

Challenging Environmental Racism: From the Local to the Global

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Introductory Remarks by:

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I am very happy to introduce this first event from the Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society at Boston College. The Schiller Institute is dedicated to fostering a just, bountiful, and enduring world, and one that is responsive to the needs of people and communities across the globe. In the research and teaching that we sponsor through the Institute, we take inspiration from the Jesuit tradition of the common good - a tradition which encourages the creation of space for dialogue, bringing different perspectives to bear in the search for truth; and a tradition of taking action, individually and collectively, to create a peaceful and just society.

The Institute aims to be informed by the best ideas from science, and from creative thinkers and doers everywhere. We have a special emphasis at the Institute on issues at the intersections of society and environment, energy, and health. Areas where we see both great challenge and great opportunity for contribution.

In this sense, it would be hard to find a more appropriate topic for the Institute to address than environmental racism. As our speakers will explain, environmental racism reaches deep into the lifeblood of communities, causing an accumulation of environmental harms, threatening health, and eroding the value and cohesion of neighborhoods. This is a fundamental issue for society which communities of color have grappled with, largely unaided, for a very long time. The Black Lives Matter movement, climate justice activism, disproportionate impacts of COVID 19, and the dying words of George Floyd as he layed on the pavement in Minneapolis gasping “I can’t breathe” have helped to rocket issues of environmental racism to new levels of public awareness.

However, motivated as we may now be, understanding and taking effective action on environmental racism will require linkages with science and social context, ethics and policy. The Schiller Institute is undertaking a concerted, interdisciplinary effort to explore the origins, extent, and effects of environmental racism and to work towards approaches to combating this deadly injustice. We seek to understand it as a manifestation of structural racism and to wrestle with its implications for making meaningful change. The Schiller Institute will be sponsoring a series of events over the next year on this topic so stay tuned for notifications about these.

We are hoping that this programming will equip you with insights and capabilities that will allow you to engage, in whatever ways you are most comfortable, with addressing the challenges of Environmental Racism locally, nationally, or globally.

In the creation and planning of this event, I am indebted to the Environmental Racism planning committee. This is a group of 20 faculty, students and staff from BC, who have worked tirelessly over the last 2 months to put this program together. They represent such programs as the African and African Diaspora Studies, the Rappaport Center for Law and Public Policy, the Environmental Studies program, the Office of Student Involvement, the School of Social Work, the Departments of Sociology and History, the Complex Problems and Enduring Questions Core Curriculum, the Black Student Forum, and others.

Now, to tonight's program:

Our guest speakers are Dr. David Pellow, Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara and Reverend Mariama White-Hammond.

The program will begin with presentations first by Dr. Pellow, and then by Reverend White-Hammond. Following these, I will moderate a discussion with Dr. Pellow and Reverend White-Hammond, and following this, our panelists will take questions from you for about half an hour. We will end with summing up statements from Dr. Pellow and Reverend White-Hammond. I encourage you to submit questions for our speakers via the Q&A function at the bottom of your screen.