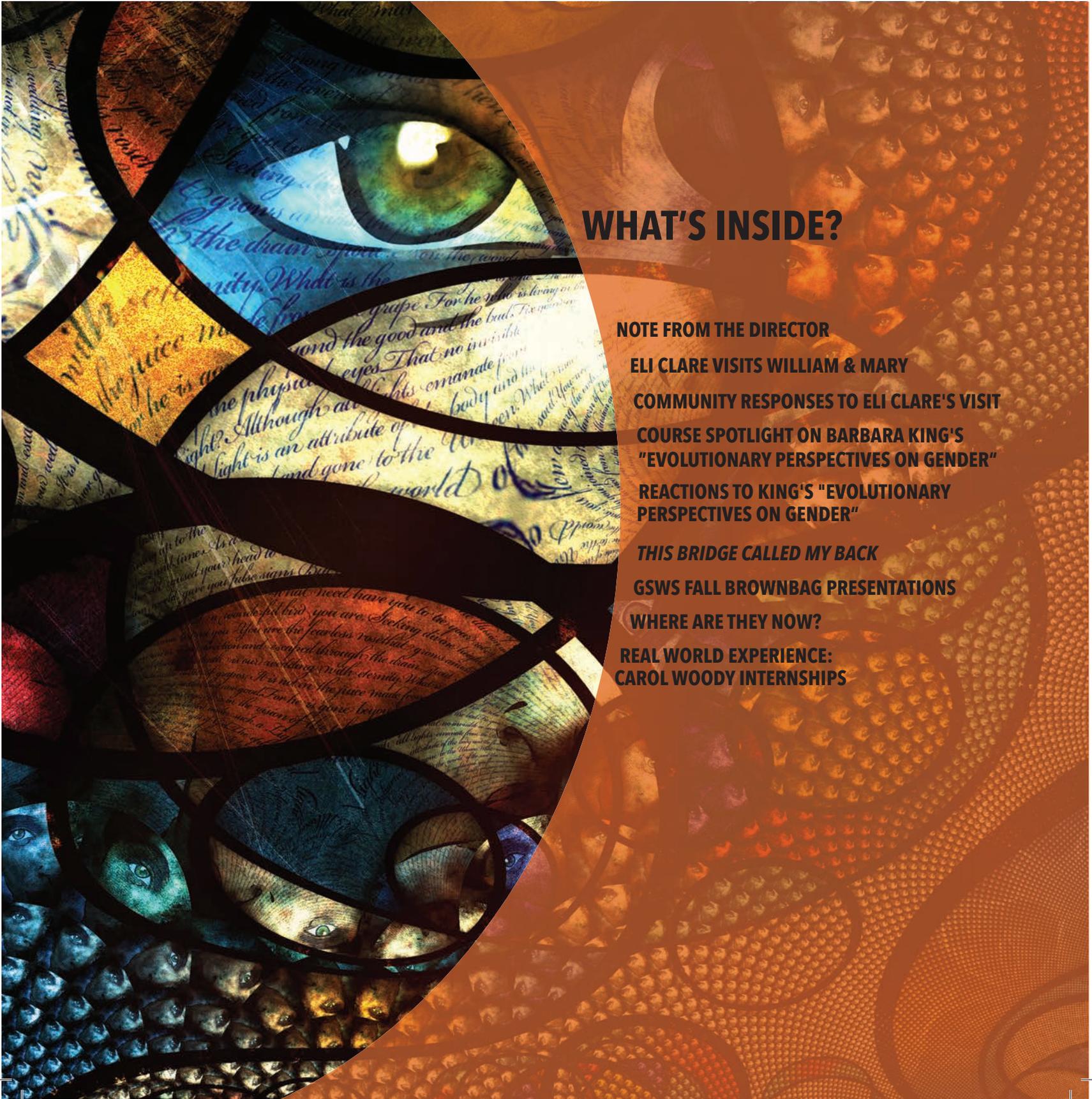


# Mary & William

The Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program Newsletter

FALL 2015: ISSUE 9



## WHAT'S INSIDE?

**NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR**

**ELI CLARE VISITS WILLIAM & MARY**

**COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO ELI CLARE'S VISIT**

**COURSE SPOTLIGHT ON BARBARA KING'S  
"EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER"**

**REACTIONS TO KING'S "EVOLUTIONARY  
PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER"**

**THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK**

**GSWS FALL BROWNBAG PRESENTATIONS**

**WHERE ARE THEY NOW?**

**REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE:  
CAROL WOODY INTERNSHIPS**



## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

### One of the oddities of academic life is that you're asked to think about the next semester before you're even done with the one

**you're in.** As Director of the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program, I am currently planning our spring Braithwaite Lecture (on Tuesday, April 5th—save the date!) as well as our GSWS faculty brown bag lunches. And as a teacher, I'm ordering books for my spring course on "Transgender Fictions." This is a course that I've never taught before, one that I felt compelled to teach after the release in recent years of a number of novels and short story collections by transgender authors as well as novels by cisgender authors about transgender characters. I am teaching both of these kinds of texts in this course, trying to think about the shape of the field and the methodological approaches that can be used to study it. Yet I'm also thinking about intersectionality in this class—the way in which multiple forms of identification and oppression interconnect for those who identify under the transgender umbrella. Being transgender is by no means the same experience for athlete and celebrity Caitlin Jenner, poet and fiction writer Ryka Aoki, and Lamia Beard, the Norfolk, Virginia native who was murdered in January 2015. Race, class, and national identity (among other factors) intersect to shape the ways in which each of these women experiences their lives as transgender individuals.

Professor of Law Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989 in an analysis of a suit against General Motors in which African American women claimed that GM segregated its workforce by race and gender. The court dismissed the claims of the plaintiffs, Crenshaw explains, because they insisted that race and gender discrimination could not be argued in the same case. This focus on a single form of oppression, she argues, "marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination." As defined by Crenshaw, "Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them."

