University), shedding new light on the university’s complicated past with the Atlantic slave trade. Here at Brown, Isaac is working closely with Professor Rockman and Gabriel Rocha on the parallel development of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the emergency of modern financial institutions such as banking and insurance.



FRIENDS OF THE CENTER

Getting to Know the Friends

The Simmons Center Friends were co-founded by Tom Bale '63 and Ann Coles '63 on the occasion of their 50th reunion. The Simmons Center Friends are an important network of alumni and community members that help to support the Center's work and help connect its programs and resources to more communities.

The Simmons Center Friends support the Center's work in many different ways, including financial and outreach support, connecting the Center with their local alumni affinity or regional group, and/or by joining the committee which meets monthly.

Hear from a few of the Simmons Center Friends about what the Center means to them:

What does being a Friend of the Center mean to you?



"Solidarity with like-minded good souls, and an ability to help foster impactful work at my alma mater and other organizations that are part of the fold."

Tom Bale '63, Simmons Center Friends Co- Founder



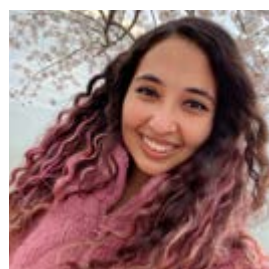
"Being a Friend of the Center is a way to contribute to Brown's efforts to honestly study the history and impacts of slavery and race relations on capitalism, national and local civilizations, and as part of my efforts, to contribute in a small way to healing its adverse influences."

Malcolm Farmer III



"The Center has expanded my thinking about slavery and its impact across the world, especially the many ways that slavery manifests itself in the present day. For example, the work of the Center has helped me and the Inman Page Black Alumni Council (IPC) build bridges with the Latino and Asian alumni communities through our deepened understanding of slavery continues to exist today and throughout the world."

Eldridge Gilbert '05, Inman Page Black Alumni Council President



"Being a Friend allows me to continue to stay involved with the CSSJ and Africana Studies, which were both the best parts of my college experience. It also allows me to connect with like-minded and like-hearted people beyond college, which is surprisingly difficult!"

Josette Souza '14

Hear more from the Simmons Center Friends and the social justice work they are doing in their communities at simmonscenter.brown.edu/friends-center

ONE BEAR | ONE BOOK

The One Bear | One Book program seeks to connect alums in a global book club where all are encouraged to read and discuss a selected title at the same time. Books are nominated by Brown Clubs across the nation: The Brown Club of Greater San Francisco, the Brown Club of Georgia, the Brown Club of Washington DC, the Brown Club of Miami with each club nominating a book that captures the zeitgeist of their region, a title they would tell a fellow alum: "you gotta read this."

To conclude this season's One Bear | One Book series, One Bear | One Book partnered with the Simmons Center in collaboration with Friends and the Inman Page Black Alumni Council (IPC) for a hybrid program for a community discussion of Brown University's Slavery & Justice Report 2nd Edition.

Moderated by James T. Campbell, Edgar E. Robinson Professor of History at Stanford University, the event featured panelists: Rakim Brooks '09, Simmons Center President's Advisory Council; Sydney Smith '22; Marcelo Rosanova, Simmons Center/Watson Historical Injustice and Democracy Postdoctoral Research Associate; with introductions by Simmons Center Friends Chair, Sean Siperstein '05.

The discussion brought together members of the various Brown Club, alumni, students, members of the broader Brown community, and beyond for a captivating conversation that delved into diverse perspectives and examined the historical and contemporary implications of the Report.

[Watch "One Bear | One Book: Brown University's Slavery & Justice Report 2nd Edition"](#)



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Learn more about what it means to be a friend of the Center and how you can support the work to create a more equitable world by visiting <https://simmonscenter.brown.edu/>

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND THANKS

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

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Inside and outside back cover:

Audience at the Brown+Beyond celebration of the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice on March 30, 2023 at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

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