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From the President

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

I started the month of May with a visit to Maine Superior Court. The courthouse, a glass and masonry building along the Kennebec River in Augusta, opened last year adjacent to its 1830 predecessor. I was called to the courthouse for jury duty, one of 150 to be questioned and possibly empaneled for upcoming criminal cases. While the setting and focus differed from my daily work on Mayflower Hill, the experience reminded me how closely tied we at Colby are to broader issues in our society.

The judge talked to us about the critical role of jurors and why impartiality was a cornerstone of our justice system. While the building was new and the challenges we would be asked to address would reflect modern social problems, the tenets of the laws we would be interpreting are rooted in the 800-year-old Magna Carta, he told us. We were asked several questions to assess conflicts. I looked around the room. To my imperfect eyes, 148 of the 150 potential jurors were white. So, too, were the judge, the clerks in the courtroom, and the sheriff's deputies. The juries chosen that day were, from what I could tell, completely homogenous with respect to race (I was not among those chosen).

What would it mean for defendants from ethnic and racial minority groups to face those juries? Would the questionnaires we completed reveal biases we might hold with regard to race and identity? Could our legal system, designed for a far less diverse society, be truly impartial?

The fault lines in our judicial and law enforcement systems have been exposed in dramatic and tragic fashion in recent years. The resulting social unrest, the anger and disenfranchisement, the challenges of understanding and acknowledging the antecedents and realities of different experiences in our society, are playing out in our cities, politics, and courts.

That unrest has roiled campuses across the country as well. Our higher education system, like our legal system, is hundreds of years old and built on ancient European

traditions designed for a different time, place, and population. Many colleges, Colby among them, have done an admirable job creating more diverse and dynamic communities. In fact, the Colby Class of 2020 will be the most diverse and academically prepared class to enter the College, with approximately 25 percent of the class identifying as students of color. But are Colby and other colleges doing enough to find and address biases in our systems and practices? Have we challenged ourselves to understand the complexities of how students from varied backgrounds experience our campus culture and programs? Do we know what it takes to create an intense and intentional residential community of scholars where all participants can engage fully, benefit equally from the intellectual and social resources of the campus, and be treated with respect? When things go wrong, as they do in all communities, will our response be just and unbiased?

These questions have guided a series of conversations at Colby this year, and a task force on diversity, equity, and inclusion will report its findings and recommendations next month. We will soon appoint a dean of the College, whose responsibilities will include leading our efforts to create a more inclusive community. We have much work ahead of us, but I am encouraged by Colby's commitment to honest, difficult conversations, even when they are about our own shortcomings.

When I arrived back on campus from my day in court, my wife, Carolyn, and I strolled to the last-day-of-classes barbecue on Dana lawn. The sun was out, a band was playing, and we were surrounded by an amazing group of students, friends, and colleagues who came to Mayflower Hill from down the road and across the globe. It's always good to return home, especially with a little extra inspiration to build on our past and face our challenges with resolve.

David A. Greene