

The Department of Africana Studies at California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) stands in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives. We recognize that protest is a legitimate tool used to respond to the systemic violence that seeks to attack, neutralize and eliminate the activist spirit of our community. We support the Black Lives Matter Los Angeles chapter and Dr. Melina Abdullah, our colleague, for their critical work on the frontline, addressing the central issues of racism and the criminal justice system.

Audre Lorde reminds us that “Our silence will not protect us.” In this critical time, we find it necessary to champion our activists that are carrying on the legacy of our ancestors’ fight to eliminate structural racism and white supremacy. The fight to defend and preserve African peoples’ humanity has never been peaceful due in large part to America’s commitment to preserve structural racism and white supremacy. American economic, political, judicial, educational and social institutions have historically waged a violent war on Black lives. The seeds of destructive violence and hate unleashed on Africana people is a declaration of war. The numbers of Black bodies that have been snuffed out, marginalized, psychologically terrorized, miseducated, exploited, sexualized, criminalized, demonized, neglected and forgotten marks a systematic trend that seeks to uphold the notion that Black lives have no value. Our faculty are committed to social justice and through our work in the classroom we provide CSUDH students with a transformative education that trains them to be active change agents empowered to challenge these perspectives about Black humanity. As scholars, we are dedicated to producing liberatory research that introduces new theories and approaches for eliminating institutional racism.

The Black community is in the midst of making global history. Our community has activated not only a national but international movement that has mobilized a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual, inter-class movement. We denounce the phrase “violent protest” which has been attached to the Movement for Black Lives because it over simplifies the complex nature of our struggle. A monolithic analysis has attempted to characterize our movement as the source of violence which is grossly inaccurate and misdirected. As academics, we demand a more critical analysis of the events unfolding in this nation. While we acknowledge the vitality of peaceful protest, we also recognize that the current location and mission of CSUDH, one of the CSU 23 campuses, is the direct product of the Watts Rebellion. Also, the movement to institutionalize Black Studies is the direct result of the Black Studies Movement (aided by our American Indian, Asian American and Chicano/Latino brothers and sisters involved with the Third World Liberation Front) that occupied administration buildings and engaged in skirmishes with police. In some parts of the country, during peaceful Civil Rights demonstrations, the presence of the Deacons of Defense served as a stabilizing force to protect demonstrators.

While it is critical that we gain the support of allies across various communities, at our workplaces and organizations, it is equally necessary that those allies understand that the resolution to historical and institutional racism will not always be peaceful. It is not the place of those seeking to be viewed as allies to suggest alternative narratives that undermine our historical fight. It is not the place of any external and oppositional interests to tell Black folks and action-oriented allies how to protest the injustices caused by these interests. This is especially pertinent

for external and oppositional interests in positions of power to understand and equally necessary for Black folks and action-oriented allies to express.

"I think it's a huge mistake for people to be equating what happens to property with what happens to the lives of black people. We need to shift that. We also need to remember that in these demonstrations, the first acts of violence are the police assaulting protesters." – Dr. Melina Abdullah, Black Lives Matter-Los Angeles, June 4, 2020

We understand that those that seek to denounce and/or condemn our right to protest aids to the ideological and physical terroristic assault on our movement and our humanity. The fight to defend and preserve African peoples' humanity has never been peaceful due in large part to America's commitment to preserve structural racism, white supremacy and racialized violence. It must be noted that the source of violence that has been tied to our movement has been ignited by institutions and individuals committed to maintaining the racial order and preserving white domination.

As students and scholars of our movement, we have spent a few days reflecting with heavy hearts. James Baldwin poignantly noted in 1961 that "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time." It is 2020 and even still we find that as Black folks, we are both conscious and enraged. As such, it is our collective decision that the letter sent by Chancellor White's office is not sufficient in that it does not demonstrate a critical understanding of racialized conflict in America, and in that it sends severely juxtaposed messages surrounding the need and historical relevance of riots while also dismissing the CSU's own hands in perpetuating "...racism overt and hidden. Individual and systemic."

