



The Honors Program Newsletter at Bentley University ■ Summer 2020



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## FROM THE EDITOR

Over the last few months, Bentley has had many conversations about how we can support our Black students, faculty members, and staff in the fight for racial equality. From *Columnas*, we wanted to extend our platform to our community members of color and provide them with the space to share their stories. We're so thankful to the students and staff who took the time to contribute to this special edition of *Columnas*. Your stories are helping change our campus and we're very proud to play a part in it.

Our work doesn't stop here—*Columnas* is committing to include a piece discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion in each upcoming issue from

now on. We hope to continue this summer special edition and will always look for ways where we can be an ally to those in marginalized communities.

Thank you to our student and staff contributors, Professor Rubio, and Editor-in-Chief Emeritus Alyssa Kastner for helping bring this to fruition. Your work over this summer has been relentless and incredibly valued.

On a personal note, one of the most highly requested pieces for this special edition was to give a very special shout-out to Bentley's very own, Claudette Blot. In her work with the Multicultural Center and the Summer Transition in Education Program (STEP), she has made Bentley a home

for so many students and provides unparalleled support for anyone who needs her. We had a chance to talk to Claudette for our staff interviews, but she deserves much more recognition than we can imagine. Thank you, Claudette, for all of your advocacy, support, and passion.

Without further ado, *Columnas* is proud to present our first-ever summer edition featuring articles written by our community members of color. We hope that this continues the conversation and promotes action for racial equality at Bentley and beyond.

Sincerely,  
Asimina Morris, *Class of 2021*  
Editor-in-Chief

## ALLYSHIP IS NO LONGER ENOUGH

By Reginald Fils

### We Need Accomplices and Co-conspirators in this Fight for Justice

Like many of you, I have been having conversations about police brutality at

my kitchen table, on virtual calls, and on social media. These conversations, although re-ignited by the George Floyd murder, did not start with George Floyd, Michael Brown Jr., or Rodney King for that matter. For Black people,

this is an old conversation that can be traced back to this country's original sin, when the South first created "police forces" whose sole job was to preserve slavery. These slave patrols had one goal and one goal only: To  
*(Continued on page 5)*

# HARROWING INJUSTICES INCURRED AT BENTLEY

By Hilary Yeboah

As a Black woman, I have always felt a constant policing of my body, of the ways I can act and present myself to people. When I first arrived in the States from Ghana, I came with the desire to create opportunities for myself and my family. Unfortunately, I was greeted with hostility for being Black. I was yelled at for trying to learn, ridiculed and demeaned in an international context, singled out for my Blackness - my teachers would scream and shout thinking that was the only way I could learn. This was the first time I was silenced; faulted for wanting to learn, which led to a constant feeling of being inadequate.

I came to Bentley to be a change agent but the fear of living in my truth still carries on. The past weighed heavy, and at Bentley, I took the first steps to loosen those weights. I was able to take advantage of the educational and career opportunities that I wanted to plant and sow. The Summer Transition in Education Program (STEP) became my first safe haven at Bentley, where I got to share my story and live in my truth, where I got to feel safe. STEP built the stepping stones to a career rooted in academic excellence and professional growth, where I felt no constraints alongside my STEP and Multicultural Center (MCC) peers solely

because of the color of my skin. But then reality crept in, and the floodgates opened to a cohort of 1000 students, where assimilating was required.

Where erasure was necessary to survive, where in the academic and professional playing field I was propped up as a single symbol of what it means to be “diverse,” pimped out for the color of my skin and the monetary value that my skin brings. In the classroom and at other events on campus, I put on a mask every single day to make others feel comfortable, policed inside my own body, unable to breathe as I felt the pressure of having to hide my true self to feel safe. *(Continued on page 5)*

# CODE BLACK: HOW RACE INFLUENCES THE MEDICAL FIELD

By Shanaya Theodore

Systemic racism is a phrase we’ve been hearing a lot within the past few months. Social media, local, and national news continuously spew the word - with police brutality at the center of it all. What we don’t hear about are the various other symptoms and burdens that systemic racism produces for Black Americans. One of these symptoms has significantly given rise to racial disparities within another field where employees are called to serve and protect: the medical field.

