

ACMRS Second Book Institute 2024 Evaluation Report

June 2024

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INTRODUCTION

The Second Book Institute offers support structures for midcareer scholars of premodern critical race studies who are in any stage of writing their second book. The Institute is part of the RaceB4Race Mentoring Network, a Mellon-funded initiative based at Rutgers University-Newark.

The goals of the Institute include:

- Make progress on the writing of a first book, starting from any stage.
- Discuss what is unique about the second book, and how it differs from a first book.
- Discuss publishers' expectations of a second book project.
- Discuss the unique challenges of writing a second book at a busy stage of professional life, and explore strategies for meeting those challenges.

All Institute attendees are expected to attend all Institute sessions, read and discuss the work of fellow members, and write and present their work at an Institute session.

In 2024, the Second Book Institute ran from February through June. The 2024 RaceB4Race Second Book Institute program director is Dr. Patricia Akhimie and the Second Book Institute was led by Dr. Jean E. Howard. Participants met virtually twice per month via Zoom to discuss and workshop their writing. During the Second Book Institute, participants also received mentorship and insight into publishing.

This evaluation report details the following:

- [Program descriptive information](#)
 - Participants
 - Evaluation Methods
- [Evaluation findings](#)
 - Initial Perspectives
 - Experiences
- [Summary and recommendations](#)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

Participants

Thirteen midcareer scholars participated in the 2024 Second Book Institute. Of the 13 participants, 10 took the evaluation survey for a response rate of 77%.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluation methods included a survey with both open and closed ended questions on the following:

- how they heard about the Second Book Institute
- what about the description of the program made them feel like they would be a good fit
- if there was anything in the description of the program that made them worry they would not be a good fit
- what they were most nervous about encountering during the Institute
- their expectations when they enrolled in the Book Institute
- if their expectations were met, and what they would have preferred to have happen if their expectations were not met
- their goals for themselves during the Institute
- if they met their goals
- if anything could have been done differently during the Institute to help them meet their goals
- what components of the Institute helped them to meet their goals
- what they liked about the Institute
- what they wish would have happened during the Institute
- their overall rating of the Institute
- if they had any additional comments

To draw attention to the core of the elements of the comments provided, some words in the participant responses are **bolded** within this report. The percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Initial Perspectives

Learning about the Second Book Institute

Participants were asked to explain how they first heard about the Second Book Institute. Some mentioned more than one means of hearing about it. Responses included the following:

- Twitter (n=2)
- Email/announcements from ACMRS (n=2)
- Email (unspecified) (n=2)
- Email from RSA (n=1)
- Social media (unspecified) (n=1)
- Patricia Akhimie (n=1)
- From a colleague (n=1)
- Professional listserv (unspecified) (n=1)

Second Book Institute Description: Participant Assessment of Fit and Concerns

Participants were asked open-ended questions about what in the Second Book Institute description made them feel they were a good fit for the program, if anything about the description made them feel they may not be a good candidate, and what they were most nervous about encountering during the Institute and if those things occurred.

Regarding the description of the Second Book Institute and assessing their possible fit, participant comments focused on the aspects of support for second book authors, structure, the focus race, and working with Jean Howard. Illustrative comments are displayed below, and all comments are in the Appendix.

- *Working with **Jean Howard**, that there would be an opportunity to be in a **writing community**, that there would be a **structure** in place to make some progress on my book.*
- *Everything! The offer of **support for the process of writing and publishing my second book**; the opportunity to **learn from and share work with other scholars committed to PCRS work**; and, almost above all, the chance to work with Second Book Institute leader, **Jean E. Howard**.*
- *It offered **structure, mentorship, and community** that I wanted as I worked on the second book.*
- *I had a strong sense of what it was already from colleagues, etc. I was **drawn toward a program to help people plan and make progress on their second books**, which is a form of mentorship not frequently available.*

When asked about what made them think they would not be a good candidate, five wrote about their concerns. Three wrote about working in fields they felt may not fit or that their approach does not align with PCRS, two noted they were worried about not being a scholar of color, and one said they were new to studying race. Illustrative comments are below, and all comments are in the Appendix.

