



AfricanaStudies

at Williams College

May 7, 2014

To Our Senior Concentrators:

Congratulations on completing the Africana Studies concentration. Through our courses, which vary greatly in their disciplinary and theoretical orientations, you have explored the diverse experiences of African and African-descended peoples. We know that you view the concentration as a distinctive and honorable feature of your Williams education. We also know that part of your life at Williams has been not only learning about your own and others' lives, but also becoming proficient in navigating this institution. Reaching the end of this journey is no small feat and you should be proud of your accomplishment.

For some of you, the selection of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a highly controversial figure in American cultural and political life, as honorary degree recipient and Commencement speaker may dishonor the graduation exercises for you and your families, and discredit the hard work you have invested in completing your degree. As noted by many over the last month, during his administration Mayor Bloomberg supported a number of policies that were detrimental to the lives and civil rights of Black people. We stand with those who have voiced opposition to the College's selection of Mayor Bloomberg in various campus forums, whether through demonstrations or their published editorials and comments in *The Williams Record*.

While we see the importance of publicly declaring our objection to the decision of the Committee on Degrees to bring Mayor Bloomberg to campus for this dignified occasion, we do not want the controversy of his selection to detract from the larger problems of how racism and other forms of inequality are understood in our campus culture, as two of our talented Africana Studies concentrators, Ahmad Greene-Hayes and Cinnamon Williams so eloquently noted in their open letter to Williams College last month (April 9, 2014). We applaud their efforts, which we consider to be part of the mission of our Program, to expose and critique those multiple and intersecting forces that continue to support racial oppression, even—or perhaps especially—here at Williams College. Notable among those forces is our discourse of diversity, which casts an illusion of open-dialogue while compelling an accommodation to what Green-Hayes and Williams note as “our campus's tendency to maintain and enshrine safe spaces for the majority of white students.” Their astute observation resonates with our Program's mission to expose and bring coherence to the forces that limit our understandings of inequality.

We are grateful for your support of our Program. Without you, we would not be able to continue the long, arduous task of enlightening dialogue at Williams College.

Sincerely,

The Senior Faculty of the Africana Studies Program