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# Keynote Address: Race, Belonging, and Academic Community at the University of Dayton

*Paul H. Benson*

What was I thinking when I accepted the invitation last spring to speak at this symposium? I am not a scholar of race nor of higher education, for that matter. I have no privileged perspective on the state of race on our campus or the history of racial diversity and inclusion here. My current perch in St. Mary's Hall can obstruct or distort my understanding of our campus as much as it can illuminate. In general, provosts do better when they devote more time and effort to listening and learning than to declaring or mandating.

Additionally, it is worth acknowledging at the outset tonight that, in the words of Emory philosophy professor George Yancy, "the experience of those who live and have lived as people of color in the white-run world [. . .] is something no white person could ever truly know first-hand" ("Dear White America," *New York Times*, Dec. 24, 2015). I reflect on race, belonging, and the building of academic community at UD from a racialized and professionalized perspective that can make it difficult for me to apprehend in an immediate way all the burdens that persons of

color—students, faculty, and staff—bear on our campus, as on so many university campuses across this country. As Professor Yancy goes on to say in his Christmas Eve letter in the *New York Times* addressed to “White America”: “Try to listen, to practice being silent. There are times when you must quiet your own voice to hear from or about those who suffer in ways that you do not.” And yet, I have been asked—indeed, am expected—this evening to speak, to give voice to some of the things I perceive or think I know about race on our campus.

If I can be permitted to express one small protest to the symposium organizers, it would be this: Is it really fair to anticipate that I might offer anything very intelligent, insightful, revelatory, or useful, when last evening we heard from Dr. Elijah Anderson, one of the most distinguished scholars of race in American society? Perhaps my remarks will simply be recorded as yet more evidence of the rather foolhardy impulses or dispositions of provosts, something that probably needs no demonstration.

Setting aside that complaint, I am truly honored by the invitation to address this symposium, in part because of the particularly important work that the Africana Studies Program and symposium organizers, including Patty Alvarez, Julius Amin, Denise James, Tom Morgan, Joel Pruce, and Patricia Reid, have undertaken. The work that so many UD faculty, staff, and students have shouldered over the years to confront and improve the climate for persons of color on our campus deserves to be honored. Offering this talk seemed to me to be one small way in which I could acknowledge and honor that valuable and difficult work. I especially want to call out tonight the good work that many of our students have done over the past year to draw attention to and to seek to overcome the racially-framed hostilities and indignities that they have experienced. While I still have everyone’s attention, let me encourage all of you to participate in the conference, “Giving Power Back,” being

organized by students Brandon Rush, Jesse Hughes, and Kaleigh Jurcisek on Saturday, March 5, as part of the Creating Inclusive Communities initiative (about which I shall say more later).

## **Race, Representation, and Access**

Discussions about race relations and institutionalized inequities on college campuses often begin by focusing on diversity of representation or breadth of access to the institution by prospective students, faculty, and staff members. Issues of retention and advancement also are central to these discussions. While consideration of race on campus must encompass far more than representation and retention, this is a useful place to begin, in part because UD's profile reflects in many ways the general state of private, tuition-dependent higher education in the U.S.—and especially in the Midwest. I want to make it clear that, while I concentrate in this portion of my talk on data organized by standard racial and ethnic categories employed by the federal government, there certainly are other valuable ways to examine the racial and ethnic diversity of a university campus, not to mention the far wider array of dimensions of diversity that can be important to the quality of learning, scholarship, community engagement, and personal development that take place in a university community. I have been asked to address race, specifically though not only in the context of black student, faculty, and staff experience at UD. Of course, it is valuable for us bear in mind ways in which increasing African American representation on our campus would tend to increase intellectual diversity, religious diversity, socioeconomic diversity, cultural diversity, and so forth, all of which are germane to the broader purposes of a Catholic and Marianist community of learning and scholarship.

Over the past fifteen years, since 2001, our faculty have become notably more racially and ethnically diverse by standard Census categories; yet diversity of racial representation on our

full-time faculty remains disappointing [Slide #1]. Full-time black or African American faculty have increased from only 11 in 2001 to 24; Hispanic faculty from 7 to 16; and Asian faculty from 21 to 46. One full-time faculty member currently reports as “two or more races”; 8 faculty are “unknown”; and 26 are currently non-resident aliens. As a percentage of our total full-time faculty of 535, black faculty presently account for 4.5%, Hispanic faculty 3.0%, Asian faculty 8.6%, and non-resident aliens 4.9%. 414 of our full-time faculty, or 77.4%, report as white, a notable decrease from 348 full-time faculty, or 89.7%, in 2001. I point this out so that we appreciate where the University has been as we reflect on our current state and contemplate where we should head.