- *I wasn't worried but **wasn't sure my research would align with the traditional focus of PCRS**. And **I am not a scholar of color** so wasn't sure I was the target audience for this mentorship.*
- *I am **new to the field of race studies** and did worry at first that others would think I was not sufficiently invested in the field.*
- *I work in a comparative field, and sometimes **the way that my approach deals with race is hard to convey to folks outside my field**.*

Participants were asked to reflect on what they were most nervous about encountering during the Second Book Institute and if these things happened. None of those who mentioned things they were nervous about said those things occurred. Of the six who shared their insights, their comments centered on worries about others' engagement and cooperativeness, being judged, and the stage of their project. One noted that not all participants in their cohort were collegial, one noted that the group was not the best fit due to engagement, and another said there was some degree of Anglophone bias. Illustrative comments are below, and all comments are in the Appendix.

- *I was nervous that I would encounter judgment about the subject of my project, or about my approach. This did not happen. To the contrary, **I have found the atmosphere to be remarkably supportive throughout.***
- *I was nervous about whether my project was sufficiently advanced to participate; I think on balance, **mine is in an earlier stage than some of my colleagues' projects are, but I think in the long run that's probably helpful to me because it gives me models to follow** as I continue to advance the second book project. I have found sometimes in interdisciplinary early modern studies venues, there's often a bias toward the Anglophone world, with non-Anglophone literature being pushed to the margins. I wonder if in future iterations of the SBI if the organizers could make an effort to even the numbers out more among different disciplines. **The ratio of English to non-English scholars meant that many of our conversations had a distinctly Anglophone bias**, which meant I felt like I was having to play a particular role representing my field in conversations rather than getting to be a full participant.*

Personal Goals for the Second Book Institute

Of the ten responding to the survey, 90% (n=9) said they were able to meet their goals during the Second Book Institute. The person who was not able to meet their goals noted that one thing that could have helped them meet their goals would be, “Mandating that the smaller accountability groups meet once per week -- my accountability group peers did not want to do that (we met once per month), and I think that it would have helped to meet often.”

Those who were able to meet their goals were asked to describe what components of the Institute helped them to meet their goals. Participants said the accountability, leader, feedback, and structure helped them to meet their goals. For example, one participant commenting on accountability said, “The annotated bibliography and accountability groups were both extremely useful, the structure of feedback was useful for gaining perspective on how scholars in other disciplines were working in this theoretical framework.” Another noting the leadership and feedback model said,

- ***Jean has welcomed everyone in the group, shown no favoritism, exuded so much positivity about the worth of our projects, and modeled through her extraordinarily brilliant written responses and her discussion facilitation how to provide intellectual feedback in ways that are both genuinely useful and critical.** Thus, rather than allowing the seminars to be venues where we are invited to display our knowledges by offering writers endless bibliographical info, **she has instead created a real community in which we can listen thoughtfully to each other**, tell writers what we think they have said, and then address both substantive and structural issues in a generous way.*

Additional comments about the components of the Second Book Institute participants felt were helpful in meeting their goals are in the Appendix.

Participant Expectations

Participants were asked to reflect on what their expectations of the Second Book Institute were. Key themes were related to expectations of accountability and community, feedback, and working with PCRS scholars. Illustrative comments on participant expectations are below, and all comments about expectations are in the Appendix.

- *Opportunities for **substantive feedback** on written work; **accountability** on top of self-imposed deadlines; **guidance** on conceiving of a second book project; **advice for navigating publishing process for second book.***
- *I expected to **be challenged** by Jean and the other members of the seminar to think harder and **move the project along.***
- *I had hoped to **complete a proposal and to get feedback from others**; I had also hoped to **be part of the community of scholars** working on their projects.*

Participants were asked if their expectations for the Second Book Institute were met. All (100%) said their expectations were met.

Participant Experiences

Overall Rating

Participants rated their overall experience as a participant in the Second Book Institute on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent). The mean and median rating was 9 out of 10. The lowest rating was 7 out of 10, and four (40%) of the 10 responding participants rated their experience a 10 out of 10.

