

# CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

## Office of the Dean of Institutional Equity and Inclusion

June 19, 2020

To Members of the Connecticut College Community,

One year ago, today, my family and I were fortunate to make our second visit to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the newest Smithsonian site on the National Mall in Washington. We were there to celebrate Juneteenth—a holiday commemorating June 19, 1865, the date that the remaining enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas finally received word from Union soldiers that they were free. Of course, this news came a full two and half years after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863. The Smithsonian museum told the story beautifully—and my young children began to see Juneteenth as an important, albeit troubling, part of our history and culture.

Juneteenth is more meaningful to me and my family this year than ever before—in a year when we are making history rather than learning about it. In a year when we have freedom on our minds.

Like so many of you, we are proud to be part of the global movement calling attention to and seeking to eliminate anti-Black racism as well as other oppressions endemic to American society. People have taken to the streets for more than 20 consecutive days and nights to protest systemic racism and police brutality. Letters and phone calls to elected officials are making a difference. Statues and symbols of cultural imperialism are being removed, including right here in New London. On a national scale, the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled in favor of two key civil rights protections: one extending employment protections to LGBTQ people and another defending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Juneteenth offers a fitting occasion for personal reflection on these and other steps forward on the long journey to freedom.

Today, I am personally drawn to the musings of Black scholars, activists and artists who have been conceptualizing and chasing freedom for generations, including the poetry of Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks; essays by Audre Lorde and James Baldwin; songs written and recorded by Nina Simone and Sam Cooke;

*Revelations* and other performances by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; words spoken by Marsha P. Johnson; and Ella Baker's riveting speeches. I am also re-reading the [Combahee River Collective](#) statement, in search of deeper connections to the work of these brilliant Black feminist thinkers.

Perhaps you are asking what you should do today. I would encourage you to find ways to deepen your own knowledge and personal awareness.

And in that spirit, I want to announce that, starting in 2021, the College will use Juneteenth as a day for all who are on campus to engage in reflection, anti-racist education, and community building. In anticipation, I encourage you to participate this year in virtual Juneteenth events organized throughout the weekend by the [Smithsonian Museum](#), a webinar on anti-racist action featuring [Ibram X. Kendi](#), or other local, regional and national commemorations.

I hope you will draw strength and inspiration from the power and resilience of those for whom freedom has been a long time coming. A change is gonna come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. McKnight, Jr.", with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

John F. McKnight, Jr.  
Dean of Institutional Equity and Inclusion

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