

Friends of the

PEMBROKE CENTER

Newsletter

40th
Anniversary


2022-23 PEMBROKE SEMINAR: “In the Afterlives and Aftermaths of Ruin”

In 2022-23, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Associate Professor of American Studies and English, will lead the Pembroke Seminar “[In the Afterlives and Aftermaths of Ruin](#).” The present is a time when the entire world seems to be in ruin—social, economic, political, and ecological ruin wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, right-wing radicalization within and across national borders, and the denigration of scientific and academic knowledge.

Approaches to understanding and addressing ruin come from many fields, disciplines, and vantage points. These include philosophical inquiry into the relationship between catastrophe and history, accounts in Native American and Indigenous Studies of the persisting effects of settler colonialism and land dispossession, contemporary Black art that represents the racialized and gendered violence of U.S. slavery, environmental humanities studies of climate change in science fiction, and Black feminist theorist Saidiya Hartman’s influential description of the “afterlife of slavery” as systemizing a “racial calculus” that maintains “skewed life chances” for descendants of New World slavery in the present.

The 2022-23 Pembroke Seminar will study different ways of conceptualizing ruin along with practices of survival, persistence, sustenance, and critique for those living in and after ruin. Through the Pembroke Seminar, Abdur-Rahman and participants will collaborate to mine the resistive politics,

critical archives, alternative geographies, and expressive practices of BIPOC, Black feminist, and LGBTQIA+ scholars and artmakers. Hence, while the “afterlives” in the seminar title connotes the persistent effects of a phenomenon beyond its formal end, the “aftermath” signifies a reckoning with the consequences of ruin.

The seminar will foreground the ongoing impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the perpetual, pervasive structural assaults on the lives of black and brown people. Participants will regard both critical and creative texts as necessary sources of social critique, political upheaval, aesthetic innovation, and transformative change. The seminar’s ultimate goal is to theorize systems of endurance and to promote reparative infrastructures amidst the ruin of our times.

Professor [Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman](#) specializes in African American literature and culture, gender and sexuality studies, and visual culture and media studies. Abdur-Rahman has been awarded fellowships from the Ford Foundation, the American Association of University Women, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, and the Mellon Foundation among others. Her first book, *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race*, was published by Duke University Press in 2012.



Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman



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From the Director



The close of the Spring 2022 semester marks the end of an eventful academic year at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women.

Despite the persistent challenges brought on by the public health crisis, we were able to continue holding in-person classes. This year, our Gender and Sexuality Studies program offered a total of 14 undergraduate courses over two semesters. Many

of these courses confronted societal challenges across borders and reflect the vital importance of our center's teaching in building a community dedicated to intersectional feminist inquiry.

Over the past several months, to mark our 40th anniversary celebrations, our outstanding team facilitated a number of in-person, virtual, and hybrid events, enabling audiences to witness groundbreaking research in action while remaining as safe as possible. We launched the inaugural Pembroke Center Publics Initiative and Lecture Series, which brings to Brown pathbreaking artists and scholars whose work contends with issues of gender and sexuality in a transformative manner. We also convened highly successful and well-attended programs under the auspices of our LGBTQIA+ Thinking initiative.

Our Archives team launched two successful in-person exhibitions—one at Pembroke Hall titled “Hortense J. Spillers: A Life Recorded,” and another co-curated with the Providence Public Library called “Tomboy.” If you find yourself in the area this summer, we hope that you'll be able to visit either or both. See a recap of some of the semester's events later in this newsletter.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to put a hold on several activities, including the awarding of faculty seed grants. Happily, this hiatus came to an end during the 2021–22 academic year. Please see the article on page 9 which details two new interdisciplinary projects that we are funding.

In other projects, we are thrilled to inform you that the first ten years of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* are currently in the process of being digitized. This exciting development means that an electronic archive of issues published from 1989 to 1999 will soon be accessible to a broader audience.

Since our founding four decades ago, we have combined academic rigor with a public-facing outlook. In the context of the distressing national news of a Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the Pembroke Center declares its solidarity with reproductive justice and women's health the world over. Our programming for next year will reflect these ongoing commitments.

I am delighted to offer congratulations to Brown's graduating class, which includes our impressive GNSS concentrators. We extend a warm welcome to students who will be joining the GNSS program this fall, as well as the 2022–23 postdoctoral fellows, faculty fellows, and student fellows who are coming on board for our next Pembroke Seminar, “In the Afterlives and Aftermaths of Ruin.”