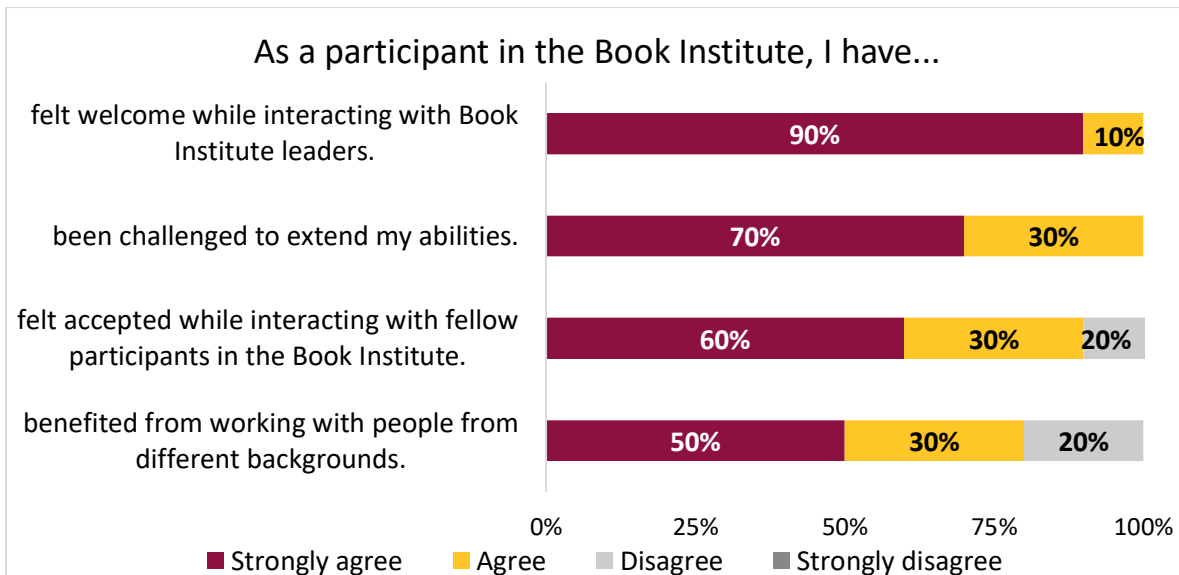
Participants providing additional feedback about the Second Book Institute commonly focused on Jean Howard's leadership and expressed gratitude for the Institute, and some provided some insight into what they wished was different. For example, one said,

- ***I am grateful beyond measure for the gift of this wonderful Institute! I especially love the way Jean set up writing groups, which enabled us to have accountability and support from week to week. the same time, I wish the group included a few more "senior" mid-career scholars who (like me) have not yet published their second books, for this group can help so very much. Of course, I realize that there are many factors, including structural racism, that explain why there aren't more 'senior' scholars in this group... Given that the factors that often lead to these longer timelines tend to affect POCs more than white folks, I hope that word gets out that this group is really ideal for and welcoming to those who have been struggling with second books for a long time.***

Additional comments about their experiences are in the Appendix.

