

**BLACK STUDIES PROGRAM ❀ PROVIDENCE COLLEGE**  
**❀ HERITAGE JOURNAL, 25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION ❀ FALL 2020**

# **Heritage Journal**

## **Fall 2020**

The Heritage Journal is a biannual newsletter for the Black Studies Program at Providence College, in Providence, Rhode Island. In light of our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a program, Black Lives Matter protests, and the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2015 Student Demands, the theme for this distinctive year is Remembrance, Resistance, and Revolution.

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Special thanks to Vanessa Sullivan, Administrative Coordinator



*This journal is dedicated to*

Breonna Taylor  
George Floyd  
Atatiana Jefferson  
Ahmaud Arbery  
Stephon Clark  
Sandra Bland  
Botham Jean  
Philando Castile  
Elijah McClain  
Michelle Cusseaux  
Tamir Rice  
Tanisha Anderson  
Freddie Gray  
Michael Brown  
Gabriella Nevarez  
Eric Garner  
Alton Sterling  
Rayshard Brooks

And too many more Black lives, Indigenous lives, and lives of people of color who were taken by vigilantes and the police, by centuries of white supremacy, racial terror, anti-Blackness, and violence, that has been inflicted upon Black bodies and communities in the United States and around the world. Rest in Power.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Note from the Director (6)
Letter from the Editor (7)
Black Lives Matter, The Parenting Addition (8)
Flawless (11)
Singing for Justice: Joel Thompson's <i>Seven Last Words of the Unarmed</i> (12)
Starling (14)
The New Room (20)
Dear Institution aka Providence College (22)
What Are You? (23)
Providence College Archives: A Space for Student Voices Past and Present (24)



# **Note from the Director**

*Dr. Zophia Edwards, Director of Black Studies and Assistant Professor of Sociology and Black Studies*



2020 has been a difficult year. We are still deep in the throes of a global pandemic and a global economic downturn. Because of structural racism, COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting Black and brown communities in the U.S. and around the world. In addition, we have been shaken by a recent spate of brutal murders of Black people by the police and white vigilantes. This racial violence is deeply entrenched in social structures and institutions and rooted in the system of racial plantation slavery and its corollaries, Jim Crow violence, and the prison industrial complex that targets African and African-descended people. This occurs alongside the perpetual injustices against Indigenous communities across the Americas, who have suffered genocide, land theft, and structural racism as well. The protests against police violence, white supremacy, racial terror, racism, and anti-Blackness have engulfed us, motivated us, excited us, and in the era of COVID-19, also concerned us.

In this somber and uncertain context, it feels strange commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Black Studies Program at Providence College. In 1995, a group of student activists and their faculty allies came together and pushed for Black Studies to be established as a formal program at PC. They recognized the gaps and structural problems in the curriculum and on the campus more broadly and fought to remedy them. 25 years later, Black Studies at Providence

College remains needed now just as much as it was needed when it was started. The program remains committed to promoting and encouraging scholarship that challenges multiple forms of oppression within the U.S. and globally, encouraging students to critically think of knowledge production, and arming them with the necessary tools to critique such production. These skills, the community-building that Black Studies engages in, and the space it creates to elevate the voices of marginalized people on our campus, in our community, and throughout the world are needed now more than ever in the era of COVID-19 and mass movements to end all forms of racial, economic, social injustice, and oppression. Thus, as we commemorate 25 years of Black Studies at Providence College, our theme Remembrance, Resistance, and Revolution, speaks directly to the events of this time.

Instead of organizing in-person events this year, Black Studies is hosting a virtual year-long series to engage, discuss, and act around the major issues that continue to impact Black and other marginalized communities. Our program stands in solidarity with those protesting against white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and racial oppression in the U.S. and around the world. We honor the lives of those who were murdered and/or maimed at the hands of law enforcement and white vigilantes. We reassert our commitment to the Black Studies mission, to prepare our students to tackle the challenges of 2020 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.