The seed of destructive violence and hate was planted within our communities long ago and without our permission. Therefore, understanding that activism against racism and Black oppression in the new United States - a system that predates our naming as a country and has prevailed for over 400 years - can be composed of peaceful action but may not consistently remain nonviolent is imperative. There is no one-way ticket to Black liberation. If there was such a thing, we would have punched it already. In a recent interview, Dr. Cornell West noted, "The fire this time is because people understand what it means when a nation that rewarded corporate looters who nearly bankrupted America with their mortgage schemes and their insider trading with one more massive tax break now declares that anyone who dare loot a pair of sneakers that they'll be shot and executed on sight." Now is neither the time nor space to condemn what you do not understand. Instead, now is the time and space for those seeking allyship to listen, learn, and stand in solidarity. Allyship is not a self-assumed title; rather, it is a gift bestowed on those who struggle with us and constantly strive to understand our positionality in the world despite knowing they can never truly feel our walk.

In the midst of our plight, it is common for external and oppositional forces to take a stance that echoes Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s thoughts on hate being unable to drive out hate. Critical reflections on Dr. King, however, reveal that as he walked closer to his unbeknownst assassination, his thoughts resonated closer with the community as opposed to creating a comfortable space for oppressive forces to prevail. Dr. King also said that "A riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight

of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity. And so in a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again.” Can you hear us yet or are we speaking too loudly for a crowd who never intended to hear us?

CSU Dominguez Hills in particular is deeply embedded with the history of the Watts Rebellion that our own campus proudly celebrated during its 50th Anniversary. Despite the vast damage and devastations that occurred during the demonstration, Watts poignantly highlighted severe inequities faced by our local communities of color and sparked global dialogues in our pursuit of sustainable, systemic changes. Celebrating this critical point in the Black liberation struggle and in the CSU’s history is clearly juxtaposed to Chancellor White’s message, condemning “the senseless violence and destruction” that was said to “dilute(s) the public outrage and shift(s) the focus away from demanding action against pernicious racism.” Lawrence Grandpre appropriately challenges this line of thought in saying “It’s presumptuous to assume those who have not experienced 400 years of anti-black violence have a right to moralize on the black community’s expressions of grief and rage. As such, to the extent to which urban rebellions help expand the range of relevant questions and important thoughts on race in America, these actions have value.” The Chancellor’s statement further criminalizes Black people by not addressing the large number non-Black violent anarchists who defamed or destroyed property in the name of Black Lives Matter. Yet, Chancellor White has been silent to this point just as he has been silent about instances of racism and violence across the CSU system. This silence has been loud and deafening.

The CSU system has been in a constant struggle to get adequate support on campuses for Black students, to urge our campuses to value recruiting and retaining Black students beyond simply to use their bodies on athletic fields, to value recruiting, hiring, supporting, and sufficiently paying Black faculty, staff, and administration, to host more Black speakers, and to nurture Black hope as was promised through the birth of the Dominguez Hills campus.

Therefore, in the interest of supporting Black students, faculty and staff on this campus, we demand

1. That CSUDH launch a results-based Black student recruitment plan aimed at increasing the Black student population on campus. The rates of Black students at CSUDH has consistently declined for the last 10 years. This decline also coincided with the wide-scale loss of Black recruitment personnel so it comes as no surprise that the Black student numbers are declining. Hiring more staff which knows the Black community will aid in targeting Black students for recruitment beyond a few large-scale recruitment events.
2. To support these students, we demand the CSUDH develop and implement a recruitment and retention plan to increase Black tenure/tenure-track faculty on campus. Inherent bias training is not enough. Many qualified potential Black applicants do not apply because they do not know about the campus. Our recruitment efforts are substandard at best. Current Black

faculty make the best recruiters but without specially earmarked funds set aside to assist these faculty in attending academic conferences and academic recruitment events to interact with potential applicants, Dominguez Hills will continue to lag behind in recruiting the best Black talent. In those departments and colleges where there is very low representation of Black tenure-track/tenured faculty, every effort should be made to prioritize outreach to qualified potential Black faculty for the next rounds of faculty recruitment.

