A PROPOSAL OF THE CONCERNED BLACK ALUMNI OF PRINCETON FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CENTER TO COMBAT AND ERADICATE RACISM AT PRINCETON AND BEYOND
CBAP MISSION AND IDENTITY STATEMENT

CBAP is an independent alumni group of Black and other People of Color who have coalesced to support the call for and the establishment of a center that institutionalizes the University’s commitment to combat and eradicate racism at Princeton and beyond.

Our work is strengthened through collaboration with affinity groups, and we work through consensus-building to organize around the idea that diverse experiences, views, and skills are indispensable to understand different needs and create sustainable change.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The call to uproot pervasive structural and systemic racism, within the United States and globally, is driven by the unrelenting burden of racial injustices shouldered daily by Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, and all people of color. The Concerned Black Alumni of Princeton, a group of alumni of color spanning six decades of scholarship at Princeton University, have prepared this proposal detailing the critical need and rationale for the University to establish an applied research center to combat and eradicate racism. The proposal advances why it is imperative that Princeton University reach beyond its commitment to making Princeton a more diverse and inclusive community by establishing a research center dedicated to answering President Eisgruber’s charge to eliminate systemic racism.

Racism is embedded within the foundation of America’s evolution from a colony to a world power. Consequently, the scourge of racism permeates disciplines as disparate as philosophy and genetics today. Envisioned as a hub for applied anti-racism research, the proposed Center will use an interdisciplinary lens to study the various forms of racism-- internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural-- to inform both academia and the broader public. The proposed Center will draw from and build upon the body of scholarly work at the University and translate such research into real world remedies and solutions to end racism.

The Center Proposal:

1. presents a substantive framework to achieve the Center’s core mandate and purpose;

2. highlights the historical context that drives the Center’s mission, while defining its forward-looking purpose to support scholarship and generate novel applied research on racism across disciplines; and

3. delineates the Center’s benefits to students, faculty, the University, and society.

The proposed James Collins Johnson Center to Combat and Eradicate Racism transforms the global conversation to end racism into a centralized effort for continued university-led action. The Center’s purpose, while expansive in scope, is critical in dismantling the oppressive weight of racism that prevents all people of color from full participation in the political, economic, and social mainstream of American life. By supporting this proposal to institutionalize the Center, Princeton will become a leader in the field to advance racial justice and inform public policy, consistent with its motto, “Princeton in the nation’s service and in the service of humanity.”
I. INTRODUCTION

We, the Concerned Black Alumni of Princeton University (CBAP), welcome the June 22, 2020 call of Christopher L. Eisgruber, the 20th President of Princeton University, and his charge to his cabinet “…to submit plans . . . to combat systemic racism within and beyond the University.” This directive is certainly consistent with the mission and motto of Princeton University, “Princeton in the nation’s service and the service of humanity,” and is responsive to this current moment in America. CBAP enthusiastically endorses this momentous call to action, and we urge that it be put into practice through the creation of an academic center as the mechanism to systematically combat racism at Princeton University and beyond.

CBAP joins with other members of the Princeton University community in embracing the call for establishment of a center to combat racism. The purpose of this document is to advance our arguments in support of the requests articulated in petitions of faculty, students, and alumni, for the University to establish the Center to Combat and Eradicate Racism. We will share our views as to why the University should be ambitious in seizing this particular moment to do so. We will discuss the University’s capability to deliver on this mission to combat racism through a center dedicated to doing this work. Additionally, we will set forth the major foreseeable benefits of such an initiative to the University as an institution, to its faculty, and—through its transformative mission—to its student body in general and Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous students in particular. Furthermore, CBAP embraces the role of a center to combat racism in advancing the mission of the University to serve the nation and humanity.

Beyond the points stated above, CBAP will articulate a preliminary set of foundational precepts that we understand as central to the conceptualization, development, and work of the proposed Center. In addition, we will suggest ways in which we can assist University leaders in the faculty, staff, and administration in garnering the external buy-in, expertise, and resources needed to bring the Center to fruition.

II. CHAMPIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

The sponsors of this preliminary proposal include alumni whose engagement with anti-racism work at Princeton stretches as far back as the 1960s and extends forward to graduates from the past decade. As students, we matriculated into an institution that was once known as the “northernmost outpost of Southern culture.” We had to create for ourselves the social, cultural, spiritual, academic, and other support systems to succeed because they were lacking for us in our time as students at the University. We advocated for the establishment of an African American Studies Program that became a Center and now a Department. We fought for the creation of the Third World Center, the antecedent to the Carl Fields Center for Equality and Understanding. The Third World Center was a site of interdisciplinary collaboration, leadership development, student-initiated seminars, and inclusive community-building among diverse members of the University community. We have helped the Admissions Office with recruitment and participated in the admissions process through Alumni Schools Committee (ASC) interviews. Our “lived experience” at Princeton, along with the knowledge and expertise we have acquired in our post-Princeton endeavors, make us critical stakeholders in the proposed project. We have contributed financially and via our human resources as trustees and as other volunteers in assisting the University to live out its commitment of service.
The members of CBAP have been meeting several times a week since June 2020 to consolidate our engagement to advance this project. We have communicated our interest in creating the Center to President Eisgruber, the African American Studies Department,ii the Association of Black Princeton Alumni (ABPA),iii the Association of Latino Princeton Alumni (ALPA),iv Native Americans at Princeton (NAAP),v and the Asian American Alumni Association of Princeton (A4P).vi An ever-growing list of Black and other alumni have signed the petition in support of the faculty and graduate students who called for a center to eradicate racism.

CBAP proposes that the Center be named the James Collins Johnson Center to Combat and Eradicate Racism. Johnson’s life story is one of triumph that exemplifies resilience in the face of the atrocities of slavery, the struggles for freedom, the denial of equality, opposition to access, and the imposing indignities that continue to characterize racism today. His unique relationship to Princeton University makes it appropriate that a center created to address the inhumane vestiges of racism be named in his honor. vii

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROPOSAL

CBAP proposes the establishment of a new academic entity at Princeton University, exclusively dedicated to the study of “racism” as a pervasive phenomenon in Western Civilization and global history. Race is a social construct of humanity invented and promulgated to impose false hierarchies. This stratification was designed to exploit resources and wealth through the imposition of racism, a process that has over centuries resulted in the dehumanization of a class of individuals who are currently referred to as “people of color.” Racism provides the theoretical justification for the brutal and inhumane extraction and transfer of material wealth and knowledge from Indigenous, African, and other peoples of color worldwide to Europeans, from the late 1400s through to the present day.

The mission of the Center is to combat and eradicate racism.

• The Center will support cutting-edge, applied research that identifies solutions with the goal of disseminating findings to use for the elimination of racism and remediation of its adverse effects.
• The Center will serve as a curated repository of information chronicling internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism at Princeton University and beyond.
• The Center will assemble expertise to diagnose and remediate both past and current manifestations of racism.
• The Center will be a resource for students, academics, governments, for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, as well as the lay public, to advance the mission of combating and eradicating racism.

The Center will seek to fulfill Princeton University’s vow to be of service to the nation and to humanity.

The objective of such an entity is the creation of a supportive and high-quality environment that promotes fact-based, data-driven research and analysis of racism by experts in their fields of accomplishment. The intended outcome of such efforts is the creation of solutions that rid society of the scourge of racism in all of its multifaceted and dynamic complexity. A variety of pedagogical approaches and tools will be used to examine racism from a multi-disciplinary approach.

1. Highlight and support both disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship, creative work, pedagogy, and community engagement devoted to deepening understanding of the history of the formation of racist ideologies, policies, and systems, as well as the damage that those ideologies and systems have
produced. The following systems, each of which contains a plethora of relevant issues, are examples for applied research:

a. Criminal Justice  
b. Housing  
c. Pre-K-12 and Higher Education  
d. Transportation and Infrastructure  
e. Technologies, Media, Communications, Algorithms, and Artificial Intelligences  
f. Government and Politics  
g. Employment Opportunity  
h. Healthcare and Mental Health  
i. Environmental and Water Safety  
j. Banking and Finance  
k. Military  
l. Spiritual/Religious Life and Cultural Institutions

2. Develop remedies to eradicate practices that support, perpetuate, or condone racism within and beyond the University.

3. Promote replicable anti-racism practices that will successfully transform institutions, including Princeton.

   a. Develop and implement tools for assessing the effectiveness of models intended to promote racial healing and relationship-building, such as the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation framework that undergirds those centers developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities.