As you interact with the various pieces within this issue of the Heritage, we invite you to read them as expressions and explorations of our theme - Remembrance, Resistance, Revolution - and connect them with Black Diasporic agency, creativity, and self-determination. In Solidarity.



# Letter from the Editor

*Hanna Awwad, 2020-21 Graduate Assistant for Black Studies*



Dear Reader,

It has been an honor to serve the Black Studies Program during its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in the historic midst of a global pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests. I am inspired by Dr. Zophia Edwards' unrelenting commitment to centering the voices of Black people, whose narratives are often silenced and disregarded.

Our theme for this year encapsulates the ongoing Black Lives Matter protests and the 2015 Student Demands, which, to this day, have not been wholly met. Thank you for joining us on this journey of Remembrance, Resistance, and Revolution. I thank the authors who submitted pieces to this edition for their power, eloquence, and prevalence.

Finally, I commend the Black, brown, and other marginalized students and faculty at Providence College for their tireless anti-racism work to make this campus safe for us all. One day, PC will pay us for speaking at their community conversations about inclusivity and equity, and security alerts will be carefully considered before being distributed. Inshallah one day PC will stop exploiting our emotional labor and be the beloved community it claims to be. Thank you to those who came before me, and for those who are continuing the fight for justice and equity.

Yours in the struggle,  
Hanna Awwad

# **Black Lives Matter:** **The Parenting Edition**

*By Nada Samih-Rotondo, community member*  
*To read more of her work, visit [NowApproachingProvidence.com](http://NowApproachingProvidence.com)*

These are heavy times. As a mother, teacher and writer, it can all feel like too much if I let it...

My son, half Palestinian, half Black is 11 years old this year. We have so many folks checking in on us during this historic time of global pandemics, police violence and protests. While people's hearts are heavy at this time, mine is carefully cautious, even a bit calm.

White supremacy is not a new concept in our lives. As a 9-year-old, my immigrant mom sat me down to watch the Roots series to "see what America did to Black people." A child during the Black Power movement of the 60's (even though in Kuwait), she knew enough to inform me of the unique racism of the United States.

Flash forward decades later, I married my college sweetheart, a Black man-and gave birth to Ali. The micro (and macro) aggressions we faced as a couple from everywhere like family members to even my midwife deserve their own book, let alone a blog post. I have been writing for 32 out of 36 years of my life and don't feel like I have the energy to tackle that subject. I know that some readers need a lot deeper education than I could- (or want)- to supply. I decided long ago that I was no longer responsible for everyone's political or racial education, only my art and creative practice. Therefore, until it strikes my creative fancy, I will not delve into details of what that relationship was like for me and my family.

So why the calm heart? This is a marathon, not a sprint. I need to pace myself.

About 5 years ago, my oldest son was 5 years old and in Kindergarten. The year was 2015. According to an [article in The Washington Post](#), nearly 1000 people were fatally killed by police in 2015. This was the time period of harrowing phone video footage, which people hoped would help bring about swift justice. Unfortunately, justice still awaits us now in 2020. A year before that in 2014, 12-year-old Tamir Rice (God rest his soul) was killed 2014 while playing in the park. 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin (God rest his soul) was killed.

These names BARELY scratch the surface.