Second Book Institute Environment

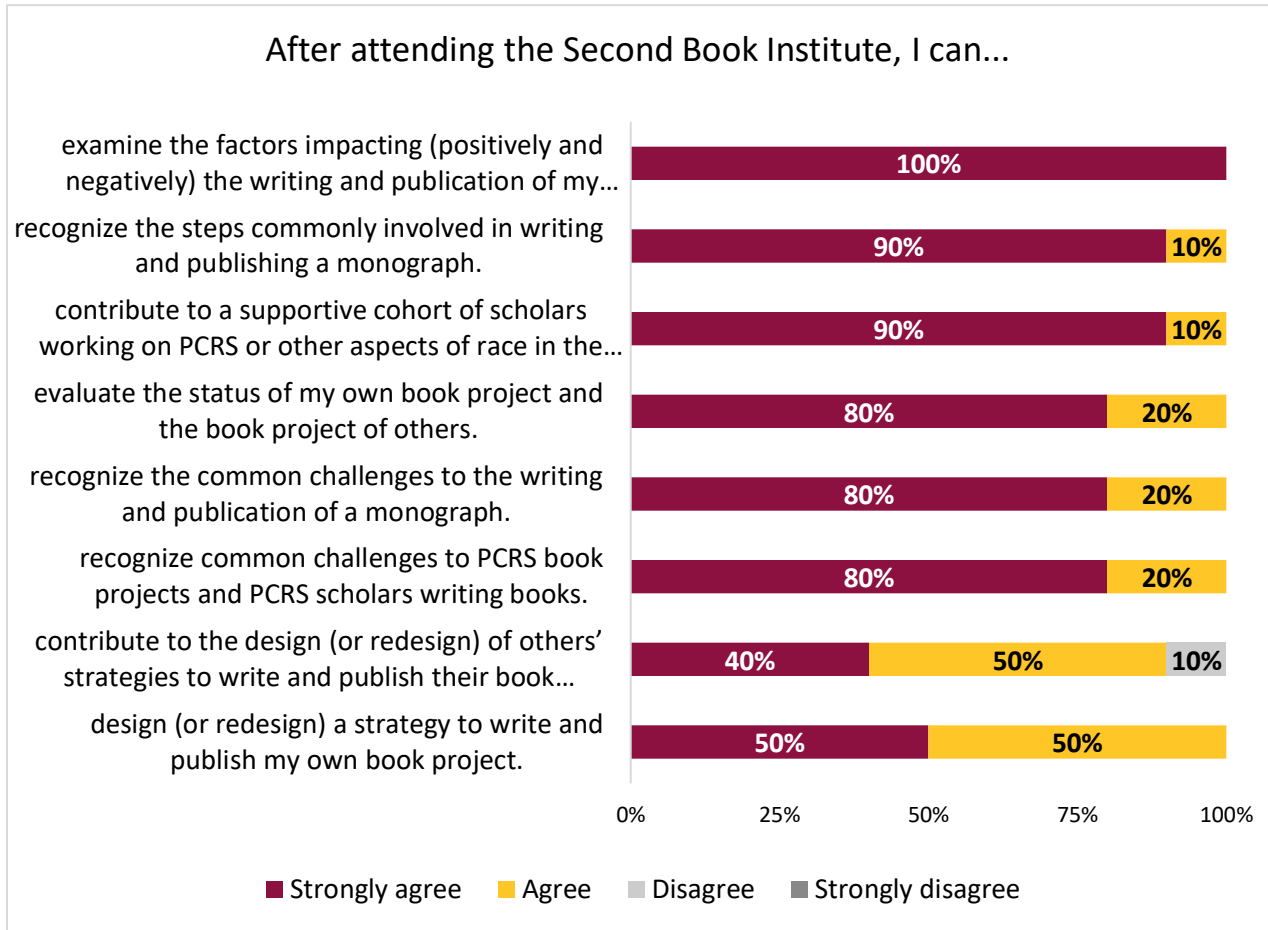
Survey respondents were also asked a short series of closed-ended questions about the environment of the Second Book Institute. All questions began with “I have...” and centered on feeling welcome, feeling accepted, benefitting from working with those from different backgrounds, and feeling challenged. Response choices included strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. As shown in the chart below, 100% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed they felt welcomed while interacting with the leader and had been challenged to extend their abilities. Ninety percent (n=9) said they felt accepted by fellow participants, and 80% (n=8) said they benefited from working with people from different backgrounds.



Participant Abilities

Participants also rated their agreement with several statements on their capabilities (“I can” statements) after the Second Book Institute. The statements along with the distribution of responses are shown in the chart below. Respondents were provided a 4-point Likert scale for their ratings which included the options strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. As shown in the chart, 100% (n=10) strongly agreed or agreed that they can:

- examine the factors impacting (positively and negatively) the writing and publication of my own book project and the book projects of others.
- recognize the steps commonly involved in writing and publishing a monograph.
- contribute to a supportive cohort of scholars working on PCRS or other aspects of race in the early modern world.
- evaluate the status of my own book project and the book project of others.
- recognize the common challenges to the writing and publication of a monograph.
- recognize common challenges to PCRS book projects and PCRS scholars writing books.
- design (or redesign) a strategy to write and publish my own book project.



What Participants Liked and Wished was Different

All survey participants were asked what they liked during the Second Book Institute as well as what they wished happened during the Institute. Ten participants left comments on both questions. The comments about what participants liked commonly focused on leadership, engagement, support, feedback, accountability, and varied approaches to PCRS. Illustrative comments on what participants liked most are below, and additional comments are included in the Appendix.

