

## Facing the Complex, Multiple Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

As the New Year's Eve ball slowly descended from atop One Times Square at the start of this year, thousands watched from below, joined digitally by a billion more from across the globe. They bade farewell to 2019—looking forward to a bright new year, 2020. They watched with expectation, and with hopes for a prosperous and healthy New Year. Many economies were booming, jobs in the U.S. were increasingly plentiful, and families prepared for return to work and school, after a routine holiday break.

Far across the world, Chinese officials had already confirmed dozens of cases of a deadly and mysterious new pneumonia. First, eastward into Europe and, then, westward towards the Americas, the virus, carried by—and within—humans, reached every continent, save one, Antarctica. Three short months later, city streets across the globe emptied, and hospital beds filled. A one hundred-year, black swan event, the pandemic changed nearly everything about our lives-- how (or even if) we work, how we shop, eat, learn, travel and socialize. Nothing was normal; nothing felt routine.

In the early months of this global pandemic, more than 141,000 Americans have died, with a predicted tens of thousands more to follow. Masks and social distancing are the norm, except where they are not. Amidst the social and economic misery, some posit that the pandemic offers us lessons to the complex, interconnected challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century--if only we will listen. Climate change, structural racism, the Covid-19 pandemic, economic, environmental or political dislocations, and environmental justice catastrophes are causing monumental disruptions to life as we know it—with the poor and disenfranchised often the easiest and most affected victims. These critical challenges require complex solutions, forged with open minds and a commitment to turning, in part, to lessons gleaned from the past. New Fellows will have the opportunity to choose one of these challenges to help

enhance or refine their areas of study and expertise and to bring their knowledge and understanding to their students in varied and important ways.

Each of these humbling, 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges offer us the chance to be inventive and creative, even inspired, to make a difference. What will our responses be? What can history and science teach us? In the 2021 Fellowship, let's open conversations between our professors and students with questions that have touched so many for so many months across so many of our disciplines. Let's bring the challenges of these crises into our virtual—and, hopefully, in time, face to face-- classrooms and attempt to generate thoughtful and meaningful responses and actions.

For guidance, Smithsonian Faculty Fellows can turn to the world's largest museum and research complex, the Smithsonian Institution, whose objects, exhibits, and experts hopefully will help us shape effective and lasting solutions. In the special circumstances presented by the pandemic, museums are shuttered or offering reduced access. MC's own response for spring classes is unknown, but the MC-Smithsonian Faculty Fellowship will prevail, despite these hurdles. We have already planned virtual meetings with curators and educators to prepare our fellows to lead MC students toward the future. Lonnie G. Bunch III, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, describes how the Smithsonian's job is to find the "tension between technology and (the) traditional. This is a time that encourages us to think about things differently because the country will never be the same."

Indeed, the Smithsonian's work to expand access to its digital content is vast and increasingly relevant to our teaching. Our professors and students will be introduced to virtual and real exhibits, museums, and data from the Smithsonian's vast resources, including the Smithsonian Learning Lab. Together, we will promote integrative learning and teaching at Montgomery College to enrich the lives of our students in new, different, and meaningful ways.

Consider becoming a part of this journey, shared by 214 MC professors and more than 20,000 of our students, their families and friends who have benefited from this Fellowship experience.

Communicate with your department chair to assure a teaching schedule that allows you to devote all Thursday afternoons in fall and spring semester of calendar year 2021 to the Fellowship. To discover more, please contact Professor Mimi Mann, Coordinator of the Fellowship

([Mimi.Mann@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:Mimi.Mann@montgomerycollege.edu)) or Professor Denise Dewhurst, Co-Coordinator

([denise.dewhurst@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:denise.dewhurst@montgomerycollege.edu)).

### **IS THIS YOUR YEAR TO JOIN THE SMITHSONIAN FACULTY FELLOWSHIP?**

--**Professors across the Disciplines** can discover and match a 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge with their area of study or interest, for example:

--**Art, drama, and music** professors can look to inspiration in the stories from the pandemic, the art of protest signs or the songs that help create or unify a movement.

--**Biology** professors can examine the behavior of viruses and pathogens in the environment.

--**Communication and Journalism** professors can share with their students how best to tell the story of these enormous challenges and help them develop ways to serve the individual and community in times of crisis by developing language skills that meet the needs of the people. They also can spread the message of the importance of protest and work with their students to understand the history of “race” and racial tensions in the U.S.

--**Criminal Justice** professors can delve into the history of policing or injustices change and poverty can bring.

--**Economics, business, mathematics, and statistics professors** can study the economic toll one or more of these challenges can create. Alternatively, they may consider the costs of *not* addressing them.

-- **Education** professors can experiment how best to explore complex but vital challenges in the classroom or focus on how to educate and prepare their students for the challenges they might face in the decades ahead.

--**English** professors can debate responses to climate change using resources from the *Deep Time* exhibit at the National Museum of Natural History and scrutinize vocabulary to find the most effective words to use in creating a winning argument.

--**Geography** professors can map the journey of Covid-10 and/or look at how climate change has affected regions of the world.

--**Geology** professors can interpret the story of climate change in the rocks and fossils they examine.

--**Health and Nutrition** professors can research the effects of pandemics on the body and mind: how do we function successfully and meet our needs in the midst of so many medical hurdles and so much anxiety, sadness and change?

--**History and Political Science** professors can explain the context in which such events and outcomes occur and the effects on those who experience them.

--**Psychology professors** can address the psychological effects of changed economic, environmental or political circumstances, as well as the impact that social isolation from family and friends creates.

--**Reading** professors can help students envision answers to social injustices after learning about American history at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Museum of American History and the National Museum of the American Indian. How can reading enhance one's understanding of major challenges facing humankind and how to face them successfully?

--**Don't see your discipline?** You can make it happen!!