There is much to say about these numbers. We know that the availability of persons of color with terminal degrees in many of our academic fields is low, in some cases extremely low. This is particularly the case in some of the areas in which UD currently is growing most rapidly: for instance, in engineering, the natural sciences, and in business. But we also know that, were representation of black faculty at UD to reach 10%, say, instead of being only 4%, it probably would be a good deal easier to recruit black faculty, even with current availability. (The same can be said of African American student recruitment and also of the recursive interplay between recruiting and retaining students of color and faculty and staff of color.)

At the same time, I don't want to pass over the importance of the procedural improvements that have been made in the faculty search and hiring process, many of which were designed specifically to increase success in recruiting a more diverse faculty racially and ethnically. The development in 2001 of the mandatory “Hiring for Mission” retreats convened by the Provost's Office each fall, the requirement for pre-search meetings with Legal Affairs and Human Resources staff and review of diversity recruitment plans for each search, the

requirement that search committees receive availability data for persons with appropriate terminal degrees in their academic fields, and so on—have, in my judgment, contributed to some meaningful successes. We need to do more of this kind of work, do it better, and expand the strategies currently in our faculty recruitment toolkit. But we should appreciate that some of the strategies we have used have made a positive and sustained difference.

For instance [Slide #2], if we subtract non-resident aliens from our full-time faculty totals, our domestic full-time faculty increased by 121 persons, or 31.2%, from 2001 to 2015. During this period, the number of domestic faculty who reported as white increased by 66, and the number who reported in some non-white category increased by 55. Thus, through factors including hiring, retention or attrition, and retirement, our non-white domestic faculty have increased in aggregate almost as much as our white domestic faculty, and their number has increased by a much higher percentage—137.5% vs. 19%. This is no occasion for a declaration of ultimate success, but it is an accomplishment that deserves recognition.

It also is important to say that faculty recruitment is one of the areas of our work on diversity of representation in which faculty members, at the department and program level, have more influence than anyone else. Faculty leadership and strategic faculty commitment clearly make an immediate and often long-lasting difference to our diversity efforts in this domain. There is no question that deans and the Provost's Office also influence the outcomes of search processes; but that influence pales in comparison to the influence of the faculty who serve on search committees and their department chairs.

Now, for some recent data on the racial diversity of our student body [Slide #3]. For reasons of time, I will focus on full-time undergraduate students and for the most part on trends since 2010. As of Fall Term 2015, 77.8% of our 8,226 full-time

undergraduates report as white; 3.0%, or 243, are black; 3.3%, or 272, are Hispanic; 1.2%, or 101, are Asian; 11.7%, or 960, of our full-time undergraduates are non-resident aliens (including students in our BA program in Bangalore); and 153, or 1.9%, of our undergraduates identify with two or more races (a category that is growing rapidly in our student body and nationally).

If we go back to 2010, a year in which we recruited a far larger entering cohort of African American undergraduates than ever before, a much larger percentage of our full-time undergraduate population was white: 85.9%, as opposed to 77.8% this fall. We had in 2010 a somewhat higher percentage of black students, 3.9% versus 3% this year; roughly the same percentage of Asian undergraduates, 1.4%; and a smaller percentage of Hispanic students, 2.6%. There were far fewer students who listed two or more races, only 0.3%. The primary driver of the decline in the percentage of full-time white undergraduates has been the four-fold increase of non-resident alien students, from 183 full-time undergraduates in 2010 to 960 last fall.

I want especially to draw attention to three dimensions of the racial diversity of our full-time undergraduates. First, we have had difficulty for some time sustaining consistent success, year over year, in first-year domestic minority student recruitment. For instance, in 2010 we released a tremendous amount of additional financial aid to recruit African American students, and we saw the entering class more than double, from 51 to 104 African American students. However, a year later, the entering class of African Americans fell back to 58 and, by 2013, the entering black undergraduate cohort fell to 36. With renewed effort, that number doubled to 70 the following year and is now being sustained. We see similar oscillations in the size of the entering class of full-time undergraduates who are Hispanic. This is a marker of, among other things, insufficient constancy of strategic intent, inadequate coordination across multiple offices

of UD faculty and staff efforts in student recruitment, and rapid changes in the external environment that affect household incomes and the behavior of our top cross-admit competitors, especially with respect to tuition pricing and financial aid.