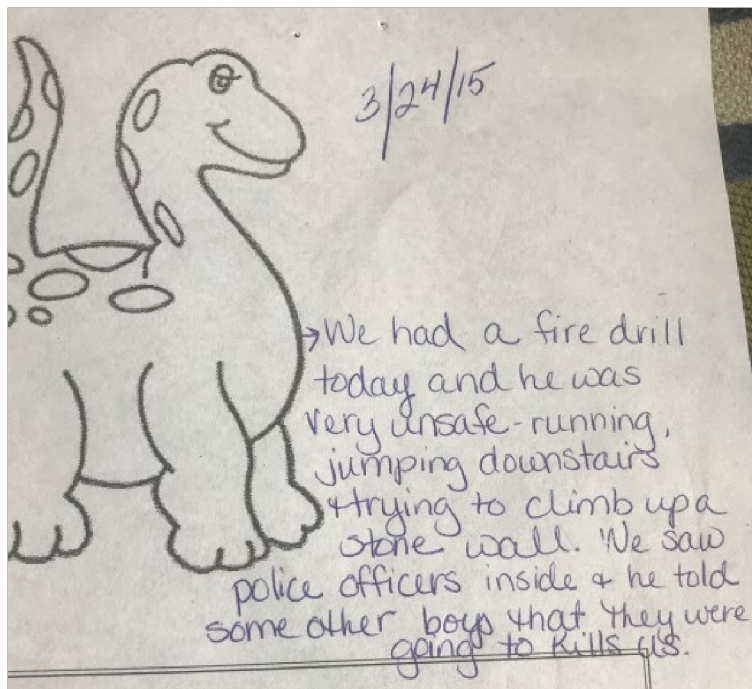
My son's kindergarten teacher was a kind, well-meaning white woman with a decade of experience teaching Black and Brown kids at a Providence elementary school. I remember feeling so grateful for her support and organizational skills. I was 8 months pregnant with my second son and needed to transfer Ali to her school after a hellish experience at a new charter school.



This charter school's racism ran so deep that it literally felt unsafe for him to continue to attend it. For example, Ali would often spend the whole school day in the Head of School's office and who else was treated this way? The other handful of Black boys at that small school as well. The head of school- a white woman from the affluent community of Barrington with no experience educating city kids- eventually threatened him (A FIVE-YEAR-OLD) with suspension and even had him physically restrained for what I (a teacher of 6 years at that time) saw as normal five-year-old behavior.

His new kindergarten teacher was great. She was kind, smart, and had good strategies to help my son balance out his physical energy and his busy body personality in a classroom environment. She sent home progress reports with smiley faces to share how his day went and we often checked in after his school day during pick up. He thrived during this school transition, which in large part is due to her hard work. It was just as I'd suspected: the problem was not with my son.

Interestingly, even this woman with all her experience of teaching in the inner city lacked awareness of systematic racism and just how differently her students' lives were from her own. We received this note on his progress report the day of a fire drill where police officers were (For what reason exactly? Um y'all better already know the answer) present at the elementary school. Picture below reads: "We had a fire drill today and he was very unsafe - running, jumping downstairs, and trying to climb up a stone wall. We saw police officers inside & he told some other boys that they were going to kill us."



How would getting a note like from your 5-year old's teacher make YOU feel? Annoyed? Angry? Frustrated at the state of the world we live in where a 5-year-old thinks police outside his school will "kill us?"

How did it make us feel?

## Annoyed

Type in kids in Palestine into a search engine and the first result that comes up will be something about them being victims of war, stuck in an endless cycle of trauma and poverty and lacking proper health care and education.

## Angry

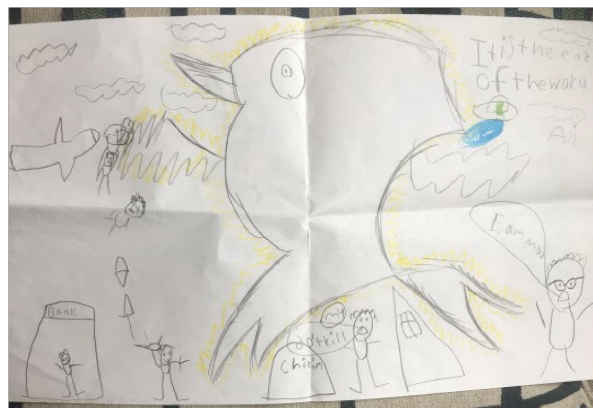
Run a search for Black childhood and what might you find? In America, Black children don't get to be children? Find me a parent of a Black child that is actually surprised by any of this and I'll sell you a bridge. According to the Washington Post article: In 1955, after 14-year-old Emmett Till was beaten and killed by a group of white men, one of his killers said Till "looked like a man." I've found this pattern in news accounts of lynchings of Black boys and girls from 1880 to the early 1950s, in which witnesses, and journalists fixated on the size of victims who ranged from 8 to 19 years old. These victims were accused of sexually assaulting white girls and women, stealing, slapping white babies, poisoning their employers, fighting with their white playmates, or protecting Black girls from sexual assault at the hands of white men. Or they were lynched for no reason at all.

