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Letters to the Readers

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Letter to Our Readers,

COVID-19—no description of this year would be accurate without some mention of COVID. Despite vaccines and widely available mitigation tools, the pandemic, along with ignorance (both willful and innocent) rages on. For me, paying attention to air flow, sizing up the number of people in a room, counting how many people are masked, and then how many of those masks cover an entire face, has been utterly exhausting. I know I am not alone in my feelings. I know at least some of the push towards normalcy, towards “living with COVID,” is driven by this exhaustion. Ironically, only by acknowledging that things will never be the same, only by relentlessly keeping our defenses up, can the world ever resemble “normal.”

Like COVID, the life cycles of other social justice issues are subject to this dynamic. After first acknowledging a problem (already a high bar), it takes knowledge, organization, and action to overcome societal apathy. Social justice fatigue is real. It is exhausting to care about the many issues that plague our society with the depth and passion required to make meaningful change. But the risks of letting exhaustion prevail are too great.

COVID has thrown into sharp relief the cracks in our system. Unequal health outcomes are exposing the deep-rooted economic and social disparities at the center of American life. Social safety nets are strained to their breaking points, and our elected representatives, in large part, are either failing to reinforce these lifelines or are actively seeking to dismantle them. The same is true of basic, hard-won human rights. As I write this, courts and legislatures at every level are eroding liberties and attacking already marginalized communities.

The *Depaul Journal for Social Justice* exists both as a loudspeaker for advocates and, perhaps more importantly, as a critical resource for those seeking to educate themselves. This issue continues in that tradition. Our authors speak eloquently and compellingly to a wide range of important issues: A synopsis of the case for Puerto Rican statehood, a case study in the disparity of life expectancy for people living only miles apart, the sexual abuse of indigenous people in foster care, a primer on Section 1983 of the Civil Rights Act, the *Bostock* decision and its impact on LGBTQ advocacy, and the possibility of criminalizing the destruction of cultural property.

The social justice community is often the most affected by our political (and physical) climate. The added hardship of recent years has been deeply felt. For you, know that we see you. We see your struggles, and we see your passion, your commitment, and your continued work. In these days of chronic burnout, I hope the energy of these authors speaks to you, as they spoke to me. I hope their passion reignites your own passions and renders your personal paths forward bright and clear.

Thank you to the staff and executive board of the Journal, who cared for their own families and health, worked hard work in their internships, externships and classes, and found the focus to read, select and carefully edit the articles in this volume. The Journal wouldn't be possible without their hard work. Thank you also to my partner, Ryan Hunt, who has literally held my hand through three years of law school and continues to do so now, as I publish this edition.

Finally, thank you, our readers. Thank you for devoting your time to these challenging and important articles. And for choosing advocacy over exhaustion.

Silpa Bulusu

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Silpa Bulusu', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Editor-in-Chief
DePaul Journal for Social Justice

Dear Readers,

In the summer of 2020, the streets of Chicago were filled with calls of "Who do you protect? Who do you serve?" Millions of people all around the world were looking for answers and accountability after the slaying of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and hundreds more.¹ This refrain was directed at the police, who lined the streets, at best watching hesitantly, and at worst antagonizing and arresting peaceful protestors. I stood among them, trying to be a passive bystander as a Legal Observer with the National Lawyers Guild, taking down the names of the arrested and the badge numbers of the arrestors and agitators. These chants mingled with the energy and the fear as hundreds of us realized the trains had been shut down or the bridges had been raised, trapping us in downtown Chicago as tensions rose, has stayed with me.

At the protests, "Who do you protect? Who do you serve?" was not being asked to me directly, but it was being asked to people in positions of power. As a white person who will soon hold two advanced degrees, I am in an incredibly privileged position. And, in my position as the *Journal for Social Justice* Executive Submissions Editor, I hold a position of power and leadership, as the first gate keeper of what gets published in our journal. This year, I tried to develop my own rubric to assess submissions against, beyond the technical requirements of the journal. I asked: "Who or what does this article, or author, serve? Who or what does this article seek to protect?" Social Justice covers an incredible number of topics, only a few of which we were able to include in this volume. But, my hope is that the articles in this volume serve populations we don't often get to hear from in

¹ For a more complete and updated register of names and stories of Black Lives who have lost their lives due to systemic racism, visit www.saytheirnamesmemorials.com.

strictly academic settings and offers a safe space to share their stories and concerns about our judicial and political systems.

The millions of people who showed up for racial justice, exercising their right to protest, holding those in power accountable for their actions, showed us what democracy looks like. I tried to emulate some of what I have learned from them in this volume.

This year, I aimed to strengthen the journal's position as a platform for suppressed voices. The *Journal for Social Justice* has one of the most diverse boards of all the journals at DePaul and I wanted that diversity reflected in the articles we published. This volume has articles about underrepresented communities from authors who, though they may be new to the legal field, are experts of their own experiences and often from the communities they write about.

I also tried to build upon the principles of collective care as self-care. Social Justice, as the name suggests, is social and cannot happen in a vacuum, it can't be directed by one's own personal agenda. In her book, *We Do This 'Til we Free Us*, Mariame Kaba talks about her vision for society, one "built on cooperation instead of individualism, on mutual aid instead of self-preservation."² She goes on to say, on the subject of collective care, "Yes, think about yourself and reflect on your practice. But then you need to test it in the world; you've got to be with people. That's important."³ For the past two years, balancing isolation and collective care has been both more essential and more difficult for many of us than before. I view this journal as our attempt, as a team, to test our values and education as law students and serve the communities we've committed ourselves to.

This issue was written largely at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and edited as we entered our second year of navigating the virus and the life disruptions that came with it. While any publication is an impressive accomplishment, I want to especially congratulate everyone who made this issue possible. Thank the previous Editorial Board of 2021-22 and DePaul staff who, despite a very challenging year, gave us all the tools we needed for success. I want to thank our incredibly talented Executive Board and citations staffers who worked very hard over the course of the year to put together this volume. And, of course, thank you to our authors who trusted us with your works. I hope you enjoy this volume.

In solidarity,

Bridget Roddy

She/Her/Hers

Article Selections Editor

² Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, 17 (2021).

³ *Id.* at 18.