Second, on a far more positive note, we have made dramatic improvements in the retention of students of color since 2010. In that record class of African American undergraduates entering in 2010, only 79% of them retained at UD for their sophomore year, and only 35% of them graduated in four years. For the class of African American students who entered as full-time undergraduates in 2014, 93% retained to become sophomores this fall. Significant improvements in retention also were seen among our Hispanic students, who retained at 85% from the 2010 entering class and at 92% from the 2014 matriculants. This past year, black and Hispanic students retained better than the entire first-year, full-time undergraduate body, as well as the entire entering white student cohort from 2014; and the entire first-year class reached a record high of nearly 91% retention, having been at just 85.6% in 2010.

Many factors have contributed to these dramatic improvements in first- to second-year retention, both campus-wide and among students of color. The four-year net tuition pricing plan and elimination of fees that went into effect in 2013 clearly has been a major contributor to this success. We have seen more rapid and sustained improvements in retention over the past three years than in the past 25 years, and these improvements are showing up in retention to the junior and senior years; they are not limited to sophomore retention. Of special note is that improvements in retention—as well as substantial decreases in student borrowing—now appear across every household income band for our entering students since 2013. In addition, the painstaking coordination and analytic work that has been carried out by the Student Success and Persistence Team, currently co-chaired by Deb Bickford and Becki

Lawhorn, has been very important in boosting retention and persistence. This team has brought about more informed and better executed coordination among Enrollment Management, deans' offices, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and the Office of Learning Resources than was the case in the past. This team's work has also led us to invest in the UD Student Success Network, whose tracking and communication power is critically important for making the sorts of advising interventions that will be necessary if we are to continue to improve overall student retention and the retention and academic success of our students of color. At the Board of Trustees meeting last week, I proposed that the University seek to increase undergraduate student retention by another two percentage points, to 93%, in five years, placing us in an elite class of universities and outpacing by a significant margin the expected retention rate for students with the academic credentials of our entering students.

I hasten to add that some longstanding efforts of individual academic units, notably the School of Engineering's Minority Engineering Program, have been especially significant for the University's overall efforts in minority student recruitment and retention. The other academic units can learn much from what the School of Engineering began.

All of these measures point, in my judgment, to meaningful and constructive responses to many of the factors that led to inconsistent diverse student recruitment in the past. In particular, these measures evidence sustained strategic focus and effort, along with continued improvement each year in coordination across campus of efforts to improve student success and persistence to on-time graduation. Regular, self-critical appraisals that build upon clearer strategies and more robust systems and practices are paying off.

Third, the challenges of affordability for a private, still heavily tuition-dependent university in the Midwest are many and complex. While these challenges affect all of our prospective

students and their families, they fall disproportionately upon many of the families from which our students of color come. We already offer, on average, substantially more financial aid per student to African American students than we offer to the average entering student. Yet our aid offers face increasingly stiff competition; and we currently lack the financial means to overcome that competition immediately. For instance, Ohio State's in-state tuition has been roughly flat, and OSU has been offering to many admitted African American students aid packages that cover the total cost of attendance (including room and board). Overall, UD's competition with in-state public universities, who have an enormous pricing advantage over us, has grown significantly in recent years. Last year, of the top five cross-admit universities for UD's entering class, four were publics, with Miami University and Ohio State leading the list.

Still, we see some positive trends and new initiatives that indicate ways in which we can continue to strengthen recruitment of students of color. First, our applicant pools continue to expand, and the demographic and geographic diversity of our applicants continues to increase. For instance, as of January 15, our total applicant pool had increased by 10% from the same time only two years ago; our domestic pool of non-white applicants increased over 13%; and our African American applicant pool increased by 28% over the same period. Preliminary acceptances as of January 15 also are healthy, with African American acceptances up 11% over two years ago on the same date, Hispanic acceptances up 9%, and acceptances of multiracial students up 38% over 2014. Growth in our applicant pool is occurring primarily out of state, and our yield rates on admitted students who have not applied to Ohio public universities continue to be very strong.

Moreover, Advancement has been working hard over the past two years to develop a program for individuals and private foundations to fund micro-scholarships for students of color and

students from lower-income families, to help cover the gap between all other sources of financial aid and the remainder of students' tuition bills. As opposed to focusing primarily on endowed scholarships, in which less than 4% of the endowed funds goes toward students' financial aid each year, these micro-scholarships will enable us to cover more students' financial needs more fully. This concept is attracting significant interest from donors.

