



HERITAGE

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Racism Hidden in Plain Sight

By Julia Jordan-Zachery, Director of the Black Studies Program

The Providence College Black Studies Program Newsletter

**“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
-Martin Luther King Jr.-**

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Guthrie (a UCI student) on February 22, 2010 in her article “Black History Month” wrote that racial inequalities exist not because of “the fault of the “white man,” but are also partially the result of personal responsibility—or in this case, a lack thereof.” She goes on to suggest that racism is no longer a problem using the assertion that “we have an “African-American” president; other African-Americans in the spotlight including former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, GOP Chairman Michael Steele, Oprah Winfrey, nationally syndicated talk radio show host Larry Elder and many more.” She further argues that Black History month is “irritating” and “racist”. As Ms. Guthrie is making this argument a number of racialized and racist incidents have been occurring across college campuses such as the hanging of a noose (by a young lady who later claimed that she did not know the significance of such an act), a hanged Black effigy, “Catch an illegal immigrant day” celebration, and the “Compton Cookout” a racist barbecue event sponsored by European-American fraternities. The illusion of a post-racial state, where evidence of a first “Black” president is offered as an indicator of post-racialism, fails to recognize the racism that is often hidden in plain sight.

As we celebrate graduation season, we are forced to confront some very challenging issues. One of which is the inclusion of people of color in the halls of academia. A number of universities, while increasing the number of students of color, are faced with the increasing problem of retaining and graduating these students. Part of the problem stems from the institutions’ failure to recognize racism within its structures. Many students and faculty of color are faced with increasingly hostile environments where they feel increasingly less safe. For example, On March 25, 2010 as I attempted to enter Providence College via the Huxley entrance, I had

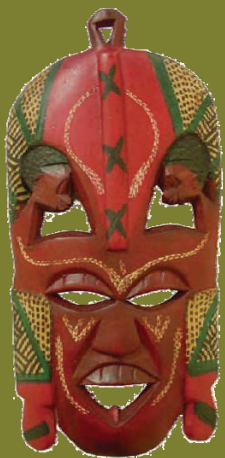
to prove that I “belonged” to the Providence College Community. This is not the first time. In a previous incidence, the security guard left the booth, I had to display my parking decal—which meant removing it from its position of hanging from the rearview mirror and holding it in my hand for close inspection. Additionally, my license plate was recorded and I was de-

manded to state which building I was going to. What is interesting about my most recent experience was that I was transporting our invited guest lecturer Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-

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Silva. Dr. Bonilla-Silva is noted for his work on “racism without racist” and for critiquing structural racism. The irony and symbolism of this act of me proving that I was a legitimate member of the Providence College community was not lost to our invited speaker. Unfortunately, my experience is not isolated. Students can recount tales of being asked to prove that they are PC students upon entering the library or even dorms. There are those among us that will say that this is not racism, that this is simply the misbehavior of some ill-informed and possibly backwards individuals. For individuals who experience such everyday occurrences and assaults, there is a constant struggle to rise above such racism while fighting to have their voices heard. Many institutions establish centers for diversity and programs for racial and ethnic studies to show their commitment to diversity. However, these centers and programs, while symbolically present, are often substantially and substantively marginalized. One entity, unless fully integrated into the institution, cannot be expected to systematically address these issues.

Furthermore, when people of color attempt to tell our stories of such incidences, we are often told that we are over reacting. When we ask about the presence of students and faculty of color, we are told of recruitment difficulties and how hard it is to find such individuals. As such, we are given the message *Continued on Page 2*



Faculty Spotlight

Eric Hirsch Ph. D
By Lovelyn Bogle '10

In 1990, Dr. Eric Hirsch joined the Providence College community as an Assistant Professor of Sociology. This scholar activist constantly challenges social inequality embedded in institutions and societal norms. Beyond writing and researching social inequality, Dr. Hirsch has taken part in several student social movements at Columbia University where he was an Assistant Professor in the '80s. He continues his activism for social justice at PC. Several students of color at PC, having gone through the rigors of the college's curriculum, felt that they were only taught from a Western (white) perspective. The students, beginning in 1994, sought to develop a program reflective of their heritage and the changing society.

With the assistance and full support of Dr. Hirsch, and two other faculty members (who have since left PC), the students wrote a proposal for the creation and implementation of The Black Studies Program. In the proposal the students stated that "the purpose of the Providence College Black Studies Program is to contribute to the end of **endemic** racism in the United States. Institutional relationships in the United States are based on a constellation of interrelated fundamental beliefs and values in which racism is a functional way of life. Therefore, racism can be eliminated only through a political,

economic, and cultural challenge by countervailing beliefs. The systematic study of the history of the black community, its political, economic, cultural development, and its various manifestations in contemporary society, **from the point of view of the members of that community**, is the mechanism through which this is to be attempted". Through the efforts of these students, and the continuous support and involvement of Dr. Hirsch, in his role as a member of the advisory committee to serving as Director, the Program became a reality.