## Frustrated

That same Washington Post article also cites the issue that glaringly mirrors our experience with Ali's charter school kindergarten: The overestimation of a Black child's age begins even before age 12. A study published this year in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology — which long ago published racist studies on Black children — linked the higher use of force by police on Black youth to the common perception that, by age 10, they are less innocent. The study also cited Department of Education data that said Black students are far more likely to be harshly disciplined at school than students of other races who commit the same infractions.

So how does it still make us feel reading that progress report with the silly cartoon dinosaur? How does it ever feel raising a Palestinian Black boy in America?

**We laughed.**



Ali's artwork depicting a giant "chicken" bringing about the end of world.

# **Flawless**

*By Morgan J. Victor  
PC '11 Women's and Gender Studies and Black Studies  
Media Technician Specialist  
Academic Media Services, a Division of Information Technology  
Providence College, Library LL25C*

Melanin on fleek  
Brown skin glitters in sunshine  
We are god Herself



# **Singing for Justice:** **Joel Thompson's** **Seven Last Words of the Unarmed**

by Krishan Oberoi, D.M.A.  
Director of Choral Activities, Providence College  
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On Friday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, Providence College hosted composer and activist Joel Thompson for a talk on music as a force for social change. Thompson, who is from Jamaica originally, grew up in Atlanta and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at the Yale School of Music. He is perhaps best known for his 2014 composition, *The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, a fifteen-minute piece for men's chorus and chamber orchestra. In *The Seven Last Words*, Joel sets to music the last words of seven unarmed men who died as a result of police violence in the Black community.

As the new Director of Choral Activities at Providence College, I was thrilled to be able to bring Joel to campus for a talk with our students. Although the unexpected closure of our campus earlier this semester made it necessary for us to present Joel's talk virtually, we nevertheless had an enlightening discussion and Q&A session. The event was co-sponsored by the Music Department, Homecoming 2020, and PC's Institution for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

I first learned about *The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* in 2017, when I was a research assistant at Boston University. At that time, I was helping BU professor André de Quadros with his book on global choral music in the 21st century. *The Seven Last Words* is featured in de Quadros' book as a compelling example of choral music that challenges us to rethink our paradigms around issues of racial justice. I was immediately struck by the power, elegance, and sensitivity of Joel's music. I first contacted Joel in 2018, and we had several opportunities to speak on the phone. When I was brought on to the faculty at Providence College this summer, I decided it would be important to give our choral students an opportunity to interact with Joel. I knew that this experience would help our students to see choral singing in a new light; *The Seven Last Words* demonstrates that choral music has the unique potential to engage with difficult issues in a way that touches our common humanity.

*The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* is based on the 16th-century liturgical form *Seven Last Words of Christ from the Cross*. This liturgical devotion has been used as the basis of choral works by many European composers, from Heinrich Schütz in the Baroque period to Joseph Haydn in the Classical era. In this form, the "seven last words" of Christ are not single words per se; they are actually seven statements, such as "Father, forgive them" and "I am thirsty". By taking this antiquated liturgical form and injecting it with the last words of seven unarmed Black men, Thompson has accomplished a remarkable synthesis. Not only has he revived this somewhat obscure liturgical form by injecting it with new vitality and purpose; he also highlighted his own identity as a maverick Black composer within an overwhelmingly White space.