Further, realizing that continued increases in the cost of private university education, coupled with stagnant household incomes in middle and lower-middle income families, will lead many college-bound students to look at other alternatives—UD will announce later this spring what I hope will be a groundbreaking new relationship with Sinclair Community College: a UD/Sinclair Academy that should do much, over the long run, to create more affordable pathways for more local, lower-income students, including more black and Hispanic students, to obtain a UD degree in many of our academic programs. Fifty years ago, before Wright State University was established, UD was widely regarded as a regional university of choice and was readily affordable for middle- and lower-middle-income families in the Greater Miami Valley. The forthcoming collaboration with Sinclair will offer one way in which we can rebuild some relationships with talented prospective students from diverse backgrounds in this region and utilize the resources of a highly regarded community college system. Earlier this month, Jason Reinoehl, the interim Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing, launched an Intentional Diversity Enrollment and Success (IDEAS) team, chaired by Kathy Harmon, that will present later this spring specific recommendations for building upon the achievements in recruitment and retention of students of color that we have experienced over the past two years.

I have not said much tonight about why diverse racial representation in our student body and on our faculty should matter to us. Hopefully, this is not an occasion on which I need to present that case. Suffice it to say that, in order to foster meaningful and far-reaching networks of academic relationships across racial lines on our campus, we need critical masses of diverse populations among which to build those relationships. Further, the educational dynamics of the classroom and the wider campus can be expected to change significantly for the good with expansion of the diversity of perspective, experience, socioeconomic class, religion, and culture our students bring to the University. The excellence of the environments in which learning and scholarship transpire at UD can be indirectly assessed, in part, through the inclusive character and intercultural richness of those environments. As *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni reminds us, “admissions practices aimed at diversity aren’t just liberal, politically correct reflexes. They’re the vital first step toward a college experience that does what it should: unveil the complexity and splendor of the world, and prepare students to be thoughtful citizens of it” (“The Lie About College Diversity,” December 13, 2015). While, as I emphasized earlier, the inclusive character of a university educational environment is by no means solely a matter of racial diversity, the racially fragmented and stratified character of American society demands that a Catholic and Marianist university continue to address the racial demographics of our academic community.

### **Belonging and Its Role in Building a Community of Learning and Scholarship**

Let us now turn to the place of belonging in the process of cultivating a more racially inclusive academic community of learning and scholarship. I have begun to publish some formal scholarship on the implications of social psychological studies of stereotype threat and “belonging uncertainty” for philosophical

accounts of autonomous action; and it is partly on that basis that I want to give special consideration to the role of belonging in students' educational success in college and the role of belonging in building a racially inclusive academic community.

Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson's landmark 1995 study, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans" (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*), describes stereotype threat as a circumstance of "being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group." Steele and Aronson explain that, when negative stereotypes about a social group to which one belongs are widely known, "anything one does or any of one's features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one's own eyes." Persons experience such a circumstance "as a self-evaluative threat," and such perceived threat has been found to have markedly detrimental effects on academic performance. In the well over 300 studies of stereotype threat that have been conducted over the past twenty years, research has documented the significantly debilitating effects of such threat in relation to many kinds of negative stereotype, for a wide variety of social groups and in contexts of human performance far removed from academia.

Studies of academic performance by Gregory Walton and Geoffrey Cohen confirm that stereotype threat can have a prominent role to play in sustaining the so-called racial achievement gap in school and college grades. In a 2007 study, "A Question of Belonging: Race, Social Fit, and Achievement" (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*), Walton and Cohen achieved a 90% reduction in the racial achievement gap in their sample's actual classroom performance during the semester following experimental intervention by manipulating variables concerning black students' doubts about belonging in school. In a related 2011 study over a three-year period, similar

interventions to combat stereotype threat and related group-based doubts about social belonging in college closed the gap between African American students' grades and grades of their European-American classmates by over 50%. Moreover, Walton and Cohen have found that sensitization to perceived risks to social belonging, or so-called "belonging uncertainty," can have powerful, dampening effects on individuals' motivation to achieve and the quality of their actual performance, "even in the absence of prejudice, fears of confirming the stereotype, or an anticipated intellectual evaluation." Stigmatized persons are, according to this research, more inclined to construe ordinary adversity or hardship as evidence of lack of belonging than is the case for persons who are not stigmatized in the same contexts. The effects of such belonging uncertainty on motivation and performance, as well as the results of modest experimental interventions that cue the subjects to interpret their circumstances in more benign ways, are similar in magnitude and duration to those found in studies of stereotype threat.