Dr. Hirsch has remained committed to the ideals of the BLS proposal through his continuous efforts to bring awareness to students and faculty alike. His undergraduate course offerings include *Urban Sociology*, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, *Social Movements*, and *Hurricane Katrina: The Anatomy of a Social Disorder*. In an effort to further enrich students' experience, his course requirements also includes public service, and special guest speakers who also bring further reality to the lessons taught. Dr. Hirsch believes strongly in not only speaking out against social injustices, but playing an active role in bringing about social change. In his Hurricane Katrina course during the fall 2009 semester, my

classmates and I raised \$1,000, which we donated to Common Grounds. Common Grounds is a grassroots organization located in New Orleans, dedicated to relocating displaced disaster victims to their homes in Louisiana.

Beyond the walls of PC, Dr. Hirsch is active in the Providence community. His primary focus is homelessness in Rhode Island. Currently, he serves as the Chair of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Steering Committee and also the Chair of the Homeless Input Committee. These positions are facilitated by the Housing Resources Commission of the Rhode Island Office of Homelessness. The Housing Resources Commission is responsible for policy, planning and coordinating agencies and subdivisions of the state in order to provide housing opportunities for all Rhode Islanders. Dr. Hirsch embodies much of the purpose of Black Studies—social justice, activism, education and community participation.



Beyond the walls of PC, Dr. Hirsch is active in the Providence community.

Continued from Page 1 that there is nothing that can be done to address racism and the unwelcoming culture experienced by many faculty and students of color. Interestingly, these schools seem to have figured out the right recruitment formula for athletes—especially Black male athletes.

Such irony does not go unseen. In addressing these issues, universities and colleges have to recognize that institutional racism exists and that although there is at least a theoretical support for equality, we have yet to achieve a color-blind society in practice. So yes, there exist what Amy Wells in her recent book *Both Sides Now*, calls "white double con-

sciousness" which results in positive talk but negative action on racial equality. This results in racism being hidden in plain sight.

Students and faculty of color can play a role in unmasking hidden racism. We must actively speak out about our experiences. Yes this involves taking risks. As a junior faculty member, I am in a nebulous state of simultaneously being a part of academia while not being a part of the institution. I have taken a risk in writing this piece. There is a possibility that my critique of academia can render me being black balled. In the face of this, I am empowered to write

given the number of my ancestors who gave their lives for me to be here. So I encourage students and faculty of color to let your voices be heard in this ongoing challenge for the freedom of all people.

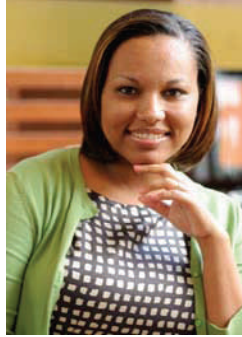
Institutions must also recognize the implicit role they play in creating a culture that allows for racism to be hidden in plain sight. There are a number of ways through which this can be addressed. The key to recruiting and retaining students and faculty of color is to achieve a critical mass of such individuals. UC *Continued on Page 4*

Alumni Spotlight

By Terza Lima-Neves Class of 2000

I graduated from PC in 2000. I had an individualized major: Political, Social, and Economic Aspects of Developing Nations, under the advisory of Dr. Tony Affigne. Obviously my minor was Black Studies. Most of the courses in this individualized major were in political science while the other courses were in Black Studies and Economics. Currently, I am an assistant professor of political science at Sewanee: The University of the South in Sewanee, TN. I hold an M.A. and Ph.D. in political Science from Clark Atlanta University. One of my research interests is the modern African diaspora. I specifically look at how African diasporas abroad support development in their homelands via informal transnational networks and activities.

The courses in Black Studies allowed me to critically recognize the diversity within the Black world. My professors carefully designed courses to demonstrate to us the diversity in Black life across the globe, from Africa, and Latin America to Europe. They taught me that the Black experience was by no means homogeneous and that each experience should be studied carefully. This realization made me value my own unique story as a young African immigrant from Cape Verde. It also led me to pursue



my studies and focus on the research areas I mentioned above.

Moreover, the Black Studies Program directors gave students ownership of the program which helped me build my confidence as a student and as a future professional academic. Because the Program was in its nascent phase, in addition to the faculty, students were also part of the committee to select the first Black Studies Director. I am very proud to say that I was at Providence during that era and was also a part of this committee. We had many meetings in Howley Hall and eventually selected Dr. Cyril Dadieh as the Program's first director. As a Program assistant, I learned how to maintain the Program's website, coordinate program awareness events, movie screenings, invite guest speakers to our lectures, and coordinate the Black Studies Banquet, among other tasks. These are all skills that I have carried with me and utilized throughout my career.

One day we will have a Black Studies Major at PC.

Current students should know that it took hard work and lots of effort for the Black Studies Program to finally be launched at PC. It should not be taken for granted. They should continue to support it by taking classes in Black Studies, attending its events, encouraging their friends to take the classes and more importantly, they should become minors. I hope one day we will have a Black Studies Major at PC.