The seven movements of *The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* reflect the dying statements of seven unarmed members of the Black community: Kenneth Chamberlain, Trayvon Martin, Amadou Diallo, Michael Brown, Oscar Grant, John Crawford, and Eric Garner. Their words are sung by a men's

chorus, accompanied by a string quintet and piano. Over the course of this fifteen-minute piece, the composer creates music that is by turns gripping, haunting, reflective, and heartbreaking. He is able to use sophisticated compositional techniques to great effect, as in the second movement, when he incorporates the Baroque musical form of *fugue*. Fugue (which comes from the word “to flee”) involves multiple musical voices “chasing” one another. Here, Thompson depicts a harrowing chase by using this compositional device, as the chorus sings Trayvon Martin’s final words: “What are you following me for?” The effect is absolutely chilling.

Throughout *The Seven Last Words*, Thompson creates profound parallels between the last statements of Jesus Christ and the last words of these seven unarmed men. The composer has stated that he was drawn to *The Seven Last Words of Christ From the Cross* because he felt that its content humanized the figure of Christ. For example, Jesus’s utterance of “I am thirsty” is something that everyone can relate to. In my discussion with Joel, I remarked that I found the opposite to be true as well: *The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* elevates the last words of these unarmed men so that the audience is forced to confront their own complicity in racial injustice. Just as the crowds stood by as Jesus was unjustly put to death, so many of us remain passive in the face of injustice in our own time. By drawing the parallel between Jesus’s life and the lives of these seven men, the composer reminds us that divinity resides in every human life.

One of the most poignant moments of *The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* occurs in the third movement. Here, the last words of Amadou Diallo are sung as a baritone solo: “Mom, I’m going to college.” This echoes Jesus’s last words to his own mother, which occurs in the third part of *The Seven Last Words of Christ*. The tender melody of this section gradually rises upward, creating a sense of hope, a yearning for the chance to transcend our present circumstances. The melody is taken up by the entire chorus, resulting in a stirring emotional climax. But the music winds down, and the chorus gradually recedes into the background, ending on a somber hum. We realize that Amadou Diallo’s full potential will never be realized; the flame has been extinguished.

“As choral musicians, we are experts on what the world needs.” This was the statement that Joel used to conclude his talk. He reminded us that choral singers are uniquely positioned to grapple with these difficult issues because each week we gather in a nurturing environment designed to unify people and lift them up. If we have the courage to engage with the pressing issues of our day, our voices can be a powerful tool for positive change, and our art can promote healing in a broken world.

*Krishan Oberoi is the Director of Choral Activities at Providence College. Before joining the PC faculty in 2020, he taught at Stonehill College, where he directed the Collegiate Chorale and co-taught the interdisciplinary course “Lift Every Voice”. Dr. Oberoi holds degrees from Yale University, Boston University, and the New England Conservatory of Music.*

# **Starling**

*By Estarlyn Hiraldo  
Providence College | Class of 2021  
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## **“Control” (Spoken Word Piece)**

Fake it ‘til you make  
That’s what they will tell you  
But the minute that you turn your back  
America will play you  
Feeding people fake news  
Trollin’ for the K views  
Fuck up all that surface shit  
Pave the way like Jesus  
Black as a “Hey, Die!”  
White out them grey shoes Bring  
the Force to a Jedi  
Craving brighter day views  
Track the man down  
Remind him that the pay’s due  
Face blue, hey dude, follow all the way through  
Support from day one,  
Then we wouldn’t break loose  
It’s easy to convict, but then they never say who  
Never ever say: why? Only like what they choose  
We cry at their door, feds always scared to state who’s Really  
at fault  
They love to lock my niggas in a vault  
Send them away, as the better al–ternative  
Same old shit, always repetitive



**“A Tale of no roots” (Poem)**

My identity —  
Think it's all been a success  
Listen to the verses in my head  
when I address  
Failure at its best  
Told me I'm a mess  
Feel the melanin out of control  
inside the chess

When can I confess?  
No longer hold this heft  
Claim that they're the greatest  
on the pavement or the nest  
Settling for less  
Never did they bless  
The fear inside my cheers  
Man, how could they possibly forget?