Attention to the obstacles that many students of color face in gaining or maintaining a sense of meaningful belonging in a university community in the face of prevalent stereotypes or stigma has a special priority from the perspective of Marianist philosophy of education—in which education is itself not only communally situated but also inherently a community-building enterprise. For the Marianists, education should evoke and strengthen a shared sense of "family spirit." University students' attainment of a genuine sense of belonging would, on this view, seem to be a precondition of their participating in any community of advanced learning worth the name. And realizing in campus practices and cultures the conditions for meaningful belonging certainly would seem to be a requirement for an academic community that strives to embody and promote ideals of social justice. Culturally entrenched threats to students' sense of belonging based on their race or ethnicity are unjust; they tend

to yield unjust distributions of status, power, and efficacy; and, as the literature on stereotype threat indicates, such threats present unreasonable impediments to students' educational advancement.

This is one point at which UD's cherished language of community can be dangerously seductive and may function to diminish, rather than to elevate, the quality of our relations with one another. Because many on our campus readily embrace a welcoming and friendly demeanor as a characteristic element of UD culture, it is easy at UD to underestimate the real conditions that are necessary for engendering, cultivating, and safeguarding a shared sense of belonging among all members of our academic community. Cheerful, affirming "I love UD" spirit can make it difficult to recognize and appreciate that some on our campus might feel, through no fault of their own, that they do not genuinely belong here. Of course, I am hardly the first to note this challenging dimension of the community ethos to which the University of Dayton aspires. But not as much has been done to probe and confront it at a deep level as is possible or desirable, especially with respect to the racialized dynamics of our campus.

I recognize that some on campus may feel that highlighting this tension between our uplifting language of community and the conditions for a more robust and equitably shared sense of belonging simply shows that one is uncharitable, a bit mean-spirited even, or simply not on-board with the inspiring program of community at UD. Because there is such abundant friendliness, helpfulness, and collegiality in many quarters here, raising the question about additional impediments to genuine belonging at UD is sometimes interpreted as revealing only that one has abdicated one's responsibility for community building—that one is a Grinch, as it were, sneering and scoffing resentfully at the UD-"Whos" down in UD-"Whoville." Similarly, those who readily profess their love of UD sometimes take this critical concern about what apparent UD friendliness ignores or papers

over as a charge that such UD happiness is entirely shallow, ill-motivated, and ultimately of little value. If we are to be fair to one another, it is important that we not succumb to that accusatory stance. UD is, in many respects, a strikingly friendly and hopefully energized university. We shouldn't devalue or take that for granted.

What we must take more seriously is the fact that some on our campus — in virtue of their race or color—are subjected to ugly name-calling, to presumptively demeaning stereotypes, to the defacement of their property, to others' alienation, and to acts of hostility large and small that, over time, accumulate to obstruct or unsettle their sense of really belonging at UD, their sense of being included as fully participating, equally valued, and influential members of the UD campus community. In a recent paper in the *Harvard Education Review*, Dr. Shaun Harper, executive director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, rehearses some of the standard ways in which black male students at highly selective universities experience this. These students report being asked by white students, on the basis of no evidence other than their color, about their presumed rapping, dancing, and athletic abilities. They report being questioned by white students how they managed to be admitted to university and by their faculty members whether they have plagiarized work that received high grades. They report being asked by white students whether they have controlled substances to sell. Sadly, such encounters occur on our own campus, too.

When UD students this fall, led predominately by students of color, voiced publicly the depths of their concern about the persistent use of the term “ghetto” as a name for UD's student neighborhoods, many of them encountered not simply disagreement or divergent perspectives but verbal, mostly anonymous attacks on their intelligence, their appearance, their family backgrounds, their character, and their commitment to

UD. This is a prime example of one of the ways in which thoughtful, heartfelt concerns about campus culture and practice are turned back against those who profess to feel left out or invisible. The fact that “ghetto” is a term coded by race, ethnicity, and class is not coincidental to the backlash that many members of our community experienced.

The controversy about appropriate naming of the student neighborhoods illustrates how vulnerable students’ sense of belonging can be and why the mere prevalence of “I love UD” spirit does not suffice to show that the prerequisites for genuine communal belonging are in place on our campus. Acknowledgment of the fractures in a meaningful sense of belonging on campus was also implicit in the design of the SGA-sponsored forums in early December, which sought to stimulate open and deliberative dialogue about use of the “G-word” in a context that affirmed critical perspectives as being worthy of being heard and examined thoughtfully and, hence, as being consistent with belonging in the UD community.

