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Introduction

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Introduction

Julius A. Amin, Alumni Chair in Humanities

In 2016, the first Symposium on Race on the University of Dayton campus arose within a historical context of several events, including the nationwide racial crises beginning with Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, and the subsequent emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Amid these “headline” events was a lingering dissatisfaction of Black students on the University of Dayton campus; an incomplete understanding of America’s racial past; the experiences of Black and white participants in the University’s African immersion program; and my belief as a faculty member and then-coordinator of Africana Studies that we were not doing enough to address the problems of race and racism on campus. That seems to have been a very long time ago; since then, racial issues have surfaced in rapid succession.

Five years later, we are back in a similar situation. The 2021 symposium, like the first one, developed within a historical context of events that culminated in the protests of summer 2020. The headlines were many: Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Jacob Blake and many more. The nature and persistence of the protests confirmed that something had changed. Students from our campus participated. There was national and international outrage.

African Union spokesperson Ebba Kalondo issued a strong condemnation of what she described as “the continuing discriminatory practices against Black citizens of the United States of America.” Another of the organization was equally blunt, stating about the killing of George Floyd, “This is one too many. We may be Black, but we are

people too,” adding, “Africa demands a full investigation into this killing.”

On campus, students grew impatient with an academic curriculum that failed to address the sources and nature of anti-Black racism in the country. The protest of summer 2020 was indeed a reminder that anti-Black racism could no longer be shelved and forgotten until another crisis emerged. The time for change had come. Hence our symposium.

The goal of the 2021 Symposium on Race was to study the history of race relations at the University; to understand a sense of trends and attitudes; and to outline potential steps toward building a more inclusive and anti-racist university. The symposium challenged each of us to ask difficult questions about ourselves—what am I doing to end anti-Black racism? We have spent too much time on what others are doing and not doing; the symposium prompted a critical examination of self and called upon leadership to ask the same question of institutional structures. Speakers at the symposium included faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Attendees came from all over campus and the larger local community.

A project such as this entails the commitment and dedication of many people. I want to express my appreciation to a few of them. First, the planning committee—Merida Allen, Larry Burnley, Denise James, Ashleigh Lawrence-Sanders, Tom Morgan, and Joel Pruce—did a superb job. I thank you for your dedication and patience. You made this worthwhile.

I extend my thanks to the president of the University, Eric Spina, whose vision of a university for the common good created a sociocultural context in which symposia such as these can and will flourish. I offer immense gratitude to Jason Pierce, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, who immediately approved this project when I took it to him late in the summer. The provost, Paul Benson, has always been supportive of our programs, frequently asking if there are things he can do to assist. Thank you. Amy Anderson is always encouraging and promptly responded to my emails each time I requested something. Chris Agnew, chair of the history department, spared me from some of the department obligations because I was working on the symposium. Misty Thomas-Trout designed our flyers and never complained of the frequent revisions we made along the way; thanks for your patience. Our student workers Jalen Turner, Maleah Wells, Dezanee Bluthenthal, and Amira

Fitzpatrick did a superb job. Thank you. Heidi Haas, the office's administrative assistant, made sure that everything functioned properly. Thank you. I pay a special tribute to our presenters. I learned so much from you. Thank you for taking the time to do this.

To our audience, thank you for Zooming in.