I don't usually spend time on feminist theory in these notes, but it seems to me that theories of intersectionality are crucial if we are to make sense of the increasing violence against transgender women of color; the racist dismissal of Syrian refugees in the Republican presidential debates; and the relative silence surrounding the leadership of African American queer women at the University of Missouri, among other issues. Intersectionality is not a new idea, but it is more relevant than ever. In our best moments, it lies at the heart of what we do in the GSWS Program here at William and Mary. Courses like "Transgender Fictions," "Queers of Color Critique" (taught this coming spring by Professor Bettina Judd), "Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Societies" (taught by Professor Gul Ozyegin), and "Gender, Violence, and Social Change" (taught by Professor Victoria Castillo) are all indebted and committed to theories of intersectionality. Much of our thinking about events and speakers on campus is guided by our desire to create a community of activists and intellectuals who understand the intersectional nature of identity and oppression and are able to collaborate and mobilize around issues of civil rights and social justice. In October, for example, we hosted a visit from poet, essayist, activist and teacher Eli Clare. In his time here on campus, Clare spoke with students, faculty, and administrators about the tangled roots of disability, gender, class, and race, insisting that one form of oppression cannot be

understood apart from others. Clare attributes his understanding of intersectionality to his early exposure to the work of women writers of color, writing in his book *Exile & Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation* (1999) that "My political education started here with feminists of color insisting upon the many ways in which patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism define, impact, reinforce, and contradict one each other. I can't even count the lessons I learned from them about institutional power and personal accountability, the twine of oppression and privilege."

Inspired by Clare and the queer women of color at Missouri, disturbed by the rhetoric about Syrian refugees and the violence against trans women of color, the GSWS Program went back to our roots this semester, hosting a book discussion group to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*. Edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa and published originally in 1981 by Persephone Press (and later successively by the Kitchen Table Press, the Third Woman Press, and currently by SUNY Press), *Bridge* provided a framework for thinking about political and intellectual coalition building. It offered an important critique of the rhetoric of sisterhood in second-wave feminism, one that continues to shape feminist thought about inclusion, access, and privilege. Our book discussion began with Professors Castillo and Judd who shared reflections on the place of *Bridge* in their own lives and work. As a group, we celebrated this ground-breaking book, but also lamented its continued necessity. Why, in the past 35 years, have we not moved past the need to be reminded that we must learn to speak *and to listen* in

order to create a feminist movement (and, dare I say, a nation) that is, at the very least, inclusive? "Inclusive" doesn't quite cut it for me though, in that it implies that "we" are allowing "others" to enter into a world created by the dominant group. I'm looking for another word, another model, and I'd love to hear suggestions.

For now, I'm looking forward to finding

out what our spring Braithwaite speaker, Rhodessa Jones, will add to the conversation. Jones is the co-artistic director of the San Francisco based performance company Cultural Odyssey. She is also an actress, teacher, singer, and writer, and is the director of the acclaimed Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women. She will be here on campus to talk about her work, particularly with the Medea Project, and to help us think about the relationship between art and social activism. Please don't hesitate to contact me for more information!

Also contact me if you have ideas for how we can continue these kinds of conversations in the GSWS Program. What texts should we be (re)reading? What theories are useful? When is theory not enough? And what is going on that we should be talking about?

Best wishes,

**Jennifer Putzi**, Associate Professor of English and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

## ELI CLARE VISITS WILLIAM & MARY

By Noah Brooksher, '16 (English/GSWS)

During the last week of October, the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program was honored to welcome Eli Clare, author of *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness & Liberation*, who gave a lecture titled "Yearning Towards Carrie Buck," a multi-genre presentation on the continuously relevant implications of the 1927 Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell*. In addition to the scheduled lecture, the ever gracious Clare also visited individual GSWS classes to meet our students and discuss the importance of taking an intersectional approach to activism. He also led a workshop on disability and access issues on college campuses.

"Three generations of imbeciles are enough." These are the words with which Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., concludes the majority opinion of the 1927 case *Buck v. Bell*, upholding a statute that allowed for compulsory sterilization of the unfit. These are the words that supplied the basis for the sterilization of the eponymous Carrie Buck, a poor white woman from Virginia, whose body provided the foundation upon which the case was built. These are the words that tried to trap Carrie, tried to confine her body to mere letters and symbols, tried to reduce her subjectivity

to a footnote on the pages of history. These are the words that threatened to erase Carrie Buck's sense of herself as a person.

How could someone like Carrie, who seemed to be entirely at the mercy of the state's power, resist the narratives in which she was ostensibly codified? This was one of the many subjects which activist and writer Eli Clare discussed in his lecture, focusing not only on the case itself, but also on its impact on a personal and political level. In a talk where historical analysis, intersectional feminist criticism, poetry, and creative non-fiction were all seamlessly intertwined, Clare's multi-genre approach was a devastating attack on the longstanding dichotomy of the personal and the political, revealing how the language used in *Buck v. Bell* persists in both everyday life and academic discourse. For Clare, history is not a passive, harmless narrative, but rather a whirlpool that threatens to silence those who, like Carrie, swim against the current.

Rather than merely focusing his discussion on disability, Clare drew attention to the multiple ways in which disability intersects with various other parts of an individual's identity, including race, gender, class, and sexuality. In a particularly insightful part of the lecture,

Clare revealed how the state used the language in *Buck v. Bell* as a way to justify the sterilization of various other bodies, including sex workers, immigrants, poor whites, and black women. Indeed, Walter Plecker, noted white supremacist and eugenicist of the early twentieth century, saw this connection as well and attempted to exploit the language of feeble-mindedness in *Buck v. Bell* to legitimize his own attempts to stop mixed race individuals from giving birth, thereby ensuring the purity of the white race. As such a horrific anecdote indicates, one cannot study *Buck v. Bell* and the sterilization of the disabled without consideration of other forms of oppression; we must examine how disability interacts with race, class and gender.

Although Clare frankly and candidly discussed the hardships that Carrie Buck and others faced as a result of this case, he was careful not to paint them as victims. Rather, he emphasized that despite attempts at social control, these individuals did not simply let the state use their bodies as parchment on which to write its version of history. Far from passive receptacles for state power, these bodies were sites of resistance, sites of struggle, sites of protest.

### COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO ELI CLARE'S VISIT

"Whether in a classroom discussion, a lecture, a workshop, or a one-on-one chat, Eli Clare captured his audience's attention right from the start. As a result of his open nature, I was able to learn more about a conversation that I knew only a little about. Eli was receptive to questions on the material he covered. For example, the use of language was a prominent topic in his workshop, and I had posed a somewhat personal question to him about more positive-sounding terms, like "special." I thought it was commendable of Eli to not shut down the conversation at that point in regard to words that might hurt him, but instead to teach us how powerful words truly are. I feel as if I have gone through a personal growth after his visit with the words I now use and how I think about systems of oppression. Eli is a natural-born teacher, and I have taken away more than I ever thought I would by attending what I thought would simply be an interesting lecture."—**Baldeep Kaur Mann, '19**

"Eli Clare demonstrated how ongoing social justice work requires a multitude of activist interventions including creative writing and uncovering difficult histories. His training on disability as a social justice issue clarified how the work of making college campuses more inclusive involves confronting multiple systems of oppression, including ableism. Additionally, the training gave campus community members tools to expand discussions of disability beyond accommodations to consider how language communicates in-

clusion and exclusion. Most significantly, Clare modeled how to create accessible space in both his talk and training through checking in at the beginning of each presentation and letting people know they could move around as needed. It was an important reminder that one way to dismantle ableism in academic settings is simply by reminding people that they belong."—**Jessica Cowing, graduate student in American Studies**

"It was such a rare treat to have Eli on campus. His lecture's interdisciplinary and intersectional nature provided the nuance necessary to discuss the fascinating issue of eugenics in 1920s Virginia. The subtleties that defined this talk were present in every conversation we shared, all of which were deeply enriching and rewarding."

—**Gul Ozyegin, Associate Professor of Sociology and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies**



Eli Clare

### LIKE US

William & Mary Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies on Facebook! Find us on Facebook and keep updated about everything GSWS!



## Course Spotlight: BARBARA KING "EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER"

Interview by Aiesha Krause-Lee, '16 (GSWS/Anthropology)

### Barbara J. King is Chancellor Professor of Anthropology at the College of William & Mary and has been at the institution

since 1988. She has studied learning behavior of free-ranging baboons in Kenya and gestural behavior of captive gorillas and bonobos, and now writes and speaks about animal thinking, feeling, and welfare more broadly. Adapted from her book *How Animals Grieve* (University of Chicago Press, translated into French, Japanese, and Portuguese), her article "When Animals Mourn" in *Scientific American* was included in the 2014 anthology *The Best American Science and Nature Writing*. King writes weekly for the "13.7 Cosmos and Culture" blog at NPR; regularly for *The Times Literary Supplement*; co-edits the *Animal Lives* book series at the University of Chicago Press; and just completed a new book entitled *Animals We Eat*. Among her previous books are *Evolving God* (Doubleday) and *The Dynamic Dance* (Harvard University Press). She has been funded by the National Science Foundation and by a Guggenheim Fellowship. She also teaches and writes about human evolution, especially the evolution of art, culture, and language; issues of gender and transgender in the modern world; and ethics related to animals held in laboratories and zoos.

Professor King has recently been involved with local transgender issues by supporting Gavin Grimm, a transgender student, in Gloucester County, where she lives. She has written articles and spoken on behalf of Grimm's right to use the bathroom that matches his gender identity. Professor King was given a grant in 1992 to develop the course "Evolutionary Perspectives on Gender," which combines biological and cultural knowledge to gain a critical understanding of gender in humans across cultures.

**AKL:** Would you describe the course a little bit?

**BK:** The course is "Evolutionary Perspectives on Gender," and it's cross-listed in Anthropology and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies. In it, I try to take a biocultural approach to gender to ask how we can understand both the biological and cultural contributions to the way we experience gender. When I originally devised this course in the early 90s, there really were not many science offerings related to gender. It was all humanities or social sciences. I jokingly subtitled the course "Why Feminists Shouldn't Fear Biology," because I wanted to counter the idea that applying biology to gender is inevitably deterministic. It can be, it shouldn't be, and it doesn't have to be. We have bodies, we have genes, we have hormones, and we have brains... We need to understand the very strong balance between biology and culture. That was really the genesis of the class. I should say that it

was created very much in a women's studies context, and I got a small grant to develop this course, so it came out of your program.

**AKL:** Why did you decide to start offering the course?

**BK:** I only came in '88, so really this was at the start of my career. I was always very attracted to conversations with faculty in the Women's Studies Program, I was on the Women's Studies advisory committee, I've always thought about gender in my life. It's part of anthropology, certainly, and I am an anthropologist first and foremost. But really, I began hearing a certain distrust of biology from feminist theory, which I completely understand given how biology has been used against women and against lots of oppressed groups, continuously. But I wanted students to hear that there's another way to think about biology and gender, and that was really the genesis of the whole thing. At the time—and that's a while ago now, over 20 years ago—the discussion of things like gayness, transgender issues, was in a very different place. Teaching the course now is a very different experience. Students come to my course really knowing a lot of this material. But trust me, in the '90s it wasn't like that. There was a sense that the course became known as a "safe space." I was invited on that basis to give a lecture to a

*"We have bodies, we have genes, we have hormones, and we have brains...."*

group of gay William and Mary students, who did not meet in the open. I was told when I went to speak that the condition of speaking there was not to talk about who was there, not to acknowledge someone who was there. Of course I understand why. So I think there was a need on campus at that time. I still think there's a need on campus. But that it's a need of a different nature.

We're at the point in this semester where we are reading *Sexing The Body* by Anne Fausto-Sterling and we are talking about transgender issues, which I've been involved with now in the local community. But I find that many students are still very unaware of issues of intersexuality as opposed to transgender issues. We left the class last year agreeing transgender issues are much more upfront, and intersexuality issues are not. There's kind of a shift not so much in what I'm teaching, but in how I'm teaching it, what I'm emphasizing, and what I'm expecting students to know. Also there are students who come from certain backgrounds where they really don't know any of this—and that's not a bad thing, that's why they're here—nobody should feel that they should come in knowing anything; in fact, we just had this great discussion among people who have different viewpoints.

