The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities

In 1989, Vanderbilt’s Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities was awarded a $480,000 Challenge Grant from the NEH to help establish a permanent endowment for the center. The grant had to be matched 4:1 with funds from the private sector, which helped leverage an additional $1.9 million. This award signifies the nationally recognized achievements of the center and helps ensure its long-term future.

The center facilitates interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences by hosting annual faculty fellows, including one visiting faculty member, and convening faculty and graduate students to find both short- and long-term ways to support and promote the humanities at Vanderbilt and beyond. The center supports and promotes the humanities in three main areas: career diversity and development for graduate and undergraduate students, humanities-led solutions to real-world problems, and community partnerships.

In the 2019–20 academic year, the Warren Center is exploring the theme of Borders and Belonging. Whatever forms borders take, they create inclusion and exclusion, belonging, and alienation. With this theme in mind, the center’s programs will include:

- Co-sponsoring a Borders and Belonging-themed track at the Southern Festival of Books, featuring multiple authors and activists over the three-day period
- Co-sponsoring an art exhibit at the Jean & Alexander Heard Libraries Fine Arts Gallery titled Visionary Aponte: Art and Black Freedom

Vanderbilt slavery archive to reach wider audience through data hub

A digital archive of the oldest records for Africans in the Americas, directed by a Vanderbilt history professor and hosted at the Vanderbilt Jean & Alexander Heard Library, will join a new online data hub. This will enable researchers and the public to access and analyze millions of pieces of data from collections across eight institutions, including Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt’s Slave Societies Digital Archive, supported in part by NEH, is the largest digital collection of records for Africans in the Atlantic World, approaching 700,000 digitized images from the U.S., the Caribbean region, and Latin America. These records date from the 16th to the 20th centuries and document the history of between six and eight million individuals. The collection is the most extensive serial record of the history of Africans in the Atlantic World and also includes valuable information on the indigenous, European, and Asian populations who lived alongside them.

- Award-winning writer Jaquare Díaz who will present the annual Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture, based on her memoir, Ordinary Girls
NEH Summer Stipends

NEH Summer Stipend Awards advance research that is of value to scholars and general audiences. Two Vanderbilt faculty members were awarded 2019 Summer Stipends:

- An associate professor of Jewish Studies and Law, who researches the history of Jews in Islamic lands during the medieval period, used the stipend to support a book-length project examining Jewish urbanization in Iraq under the early Abbasids and the subsequent Jewish migration to the Mediterranean region. The manuscript is titled The Shifting Fate of World Jewry from Iraq to North Africa in the Early Islamic Period, and focuses on the period from 750 to 1200 C.E.

- An assistant professor of African and African American Art, who studies 20th-century black women artists and African American engagements with Africa, used the stipend to support the early stages of research for her second book manuscript, provisionally titled States of Emergency: Politics of Ephemerality in African American Art, 1965 to 2015. Her project examines the ways in which African American artists working during the past 50 years have engaged with ideas of ephemerality, producing temporary materials such as prints and posters as well as larger-scale projects, such as site-specific community murals. She used the NEH funding to conduct primary source research for the first chapter, which will focus on prints and posters made in connection with the 1960s civil rights movement and the early black feminist movement.

"We, as a nation, need to attend to our cultural resources, because, if we do not, slowly but surely, we will lose our way. We will lose any deep and abiding understanding of our nation's ideals."

JON PARRISH PEEDE
Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Vanderbilt alumnus (BS'91)

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