- *Everyone's **work is taken extremely seriously and discussed in great detail**. The dynamic Jean fosters is **collegial and professional** and encourages all participants to find ways to give **supportive and constructive feedback**.*
- *[It] gave me the **schedule and accountability to make progress** on my work and that there was an opportunity for useful feedback from peers.*
- *I have gotten to **see so many different approaches to PCRS**, but that we do all have a similar knowledge of a certain "canon" of books in the field.*

When participants were asked what they wished happened during the Second Book Institute, three noted wanting community norms for feedback, one wanted recordings of meetings, one wanted iterative feedback, one wanted at least one in-person meeting, and one wanted more intellectual similarity. One participant who commented on wanting community norms for feedback had the following to say:

- *I think the book institute **could be improved with some better guidelines outlined at the start. I think we assume that because most people are professors, they know how to give good, constructive feedback but this is not always the case. Tone and delivery of feedback is important. ... Also important is reminding people to give feedback to HELP the writer--some folks only talked about how the author should write about what the reader was interested in rather than meet the project where it was. Finally, reminding people that we are agreeing this is a safe space to submit all kinds of work, including unpolished writing in the draft stage so authors can work through emerging ideas, and to be generous in their feedback.***

Additional comments on what participants wished would have happened during the Second Book Institute are in the Appendix.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants of the Second Book Institute found out about the Institute predominantly via emails from ACMRS or other sources or social media. Participants reported they were drawn to apply to be part of the Second Book Institute because they were attracted to its focus on second book authors, structure, the focus on race, and the leader. All participants said their expectations of the Second Book Institute were met. Specifically, participants said the accountability, leader, feedback, and structure were helpful in assisting them meet their goals during the Second Book Institute.

Participants rated their overall experience with the Second Book Institute positively. All participants said they had been challenged to extend their abilities and felt welcomed interacting with the Institute's leader. Participants also agreed their ability to contribute to a supportive cohort of scholars working on PCRS or other aspects of race in the early modern world, recognize the common challenges to PCRS book projects and PCRS scholars writing books, examine factors positively and negatively impacting the writing and publication of their book project and the book projects of others, recognize the common challenges to the writing and publication of a monograph, evaluate the status of their own book project, design or redesign a strategy to write and publish their book projects, and recognize the steps involved in writing and publishing a monograph after the Second Book Institute were strong.

Despite the positive experiences, some expressed that specific guidelines on community norms for feedback may be necessary, and some also noted the diversity in terms of what others study or others limited familiarity with PCRS may be a hinderance. At the same time, the majority of participants expressed that they benefited from working with people from different backgrounds, so what may be a problem for some is a boon to others.

Recommendations based on participant insights about their experiences in the 2024 Second Book Institute include:

- Consider means to establish community guidelines or norms for feedback to ensure all participants receive high quality feedback from peers and offer exemplars of what feedback could look like for future participants.
- Consider having Dr. Jean Howard serve as a model facilitator or train others interested in facilitating future Book Institutes. It was evident from participant feedback that Dr. Howard takes great care to ensure that participants are welcome, supported, and equipped to accomplish their goals.
- Continue to foster accountability through small accountability groups during the Book Institutes. It was evident from participant feedback that accountability is a critical component of this program that helps participants meet their goals, and this was done well in the 2024 Second Book Institute.

APPENDIX

What about the description of the Book Institute made you feel like it would be a good fit for you?

- *My current project deals with premodern race, I have a longstanding interest in critical race theory, and I am in the early stages of writing my second book project, so it seemed like the perfect opportunity to work on the project with support.*
- *Everything! the offer of support for the process of writing and publishing my second book; the opportunity to learn from and share work with other scholars committed to PCRS work; and, almost above all, the chance to work with Second Book Institute leader, Jean E. Howard.*
- *I wanted to work with Jean Howard, and the focus on race was suited to my project.*
- *I really wanted to work with Jean Howard! And to receive feedback from a group of premodern race scholars on my project.*
- *Working with Jean Howard, that there would be an opportunity to be in a writing community, that there would be a structure in place to make some progress on my book.*
- *I'm just starting to write my second book, and felt I needed the support and structure of an Institute, as well as a place to think through my ideas with colleagues well-versed in PCRS.*
- *The focus on mid-career scholars working on critical race*
- *I am working on a second book that deals with race.*
- *It offered structure, mentorship, and community that I wanted as I worked on the second book.*
- *I had a strong sense of what it was already from colleagues, etc. I was drawn toward a program to help people plan and make progress on their second books, which is a form of mentorship not frequently available.*

Was there anything about the Book Institute description that made you worried that you would not be a good candidate for participation?