**AKL:** How has your daughter stimulated the course?

**BK:** My daughter, Sarah Hogg, came to class again this year. She came out to us as queer in 2013, and she has now graduated from college and has a job with NARAL North Carolina, so she's very involved with reproductive justice. It's interesting, in a way, that I was always teaching this material, fascinated by this material, and then BOOM, it becomes really personal for my family. What she wants to do, and to a certain extent what I want to do with this class, is talk not just about things like gay marriage but the really strong issues of violence against transgender individuals (especially of color), structural homophobia and discrimination. In Virginia where it is perfectly legal to not be fair to people on this spectrum. So yeah, my personal life and my professional life met in a certain way. Sarah has taught me a lot. It's great to offer texts by and videos of people who are in the community we are talking about, and now I'm able to invite a member of my own family into class to speak.

**AKL:** What perspective do anthropologists have to give to the debates on gender?

**BK:** I think there are multiple and holistic perspectives that can be accessed through anthropology. I think that a lot of times there's a lot of conservative communities that are very reactive when we talk about things like multiple genders and how it's not just a binary. But anthropology can of course answer that, because cross culturally we know that this explosion of the binary has been around for such a long time, and in so many different places. We under-

stand that it's not some radical move that is associated with the downfall of the United States! [laughs]. We have models for that around the world, and anthropologists can talk about that.

**AKL:** You included a novel, *Golden Boy* by Abigail Tarttelin, in the syllabus. Sometimes novels are seen as less objective or scientific, putting it at odds with the other more science-based readings assigned. Why did you decide to require this novel?

**BK:** I wanted people to have an emotional response to what it's like to be an individual who is intersexual. I find in my own life that I learn incredible amounts from fiction. I think reading the Anne Fausto-Sterling book set the scientific framework, which is my primary responsibility for this class. But then to sort of say, these are not abstract ideas, how people live who are marginalized in society, and sometimes are surgically altered because we feel we need to adhere to the binary, so let's just get down to it—what might individuals feel? And I felt that the book was a very faithful rendition of what could be a real life scenario, because we do read about those case studies. I just love fiction as a teaching tool, and I found the class for the most part was very into it and very responsive to that book, so that's why I'm doing it again.

**AKL:** Has the course adapted since you started teaching?

**BK:** The course has changed radically over the years, but it has not changed greatly from last year. This was the first year in fact that I did not add a different book, and that's because I loved our class last year, I thought it went really well and that the student response was really good. I decided this is stuff I know, I can teach it well. I want to emphasize that it has iterated very much over the longer time span [since the course began development in 1992]. Many Sundays, I send a couple things from the press, like the *New York Times*, and we update. As you are probably aware of now, the anti-discrimination bill in Houston was just voted against. There was this group of people who were urging people to vote against it, and they created this video depicting a schoolgirl being victimized in a bathroom stall supposedly because trans people make the bathroom a dangerous place when they are simply allowed to use the one that matches their gender identity. This video was so awful in painting trans people as sexual predators when in fact it's trans people who face violence... we're going to watch that in class and talk about that and link that to what we are reading now. I'm trying to bring in current events.

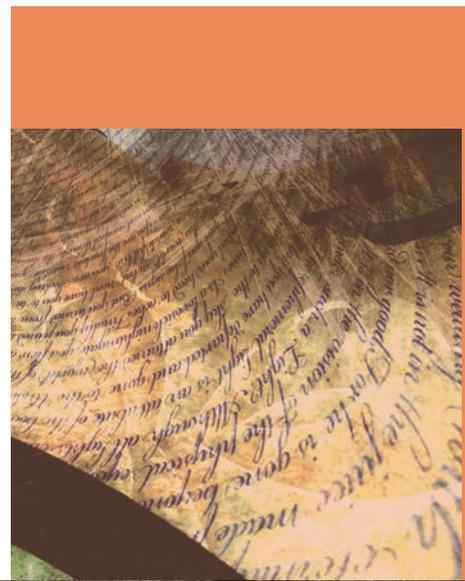
**AKL:** What's your favorite part about teaching this course?

**BK:** My favorite part is that I learn a lot! I know that sounds like a clichéd, programmed response professors are supposed to have, but it's really genuinely true. I think there's a certain degree of self-selection in this class. There are people who come who want to learn about gender, who are open to gender non-conforming perspectives, may be gender nonconforming, may be trans ... I never call on such individuals to speak about

their experiences, but some individuals do choose to speak about them. I will often say let's play devils advocate, so we all talk about things in a way that I hope is very open. I find that very stimulating for me, and I always leave with new thoughts. I also feel the students are really getting into the material, and that's very rewarding. When I leave, it's usually the case that most people have spoken, we've had a good discussion about some text, and I leave feeling energized. And it's a long class—I teach it once a week—so if you can still leave feeling energized, that's a good thing!

**AKL:** What do you plan to do after leaving William and Mary?

**BK:** I'm jumping right into full-time science writing. I've been freelancing—I write every week for NPR. I've been writing for *Scientific American* a little bit, *Washington Post*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and my books. When I started this, I went to half time to see if it would work, and it is working. My actual retirement date is September 1, because of the fact that I take every spring to write, and that's days after my 60th birthday. I'm looking forward to a new phase of life and working hard on my writing and also my activism for animals.



Barbara King

## REACTIONS TO "EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER"

"What I liked most about Dr. King's class is how she stayed true to the course's name and provided a simultaneously all-inclusive and yet critical examination of our gendered understanding of evolutionary biology/anthropology. She thoroughly incorporated the idea that the prototypical 'male = hunter and female = mother, gatherer, and homemaker' model might not be the only true one, and her accounting for the existence and possible functions of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people in these evolutionary models where they'd otherwise be omitted was extremely validating to me as a queer man. I left the course enlightened about the trap of patriarchy in academia and the need to look at our human past from new and critical perspectives."

