Emily Duru, a graduating senior majoring in English and minoring in Creative Writing, is a McNair Scholar for the 2020-2021 academic year. Duru’s undergraduate research work, through the McNair Scholars Program, focuses on positive representations of Black women in contemporary literature. In particular, Duru uses Black Feminist theory and methodologies in her reading of Paule Marshall’s Daughters to interrogate how the antebellum construction of race and gender effect present-day ideas and assumptions about Black womanhood. When describing her work and the stakes of her research, Duru writes:

*As a Black woman, I have always sought out representation in media or more specifically literature. Originally, I wanted to center my research around a book that poorly showcased Black women, and twisted the narrative around our bodies, sexuality, and maternity. However, I realized highlighting the bad only furthers the problem and doesn’t offer a solution to what a positive image could look like. While people have looked into the works of Paule Marshall in the past, I wanted to look at it from the point of view of Black feminist scholars and use critical theory to piece together how Marshall constructs a more encompassing illustration of Black womanhood. While this research project is just the beginning, in graduate school, I hope to continue to explore how critical Black feminist theory can change our reading of contemporary literature.*

During her time as a McNair Scholar, Duru has come to see her relationship with both the program and her colleagues as familial rather than merely academic. She notes that the community of scholars formed through the generous program afforded her contact with other eager and inquisitive minds, all pursuing future-oriented research. She is especially appreciative of the stipend that came with the scholarship. The funding she received allowed her to take the summer off of work and focus exclusively on her research. In addition to time, the funds also helped in the acquisition of materials and some course fees. Finally, since the McNair program has a vested interest in preparing undergraduates for graduate school, Duru was able to use funds to help with GRE prep materials and used the mentorship of the program in her selection of the right doctoral program for her future.

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