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To confront systemic racism in Iowa City, a mural won't be enough

Dellyssa Edinboro Guest Columnist

Published 7:30 a.m. CT Oct. 18, 2020



Over the summer, Public Space One's Center for Afrofuturist Studies, an artist residency program in Iowa City, entered into an agreement with the City of Iowa City to serve as caretaker, archivist and project-builder for a mural dedicated to Black lives in Iowa. Though the mural first had a rapid timeline, it has now been revised to carefully accommodate its public programming, extended education opportunities and documentation. It will now be unveiled next summer on the outer side of the two 5-story parking garages on 201 South Clinton St.

When we committed to our roles in assisting in the development of this mural, we understood the significance of having a prominent public art piece in Iowa City that championed the visibility of its Black residents and genuinely engaged with their lives, their dreams and their struggles. However, as one of the mural's lead artists, Antoine Williams, stated, "the mural in itself is not enough." The mural needed to do more than support Blacks' visibility in Iowa City. The mural needed to also publicly recognize and challenge the systemic racism and discrimination Black people experienced in our community.