—Austen Stevens '16 (GSWS)

"Evolutionary Perspective on Gender" was one of the best classes I've ever taken at William & Mary. Dr. King did a beautiful job of blending an anthropological viewpoint of gender and its significance throughout our evolution and modern day themes of social justice, inclusion, and the variety of experiences associated with the LGBTQIAP+ spectrum. She was humble about the difference in her vast knowledge of the evolutionary/biological anthropology and her relatively lesser experience with the literature and language surrounding gender; she hoped to learn from us as much as we did from her. It was an incredibly rewarding class that was filled with engaging discussion and a creative course construction. I would happily take it again." —Megan Heim '16 (Psychology/Anthropology)



## THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF A FEMINIST CLASSIC

### The Influence of *This Bridge Called My Back*

By Victoria Castillo, Visiting Assistant Professor, GSWS

For me, *This Bridge Called My Back* was most influential to my life because of my Latina heritage and the sense of isolation I felt growing up in a very white town. I was one of only a handful of non-white kids in my school, and this lack of representation also extended to the classes and course material we discussed. When I think about the influence of *This Bridge Called My Back* on my life one of the first thoughts that comes to mind was Peggy McIntosh's famous essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" and two specific privileges that she mentions in her long list. She says, "When I am told about our national heritage or about 'civilization' I am shown that people of my color made it what it is," and, similarly, she writes, "I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race." In my experience, that was not the case, even in the progressive college town that I grew up in. I craved knowledge about my Peruvian, Bolivian, and Aymara heritage, and I also wanted to know that Latinos in the United States made some important or useful contributions to society. When I came across *This Bridge Called My Back*, and the editors were two Latina women, the book helped to fill a huge void. I could see myself and my family in some of their writings.

Growing up Latina in a white environment, I felt split in two. On the one hand, I wanted to be like any other American kid trying to blend into the white dominant culture, and on the other hand, my family spent a lot of time with other Latinos, mainly in the context of a Hispanic church that catered to many poor and working-class Latino immigrants, including undocumented immigrants. As an American kid, I wanted to fit in and have friends at school, but I didn't feel comfortable inviting people over to our house because it was too small, and friends always had a hard time understanding my father's English. I didn't know how to bring these two worlds together. And what was worse was that I was also constantly fed the messages of the dominant culture that told me it was better to be white and wealthy. So when I read the poem by Nellie Wong, "When I Was Growing Up" and she describes how she longed to be white and was at times ashamed of her own family and culture, it resonated deeply with me. Or, when Cherrie Moraga in "La Guera" talks about her experience as a woman "with a foot in both worlds" and with her struggle with her internalized racism and classism, and how she was told that she should try to pass if she wants to get by easier in the world, I could relate.

The writings in this book helped to heal me. This book helped me to bring together my two different lives into

one whole, or as Moraga states, "to refuse the split," and to allow me to be proud of my family and my heritage.

### Remembering *This Bridge*

By Bettina Judd, Visiting Assistant Professor, GSWS

I remember the exact day that I first got my hands on a copy of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. It was, in my recollection, perhaps the most womanist care-free Black girl day of my teenaged life. To tell you this story in its full effect I have to give you some context about the town in which I grew up and my life until then. I was fifteen years old and coming into my identity as a lesbian, which was the only term I knew to call it then, and my politics as a feminist. Gay rights and lesbian images were becoming more available to mainstream audiences. Ellen had just come out on national TV, there were magazines such as *Curve* and *Girlfriends* to sneakily read in my bedroom. But none of these images or discussion around lesbian identity were Black women. I took to the library for resources and only one book appeared under my search "*Black + lesbian*," *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde. This didn't deter me. I checked out this copy of *Sister Outsider*, and combed through the book to find myself. Lorde was inspiring, she was articulating the importance of inhabiting the multiple aspects of oneself: woman, lesbian, warrior, poet. This excited me. I wanted more work like this and began to search for more places where this woman's voice appeared. I liked a challenge, so when an internet search (and these were the days when Yahoo was the search engine of choice) revealed an out of print book with one of her essays in it titled *This Bridge Called My Back*, I decided that I would own this book myself.

By the power of mid-nineties internet, I ordered a used copy of the book. Which brings me to the wondrous day that arrived. It was a Tuesday and my mother picked me up early from school to see my favorite Black queer musician, perhaps the only Black woman queer musician I knew of at that time: MeShell Ndegeocello, whose recent album "Bitter" was released earlier that summer. Mind you, my mother is a teacher, so taking me out of school early for me meant getting out of school early for her to take the two-hour drive "down the hill" to Los Angeles at Virgin Records where my idol may, by chance, happen to talk to me. It was me and my mother, but there were a few other Black women there who were somehow impressed with a teenager who would have music interests in MeShell Ndegeocello, who represented for them at least "grown folks' music." They urged me to show MeShell my sketchbook which had an image of her that I'd drawn for AP studio art. They snapped pictures of me

Our discussion of this feminist classic began with two GSWS faculty members speaking about the impact of the book on their own personal and intellectual lives. We share those comments here, along with reflections from other faculty and students who participated in this conversation.

## The Bridge Poem

By Kate Rushin

like they were my own aunts. I was squealing the entire drive home, to find at our arrival a package with the old dusty used copy of *This Bridge* waiting for me.

I couldn't sleep. Who could sleep? So I poured over it that first evening. I can arguably say that this was the first time that I'd read the works of Indigenous, Asian-Pacific Island, Xicana, and Black Feminists, and particularly in one place. *This Bridge* was my introduction to feminism not as idealized unified girl power (I had the Spice Girls for that and was not impressed.) but as substantive critique. Think of this, Lorde and *This Bridge* were my first encounters with something called feminism with the concept of radical writing by women of color. I didn't have a whole sense of the source of their critique, but their concerns, their platforms resonated with my own desires for taking up space in the world. I imagined these women as an intellectual family, taking me up on this day when Black women shared in joy, and I was a part of that.