   b. As a complement to its applied research, compile a granular, verifiable, rigorously curated database of overt and systemic racism by scrutinizing documents, including newspaper archives, government documents, legal documents, religious records, correspondence, photographs, and any other available repository of relevant information. Employ leading scholars tasked with the role of overseeing the database and disseminating findings of such databases.

   c. Serve as a “node” in a national and potentially international effort of other institutions or think tanks concerned with similar objectives.

   d. Offer symposia, conferences, and other means for individuals and organizations to share ideas and strategies in the furtherance of the social/racial justice objectives.
IV. JUSTIFICATION FOR PROPOSAL

A. Princeton University Is Best Positioned to Lead This Effort

We believe that the University is uniquely positioned to meet the challenge and become the foremost leader in this transformative initiative to combat and eradicate racism at the University and beyond. President Eisgruber, along with his cabinet, has already demonstrated commitment to this cause by issuing a major, critical statement addressing racism at Princeton University that was authentically introspective. As a result, the U.S. Department of Education launched an investigation into institutional racism at the University that in 2020 threatened Princeton’s federal funding. The case was withdrawn in February 2021. It was this very leadership on the part of the University that garnered support and recognition from more than one hundred (100) top-tier universities and colleges in America. The President received the robust support and backing of his peers within the University and throughout higher education.

Through its transparent introspection about racism, and its declared willingness to combat racism, the University not only garnered tremendous respect but became the leader of this movement among peer institutions nationally. The establishment of the Center is in direct alignment with the President’s declarations and the University’s actions. It is the creation of the Center that will institutionalize this work and consolidate the University’s moral leadership in this realm.

B. Benefits to the Faculty

The faculty will be on the forefront of this work as it engages or continues to engage in the reflection, the practice, and the elevation of the knowledge accrued from the process of transforming the University, the community, the nation, and the world to eradicate racism. Of course, such work must be done in collaboration with the African American Studies Department in particular and various other academic departments, programs, and institutes across the University. In the African American Studies department, the University already has assembled a top tier of thought leaders and change agents in the struggle against racism. So, the University would be building on their work and that of other academic disciplines and departments to meet the aims of the Center.

This proposal views the Center as a centralized "hub" that will support the work and mission of the University in the following ways:

1. Offering faculty dedicated support for applied research projects that include both research and implementation grants—i.e., faculty fellowships, travel funds for field research, and professional development, etc.;

2. Creating a pool of academics whose applied research focuses on racism and is attractive to foundations interested in the research;

3. Providing a chance to collaborate with colleagues across the disciplines and others (e.g., post-doctoral researchers, visiting professors, fellows, scholars, celebrities, and alumni);

4. Facilitating development of new inter- and multi-disciplinary courses and research projects;
5. Affording opportunities to gain recognition through the Center’s publications, symposia, presentations, podcasts, performances, website, and speaker's bureau;

6. Creating a "pipeline" to government agencies, research labs, and think tanks, where faculty could engage in policymaking and governance;

7. Complementing existing Princeton University research areas, such as The Eviction Lab, the Ida B. Wells Just Data Lab, Princeton Slavery Project, the Princeton Prison Teaching Initiative, and others.

C. Benefits to the University

Given the ground-swell movement for academic institutions to form task forces, divisions, and committees to address racism, Princeton can become the pinnacle of applied research to combat and eradicate systemic racism globally through establishment of the Center. Numerous leading universities have already invested in creation of dynamic centers with a focus on racism—i.e., Boston University, American University, University of Maryland, University of Utah, University of Michigan, Temple University, Cornell University, and others.

1. The University will demonstrate a positive response in practice by instituting the Center. This will serve as an implicit and robust response to the harsh and effective social criticism of such individuals as Malcolm Gladwell who argue that elite institutions such as Princeton are “hoarding” educational funds that should be more equitably distributed to other, less well-endowed academic institutions (Gladwell, 2015). Through the Center, the University will become a “safe harbor” for certain donors to justify their generous donations.

2. The Center would help to highlight current and future intramural work in the area of housing discrimination, algorithmic racism, and other initiatives that are contributing to the eradication of systemic racism.

