

June 17, 2021

Dear BSD students,

The month of June marks the remembrance of momentous milestones for Black and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ), and “+” (representing other sexual and gender diverse people) liberation — from the Juneteenth commemoration marking the abolition of slavery in the U.S. on June 19th 1865 to the LGBTQ+ community pride parades honoring the June 28th 1969 Stonewall Uprising in Manhattan and the beginning of movements to outlaw discriminatory laws and practices against LGBTQ+ communities.

Alongside the opportunity to rejoice and celebrate, these victories also represent an opportunity to elevate conversation, build allyship and education on the continued battles these communities face, while also recognizing how science and medicine have historically influenced views and oppression. For example, “homosexuality” was considered a pathology and mental illness until 1973, while many LGBTQ+ members have lost their lives to hate crimes and HIV/AIDS related to stigma and discrimination.

Further, it is also noteworthy that stresses from living in environments marked by stigma and structural discrimination are known to result in early deaths from suicide and increased risk of a cascade of life-shortening health conditions. Evidently, the recent racist and violent hate crimes against Black, Brown, Asian and LGBTQ+ folks such as the police killing of Breonna Taylor and the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting remind us that not enough has ever been done to end this oppression in all its forms, and truly heal the wounds of centuries of racism, inequality, injustice and prejudice. Building upon and celebrating the pioneering and brave efforts from prominent gay rights figures such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, we must also recognize that LGBTQ+ people of color (POC) are marginalized in multiple ways associated with both racism and heterosexism.

Following the one-year anniversary of George Floyd’s death and the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, this month several UChicago groups continue to sponsor programming aiming at sparking conversation and action upon these matters, including a Juneteenth Keynote Address by renowned activist and scholar, **Dr. Angela Davis** on **Saturday, June 19th from 4:00-5:00pm** sponsored by UChicago Grad Council, Black Grad Coalition and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, which is open to all UChicago affiliates, including BSD graduate students. ([register here](#))

Dr. Monica Vela has kindly shared the attached document from a 4th year medical student, Ijezie Ikwuezunma, who created Pritzker’s guidebook to Juneteenth. In addition, if your schedule allows, please join us in **observing Juneteenth** by gathering with us on **Friday, June 18th at Noon** in front of the Cummings Life Science Center (920 E. 58th Street - between the bookstore and the old ED entrance). We will be led by Dr. Abdullah Pratt and will hear reflections from a number of our leaders.

In our efforts to continue dialogue and spark action, we also invite you to revisit our [1ST Annual BSD Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Retreat](#) website which has now been updated with video interview recordings from **Dr. Valerie Jarret** retreat interview, as well as panel sessions summaries and resources shared throughout the retreat. We are also currently working in furthering efforts to build stronger long-term relationships with the Chicago Southside and university neighborhood communities. Further details will follow at the BDC summer quarter general meeting.

In sincere support,
BDC Committee