Many people have characterized the voices in *This Bridge* as angry. My experience with the text initially, and today is that it is produced through an immense amount of joy and self-preservation. If there is anger, it is that productive anger that Audre Lorde defends in "The Uses of Anger." The kind of anger that is "loaded with information and energy." Anger that produces a wellspring of knowledge that we are but so lucky to learn from.

Thirty-five years later, *This Bridge* still resonates with many of us who work on the side of justice. *This Bridge* indicts the narrative of progress of the past three and a half decades. For me, it has become a text to which I return to refuel and refocus. It has offered a kind of home to those of us who operate from the margins, those of us whose backs have become bridges. The work of women of color in the academy, in our homes, and on the streets is an unacknowledged labor of being the tether of humanity in a racially, economically, and gender stratified society. As Kate Rushin writes in "The Bridge Poem," "I'm sick of seeing and touching/ Both sides of things/ Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody... I am sick/ Of having to remind you/ To breathe/ Before you suffocate/ Your own fool self." It is exhausting work, and the authors of *This Bridge*, though tired, sick, and angry, have done this work for a new generation, and generations to come.

I'm sick of seeing and touching  
Both sides of things  
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody... I am sick  
Of having to remind you  
To breathe  
Before you suffocate  
Your own fool self.



## BOOK DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS RESPOND TO *THIS BRIDGE*

"*This Bridge Called My Back* truly helped me to look at feminism and activism through a more intersectional lens. I have the privilege to not know some of the writers' experiences (those pertaining to class, immigration status, and race especially), yet I feel my own life reflecting back at me when I read this book. I saw myself in Nellie Wong's desire to write, and in Rosario Morales' expression of guilt. Through the authors' words I learned about their struggles and began to realize how they overlap with my own. This was the first book that truly connected various systems of oppressions in my mind; the words solidified the idea that these systems unite the subjects of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and even those the authors did not cover in depth such as ableism and transphobia. *This Bridge Called My Back* did a beautiful job of weaving together the stories and ideas of women of color to expose honest truths that need to be discussed." —**Laura MacDonald, '19**

My response to *This Bridge Called My Back* is incredulity. On one hand, I am unsurprised to find that these writings still have relevance today. On the other hand, I am surprised. There is talk of progress, which I am not doubting, but there is still enormous room for more. Although there is much I have to say about this book, there is one thing that stands out for me. When I first picked up this book, the subtitle read "Writings by Radical Women of Color." That instantly made me think that these writings were by people who had African ancestry, but when I actually opened the book, I was in disbelief. There were writings from those of Mexican descent, of Native American descent, of other descents. When I was younger, I thought that I could also belong to the category of "people of color" before I learned that my brown skin did not count since it was Indian, not African. This just brings that conversation back into focus for me because it reinforces the truth that "women of color" includes all colors—including mine."

—**Baldeep Kaur Mann, '19**

"I first encountered *Bridge* as a graduate student when six of us in the women's history program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison decided that our courses were too focused on white women and a heroic narrative of women's history. We put together a practicum that was nominally supervised by a faculty member but really designed and run by us. (This was in 1986.) We started by creating a bibliography of readings on the history and theories of/by women of color and *Bridge* was at the top of our list of resources. The course we designed and what we learned through our research and in conversation with one another shaped the trajectory of my scholarship and teaching for the rest of my career and *Bridge* was the keystone of the seminar—we started and ended with

it and I have carried that first edition with me ever since (now almost 30 years ago)." —**Leisa Meyer, Professor of American Studies and History**

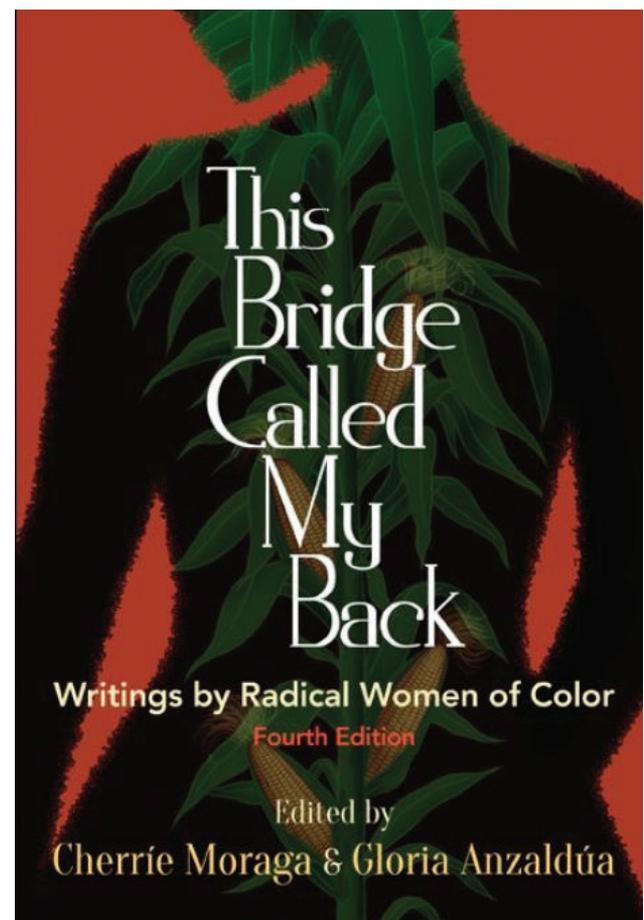
"I first read *This Bridge Called My Back* in an Introduction to Women's Studies course taught at Augustana College in 1989. The class was taught by a white woman, Professor Nancy Huse, and I remember distinctly that there were no women of color in the class. As a young white feminist trying to find a way to think productively about my own issues—body image, reproductive health, and the deeply gendered structure of my own family—I took "Introduction to Women's Studies" to find support and community and useful ways of framing my experiences in a broader theoretical context. While many of the texts we read in the course provided me with those things, *Bridge* put me on the outside, a listener privileged to be hearing the voices of women of color, but also sometimes uncomfortable with my own marginal position in this conversation. I sometimes resented having to be disillusioned with what I saw as the history of feminism before I'd even had time to enjoy it! I realize now, of course, that there are multiple and intersecting feminist histories and no one gets to pick and choose the ones with which they are most comfortable. I also realize that this outsider position, this rejection, is something that all white feminists, young or old, should feel—not all conversations are for us and when we are able to listen in or to participate, we'd better be prepared to think about our own privilege. I couldn't have framed it in that way as a college sophomore—our students now are so much more sophisticated than I was then—but the lessons that I've learned from *Bridge* have stayed with me and I'm so grateful that I read it when my feminist sensibilities were developing."