Finally, I want to thank Anne Buehl '88, who served as Chair of the Advisory Council for the last two years. During these extremely challenging pandemic years, Anne has helped guide the Council and the Pembroke Center. I hope you will all join me in thanking Anne for her service and vision during her term. She will be succeeded by Sophie Waskow Rifkin '07, who is stepping up from the position of Vice Chair. In addition, Emily Coe-Sullivan '99 will become the new Vice Chair of the Pembroke Center Advisory Council.

Our work would not be possible without supporters like you. Thank you for your consistency, your collaboration, and your commitment to the Pembroke Center.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leela Gandhi', written over a horizontal line.

Leela Gandhi

Shauna McKee Stark '76, P'10 Director
of the Pembroke Center



Congratulations, Graduates!

The Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women is pleased to congratulate the Brown class of 2022, including our outstanding Gender and Sexuality Studies (GNSS) program concentrators, as well as Ph.D. students who completed our graduate certificate program.

Sara Bermudez (left) and Sabrina Bajwa (right) celebrate Commencement 2022 at the GNSS departmental ceremony in Pembroke Hall on May 27, 2022.

Undergraduate Concentrators

Sabrina Bajwa '21.5

Sara Bermudez '22

Laurel McIntyre '22

Graduate Certificate Students

Arianna Falbo

Philosophy, Ph.D. '22

Maggie Unverzagt Goddard

American Studies, Ph.D. '22

Eleanor Rowe-Stefanik

English, Ph.D. '22

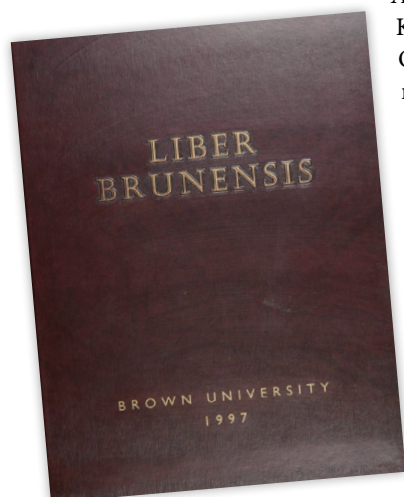
Reunion Oral History Interview with Class of 1997 Alumnae

In anticipation of their upcoming 25th class reunion, a group of Brown alumnae from the class of 1997 were interviewed by Assistant Archivist Amanda Knox for the Pembroke Center Oral History Project. This recorded interview documents the undergraduate experiences of Kavita Bali, Kathryn King Crowley, Stephanie Malia Sylvester Hom, Rebecca Kellar Duke, and Danielle Solari Larouco.

The interviewees recall some of their memories during their time on campus from their first year through graduation. Topics of discussion include

first-year housing and roommates, managing a college workload, and building friendships, as well as the Third World Transition Program at Brown. The alumnae also delve into their extracurricular activities, such as playing on the ice hockey, field hockey, and softball teams, as well as participating in the Brown Outdoor Club, the South Asian Student Association and the Asian American Student Association. Towards the end of the conversation, each interviewee shares their hopes for Brown's future, which include reinvigorating athletic programs, fostering intellectual freedom and creativity, and continuing to offer the satisfactory/no credit option.

The Brown University class of 1997 was the last class to graduate under President Vartan Gregorian. A video and a printable transcript of the recorded conversation are now available on the [Oral History Project website](#).



Meet the 2022-23 Postdoctoral Fellows

The Pembroke Center is pleased to introduce our 2022-23 [postdoctoral fellows](#), who in addition to teaching undergraduate courses and pursuing research projects, will participate in the Pembroke Seminar, “In the Afterlives and Aftermaths of Ruin.”