Guiding documents of the University of Dayton, including the “Commitment to Community” (C2C), “Habits of Inquiry and Reflection,” and “Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton,” plainly set an appropriately high standard for community-building on our campus, one that by no means devalues our habits of friendly hospitality, but a standard that also recognizes the central responsibility of nurturing one another’s belonging. Put bluntly, if we love UD and UD’s mission, then black and brown lives matter, and we must take to heart what this entails for our treatment of one another.

### **Belonging, Safety, and Comfort in a University Community**

I have spoken only in a very general way about the role of belonging in a just university community and some of the means through which persons of color on our campus experience threats

to their sense of belonging that can impede their educational advancement and offend their dignity as fellow members of the UD community. Some of you probably have been thinking that “belonging” is too vague and slippery a term to use when contemplating the sort of membership and participation in an academic community that would evidence a racially inclusive environment for learning and scholarship and characterize life on a campus that genuinely strives for justice. I am not prepared this evening to refine the relevant notion of belonging in any definitive way. However, I do want to address three possible confusions about belonging that frequently complicate and frustrate conversations about racial inclusion in academic communities.

First, belonging in a university community might be conceived merely as a matter of *fitting in* or *being suited to* the university. In this sense, anyone at odds with the prevailing sentiments, opinions, habits, practices, or values of a university campus would, by definition, not belong. And so, in this sense of the term, belonging uncertainty that underrepresented campus populations experience would be not only predictable but also inevitable, given the racialized formations of primarily white university campuses in the U.S.

Belonging as “fitting in” is clearly not the sense of the term that is appropriate to tonight’s discussion of university community. Universities are supposed to create an environment for active questioning, critical reflection, provocation, and non-conforming imagination, for the engagement of fundamentally deep disagreements and wide-ranging creative resistances to what easily “fits in.” As C. Vann Woodward wrote in the 1974 report on freedom of expression at Yale, “a university [. . .] is not primarily a fellowship, a club, a circle of friends.” A university, he continued, “provides a forum for the new, the provocative, the disturbing, and unorthodox.” That is to say, a university community is not to be predisposed to having its

members simply fit in or be suited to prevailing norms or sentiments. Such would be the antithesis of university community.

As an academic community focused on scholarly learning, a university must be open to and welcome the risks, pains, tensions, and conflicts inherent in growth—growth of intellect, growth of understanding, growth of character, growth of spirit. University life aims at cultivating certain virtues that are necessary for scholarly learning, and therefore university life demands of all of us, not only students, deep and difficult journeys of growth. This is especially germane in a Catholic and Marianist university, whose mission and traditions aim at engendering education of the whole person, in mind, hands, and heart, extending across the whole of our lives and throughout the webs of our relationships with one another. “Fitting in” is not a characteristic accompaniment of such education.

Second, we should resist thinking of belonging in an academic community as primarily a matter of being *comfortable*. As with fitting in, being comfortable has no necessary relationship to the fundamental purposes of a university. As Plato so often reminds us, openness to wisdom begins with perplexity, confusion, radical cognitive dissonance. The search for wisdom has its beginnings, in part, in perplexity, disorientation, and conflict. One need not embrace fully a Platonic account of learning or knowing or endorse all of the interrogative tactics associated with Socrates in order to appreciate the truth in this point. Deep learning is more often occasioned by some discomfort than by comfort (which, of course, is by no means to say that all forms of discomfort promote learning or that all types of comfort are inimical to it). Former University of Chicago President Hannah Holborn Gray voices this contention forcefully when she writes, “education should not be intended to make people comfortable, it is meant to make them think” (*Searching for Utopia*, 2011, p. 86).

I draw attention to the idea that belonging in a university context must sit side-by-side with conflict, disturbance, and attendant discomfort because some perspectives circulating on American university campuses lately appear to suggest that students and even faculty should be protected from claims, ideas, theories, or convictions that provoke or disturb, or that racial inclusion on campus requires making a comfortable environment a top priority. If comfort is coextensive with safety, then I have absolutely no quarrel with this position. Permitting encounter with disagreeable or disturbing ideas should not make us complacent about safeguarding members of our community from threat or harm. Moreover, a sense of safety is necessary for the openness to the challenges and tensions inherent in learning that universities should promote. But to the extent that comfort is a matter of encountering primarily the pleasing or agreeably familiar, an inclusive university community should not aim to promote belonging construed as comfort.

Regrettably, those who do recognize the divergence of learning and scholarship from what is comfortable often say too little about the place of the virtues of respect, civility, and dialogical responsiveness in the proper functioning of a healthy and fruitful educational environment. Callousness, insult, aggression, and close-mindedness are by no means natural accompaniments of the sorts of conflict that promote understanding, insight, or illumination.