—**Jennifer Putzi, Associate Professor of English and GSWS**

"I was pretending to complete a Master's in English that I had really already completed when I first came across *This Bridge Called My Back*. What I was really doing—instead of the Master's—was working at a refuge for battered women and their children in New Haven, Connecticut. The paid workers and volunteers there were always buzzing with talk about books and ideas, even though our "job" was

to work directly with our clients and their immediate practical needs. I don't remember how I heard about *Bridge* but it hadn't been out for very long when I read it in 1984. The voices in the anthology spoke from worlds I knew nothing about, at least until I arrived at the shelter. For me, the book represented one in a series of moments of synergy, when what I cared about intellectually, emotionally and politically all seemed to be the same thing."

—**Suzanne Raitt, Professor of English**



## GSWS FALL BROWNBAG PRESENTATIONS

### "Women and the Revision of Age: Longevity and Its Representation in the 1920s"

**Melanie Dawson**, *Associate Professor of English*

What does it mean to grow older during the "age of youth," as the 1920s was often called? At what age was one old (or at least, older)? What did aging look like, in the eyes of writers and illustrators? How did gender affect perceptions of aging – and interventions into it? This talk examines desires and questions about aging from the early twentieth century, interrogating textual examples from the 1920s and from Edith Wharton's oeuvre in particular. How Wharton and her contemporaries imagined older age (as well as the innovations and controversies surrounding it) sheds light on early twentieth-century constructions of womanhood. From examples found in fiction, advertising, and film, I explore visions of aging that depict age's cultural instability, its availability for manipulation, and a modern unsettling of existing age-bound categories.

### "Adjudicating Sexual Assault on Campus: Emerging Models at U.S. Colleges and Universities"

**Cynthia Ward**, *Professor of Law*

Amid a nationwide conversation about sexual assault on campus, colleges and universities across the country are instituting reforms in their process of adjudicating allegations of sexual assault. In the absence of a general consensus as to what adjudicatory structures will meet the need to produce just outcomes, academic institutions have mostly been "going it on their own" and have produced systems which differ widely on a number of important variables. This talk outlines the basic tenets of the major emerging models of sexual assault on campus and evaluates those models from a core perspective: that any acceptable model for adjudicating these cases must produce outcomes which both deliver justice for victims of sexual assault and offer adequate rights and protections to accused perpetrators. The emerging models differ significantly in their capacity to achieve both goals.

### "Public Spheres and Safe Spaces: GamerGate and Online Misogyny"

**Elizabeth Losh**, *Associate Professor of American Studies and English*

The basic narrative of the #GamerGate controversy involves feminist game developers, critics, scholars, and fans of independent gaming who have been targeted by very intense campaigns of online harassment that threaten their fundamental rights to personal privacy, bodily safety, and sexual agency. It is important for the eloquent firstperson testimony of the women themselves to be given priority as speech acts that command attention as forms of resisting to prevailing misogyny, but it also may be useful to examine the larger discursive context of #GamerGate and why hard-core gamers who are fans of AAA videogames with military storylines and first-person shooter game mechanics have constructed a seemingly illogical and paranoid explanatory theory about so-called "social justice warriors" pursuing unfair advantage. How do we understand their claims for noninterference and sovereignty in game worlds? How do gamers' desires to preserve a "magic circle" around game play conflict with feminist notions of "safe space"?





## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

### Mira Nair, '12 (GSWS)

It's been a long and eventful journey since graduating from William and Mary in May 2012. After working for a year in the non-profit social justice sector in Washington, DC at organizations like the National Women's Law Center and Alliance for Justice, I decided to take the opportunity to get some international experience and pursue a postgraduate degree across the pond at the University of Cambridge. After completing my MBA, I took a job in Cambridge, UK in the traditionally female-dominated world of marketing within the traditionally male-dominated hi-tech sector – a very interesting experience for someone with a Gender Studies background! Living abroad for 2.5 years has taught me the following about England: abortions are a given, not a debate, cake is a food group,



Mira Nair, '12

gun control is also a given, ale is also a food group, all important and unimportant social activity is organized around a pub or a tea room, and Americans are the go-to group of people to poke fun at (which is sometimes and sometimes not for good reason).

### Ari Pak, '13 (GSWS/Psychology)

I want to share with you two snapshots from my life and words for the future we are creating together.

Snapshot One: November 21, 2010. I am a second semester freshman at William and Mary. I am taking my first Women's Studies courses with Professor Ozyegin and Professor Meyer, longboarding between classes and the Grind, and organizing with the Living Wage Campaign for W&M Campus Workers. I am reading (and being thoroughly confused and moved by) words written by new-to-me names: Audre Lorde, Dean Spade, Michel Foucault, Kimberle Crenshaw, Peggy McIntosh, and the list goes on. This was one of the catalyzing years of my consciousness, of my politicization, of my power -- when I started to sift through the questions: Who am I? What do I believe in? What will I fight for?

Snapshot 2: November 21, 2015. I am co-facilitating a workshop at the University of Maryland's F.U.E.L. the Fight Leadership Conference with Asian Pacific Islander Resistance (API Resistance), a local group of API folks organizing in solidarity with Black Lives Matter and Black liberation. F.U.E.L. workshop participants present skits exemplifying how they want to be in solidarity with their communities for justice: resisting Islamophobia, demanding protection from bullying in schools, and insisting on Ethnic Studies programs at their high schools. I am also here as a HS Program Coordinator for Asian American LEAD (AALEAD), a youth-empowerment

program in which we work with API youth, with a group of 20 AALEAD youth attending the conference. I get to do empowerment and liberation work in the DC area with my communities on a daily basis. This is another catalyzing year of my consciousness-- when I again sift through the questions: Who am I? What do I believe in? What will I fight for?