3. The Center will attract thought leaders in anti-racism research, will generate donor support from those who have proven a commitment to anti-racism, and will attract a diverse corps of students and faculty who are interested in applied research. Princeton will become a change agent that produces lasting solutions.

4. Establishment of the Center will expand the options of Princeton to procure financial support for research in areas of social and racial injustice, including reparations, currently being addressed by the federal government and other entities.

5. By focusing on tangible, verifiable, rigorously curated “best practices” the Center will serve as a source of applied research on effective mechanisms for the dismantling of systemic racism, and Princeton will establish a new legacy of leadership in combating and eradicating systemic racism.

D. Benefits to the Students

The Center will provide psycho-social benefits to the student body of Princeton University through their actual involvement in the practice of research in an institution that combats racism internally and transforms
the world by leading its community, the nation, and humanity to overcome this scourge. The social, cultural, spiritual, and academic content and support systems at the University have historically disregarded the needs of Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous students by omission or commission. The Center will integrate the “lived experience” of students of color into the applied research conducted, and it will become indispensable to the University in its endeavor to combat racism. Many Princeton students are destined to hold positions of great influence, and this Center will be a bridge connecting the University of today to the University of tomorrow.

The Center will cultivate a new paradigm for students looking at themselves and the world. Some of the specific benefits to students will include the following:

1. The Center will help to expose both the insidious as well as the obvious ways that systemic racism has evolved and become embedded into the structure of American society and beyond.

2. The Center will provide opportunities for students to participate, and even initiate research projects to remediate the consequences of racial inequities.

3. The Center, through its physical presence, and sponsorship of lectures, conferences and symposia and influence on course offerings, will contribute to the psychosocial and intellectual development of the students.

4. The Center will offer meaningful internships that prepare them with unique skillsets to pursue careers in a host of fields.

5. The Center, through its national and international affiliations, will help expose students to a network of opportunities to investigate and help remediate racial inequities both in America and abroad.

6. The Center will help attract talented students interested in the study of race, racism, and racial inequity.

7. The presence of the Center will diminish the alienation experienced by students of color during their matriculation at Princeton, thereby increasing their ongoing connections and support to the University.

E. Benefit to Society

While the aforementioned benefits are profound for the University, they are of minimal societal significance if they have no utility to the wider community beyond its hallowed halls. Princeton’s obligation to society is not a charitable act for the benefit of the University; rather it should inure to the benefit of society as well.
Its obligation extends to combating and eradicating systemic racism. What follows are some of the benefits to society both in America and abroad:

1. The Center through its multi/inter/intra-disciplinary scope, will help to develop real world solutions to practical problems in education, housing, health care, criminal justice, and economic empowerment faced by people of color due to slavery, genocide, land acquisition, immigration policies, and other historic racial barriers perpetrated against both their predecessors and their current descendants.

2. The Center will serve as a prototype for the development of similar academic institutions which will deliver applied solutions to real world problems related to racial injustice based on evidence-based analysis.

3. The Center, by its very existence in such a prominent institution as Princeton University, will serve to enlighten people in America and abroad, that racial oppression in its multifarious manifestations can and will be both combated and eradicated.

4. The Center will become a resource for solving the real-world problems of violence, disenfranchisement, economic disparities, and inequities in healthcare, housing, education, and technology.

5. The application of its research projects will impact individuals, communities, institutions, and society at large by providing tools to ameliorate micro-aggressions, unconscious biases and inequities promulgated as a result of systemic racism.

V. SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSAL

CBAP is committed to achievement of the objectives of this Proposal -i.e., to create a Center to combat and eradicate racism at Princeton University and beyond through dynamic study and applied research on all aspects of systemic racism. Our commitment includes contributing the ongoing engagement of Black and other alumni of color with “lived experience” along with backgrounds, credentials, and expertise in academia and the professions of relevant importance to the design, promotion, launch, governance, and administration of such a center.

Funding for a center of this nature is of the utmost importance, both to develop and sustain its ongoing programmatic requirements. There are similar national academic centers addressing racism with a number of funding models to replicate. Ideally, Princeton University will fund this Center in its entirety, as is true of some of the other academic centers nationally.

