



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

College of Arts and Sciences

June 7, 2020

Statement on Recent Protests Against Police Violence and White Supremacy

We issue this statement to condemn the brutal murders by police of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade, and to condemn the use of police and military force to suppress legal protests against these killings and intimidate American citizens exercising their Constitutional rights to free speech and free assembly. We condemn the historically sanctioned and silenced killing by police of Black Americans and the use of police and military violence to threaten, harass, and intimidate protesters, particularly Black protesters standing up for their Constitutional rights, for equal protection under the law, and for and their rights as human beings.

First, and foremost, we express our solidarity with and support for the protestors across this nation and worldwide who have sacrificed their lives, their bodies, and their health during a global pandemic to express their righteous outrage at violence that Black people and other people of color regularly experience at the hands of police. To the extent that we can contribute our teaching and mentorship on matters of critical thinking as they relate to structural racism and broader aspects of intersectional inequality (including, but not limited to, ability, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and immigration status), we hope to equip our students with the tools they need to destroy white supremacy and settler colonialism. We hope that these efforts will help us—all of us—to co-create a better world.

We urge our department community, the University of Oregon, the City of Eugene, and the State of Oregon to understand the efforts of protestors in the context of ongoing historical struggles of Black and brown people to resist white supremacy, including (but not limited to) such actions as the Amistad Uprising and Nat Turner's Rebellion, the Civil Rights Movement, the Rodney King Uprising, and the current Black Lives Matter protests. Although well-meaning whites are fond of quoting Dr. Martin Luther King on the matter of peaceful protests, we understand the current uprising in relation to Dr. King's admonition that "a riot is the language of the unheard." We thus advocate seeing the current uprisings as the righteous and just actions of courageous anti-racist, activists. We seek to acknowledge the work of these protesters by explicitly *seeing*, *hearing*, and *honoring* their calls for social and political justice.

We seek to leverage our positions of privilege to amplify the voices of Black and brown protestors. We thus commit ourselves to a collaborative project of social transformation dedicated to challenging the neo-liberal, capitalist order, of which white supremacy is a constitutive element. As the scholar Walter Dignolo has noted, there is no modernity without racism, no capitalism without colonialism: they are all part-and-parcel of the same projects of Euro-American expansionist civilization. We decry these historical developments, even as we acknowledge our own imbrication in them as part of the institutional power structure that continues to profit at the expense of Black and brown bodies. We thus commit ourselves to strive toward decolonizing our research, our labor, and our teaching.

We also acknowledge that stirring words alone do nothing to address institutional racism. As a result, we commit ourselves and this department to the following concrete strategies and proposals:

- We will do everything in our power to recruit, retain, and support diverse undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty at all ranks.
- We acknowledge our failings as a department and as a university in recruiting, retaining, and supporting diverse faculty, particularly African American faculty. We commit to

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addressing this failure by prioritizing hiring Black people in all fields and from all intellectual backgrounds.

- We commit to creating opportunities for and financially supporting anti-racist teaching workshops for faculty and GEs in ways that do not place additional labor on faculty and GEs of color.
- We urge all faculty, and in particular our faculty who have the privilege and protection of tenure, to take on and discuss the politics of citation (that Black people and other people of color are cited less often than white scholars and that the ideas and writings of Black scholars have historically been appropriated without citation) in all courses at all levels of the curriculum.
- We will prioritize making anti-racist texts and supplementary resources available for all remote teaching. We set this goal for all classes at all times, but we see it as a particularly pressing need during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected Black and brown students and other students from historically marginalized groups.
- We add our department to the growing list of colleagues and academic units that seek to pressure the University of Oregon to end its reliance on the Eugene Police Department and to disarm the UOPD. Indeed, we demand that the University of Oregon take these actions immediately.
- We commit to ensuring that English major events are welcoming to and inclusive of students from historically marginalized groups.
- We endorse the recent ASUO "Open Letter to the University of Oregon," (attached) and we encourage faculty and GEs to consider making final projects, assignments, and exams optional and/or non-grade diminishing. We further ask our instructors to remind students that Provost Patrick Phillips has determined that students may take any course offered at UO P/NP during spring term 2020, and that any P grade will count toward all required courses in the English major.
- We ask instructors of graduate seminars to respect the Graduate School's Spring term policies that allow graduate students to choose the P/NP option (including for "graded only" courses) up until July 16th. This policy applies to seminars required for M.A. and Ph.D. programs in English.
- We further commit to enacting the recommendations from our recent Diversity Committee Climate Report and the Ad Hoc Committee's report on strengthening the English Major (both of which contained recommendations for equity and inclusion work).
- We encourage all members of our community to explore the ways they support #blacklivesmatter and people of color more generally. A good place to start is from this list of resources: tinyurl.com/eugene-blrm-resources
- Finally, we ask that our English Department faculty, staff, students, and supporters hold us accountable for enacting these promises by continuing to engage in dialogue, providing guidance, and working with and alongside us in the collective project to envision and enact a world free from white supremacy, colonialism, and racial capitalism.

We invite all of you to be in communication with us beginning now.

In solidarity,

David Vazquez, Gordon Sayre, Mark Whalan