George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Tamir Rice, and Sandra Bland are names that

have been at the forefront of the Black Lives Matter movement. Names we haven’t seen include Amber Rose Isaac, Sha-asia Washington, and Shalon Irving. Isaac and Washington passed in recent months, both undergoing emergency C-sections. Within the United States, approximately 700 women die every year due to pregnancy complications. One might think, “Things happen. People die. Not every pregnancy is successful;” however, studies show that over 60 percent of those fatalities could have been prevented. Prior to her death, Isaac complained of having “incompetent

doctors” who blatantly ignored the concerns she had. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has disclosed that some of the most significant factors of maternal mortality are: patients and providers being uninformed of warning signs, and missed or delayed diagnoses. In the cases of Amber Rose Isaac, Sha-asia Washington, and Shalon Irving, these women are more likely to experience this uninformed treatment compared to any other demographic.

Statistics show that the maternal mortality and injury rates for Black *(Continued on page 6)*

# VOICES OF THE COMMUNITY

By Asimina Morris and Alyssa Kastner

## Staff of Color for Sustainable Change

Over the last few weeks, Alyssa and I have had the pleasure of talking to different staff members of color about their time working at Bentley. Claudette Blot works in Student Affairs where she currently manages the first-year process at Bentley, particularly for the Summer Transition Education Program (STEP). STEP is a program that helps students transition from high school to college through summer courses and focused help from faculty. Claudette's going into her 29th year at Bentley! Mario Silva-Rosa is the Director of Undergraduate Admissions and he's been at Bentley for the last four years and has worked in Higher Education admissions for over 22 years. We also talked to Darius Davis ('16), a Bentley alum and new member of Bentley's Human Resources department, after working in sports management over the last few years. Each staff member provided their own perspective on life at Bentley and how they navigate working at a Predominately White Institution (PWI).

### Representation is Key

Both Mario and Darius pushed for including people of color in brainstorming and decision-making talks. "Every time the institution comes up with ideas and makes decisions, you have the opportunity to run those by individuals of color to get their perspective – that would be healthy," Mario describes. Darius talked about the importance of acknowledging the representation that we do have on campus, pointing to Provost Dr. Donna Maria Blancero and the newly named Chief Diversity and Inclusion

Officer, Katie Lampley. The ability to spark conversation stems from having different voices at the table, from the President's Cabinet to the 100-level professors. Darius specifically mentioned about how we can highlight the work of Bentley's alumni of color, especially what they've accomplished after leaving Bentley. The benefits of this, he describes, will make potential students of color more willing to consider Bentley.

Claudette indicated student visibility as another area of representation that needs improvement. "Students have to be visible at all times," Claudette asserts. She notes of times where students of color are less frequently called on in class and listened to during group projects. Claudette emphasized the need for students to continue speaking up, especially now that real change can be made within the University. In our conversation with Darius, and other students on campus, it was evident how passionately Claudette believes in the importance of student visibility. Her work within the STEP Program and the Multicultural Center has always been focused on supporting students of color in ways that can be overlooked.

### Opportunity for Change

In regard to the opportunity to speaking up against racial transgressions on campus, Claudette noticed different standards across positions. She described moments where faculty members are held to different levels of accountability, dependent on the faculty member's status of tenured, lecturer, or adjunct. "I've seen change happen, and a lot has changed," Claudette says, "but we

still have a long way to go." With some faculty so intertwined with students, such as professors and individuals in Student Affairs, the ability to trust is imperative. By not holding our faculty accountable for their interactions, we fail to create a welcome environment for students.