In the time between these years I've had many experiences. I've been unemployed, employed multiply at one time, and worked lots for free. I've been a dog-walker, a landscaper, an after school teacher, a barista, an HIV-prevention youth worker. I've experienced joy, depression, disappointment, anger, excitement, surprise, contentment, contemplation, inspiration, love.

I want to leave you with this quote by bell hooks about the ethic of love. Because, no matter where and when I may find my self, I know that I can always center my work, dreams, talents, and visions for the world in an ethic of love. And no matter where you may find yourself right now, in two weeks or two years, know that you hold so much power in your own experience, visions for the world, and all that you do. Let's get to work.

"The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom." (bell hooks, "Love as the Practice of Freedom")

**"...no matter where and when I may find my self, I know that I can always center my work, dreams, talents, and visions for the world in an ethic of love."**



Ari Pak, '13

## REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE CAROL WOODY INTERNSHIPS

Melanie Aguilar-Rojas, Katie Greenberg, and Taylor Medley were the recipients of the 2015 Carol Woody Internship Awards. Funding by a generous donation from William and Mary alum Carol Woody ('71), Carol Woody Internship Awards are available for academically distinguished students participating in GSWS, with a preference for women students. The award is intended to offer a "real world" experience as preparation for professional career and/or post-graduate opportunities. The awards are available for students interested in doing an internship during the summer.

### **Katie Greenberg, '16** (Sociology/Public Policy)

This summer I had the privilege of interning for Senator Charles E. Schumer (D-NY) in Washington D.C. This incredible opportunity allowed me to explore my interest in politics and experience firsthand the way the federal government works. While I enjoy politics, my main interest is policy and how it affects women. For this reason, I went out of my way to talk to staffers and lobbyists who do this type of policy work, and I attended as many briefings and hearings regarding these issues. I was fortunate enough to talk to incredible people who work on a range of issues including maternal health and child delivery, access to contraception, sexual assault on college campuses, women's participation in STEM fields, and domestic abuse. Through my conversations and my participation in events such as the AAUW's celebration of Title IX, I reinforced my desire to find a career where I can advocate for women's rights and make a change. This opportunity was possible because of the generous funding I received through the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program's Carol Woody Internship Award. I am so grateful to have the support of Carol Woody and the GSWS Program, who allowed me to explore my interest in politics, policy, and being a woman working in Washington.

### **Taylor Medley, '17** (GSWS/Public Health)

Last Spring I was fortunate enough to receive the Carol Woody Internship Award from the GSWS Program that helped fund my internship with NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia. Along with NARAL, I worked closely with Planned Parenthood, URGE, and other reproductive justice orga-

nizations to better understand the unique experiences of people who seek out abortion care in Virginia. Most of my internship was spent organizing and preparing for NARAL's annual Leadership & Advocacy summit—this year it was titled "Women of Color, Reproductive Justice, and Choice." We had a variety of speakers discuss their experiences as black women within the Reproductive Justice movement and the unique barriers they face as a result of both systematic racism and the politicization of reproductive healthcare.

Additionally, we held information sessions on TRAP (Targeted Regulations of Abortion Providers) laws in Virginia. These laws create medically unnecessary standards for reproductive healthcare clinics and are ultimately meant to shut down clinics that provide abortion care. We were able to rally enough pro-choice voices that the Virginia Board of Health voted to amend TRAP and keep clinics open in our state. A huge victory! I also participated in tabling at local farmers markets and cultural events to give out reproductive health resources and talk about pro-choice candidates in the upcoming election. Lastly, we supported a major push for the EACH (Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance) Woman Act that would repeal the discriminatory Hyde Amendment which prevents Medicaid and other federal money from funding abortion care. Hyde prevents low-income people, especially women of color and disabled women, from accessing abortion care. Further, people who work for the government and/or serve in the military/Peace Corps are also affected by Hyde. The bill now has over 70 Congressional co-sponsors and the backing of thirty-six women's health, rights, and justice advocacy organizations.

My internship experience firmly cemented my desire to become a midwife and abortion provider, especially for communities already marginalized by our current healthcare system. Without the generosity of the GSWS Program and Carol Woody, I would not have had this amazing experience that greatly strengthened my passion to make reproductive justice activism my life's work.

**"We were able to rally enough pro-choice voices that the Virginia Board of Health voted to amend TRAP and keep clinics open in our state. A huge victory!"**



Taylor Medley, '17



## SAVE THE DATE

### 20th Annual Minnie G. Braithwaite Lecture in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

**Rhodesa Jones,**

*Co-Artistic Director of Cultural Odyssey and  
Director of the Medea Project: Theater for  
Incarcerated Women*

**Tuesday, April 5, 2016**

**7: 00 PM**

**Andrews Hall, Room 101**



## MARY & WILLIAM NEWSLETTER

*Editor*

Noah Brooksher '16

*Director of GSWS*

Jennifer Putzi

*Designer*

Cindy Baker, Web & Design



**WILLIAM & MARY**

CHARTERED 1693

## GIVE TO GSWS

Your contribution to the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program will help our faculty members provide the best learning experience to our students. You can contribute online with your credit card, using our secure web server at: [www.wm.edu/as/gsws/support/index.php](http://www.wm.edu/as/gsws/support/index.php). The contribution form will be pre-selected to direct your gift to the general academic fund for the GSWS, which supports student and faculty needs directly.

To contribute by mail, make your check payable to The College of William & Mary Foundation. Please be sure in your check's memo area to note that you are designating your gift for GSWS.

Mailing address:

*The College of William and Mary*

*P.O. Box 1693*

*Williamsburg, VA 23187-1693*

[www.facebook.com/williamandmarygsws?fref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/williamandmarygsws?fref=ts)