Pursuing the PhD: Myths & Realities  
Wednesday, February 17, 2021 | 4:30-5:30 PM EST

**PANELISTS**

**Kelly Brignac** is pursuing a PhD in History and studies the 1848 abolition of slavery in the French Empire, specifically how the introduction of indentured laborers taken from Africa, India, China, and Indochina impacted the social landscape of French colonies and how these populations interacted with former slaves. Originally from New Orleans, Kelly holds a B.A. from Millsaps College in Jackson, MS, where she graduated *summa cum laude* with Honors, and a M.A. in History from Vanderbilt University. Kelly has also recently completed internships with both Democracy Policy Network and She Grows It.

**Austin Garner** is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow, a Hershel Smith Graduate Research Fellow in Science, and a 4th year graduate student in the Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University. Austin’s studies integrate his passion for innovative genomic methods and field biology to understand the evolutionary dynamics by which biodiversity is generated on our planet. When not in the lab, Austin serves on the Graduate Student Council and as Vice President of Student Affairs for the LGBTQ+@GSAS Association. Through these appointments Austin enjoys advocating for student interests and fostering community among the graduate student community at Harvard.

**Onisha Etkins** is a PhD Candidate in Population Health Sciences at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Her dissertation work explores the impacts of racism on mental health in Black communities. She also combines her experience as a dancer with her research to explore how healing processes already existing within marginalized communities can be used to foster joy, pleasure, and positive mental health. She is Guyanese-American, grew up in a Caribbean diasporic neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY, and her community continues to be the motivation for the work she does.

**Nikhita Obeegadoo** is a PhD student in Romance Languages and Literatures (RLL) at Harvard University. Her research and teaching areas include Francophone and Hispanophone literatures, comparative literature, critical approaches to race and ethnicity (including Latinx theory), and the medical humanities. Her dissertation focuses on contemporary literatures of traumatic oceanic crossings in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean. Nikhita is a Harvard University Presidential Scholar and was twice awarded the Certificate of Distinction in Teaching by the Harvard Bok Center. In her downtime, Nikhita enjoys writing fiction, hiking and trail running.

**Michael Ortiz** is currently a 3rd year PhD student in American Studies here at GSAS where he also serves as a Diversity Fellow. Michael grew up in Trenton, New Jersey, and is a first-generation American, so diversity, equity, and belonging have been important throughout his life. Michael completed undergrad at Wesleyan University, in Connecticut, as a math and American studies double major. Michael was also involved in advocacy and inclusion work at Wesleyan, supporting student groups on- and off-campus. After graduation, Michael spent a year in management consulting before beginning graduate coursework at GSAS.