VI. CONCLUSION

Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous people in the United States have fought to bring us to this moment in the history of our nation. We have fiercely pushed back against the forces that zealously defend racism in destructive and murderous ways to maintain the status quo of their intended socio-economic and racial dominance. The process of combating and eradicating racism will not be easy because the scourge of racism
has been so deeply rooted. However, the lived experiences of the Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and other Alumni of Color have been more than the sum total of the travesty that racism has wrought. They have afforded us the tools and insights to advance this proposal. The establishment of a center to combat and eradicate racism is imperative, and the persistent and sustained effort of alumni, faculty, and students of good will are what will bring this center to fruition as a shining accomplishment for Princeton in healing the nation and humanity. We are convinced that Princeton is best placed to advance this cause and must seize the present moment so as to not be left behind. The President of Princeton University and other members of the administration must have faith that, in this time of historical reckoning, we can achieve what he has called on the University community to do to combat racism. Combating systemic racism requires a strategic approach that is multi-directional, well-founded, entrenched, and committed to the work. This Center, when institutionalized at the University, will build upon the historical and contemporary antiracism work at Princeton, and it is our belief that it will become an efficient and indispensable mechanism to combat and eradicate racism.

Endnotes

i See, Princeton Faculty Petition: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPmfeDKBi25_7rUTKkhZ3cyMICQicp05ReVaeBpEdYUCykIA/viewform

SPIA Petition by undergraduate students: https://www.change.org/p/students-against-anti-black-racism-in-the-woodrow-wilson-school-at-princeton-university

SPIA Petition by Graduate students and alumni: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfK8CJV68tIFSVNCe4AF_Mi56YMYBbn19cU59d0WX1se3vq/viewform


ii The Department of African American Studies offers the African American Studies concentration for undergraduates with a strong interest in studying the complex interplay between political, economic, and cultural forces shaping the historic achievements and struggles of African-descended people in the United States and their relationship to others around the world.

iii The mission of the Association of Black Princeton Alumni is “to strengthen the relationships among Black Princeton Alumni and with the broader Princeton University Community by providing content, access to resources, and opportunities that allow for deeper connection and engagement.”

iv The Association of Latino Princeton Alumni’s mission is to advance the interests, welfare, and educational aims of the University through the promotion and advancement of the interests and welfare of its Latino alumni and Latino students at the University.
Native Americans At Princeton (NAAP) is a student organization/support group for students comprised of Native Hawaiian, American Indian, and Native Alaskan members. We host a variety of events throughout the year, such as movie nights, powwows, and dinner discussions. Check out the calendar for information about our upcoming events.

The mission of the Asian American Alumni Association of Princeton (A4P) is to support the community of Princeton alumni in advancing Asian-American and Asian issues in student life, University affairs, personal and professional development, and community service.


The Eviction Lab at Princeton University produces rigorous and novel research about the causes and consequences of the affordable housing crisis and housing instability in the United States. It also evaluates housing-based solutions to poverty amelioration, offering evidence about how housing can be an effective platform to promote economic mobility, health, and community vitality.

The Ida B. Wells Just Data Lab brings together students, educators, activists, and artists to develop a critical and creative approach to data conception, production, and circulation. Our aim is to rethink and retool data for justice. The Lab is currently focused on developing a Pandemic Portal — a set of resources developed in collaboration with community organizations that will remain freely accessible for future research, education, and advocacy.

The Princeton & Slavery Project investigates the University’s involvement with the institution of slavery. It explores the slave-holding practices of Princeton’s early trustees and faculty members, considers the impact of donations derived from the profits of slave labor, and looks at the broader culture of slavery in the state of New Jersey, which did not fully abolish slavery until 1865. It also documents the southern origins of many Princeton students during the ante-bellum period and considers how the presence of these southern students shaped campus conversations about politics and race.

The Prison Teaching Initiative seeks to bridge Princeton University’s academic and service-driven missions by providing the highest quality post-secondary education to incarcerated students in New Jersey; offering Princeton University graduate students, postdocs, faculty, and staff innovative, evidence-based pedagogy training and the chance to diversify their teaching portfolios through intensive classroom experience; and fostering a robust campus dialogue on mass incarceration and its relationship to systemic inequalities in access to education.