Melanie Abeygunawardana '16

- Shauna M. Stark '76, P'10 Postdoctoral Fellow
- Ph.D., English, University of Pennsylvania, 2022
- Dissertation: “Dissenting Flesh: Racial Feeling in an Age of Colorblindness”
- Recipient of the Pembroke Center’s 2016 Ruth Simmons Prize in Gender and Women’s Studies for her thesis, “The Persistent Dialogue: Butch-Femme Erotics as Queer Reading”



Megan Finch

- Nancy L. Buc '65 Postdoctoral Fellow
- Ph.D., English, Brandeis University, 2020
- Assistant Professor, English, University of Minnesota
- Book Project: “Perverse Relations: Idiocy, Madness, and Black Social Life”



Marianna Hovhannisyan

- Carol G. Lederer Postdoctoral Fellow
- Ph.D., Art History, University of California, San Diego, 2022
- Dissertation: “Double Assimilations, Empty Fields, and Orphan Objects: Mapping Armenian Erasures and Displacements Through Archival Metadata and Folk Culture”

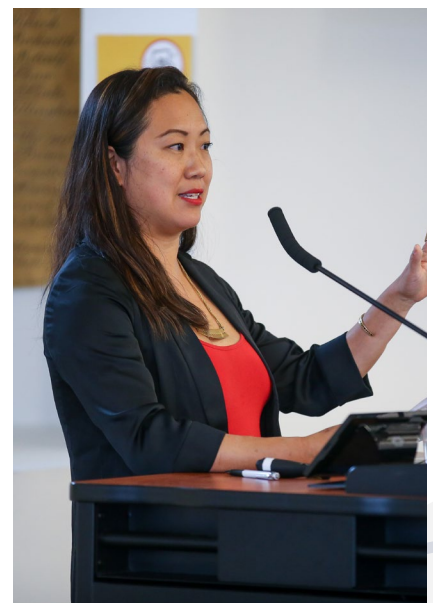
The Annual Elizabeth Munves Sherman '77, P'06 '09 Lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies

On March 24, 2022, Elena Shih, Manning Assistant Professor of American Studies and Ethnic Studies at Brown University, delivered the annual lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies, “The Trafficking Deportation Pipeline: Asian Massage Work and the Policing of Racialized Poverty.”

In recent years, the anti-trafficking movement has honed in on Asian massage work as a site of human trafficking, endorsing new forms of surveillance and policing on Asian migrant women workers. Drawing on community-based ethnographic fieldwork and oral histories with sex worker rights groups in the U.S. and Asia, Shih examined how such anti-trafficking endeavors police racialized poverty.

In light of the one year remembrance of the shootings at three massage businesses in Atlanta in 2021, Shih also discussed some of the ways that communities and grassroots activists have come together to mourn, organize, and demand an end to systemic violence.

Shih is a member of the Pembroke Center’s Feminist Theory Archive Advisory Committee.



Professor Elena Shih delivered the 2022 annual Elizabeth Munves Sherman '77, P'06 '09 Lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies.

Inaugural Publics Lecture Featuring Alexis Pauline Gumbs

On April 27, 2022, writer, scholar, poet, and activist Alexis Pauline Gumbs delivered the inaugural talk of the [Pembroke Center Publics Lecture Series](#). Gumbs describes herself as “a Queer Black Troublemaker and Black Feminist Love Evangelist.” As a writer, her feminist critical and creative practice includes poetry, fiction, experimental writing, and founding a number of inventive initiatives.

Her talk, “Nutmeg and the Scale of Revolution: for Audre Lorde,” provided an opportunity for Gumbs to share research from her forthcoming book, *The Eternal Life of Audre Lorde*, which focuses on how the Grenadian Revolution and the work of Kitchen Table Women of Color Press impacted Lorde’s political approach. Held in Pembroke Hall and also [recorded for the Pembroke Center’s YouTube playlist](#), this in-person event was well attended by students and faculty from across the Brown campus. Leela Gandhi, Shauna McKee Stark ’76, P’10 Director of the Pembroke Center, introduced Gumbs.

In lieu of a traditional Q&A, Gumbs led the room in an interactive “poetic oracle.” Introducing this as an “opportunity to ask a Lorde-ian question,” Gumbs welcomed audience members to participate. “When you have your question,” explained Gumbs, “then choose a letter from the alphabet, A through Z, that you want to associate with this question. It could have something to do with the question, or it could be your favorite letter, or the first letter of your name. That’s how we activate the oracle.” In response to each question, Gumbs read aloud a poem made up of words starting with the selected letter, and offered her interpretation of possible insights.



▲ Alexis Pauline Gumbs launched the inaugural event of the Pembroke Center Publics Initiative and Lecture Series.