A Child is Born

By Imani Smith-Dell '12

from the country of the darkly skinned natives
to the ship that carry human cargo
to the land of plenty
from the country of monarchy
to the "undiscovered" lands
to the interaction with the natives
to the deaths
all are brought together
and out of them I was born
a child born into a world where:
differences are ignored, discussed and analyzed
a child descending from: African slaves
and Cherokee native Americans

a child born into a place where:
people are separated by the color of their skin
not by their capabilities
a child born in a nation where:
one has to fight for what they have
a child born in a society where:
education is the only way out of poverty



a child born into a family where:
love and support is at the core
where education is valued
a child born in a city where:
opportunities allowed her to be where she is today
from the shores of Africa
to the hills and mountains of Georgia
to the cities of Massachusetts
to the beautiful campus in Rhode Island
this journey began long long ago
but is still yet to be continued
a journey:
where one has to fight for what is right
where one doesn't forget where they came from

Diversity at PC

By Jesse Sheinhite '10

This campus needs to be diversified. P.C. needs more students of color and more diverse and culturally interesting classes. As a senior I feel as though my college experience has been incomplete. I regret not going to a school with more diversity. I have the sense that I missed out on learning opportunities as well as life building ideas. When I walked into my *Intro to Black Studies* class I was so happy to not only see people of color, but also men and women together. Experience brings perspective, and race alters a person's life experiences. I see the world differently than a Black woman and I so desire to know how she sees the world and what she has been through.

My classes, through no fault of my professors, could have been improved if there were more people of color. For example, my *Domestic Violence* class was 100% female and very white. I desperately wanted the voice of a woman of color to come through because, as we soon learned, their experiences with domestic violence are very differ-



ent from that of a white person. My major is Social Science and, as such, have been exposed to many societal issues. I feel as though with no diversity core and a Eurocentric Development of Western Civilization Program, business majors do not get the opportunity to learn about how their society operates, where its flaws lie, and how they can be improved. This could be vitally important information to them as they begin their careers. They will have the opportunity to change society for the better. They are the ones who will be on Wall Street, working in office buildings where diversity is lacking. If their college experiences made them knowledgeable about institutional and structural racism for example, they may be more apt to make changes in how their businesses are run. This may seem a far stretch, but change must begin somewhere. Knowledge is power.

P.C. needs to diversify the knowledge it imparts on its students.

Continued from Page 2 Riverside, in part, has figured out how to do such and now Black students are more likely to graduate in comparison to other students. Beyond attracting a critical mass of such students, the University has addressed the campus's climate. Black Students as quoted by Olson say that they "are respected on this campus". The University of Wisconsin-Madison has also aggressively worked to overcome the graduation gap between Black and European-Americans. Thomas and Wingert (2010) report, "The university has poured resources into peer counseling to help students from inner-city schools adjust to the rigor and faster pace of university classroom and also the help minority students overcome the stereotype that they are less qualified. Wisconsin has a "laserlike focus" on building up student skills in the first three months." Recruitment efforts can also involve recruiting students of color relatively early, such as in seventh and eighth grade.

Faculty of color are also crucial to the efforts of retaining students of color. It has been shown that students of color perform better when they see

themselves reflected among the faculty. As such, efforts should be made to recruit and retain faculty of color. Beyond this, a more diverse curriculum, which offers a holistic representation of people of color, also enhances students' experiences.

Finally, efforts must be taken to address the climate of college campuses beyond the classroom. Euro-American students must receive constant messages from the institution that diversity, beyond mere representation, is valued. Staff and faculty must also recognize that race and gender biases will not be tolerated. To conclude, institutions have to systematically challenge all signatories to white privilege.

Citations:

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http://www.pe.com/localnews/highereducation/stories/PE_News_Local_W_blackstudents24.46dc71f.html
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Thus, P.C. needs to diversify the knowledge it imparts on its students. Many students will go through their entire college career at P.C. neither meeting a person of color, nor learning anything new about them. P.C. needs to recruit faculty and students with these factors in mind. The administration needs to expand the Black Studies program and start building a more diverse curriculum; otherwise, they are failing P.C.'s students. A diverse curriculum will help bring students of color to our campus. It will be a chain reaction. If the P.C. curriculum can be restructured, the student body will follow. I think it is a travesty that the Civ Program focuses solely on Western European Development. This is a missed opportunity to teach about Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Their histories are valuable and offer a new perspective. If I were a student of color, I would not want to spend the first two years of my college career being forced to learn about all the great accomplishments of the white man. Who wants to feel left out and under-represented? NO ONE.

Looking Ahead

For the academic year 2010-2011 the BLS program will host a series titled,

"When Disasters Happen". The series focuses on natural and man-made disasters by looking at the impact of hurricanes such as Katrina and earthquakes such as the one that occurred in Haiti. Our invited speakers include:

Dr. Avis Jones-Deweever October 12, 2010 who will speak on Hurricane Katrina, and

Dr. Alex Dupy March 24, 2011 who will speak on Haiti.

We will also host conversations on health and education disasters.

We encourage you to join us on Facebook for updates and to check out our website:
<http://www.providence.edu/afro/Welcome.html>