Third, the sort of belonging that seems essential for a just and well-functioning university community is not necessarily a matter of being *at home*. Indeed many of those of us who have found our vocational calling in university life sometimes express this by saying that the university context is one in which we feel most at home, a location in which we can authentically think and learn, experiment and imagine in ways that utilize our greatest gifts and fulfill our yearnings. Typically, we experienced this powerfully at some point in our journeys as students, and we

hope that our students might have the same experience. But this is not to say that a university should be home in other senses. Our colleagues, our teachers, our classmates, our advisors and counselors should not be expected to treat us like our parents or siblings, our aunts or uncles. Conflict, disturbance, disorientation, and dissonance certainly are found at times in most family homes. Yet they are not properly inherent to a family home in the manner in which they are essential to the purposes of a university community. To belong in a university is, therefore, not necessarily a matter of being or feeling fully at home.

This is why I would disagree with the complaint hurled by a Yale student this fall at the faculty head of Yale's Silliman residential college, Dr. Nicholas Christakis, during a protest of his spouse Erika Christakis's email regarding culturally insensitive Halloween costumes. The student screamed that her concern is "not about creating an intellectual space! [...] It's about creating a home here." Once again, if the student means that Yale has a responsibility to address threats to her safety or unprofessional hostility from the administration of the residential college, then I wholly agree. However, if the student is claiming that her rightful belonging at Yale is contingent upon her being given the protection from disagreeable ideas or behaviors that she might seek in an idealized family home, then I am unconvinced. I am quick to concede that it is by no means easy, in practice, to distinguish the legitimately provocative from the egregiously harmful in a university setting. (If you believe otherwise, I encourage you to spend a week with the Dean of Students, the Vice President of Human Resources, or an academic dean or department chair.)

### **University Community and a Love that Unmasks**

Love is a requirement, in many ways, for the highest aims of a university community. A university should nourish and

celebrate love of and the search for what is wise, good, and beautiful. This may sound naïve, even quaint, in our day. But that is not a mark of its being untrue. A Catholic and Marianist university should foster a culture of learning and scholarship that acknowledges and embraces its roots in living traditions that hold that love grounds our wonder about the world, that love grounds our strivings for understanding, that love drives our search to discern meanings that can be integrated and made whole, and that love leads us to risk forms of learning that can transform us and our social relations powerfully for service, justice, and peace. (I am not suggesting that other motivations are not also important to our deepest aims as a university; only that certain forms of love should reside among them.) The love of which our intellectual and educational traditions speak calls us to embrace the diversity of peoples and perspectives and to evaluate reflectively and critically the purported inclusiveness of our academic culture. Our Catholic and Marianist traditions compel us to imagine what a more loving academic community requires of us.

George Yancy's Christmas Eve letter to white America invokes James Baldwin's oft-cited description (in *The Fire Next Time*) of a love that is "a state of being, or state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth." Such love, I suggest, is an ineluctable element of a Marianist community of learning. Where Baldwin writes of quest and daring, Marianists would most likely refer to *mission*. That is to say, a certain kind of mission-inspired love should motivate, guide, and relentlessly challenge and disturb a university such as ours. As the Marianist dictum, "We teach to *educate*," implies etymologically, Marianist education aims to lead us out and send us forth, developing or drawing out what is initially latent or hidden, compelling us to recognize, confront, and critique those aspects of ourselves that we might prefer to repress. James

Baldwin connects such confrontation with love: “Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.”

What might this mission-inspired love entail in concrete terms for racial inclusion and belonging in UD’s academic community? Here is a preliminary and very incomplete set of suggestions. My hope is that this symposium will stimulate other, more well-formed proposals.

This mission-inspired love should mean that we devise processes and practices through which we regularly can acknowledge one another’s hurt or disenfranchisement as readily as we celebrate one another’s accomplishment. This will require building more trusting relationships with one another across lines of color, ethnicity, and culture, so that, together, we can explore honestly the significance of what each of us experiences on UD’s campus. Such processes and practices are a precondition of genuine learning and can be developed in the classroom as well as in the dorm room, the food court, the conference room, the playing field, the laboratory, or the chapel.

Our mission-inspired love should mean that we should prioritize, in the first instance, listening, seeing, and attending over judging, dismissing, and rationalizing or explaining away. Admittedly, this is very difficult to accomplish in academia, where the speedy, clever, critical retort tends to be prized over the patience of listening and the effort to understand. Searching, critical examination of our perceptions and feelings is also required by our mission. But we should cultivate the habit of listening attentively and patiently first before examining and judging.