At the end of the talk, Kevin Quashie, Professor of English at Brown University, inaugurated the Pembroke Center’s new exhibit, “Hortense J. Spillers: A Life Recorded,” which opened on the same day.

The Pembroke Center Publics Initiative and Lecture Series is a new initiative designed to bring to Brown guests whose work in any sphere—from academics to activism and well beyond—contends with issues of gender and sexuality in a transformative manner. This series was developed by the center’s new director, Leela Gandhi.



Hortense J. Spillers Exhibit Opens in Pembroke Hall

Audience members who attended the inaugural Pembroke Center Publics Lecture also had the chance to witness the opening of the Pembroke Center's exhibition on April 27, 2022. Curated by Pembroke Center archivists, "[Hortense J. Spillers: A Life Recorded](#)" offers visitors a firsthand look at the personal and professional papers of the renowned Black feminist theorist.

Spillers contributed her collection to the Pembroke Center's Feminist Theory Archive in the name of the Black Feminist Theory Project. The exhibition features archival items that showcase Spillers's professional life, scholarship, and personal interests. Highlights include an annotated 1985 draft of Spillers's landmark essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," which critiques how Black women have been figured in the American imaginary.

Also on display are a personal diary where Spillers recorded her reaction to the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, her talk about working as a Black professor during the 1970s, and handwritten correspondence from Toni Morrison. While appreciating items from the collection, viewers also encounter exhibit notes inviting them to consider how archives are formed, which stories they tell, and how available (and unavailable) materials make various narratives possible.

The exhibit was timed to launch on the same day as the Publics Lecture in part because Alexis Pauline Gumbs wrote a book that explores Spillers's work. *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity* is a work of literary criticism based on the archive of freedom-seeking Black women, including Hortense J. Spillers.

The exhibition, which is part of the Pembroke Center's 40th anniversary celebration, will be on view through December 21, 2022.



“Tomboy” Talk and Exhibit

On May 4, 2022, the Pembroke Center collaborated with the Providence Public Library (PPL) to consider the question, “What Does Tomboy Mean to You?” During this recorded webinar, Kate Bornstein ’69, performance artist and “gender outlaw,” talked with Virginia Thomas A.M. ’16, Ph.D. ’20, Postdoctoral Fellow at Rice University’s Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, and Janaya Kizzie, artist and the PPL’s Events and Programs Manager. The discussion aimed to move beyond stereotypes of the tomboy and instead called upon panelists to share their personal experiences related the idea of tomboy, and how the label affected their own identities.



What Does Tomboy Mean to You? panelists included Janaya Kizzie (top left), Kate Bornstein ’69 (top right), and Virginia Thomas A.M. ’16, Ph.D. ’20 (bottom).



This 2021–22 Shauna M. Stark ’76, P’10 Out of the Archive lecture was presented with support from the Friends of the Pembroke Center. A video of the event is now available on the [Pembroke Center’s YouTube playlist](#) along with other videos from previous events.

The talk complemented an exhibit that was also produced in a collaboration between the Pembroke Center Archives and the PPL. The exhibit called “Tomboy” was designed to examine the history of cultural expectations and gender norms for girls and women.

After a two-year long delay due to the pandemic, “Tomboy” was finally able to launch at the PPL. The exhibit was co-curated by Kate Wells, the library’s Curator

of Rhode Island Collections, and Mary Murphy, Nancy L. Buc ’65 Pembroke Center Archivist. Pieces on display include an early 1800s illustration of Alwilda the Pirate, a chest binder worn by a transgender man, and a tennis dress worn by Billie Jean King in 1974, on loan from the International Tennis Hall of Fame Museum, to name a few.

At the time of this publication, the exhibit has drawn over 2,000 visitors and has been featured in *Rhode Island Monthly* and on WPRI-TV’s *The Rhode Show*. [An interactive catalog of the exhibition’s offerings](#) is available on the PPL’s website.

World Team Tennis dress worn by Billie Jean King in 1974. On loan from the International Tennis Hall of Fame Museum. Poster advertising the “Battle of the Sexes” between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, 1973.



2022 Interdisciplinary Seed Grant Recipients

The Pembroke Center [interdisciplinary faculty seed grant program](#) supports transnational research initiatives that involve faculty from the humanities, social sciences, creative arts, health sciences, and science and technology studies. After a hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the program restarted in spring of 2022, and the following seed grants were awarded.

