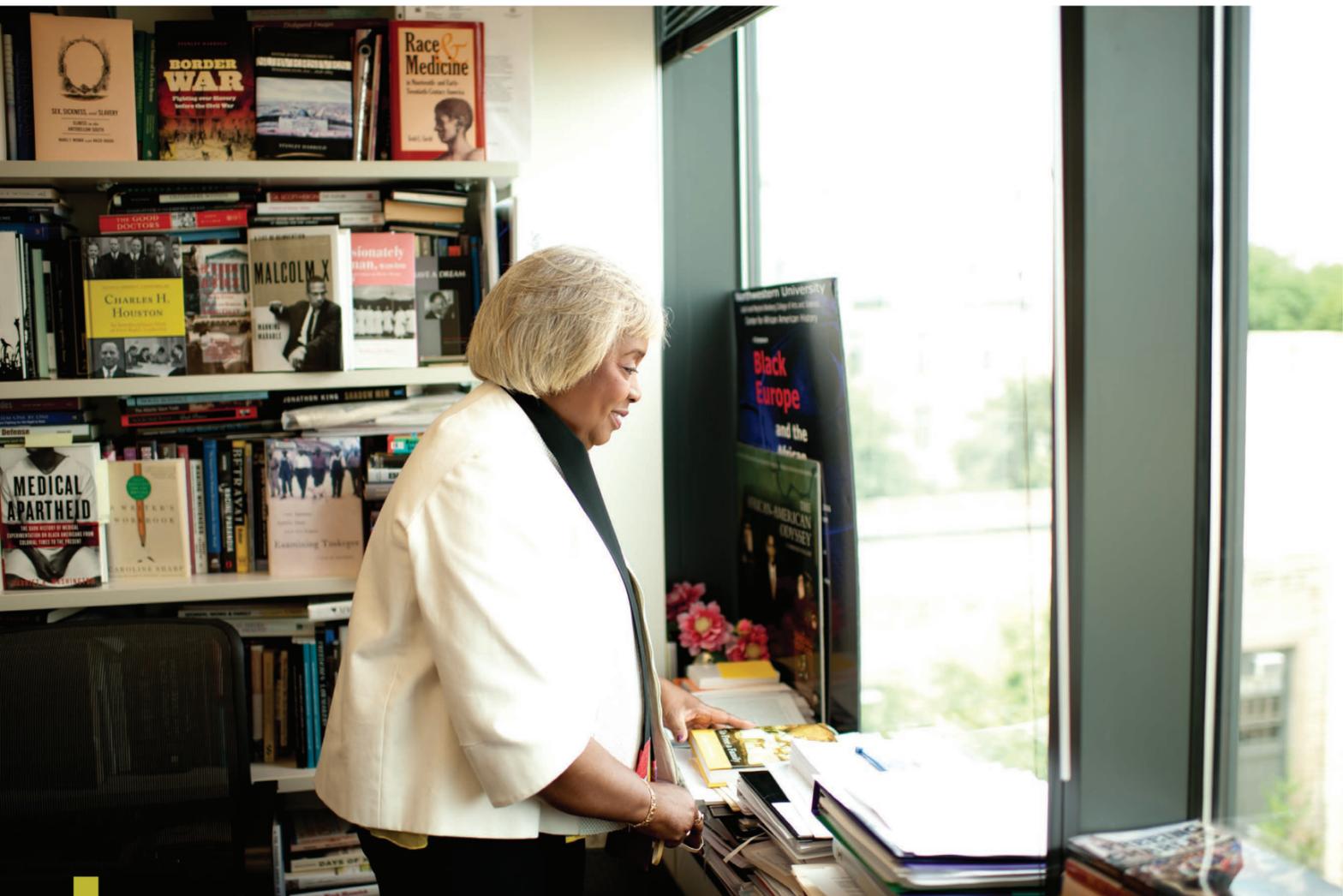


Making It Matter

What does it mean to live a life of significance?



Professor Darlene Clark Hine has spent four decades excavating the past in order to write a new, more inclusive history of the United States.

PHOTO: ROB HART

The questions often pose themselves at watershed moments: at a college reunion, on a milestone birthday, at the passing of a friend. Or they arise unbidden, while you are commuting to work or waiting for sleep to arrive: What am I doing with my life? Does it matter?

INTRODUCTION BY REBECCA LINDELL
INTERVIEWS BY ANNE STEIN AND LISA STEIN

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ften such musings are set aside as you hasten to the next task, obligation or appointment. But sometimes they linger uncomfortably, nudging you to ponder how you direct your energy in the world—and to perhaps alter that direction in large and small ways.

Does it matter? That is a question that is bound to arise in a thinking person's life, says philosophy professor Kenneth Seeskin. Fashioning an answer is a highly individual task. But one thing is universally true, Seeskin says: "A meaningful life is not going to be dropped into your lap."

"Too many people are waiting to be inspired," he adds. "They're waiting to fall in love, or waiting for some great career choice to come before them."

"But it doesn't work that way. You have to make choices about what you regard as meaningful, and what you do not. And you have to be sufficiently well-educated to recognize those opportunities when they come along."

Such discernment may come more naturally to those with a background in the arts and sciences, where questions about the elements of a meaningful life are posed regularly. Whether they are studying Shakespeare, genetics or political theory, students find they are often deliberating what it means to lead a moral and worthwhile life.

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"We teach students not only to ask those questions, but to learn about very clear ways of responding, as well as responses that have succeeded and responses that have failed," says Laurie Zoloth, a professor of religious studies. "Students begin to realize that they are part of a very old, very long conversation with many people who have endured, resisted, justified and exalted their lives in a variety of situations, but have come back to those questions over and over again."

This sort of inquiry is not the only goal of an arts and sciences education, of course. The ability to think critically, reason forcefully and study broadly often lights the way to a uniquely rewarding career, as well as engagement with one's community and fulfilling creative and intellectual activities.

Many alumni find that a meaningful life emerges naturally through the satisfaction of those pursuits. And those who find themselves wondering about the meaning of it all find they have a sturdy framework through which to re-engage those eternal questions.

In the following pages, you will meet a number of Weinberg College community members who have sought to answer the query: "What does it mean to live a life of significance?"

Their answers are as varied as the paths they have chosen. But all have drawn on the College's traditions of inquiry, research and reflection to fashion a life that each finds abundantly worth living.