- *As a white scholar, I have concerns about hoarding resources designed to support scholars of color. as someone who has been in the field a long time, I was concerned that this Institute is geared primarily toward scholars who are on a faster track than I am (i.e., they have just published their first books and are eager to start book 2).*
- *I wasn't worried but wasn't sure my research would align with the traditional focus of PCRS. And I am not a scholar of color so wasn't sure I was the target audience for this mentorship.*
- *I am new to the field of race studies and did worry at first that others would think I was not sufficiently invested in the field.*
- *I think I was a little worried that perhaps the fact that I don't work in English literature would be a problem.*
- *I work in a comparative field, and sometimes the way that my approach deals with race is hard to convey to folks outside my field.*

What were you most nervous about encountering during the institute? Did any of those things happen? Please explain if applicable.

- *I was nervous about how the group would work together. In the end, I do not think this group was quite the best fit. Half the group seemed genuinely interested in engaging with other's work, but the other half seemed more engaged with their own work and not really attending to how to provide helpful, constructive feedback.*
- *That participants would be unwelcoming or that their feedback would be ungenerous. I felt mostly people were collegial; I think some people were not (there was some posturing by folks and a few people were quite infantilizing).*
- *I was unsure what to expect in terms of the participant engagement, given that everyone might be in a different career stage when finishing the second book. However, everyone has so far been very engaged with various aspects of the institute.*
- *I was nervous that I would encounter judgment about the subject of my project, or about my approach. This did not happen. To the contrary, I have found the atmosphere to be remarkably supportive throughout.*
- *I was nervous about whether my project was sufficiently advanced to participate; I think on balance, mine is in an earlier stage than some of my colleagues' projects are, but I think in the long run that's probably helpful to me because it gives me models to follow as I continue to advance the second book project. I have found sometimes in interdisciplinary early modern studies venues, there's often a bias toward the Anglophone world, with non-Anglophone literature being pushed to the margins. I wonder if in future iterations of the SBI if the organizers could make an effort to even the numbers out more among different disciplines. The ratio of English to non-English scholars meant that many of our conversations had a distinctly Anglophone bias, which meant I felt like I was having to play a particular role representing my field in conversations rather than getting to be a full participant.*

Please explain what components of the institute helped you meet your goals.

- *The annotated bibliography and accountability groups were both extremely useful, the structure of feedback was useful for gaining perspective on how scholars in other disciplines were working in this theoretical framework.*
- *Jean has welcomed everyone in the group, shown no favoritism, exuded so much positivity about the worth of our projects, and modeled through her extraordinarily brilliant written responses and her discussion facilitation how to provide intellectual feedback in ways that are both genuinely useful and critical. Thus rather than allowing the seminars to be venues where we are invited to display our particular knowledges by offering writers endless bibliographical info, she has instead created a real community in which we can listen thoughtfully to each other, tell writers what we think they have said, and then address both substantive and structural issues in a generous way.*
- *The schedule and structure established by the leader.*

- *That there was a schedule, the affinity groups that Jean created (I got lucky with mine because we all took it seriously), feedback from Jean and from a few of the participants*
- *Discussion of other people's proposals led me to realize I needed to think more closely about the structure and theoretical framework of the entire book. Jean's commentary, in each session, was incredibly important for me seeing that I needed to allow myself time and space in order to begin this book differently than my last.*
- *Regular meetings, accountability group, community*
- *This is a fabulous program, and Jean is a dream advisor! I think that the program is extremely helpful. I sometimes feel that the feedback to the writer of the week becomes a bit overwhelming for them, and I wonder whether doing a small focus group with participants to come up with 1-2 major suggestions from the group (among maybe a subgroup of 2-3), might be more helpful, or something like that.*
- *The structure of the seminar itself, with a specific deadline, was the most tangible thing. Jean's availability to meet and discuss the project at various stages, and to offer framing in these meetings, was particularly helpful. My smaller accountability group also met and checked in regularly, which allowed for further structure along the way to the deadline.*
- *Accountability was key. I knew I had to write, so I did.*

What were your expectations when you enrolled in the Book Institute?

- *Opportunities for substantive feedback on written work; accountability on top of self-imposed deadlines; guidance on conceiving of a second book project; advice for navigating publishing process for second book.*
- *I expected to be challenged by Jean and the other members of the seminar to think harder and move the project along.*
- *To learn about the state of the field, and to get material support from colleagues in the field.*
- *I thought I would get to work with a group of scholars working on projects that tackled some aspect of premodern race studies.*
- *That I would feel like I had made some sort of progress on my project.*
- *I didn't really know what to expect but was hoping for an expanded reading list and a sense of community.*
- *Meeting scholars and similar place in career in related fields.*
- *I expected to give and receive feedback and learn about major works that I should be reading.*
- *I had hoped to complete a proposal and to get feedback from others; I had also hoped to be part of the community of scholars working on their projects.*

Please leave any additional comments you have about the Book Institute below.