Project Title: “Politics of the Prescription Pad: Pain Pharmacology as a Cultural Process”

Faculty Project Directors: William Page, Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine; Kim Adams, American Council of Learned Societies Emerging Voices Fellow, Stanford University; Fred Schiffman, Sigal Family Professor of Humanistic Medicine, Professor of Medicine; Sarah Williams, Louise Lamphere Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies.

Abstract:

Scholarship has established that the experience of pain is culturally defined. Faculty members involved in this project seek to investigate how the treatment of pain is equally embedded in the social, economic, and political contexts that shape individual experiences of illness and institutional structures of care. Admission to a hospital draws a patient away from familiar remedies and substitutes new—and sometimes dangerous—pharmacology. Increasingly, there is limited overlap between the patient’s medicine cabinet and the provider’s formulary. With efforts to reduce opiate prescription alongside documented bias in prescription rates, there is a renewed urgency to understand pain pharmacology across historical, spatial, and cultural borders.

This research group proposes a journal club and lecture series that will bring together humanists, social scientists, and allied health professionals. Monthly meetings and public events will generate interdisciplinary discussions and a range of potential outcomes with opportunity for impact in the university, the hospital system, and the diverse communities of Rhode Island.

Project Title: The C.O.M.P.A.S.S. Project (Centering our (Mother)MC’s Productions, Artistry, Stories +Sounds)

Faculty Project Director: Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo, Mellon Gateway Postdoctoral Fellow, Music

Abstract:

The C.O.M.P.A.S.S. Project will serve as a one-year digital humanities exploration of the visual and sonic possibilities for collecting, organizing, and presenting oral testimonies of women and girls who rap, DJ, and make beats. In turn, these findings will be used to support The Keeper Project, an ongoing research initiative led by hip hop artists, Akua Naru and Enongo Lumumba-Kasongo (aka SAMMUS), as well as eminent hip hop scholar Tricia Rose, Chancellor’s Professor of Africana Studies, Associate Dean of the Faculty for Special Initiatives, and Director of the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at Brown. This project calls attention to the systematic erasure of women and girls from popular and scholarly accounts of hip hop artistry and innovation; and challenges these outcomes through the presentation of a rich counter-narrative, devised from careful documentation of their life stories, recorded works, headlines, hashtags, and notably, their absences.

The C.O.M.P.A.S.S. Project will culminate in a public gathering, live music performance, and presentation in the spring semester of 2023.

Student Prize Recipients

The Pembroke Center awards prizes each year for outstanding undergraduate and graduate student research. We are pleased to announce our 2022 prize recipients.



*Ruth Simmons
Prize in Gender and
Women's Studies*
Jamila Beesley '22
American Studies,
International and
Public Affairs

Jamila Beesley '22 was awarded the Simmons Prize for her thesis, "The Architects of the Solutions They Need: Dalit Feminism in the U.S. Caste Abolition Movement." Beesley's thesis traces dynamic histories of caste supremacy in the South Asian American diaspora and celebrates the growth of Dalit feminist-led organizing against brahmanical patriarchy. Using a variety of primary media sources, Beesley narrates seemingly disparate stories of immigration, labor exploitation, sensationalized journalism, vigilante rescue, white feminism, and powerful South Asian feminist resistance to contextualize the nascent Dalit civil rights movement in the United States. Her thesis uplifts the vibrant work of Dalit feminist activists and young anti-caste organizers advocating for protections against caste discrimination in civil rights policies.



Honorable Mention
Lillian Pickett '22
American Studies

Lillian Pickett '22 was granted honorable mention for the Simmons Prize for her thesis, "(En)gendering Violence, Imagining Safety: Carceral Politics in Rhode Island's Feminist Movement, 1970-2009." In her research, Pickett aimed to understand the evolution of carceral feminist logics on the criminal legal system in Rhode Island. Bringing together research in the Pembroke Center Archives, interviews, and feminist theory and grounded in current day anti-carceral and abolitionist movement organizing, Pickett's thesis retells the history of second wave feminism in Rhode Island. Her thesis aims to have an impact on how we understand the intersections of feminism and abolition in the Rhode Island context.