Columbus at his quest  
Never took a rest  
Enslaving all his children,  
Carry gold to reach the crest

Blend colors like a vest  
More  
Conquer to the West  
Lord  
Save me from this misery  
Human body picaresque

Injecting me with fear  
Near  
They all disappear  
Dear  
White men on the road  
told me not to persevere  
Hear  
My men, they complain

Grain  
Feeding us the same  
Name  
White is who to blame  
When the Blacks all die in vain

Picking coffee sugar beans  
Tell me what you really mean  
Say our breath brings out the drought  
Struggle, that's what we about  
Still we're building up a plan  
can you all just understand?  
Find a way to see our soul  
Never have we reached our goal

Come ahead to feel our tears  
Bloody skin screaming with cheers  
Our hands are cuffed with braces  
While these angels hate our races  
You crumble out skin like tree trunks  
Spill our blood on your streets, son  
We do so much for you now  
But you all should fear when it's time  
See us guiding all our troops  
Fear my people when they're free

Seek to reach salvation  
And liberate our nation  
From the poison of the West  
Protecting at their best.

*Photoshoot of Black Lives Matter protests in Lawrence, MA (June 2020), by Estarlyn Hiraldo*









# The New Room

*By Lucille Vasquez  
PC Senior, Theatre*

The emptiness of this room speaks volumes  
Its unchanging nature  
And I've been told if I look the other way it'd be different  
But not in this room  
I could look up down, left to right  
And I still feel the pull down of past layers of this beautiful architecture The  
sameness isn't all bad  
In a way I've made my peace and found some sense of agency to it  
Where I can say it is for me and mine  
But I haven't figured out what comfort is for me yet  
If it's consistency or the chameleon nature of this all  
I've stayed silent and ready  
Waiting for the answer to come  
Because I've been made to believe  
That it will come  
The only thing that causes strife is that it isn't on my own accord  
And I wish someone told me I could've called on my ancestors much sooner than I have When I did, it  
was in hopes of salvation but nothing, nobody came  
And I cursed it  
Everything I once believed in I cursed  
I cursed it and I cursed it til one day  
They revealed themselves to me  
And I'm still in a period of pardon  
Because I realized they were here all along  
Through the colors, shapes, figures, energies  
I would encounter that has kept me up  
And continues to give power to the powerless  
So I'll continue to remain still and  
Reflect  
Feel  
It is enough for now  
And it is okay to be just (drag this out) enough right now  
It wasn't til I feared  
Really feared  
When I realized I wasn't who I thought

So I've hid in this room for some time  
I don't rush to come out  
Because it's been comfortable  
The tightness and strain doesn't exist here  
It's vague  
Not detailed  
Or specific  
The way we long things to be, the way I longed for things to be  
But there's peace in not being visible, yet present  
And while my days of preservation may be over soon  
I'll take every part of it  
It's a reminder I got through,  
Every pang in my heart and sudden void in my stomach. I know I'll open my eyes to a new room  
Where things can turn bitter only when I want it to  
Because now I found the language for it  
And this shadow will always be here too Unmasked and unintended  
It has drawn its strength over the years from Toni's invisible ink  
Kahlo's accidental acceptance  
Junot's slick word  
And Shange's honest horror Til it all just snapped.