In Darius' department, he's been able to really be himself, but he's not sure if everyone else across campus has had that same ability. Mario believes that Bentley is working on this right now – he notes that the "current situation has really contributed to the unearthing of a variety of feelings, emotions, and frustrations." The challenge, Mario says, will be sustainability. For the Undergraduate Admissions department, the conversations have surrounded "breaking down enough barriers and obstacles for students not only to apply, but also to be considered within the competitiveness of the file review process and make some decisions we know will make a difference." To him, it's about empowering staff members to have these conversations. He knows that as a Director, the responsibility lies on him to create a supportive environment for his employees.

Darius touches on the need for opportunity in experiences. Through programs like STEP, students who were on the cusp of getting into Bentley now have more doors open than before. The summer courses and focused care create a welcoming environment for students to thrive. What programs, like STEP, need, Darius asserts, are increased resources. By providing the necessary pieces for these programs to survive, *(continued on page 6)*

# TO THE “OUTSIDERS”

By Myriam Zahia Imessaoudene and Anjela Matti Maravilla

As human beings, it is only natural for us to gravitate towards those who are similar to us. It gives us a sense of comfort and allows us to find a home within those people. This is the blueprint for human interaction, and college campuses are no exception. However, as we find ourselves getting closer and closer to those like us, we equally move farther and farther away from those who are different. This creates a deeper divide between different identities. Due to these divides, there are some aspects of life that we are unable to understand, simply because they are not a part of our reality. However, we must continue to remind ourselves and acknowledge that no matter how far away things may seem, we cannot diminish or lessen the existence of those who are different from us.

To the average “outsider,” the Black community at Bentley appears to reflect an image that we can only describe as stereotypical. They appear as extremely loud and “ghetto” students. A group that keeps to themselves in the Multicultural Center (MCC) in a cult-like fashion, disregarding White students as if they don’t exist. Strong and stoic, appearing to not care about anything except what involves other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students. From the outside perspective, the Black community looks as though they refuse to associate with the White community on campus, deeming them the enemy in this narrative.

So how do we, an Algerian-American and a Filipino-American, find ourselves here? Naturally, you would think we would gravitate towards communities

that would make our college experiences much more comfortable.

**MZI:** Looking back to starting my college career at a predominantly white institution, I never would have guessed that I would one day be the president of the Africana Student Association. Being white passing, I could have easily turned a blind eye and never became a part of the MCC community at Bentley. However, my African identity stems far beyond my skin color.

**AMM:** I never felt like I could identify with the Asian-American community where Filipino culture seemed to not exist, or the community of White students from affluent families that I found my freshmen year centered around. It was Black United Body where I finally felt like myself, a person who grew up in a city heavily influenced by Black and Hispanic culture.

As a result, we made the choice that resonated with who we are. What we did not know then, but we know now is that somewhere along the way, we found a family that gave us a home that we never knew we could have at school. We found people that we could relate to on a deeper level. We were given a support system through a group of people that never bailed on us, never missed an event we ran, and never failed to just be there. The MCC that seems so daunting to an outsider became the only place at school where we could find solitude. What others do not see are mentorships, open discussions, endless laughs, and lifetime memories expressed within those four walls. Anyone that found

themselves in that room was a familiar face. A confidant. A brother. A sister.

This choice gave us a home that was already established for us, and that was a part of our privilege. But the sad truth is that the only way that Black students could find a home, at an institution where they stand as less than 5% of the population, is by creating the home themselves. Just like any family, what you see on the outside is never the same behind closed doors.

The reality for a majority of the Black students is that they are used only as props, being targeted for diversity photo ops for the next press release. They are constantly silenced and treated like criminals, going through a TSA-style security check before every Black-organization run party. They are treated as if they are worthless, hearing other students that are supposed to be their peers saying they do not matter. The *@blackatbentley* Instagram account may come as a shock to some of you, but to those in this community, this is no surprise.