Joan Wallach Scott Prize
Sabrina Bajwa '21.5
Gender and Sexuality Studies,
Hispanic Literatures and Cultures

Sabrina Bajwa '21.5 begins her thesis "Fortifying the Boundaries of Citizenship through the Simultaneous Rhetoric of Anti-Birth and Anti-Abortion: Reproductive Injustice as a Tool of Immigration Enforcement" with two seemingly contradictory events. First, in September 2020, whistleblower Dawn Wooten drew attention to allegations of forced hysterectomies at the Irwin County Detention Center in Georgia. Second, just two years prior, the Trump administration was embroiled in a legal battle as the Office of Refugee Resettlement denied pregnant minors' access to abortion in detention. Through archival work, reviewing key court cases, and conducting interviews with current organizers, Bajwa's research traces the historical incorporation of reproductive coercion within immigration politics to illuminate how these seemingly contradictory anti-birth and anti-abortion pushes exist simultaneously. Bajwa highlights the creative efforts of activists in urging for a reproductive justice-based movement to dismantle the white supremacy underlying the convergence of reproductive coercion and anti-immigration politics.



*Marie J. Langlois
Dissertation Prize*
Melanie Y. White Ph.D. '22
Africana Studies

Melanie White Ph.D '22 won the Langlois Prize for her dissertation, "What Dem Do To We No Have Name: Intimate Colonial Violence, Autonomy, and Black Women's Art in Caribbean Nicaragua." White's dissertation charts a history of intimate colonial violence in the Nicaraguan Mosquitia. Through careful examination of enslavers' wills, colonial correspondence, Euro-American travel narratives, US survey photography, Moravian missionary photography, and Nicaraguan cultural production, the dissertation traces the racialized, gendered, and sexual violence Afro-Mosquitian women and girls experienced at the hands of key colonial actors in their history. These intimate colonial violences are then juxtaposed with the counter-visualities of Black women artists from the region. White's research situates Black women's contemporary counter-visualities as a key site for confronting historical and ongoing sexual violence against Black women in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast and as a source of alternative political imaginaries for Black people as a whole in the region.

Student Research Grant Recipients

The Pembroke Center received impressive applications for our 2021-22 graduate and undergraduate research grants. Student grant winners represent ten disciplines from International Relations to Africana Studies to American Studies, and their projects range across the globe, from South Asia to Italy. Undergraduate grant recipients and prize winners presented their research at a luncheon held during the May 27 Pembroke Center Advisory Council meeting.

Linda Pei Undergraduate Research Grant



Jamilia Beesley '22
*American Studies,
International and
Public Affairs*

“The Architects
of the Solutions
They Need: Dalit
Feminism in the
U.S. Caste Abolition Movement”

Enid Wilson Undergraduate Travel Fellowship



Lily Willis '22.5
*Gender and
Sexuality Studies,
English*

“Expressing the
Inexpressible,’
and Other Queer
Sentiments:

Language and Self in Contemporary
Queer Memoir”

Helen Terry MacLeod Research Grant



Emma Blake '22
*International
Relations*

“Gender-based
Violence and
State-Sponsored
Aggression: An
Analysis of the
Relationship Between Intimate Partner
Violence and State Militarization”

Barbara Anton Community Research Grant



Sydney Smith '22
*Africana Studies,
Political Science*

“I Am a
Revolutionary
Black Woman’:
Black Power
Visions in the

Narratives of Women in the Black
Panther Party”

Pembroke Center Research Development Grant for Graduate Students



Sara Colantuono
*Graduate Student,
Italian Studies*

“The Lonzi
Paradox:
Rethinking
Lonzi’s Place in
the Canon of

Italian Feminist Thought”

Steinhaus/Zisson Pembroke Center Research Grants for Undergraduate and Graduate Students



Radhika Moral
*Graduate Student,
Anthropology*

“Silk Frontiers:
Commodity
Chains, Women’s
Work, and
the Politics of

Belonging in Northeast India”



Stephanie Y. Wong
*Graduate Student,
History*

“Material Gender in
the Early Modern
Spanish Pacific”



Ieva Zumbyte
*Graduate Student,
Sociology*

“Neighborhood
Class Distinctions:
How Caregivers
Respond
to Parental

Expectations in Delivering Childcare
Services in Urban India”



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Questions? Call Rebecca Jenkins at (401) 863-7700.

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