# **Dear Institution aka** **Providence College**

*By Magnolia Perez, community member*

Dear institution my neighborhood is not invisible, people, community and yes families live here. Dear institution to whom it may concern Providence College, stop and check your privileged parties and bikini tanning traffic stopping, while we sit quietly on the sidelines. If that was my neighborhood we would get stopped and frisked, if that was my neighborhood we would have real life consequences even resulting in death for our youth, and instead you get a pass and many warnings. I see how you talk back to officers point and hop on ripta for free. As we can't even seat, rest our feet as you overload our buses with your entitled privileged selfs. Your building is tall and takes up all sorts of square feet of half of our buildings in my neighborhood. Check your privilege selfs. My people can't even walk a shortcut anymore, by your streets even the streets are yours. Have your prayers reached our neighborhood, what service or respect have you paid us. We who do exist demand more, more, more respect, dignity and humanity. We just want to catch the bus, we want to take a shortcut to the next road, we promise we won't steal your purses or your expensive purchase from the mall. Please stop drunkenly throwing up on our sidewalks, stop your fights outside bars that draw more police to our streets, that is the last thing we need in our neighborhood. If you ever walk a mile in our shoes, you would understand our point of view. What is to you is not for us, such as loud student parties, and sirens all around always result in our people instead of you the students being harassed and followed. We are clear what our boundaries are, are you clear on yours?

Sincerely, Chad Brown Projects citizens



# What Are You?

*By Naomi Brown-Jones*

*A reflection of her overall experience at PC in 2007 to 2011*

I am Black.

I am Latina.

I am Woman.

In that order.

Though light skinned privilege flows through my veins I still have a tan that never fades. Combined  
with the kinks of my locs,

It's inevitable that Black is the first formed thought.

And then they read my resume, Hablo Español listed in bold print.

Keeping me connected to the culture My  
mother brought over the border back in '87.

She speaks the language,

So I guess a Latina she might be.

My size and my shape fill out the rest of the image,

Clearly a woman with something to say.

Too often we walk into spaces and are robbed of the opportunity To  
present the whole picture.

So before you are distracted by the pieces of me Let me remind you.

I am Black.

I am Latina.

I am Woman. In that order. Proudly.

# **Providence College Archives: A Space for Student Voices Past and Present**

*Michelle Chiles, Head of Archives and Special Collections*

Students on college campuses have long participated in activism. Whether advocating for their own rights in the campus environment or speaking out on local, national, or global issues students have long fought for their voices to be heard. The history of student protests, sit-ins, and today's social media campaigns is often told only through the lens of journalists and campus administration. While multiple perspectives are key to understanding the whole, it is often the students at the center of these events whose voices are left out of the historic narrative.

Almost every college or university has an archive, a place where the history and activities of the campus and its people are documented, preserved, and made accessible. In recent years, there has been a shift in the actions of college and university archivists who are actively engaging with students as the creators of their own history. Initiatives like Project STAND (Student Activism Now Documented) <https://standarchives.com/> center the student voice when collecting and documenting movements on campus. Most of the collections and projects from participating institutions focus on the activism of students from marginalized and underrepresented groups. This does not discount or lessen the impact of traditional voices in the archives but helps create a more wholistic view of the systems in which we work, learn, and live.

The Providence College Archives and Special Collections is no different than many of our peer institutions. Our mission is to document, collect, and share the college's history. This includes all events, issues, and perspectives as an honest reflection of where we've been, what we do, and as a tool for understanding where we need to grow and change. We recognize that there are absences and silences in the archives, which is why we have made it a priority to reach out to departments and organizations that are actively engaged in work to make Providence College a more inclusive and equitable community.

The PC Archives welcomes all forms of collaboration, including donations to the collections, and using archives in the classroom as a way to actively engage in community history. Please contact Michelle Chiles, Head of Archives and Special Collections for more information! Email: [pcarchives@providence.edu](mailto:pcarchives@providence.edu) or Phone: 401-865-2578.

In solidarity.

*Celebrate*  
**25**  
*years*

with the

# **Black Studies Program**

Remembrance • Resistance • Revolution