

Letter from the Director

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After a particularly difficult 2020, the year 2021 seems to offer a glimmer of hope. In 2020, so many loved ones suffered in the global COVID-19 pandemic, and because of structural racism, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other communities of color in the US and around the world were disproportionately among those who contracted or were lost to the disease. But the development and rollout of vaccines bring a measure of hope and optimism that everything will go “back to normal” and life will be as it was before the pandemic. Also in 2020, the world was shaken by a series of brutal murders of Black people by the police and white vigilantes. These murders forced the world to confront the racial violence aimed at exploiting and

oppressing African and African-descended people that is deeply entrenched in social structures and institutions in the US and globally. The global eruption of anger, grief, and resistance against police violence, white supremacy, racial terror, racism, and anti-Blackness engulfed us, motivated us, and empowered us. The guilty verdict in the trial of Derek Chauvin, the police officer who murdered George Floyd, provided a sense of relief to many that justice was served and an optimism that this might be a turning point in the criminal justice system, and the future for Black people in the US might now be different, or better.

However, Black communities know all too well that real structural and systemic transformation, that Black liberation, requires more than a vaccine and the conviction of one police officer. The struggle for Black lives to matter continues. Neither the COVID-19 vaccine rollout nor the Derek Chauvin verdict can bring back the lives of those lost to COVID-19 and racist violence. In fact, because of the enduring systems of structural racism and white supremacy, the structures, policies, and practices of the vaccine rollout underserve the very communities that have been most impacted by the pandemic - Black and other historically marginalized communities. As a result, these racialized and minoritized groups remain disproportionately vulnerable to the ravages of COVID-19. Similarly, the structures, policies, and practices that allowed Chauvin to murder George Floyd remain intact. The same day that Black communities collectively breathed a sigh of relief when the jury found Derek Chauvin guilty for the murder of George Floyd, that same day a police officer shot and killed fifteen year old Ma’Khia Bryant. In fact, we never stopped mourning the Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Arab lives lost to police violence and white racial terrorism, and painfully add new names to the ones listed on our tribute page of this issue – Duante Wright, Andrew Brown Jr., Michael Leon Hughes, Adam Toledo, David Suarez, Daoyou Feng, Xiaojie Tan, Delaina Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, Yong A. Yue, Ashley Yaun, and too many more. There has been effectively no change in the patterns of racist policing and criminal justice system in the US. And so, the struggle continues.

As we continue to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Black Studies at Providence College, our program continues to stand in solidarity with those protesting white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and racial oppression in the US and around the world. Through our theme for this academic year - Remembrance, Resistance, Revolution - we reassert our commitment to the Black Studies mission to continue the struggle for Black liberation, to prepare our students to tackle the challenges of 2020, 2021, and beyond, and to equip them to act, to transform, to create, to shape, to influence, and to build a better, more equitable, and more just world. In thinking about the future of Black Studies, we also celebrate Dr. Charlotte O’Kelly for her years of service, her passion, her commitment, and her central role in the creation, running, and expansion of Black Studies at PC. Through her expertise and courses, work on the Black Studies Advisory Board, mentorship of faculty and students, vigorous advocacy, generosity, and staunch support of marginalized groups on campus, Dr. O’Kelly has labored to help create the vibrant program that we have today. We wish her all the best as she embarks on new and exciting adventures upon retirement!

This issue of the Heritage follows the Black Studies anniversary and Black History Month feature event where esteemed speaker Dr. Melina Abdullah offered reflections on how Black Studies is needed now more than ever, to confront and solve the major social issues that continue to impact Black and other marginalized communities. We encourage you to view the recording on the PC Black Studies Facebook page. As you interact with the various pieces within this issue of the Heritage, we invite you to place them in the context Dr. Abdullah’s speech, connect them with our theme - Remembrance, Resistance, Revolution - and stand with us in our struggle, a struggle that is continuous.

In Solidarity.