- *I am grateful beyond measure for the gift of this wonderful Institute! I especially love the way Jean set up writing groups, which enabled us to have accountability and support from week to week. At the same time, I wish the group included a few more "senior" mid-career scholars who (like me) have not yet published their second books, for this group can help so very much. Of course, I realize that there are many factors, including structural racism, that explain why there aren't more "senior" scholars in this group--that is, why most members of the 2nd book Institute tend to have only very recently published their first books. But I wonder if the abundance of (relatively) junior mid-career scholars in the Institute is also because there is so*

much professional shame attached to the experience of not conforming to the traditional timeline. Given that the factors that often lead to these longer timelines tend to affect POCs more than white folks, I hope that word gets out that this group is really ideal for and welcoming to those who have been struggling with second books for a long time:)

- *Jean is amazing!*
- *Though there were some negative microaggressions during this series, working with Jean and some of the participants has been incredibly wonderful. Jean's feedback is thorough, constructive, and helpful. She has always been willing to meet with us 1:1 to discuss our projects, and she genuinely wants to support us!*
- *This has been such a tremendously wonderful and encouraging experience. I'm so happy to have been able to do this! As someone outside of English, I can say what those within clearly already knew, which is that Jean is a (inter)national treasure!*
- *Jean, Jean, Jean. Brilliance and care, all in one person. I love her so much.*
- *I think future institutes would benefit from community norms and from one or two experienced people modeling peer engagement and feedback.*

I like that during the Book Institute...

- *Everyone's work is taken extremely seriously and discussed in great detail. The dynamic Jean fosters is collegial and professional and encourages all participants to find ways to give supportive and constructive feedback.*
- *Everyone comes prepared, asks helpful questions, and provides serious critique.*
- *We all took each other's work very seriously.*
- *I liked that we received written feedback from the leader and from another reader. I also loved the group feedback component during our zoom sessions.*
- *Gave me the schedule and accountability to make progress on my work and that there was an opportunity for useful feedback from peers*
- *I have gotten to see so many different approaches to PCRS, but that we do all have a similar knowledge of a certain "canon" of books in the field.*
- *Every was so engaged and shared their different expertise.*
- *Offers real help to scholars working on second books--which is rare to find!*
- *The leader provided exemplary guidance and feedback.*

I wish that during the Book Institute...

- *There were possibilities for iterative feedback. While I thought that having single sessions dedicated to one or two people's work was constructive, I could imagine an alternative structure where the accountability groups actually read one another's work and give one another feedback in a structured fashion.*
- *Conversations could be recorded and listened to afterwards. I found it hard to capture all the terrific feedback.*
- *I think the book institute could be improved with some better guidelines outlined at the start. I think we assume that because most people are professors they know how to give good, constructive feedback but this is not always the case. Tone and delivery of feedback is important (I'm not just referring to an incident that Jean is already aware of, handled,*

and was never an issue because it was an isolated incident) but also in feedback I received by email on my work (one colleague gave me line edits and comments as though I am her graduate student). Also important is reminding people to give feedback to HELP the writer--some folks only talked about how the author should write about what the reader was interested in rather than meet the project where it was. Finally, reminding people that we are agreeing this is a safe space to submit all kinds of work, including unpolished writing in the draft stage so authors can work through emerging ideas, and to be generous in their feedback.

- *We had had more discussion of community norms and proper modes of engagement with each other's projects. I have been surprised at how some of the participants have been unable or unwilling to provide feedback that is outward looking and thinks beyond their own research interests--such feedback is not always helpful for the person workshopping the chapter. This is partially a product of having folks from different fields, and having folks who are less well versed in PCRS scholarship sometimes, so perhaps some discussion about community norms and expectations at the start of the institute would be useful.*
- *We had community norms so more people would be thoughtful about how to give constructive peer review. Critique is fine! But there is a difference between critique and essentially "write a book in my field/about what I know."*
- *I honestly am struggling to think of something useful that is actionable; I do wish we could all have met in person once!*
- *I wish that the institute was a bit more focused. Some folks were writing a second book but it was their first book on race and so they weren't in the same place intellectually re: race studies and PCRS as others were.*