Our mission should mean that we develop social spaces on our campus in which it is safe to unmask ourselves of racial innocence—to get beyond white persons’ common refrain, “but I didn’t create the color lines or racial history and contours of American society” — and accept our implication, however

unintentional, in social practices that tend to disadvantage or marginalize others based on race.

Our mission should mean that we support opportunities to develop institutional leadership, at all levels and in all domains of the university, that understands the central place of racial justice and belonging within our broader educational and scholarly purposes.

Fortunately, the University has many structures and processes in place upon which we can build to advance ends such as these. For instance, the Creating Inclusive Communities initiative, which was launched last year through a collaboration between Student Development and the Provost's Office, brings together students, faculty, and staff to study the dynamics of privilege on a predominately white campus such as ours and to support students in developing and leading ambitious, creatively designed projects that will promote positive community-building across racial lines and intercultural learning. Creating Inclusive Communities has tremendous potential, in my judgment, and rightly places students in a leadership role, working with faculty and staff mentors. (Please remember to look for information about the student-organized CIC conference, "Giving Power Back," on Saturday, March 5.)

A second, powerful set of opportunities is available through the systems of curricular and pedagogical reform that have been initiated to advance the University-wide goals for student learning in "Habits of Inquiry and Reflection," both within the Common Academic Program (CAP) and through academic majors. It is not accidental that the organizers of this symposium appeal explicitly to some of the guiding aims of CAP in explaining the symposium's context and purposes. UD's learning goals of diversity, community, practical wisdom, and critical evaluation of our times are framed in rich and subtle ways that open up many opportunities to expand the impact of our classrooms in the cultivation of racially inclusive, trusting, and

honest academic community-building. If we as faculty revert to regarding these learning goals as nothing more than another bureaucratic obstacle course through which students must navigate for their degrees, then their primary value will be lost.

It is also important to note that the multicultural framework and vision for students' residential learning that Student Development employs systematically, organized around educational goals of authorship, interculturalism, and community living, are fully congruent with key learning goals in our formal curriculum. Leadership in this work is rightly distributed throughout much of our staff and faculty, as well as among our students.

Other valuable opportunities to extend our practices and structures for inclusive and intercultural learning are afforded through new Diversity Fellow positions that the Learning Teaching Center is in the process of establishing and through countless programs facilitated by the Center for International Programs, the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Center for Student Involvement, the Office of Student Leadership Programs, and Campus Ministry, among others. While there may be areas in which wholly new structures should be created in order to promote a more inclusive climate of belonging at UD, I would urge all of us to utilize more fully structures, programs, and practices that already are in place or actively under development.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, I will risk cliché with the reminder that the work of furthering racial justice and more inclusive belonging across color lines at UD is a responsibility that all of us bear, individually and collectively. As we launch a national search this week for a new vice presidential position in diversity and inclusion, there may be a temptation to think that the new vice president ideally will take charge of our campus culture and

climate and simply set things right. No matter how talented, experienced, and influential the new vice president proves to be, this would be an illusory hope to hold out for her or his work. The Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion will be a strategic catalyst and orchestrator who should enable us to develop, implement, and evaluate clearer, bolder, smarter, and more sustainable strategy. We should not imagine that the new vice president will be a *deus ex machina* who, single-handedly and magically, will rescue us from ourselves.

This point is expressed far more eloquently through the words that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., uttered in what was then the UD Fieldhouse on Sunday, November 29, 1964, just weeks before accepting the Nobel Peace Prize. These are words memorialized in the elegant and compelling sculpture that Professor Roger Crum, Brother Gary Marcinowski, and John Clarke from the Department of Art and Design have created along the walkway between St. Mary's and Albert Emanuel (a sculpture whose formal dedication will occur on Friday, February 12). Reminding us of the daily, shared work of civil rights and racial justice, Dr. King said,

[...] human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts, the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. And so we must help time, and we must realize that the time is always ripe to do right.

While Dr. King underscored on our campus that night that “we have a long, long way to go,” we should embrace and be emboldened by his recognition that the time is ripe to do right. I pledge that, through the mission-inspired love of this Catholic and Marianist university, the Office of the Provost, working in

concert with the academic deans and in collaboration with all of you, will take special responsibility for “helping time.” We will do everything we reasonably can to guide, support, and sustain the work for intercultural and inclusive belonging and excellence in our academic community to which our mission commits us.

Thank you for joining us in this project, and thank you for your kind attention this evening.