Unless you are on the inside -whether directly or indirectly affected- you would not even realize this is going on. The Bentley community is so deeply segregated that having White friends and Black friends simultaneously feels unheard of. White students live in a world that is so far removed from the effects of systemic racism, a reality that is so normal when you are in the midst of it. They have the privilege to brush this off their shoulders, convince themselves it does not happen on Bentley’s campus, and go on with the rest of their day.

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## ALLYSHIP IS NO LONGER ENOUGH *(Continued from page 1)*

hunt, chase, and capture runaway slaves whose bravery was not only a threat to a potential slave revolt but also to the southern economy. I raise this point to show you how systemic police brutality truly is and for how long Black people have had to deal with it. For Black people in this country, police brutality is as American as apple pie.

Yet, this time feels different. For once, it feels like this country will no longer tolerate police senselessly killing Jamal while sparing Johnny. For once, it feels like this country will no longer accept empty words from corporations, especially when those companies benefit from Black culture and Black consumerism—all while lacking Black representation in their C-suite and on their board. For once, these marches are reflective of not just one racial group but rather many, drawing crowds that reflect the true diversity of this country.

When Rev. Al Sharpton gave the Eulogy at George Floyd's memorial

service, he told a story about a young white girl tapping his suit jacket in Minneapolis. As he braced himself, she looked him in the eye and raised her fist saying, "No justice, no peace." At that moment, this young white girl modeled what it means to be a co-conspirator in the fight for justice. She understood that she would have to spend her privilege in order for this country to rid itself of the police brutality, systematic oppression, and racism that has too often reared its ugly head.

This young woman understood that allyship will not be enough. For years those with privilege have heralded themselves as "allies" in the fight for equality. However well-intended this self-proclamation was, it was never going to be enough to transform these oppressive systems. This moment demands more than what is sometimes seen as a performative role. Right now, we need accomplices—those who are

not afraid to inconvenience themselves by getting in the fight to disrupt these systems. Above all else, we need "co-conspirators" who, like this young girl, understand that nobody is free until we are all free. Co-conspirators follow the lead of the marginalized, seek no fanfare, and spend their privilege by risking it day in and day out.

This journey from an ally to an accomplice to a co-conspirator will take some time, therefore, I challenge you to find ways you can stand in the gap for marginalized folks now. I know this work will be arduous, sometimes inconvenient, and may even get you in what Rep. John Lewis calls 'Good trouble'. But it will be through this work that you discover the role you can play in dismantling oppressive systems that will ultimately create a more fair, more tolerant, and more just world.

## HARROWING INJUSTICES INCURRED AT BENTLEY *(Continued from page 2)*

To feel secure. To feel I can move in my academic and professional career without the pain of the past threatening to haunt the future, and the world, I was trying to build.

My hopes for a brighter future were crushed in my first year at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) like Bentley. As I walked down my dorm hall Slade, tired from a long day of work, I attempted to enter my room when my neighbor stopped me in my tracks yelling and screaming, stumbling upon everything in his way, happy to be inebriated and content at the perceived ability to do harm without repercussions. The smirk on his face as he proudly yelled "NIGGER!!!" will forever be ingrained

in my mind. I felt helpless, shocked, and violated; stripped away from my identity and wrapped in a racially charged blanket term alluding to inferiority. I stumbled and fell on my bed, deciding not to engage as the fear of being labeled as the "angry black woman" was too much for me to bear. From then on, I felt inferior, as if my skin was my defining feature, as if my attempt at the societal expectation of assimilation was not enough to be labeled human. This is my story, and the untold experiences of black students are many. In order to suppress the disease of racism, we must unite as a force and educate those who are willing to pass the message of equality on to those not

yet enlightened by reality.

One thing we must never forget is where we come from and where we must go. To find a suitable future, we must look objectively at the past and come up with actionable solutions to issues that have been embedded ever since the constitution of the United States of America was written. One must never forget that progress is a never-ending process and the continuity of this process depends on unwavering support. It's imperative that going forward we take the necessary steps as a society and an institution to quell the spread of discrimination and racism. As I learned in GB112 "involve all stakeholders in this process."

