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Belew has held postdoctoral fellowships from Northwestern University and Rutgers University. Her research has received the support of the Andrew W. Mellon and Jacob K. Javits Foundations, as well as Albert J. Beveridge and John F. Enders grants for research in Mexico and Nicaragua. She holds a doctoral degree in American Studies from Yale University (2011). She earned her undergraduate degree in the Comparative History of Ideas from the University of Washington in 2005, where she was named Dean's Medalist in the Humanities. Her award-winning teaching centers on the broad themes of race, gender, violence, identity, and the meaning of war.