## CODE BLACK: HOW RACE INFLUENCE THE MEDICAL FIELD *(Continued from page 2)*

women are 3-4 times higher than white women. To put this into simpler terms, Black women are about three times more likely to die from pregnancy complications or to be left with a severe disability while giving birth than white women. While this is a huge implication of imbalance within the medical field, those facts lie among others. Other statistics include how significantly underrepresented and underserved Black women are when it comes to clinical trials, research on illnesses that dominate their demographic, and access to fertility care in the case that they are unable to bear children. Considering this, it is evident why Black women experience negative health outcomes and reasonable to conclude that these statistics also lead to a chain reaction

of events that further weaken the health of Black women nationally. If lack of trust in doctors and hospitals progresses within this community, it is less likely that they will be willing to turn to these resources when they feel something is wrong.

Not only do I have to worry about my father, uncles, and friends who bear the burden of being a Black male in America. Not only do I have to worry about routine traffic stops and suffocation at the hands of police officers. But I have to worry about going to the doctor's office. I have to worry if medical personnel will believe me the first time I say something hurts. After I celebrate the news of my loved ones "expecting," I have to worry about if our pregnancy will come to

fruition. Not only do I have to worry about my son making it back home, but I have to worry about whether I'll be able to deliver him or not.

Systemic racism is more than just "hands up, don't shoot" and "I can't breathe." Systemic racism surrounds us in ways many of us have been blind to. It's time for Americans to wake up and acknowledge how much ignorance they rest and take comfort in. Educate yourself, acknowledge the biases you hold, and spark conversation within your communities. Whether that starts at home, your sports team, your book club, or your group of friends. Let the fire that is knowledge and awareness continue to burn until everyone is ready to become agents of change. Growth never takes place in comfort.

## VOICES OF THE COMMUNITY *(Continued from page 3)*

Bentley is able to offer immensely valuable opportunities.

### **The Importance of Accountability**

For representation and opportunity to occur, accountability must exist. In all of our conversations, Darius, Mario, and Claudette mentioned the need for action outside of just a dialogue.

*"These things have been talked about before, even back when I was a student. I'll continue to do everything in my part to make sure that everything is in order from a diversity standpoint. Some people want this change—but is everyone buying into it?"*

Darius brought this point up to me in our conversation. It can be easy for us to have a conversation about implicit bias, microaggressions, institutional racism, or cultural barriers – but some will believe that the work ends there. Darius urges students and faculty to think outside of the box, bringing up the possibility of starting an African-American fraternity chapter on campus or expanding our Black History Month to encompass the great work of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni of color. Claudette advocates for infusing diversity education within all classes: "Even for twenty minutes out of the

class. Infuse it into the curriculum, for real. Don't pretend to do it, actually do it. You can't talk the talk and write articles, but not make changes internally." Similar to Darius, Claudette also sees the dangers of believing that dialogue is the only way to change our campus. Mario reminded us that, "At the core of any reform is the ability to listen." These conversations happen so that we can begin implementing changes at an individual and organizational level, and we are unable to do so without stopping to listen to the experiences and stories of the Black faculty and staff around us.

## TO THE “OUTSIDERS” (Continued from page 4)

Here is the thing: *this is a reality.*

We highlight this choice and our double life so that you can gain the perspective that goes deeper than skin color. That same privilege that gave us this choice to be a part of this community is the same privilege we are using to shed light on the injustices

we have experienced secondhand. We are proof that you do not have to be forced into this to support this cause and the people behind it.

So, now we ask you, the Bentley community, to choose. Either to hide behind your privilege and continue to live in a fantasy where racial tensions

do not exist simply because it does not affect you, or use your privilege to bring justice and amplify the voices of human beings that have been silenced for far too long.

And no matter what you choose, remember that there are those who do not have a choice at all.



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