3. That the CSUDH Academic Senate, Academic Affairs Council and the entire campus community support Dr. Shirley Weber's initiative (AB 1460) to establish a CSU system-wide ethnic studies graduation requirement. The events of recent days have highlighted the need for such education. Many members of our campus community have never had meaningful conversations about race and racism and are generally unfamiliar (and in many cases, seemingly uninterested) with the lived experiences of Black and other people of color. Many are somehow shocked by the events that have unfolded in Minneapolis with George Floyd but America has had its foot on the necks of African people for centuries. An ethnic studies education would remove this veil of ignorance. We encourage members of the campus community to review and sign the Letter of Support for AB 1460.

4. We demand that CSUDH develop initiatives to collaborate with local agencies and/or organizations committed to fight for civic, social and environmental justice for African American communities. Many conversations have taken place to solidify such collaborations, however, a commitment of institutional support is necessary to finalize partnerships with groups such as the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC) and Compton Unified School District.

5. Elevate and reclassify Catherine Jermany to the level of Director of the Rose Black Resource Center and do the same with all of the current coordinators of the campus resource centers including the Queer Culture Resource Center. Significant disparities exist where staff who engage in high touch, emotionally and psychological taxing work with students are not afforded a title elevation and salary increase commiserate with their performance as their counterparts in other campus resource centers.

6. Hire more psychologists who are trained in culturally relevant counseling and cultural-racial trauma.

7. Establish an Asian American and Latinx Resource Center, respectively, without delay. CSU Dominguez Hills should be ashamed of itself for invoking our social justice beginnings while not having such resources on campus. African Studies stands in solidarity with our Asian American and Latinx colleagues who are trying to make this happen. Simply because CSU Dominguez Hills is designated as a HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) does not mean the issues facing the Latinx student community do not exist and should be ignored. Likewise, Asian Americans, specifically Filipinos and Japanese Americans have resided in the South Bay area for generations and have attended CSUDH for years so there is no logical explanation for why these students have not been factored into the university's overall multicultural student affairs programming.

8. Funding for the faculty advocate position on the CARE team to be able to go to the individual colleges to work with faculty on culturally relevant teaching, cultural competency and racial micro-aggression mitigation. Many of the cases involving Black and Brown students come from interactions with white faculty who use racially-charged language such as threatening or hostile to describe what are primarily cultural communication differences. We have also had a number of occasions where white faculty on this campus who have walked into classes taught by faculty of color, interrupted class and questioned that person's right to be there. Academic Affairs and Faculty Affairs and Development, in particular, need to hold faculty accountable for their behavior just as the Office of Student Conduct holds students accountable for theirs.

9. Funding and support for the Sisters United Mentoring program which provides academic, cultural and emotional support to Black women students by Black women faculty and staff. The issues and concerns of Black women students have long been ignored on this campus and financial support for Sisters United has been inconsistent and uneven. If we wish to build the Black community on campus, Black women need to feel like they are being heard and their issues are important. Institutionalizing this mentoring program goes a long way to showing Black women students that the campus cares. This does not mean that funding should be stripped from the Male Success Alliance program and we will not stand idly by while men and women of color are pitied against one another because of claims of "scarcity of resources" from upper level administration.

10. Recognize the cultural taxation of Black faculty and staff to provide support to all students above and beyond our stated job duties. This labor needs to be recognized on evaluations and with additional compensation. The Exceptional Levels of Service Award was intended to recognize this cultural taxation when members of CFA established the program many years ago. However, now the award is based on establishing yet another program and still does not acknowledge the labor that Black faculty and staff have given freely because of our commitment to our students.

In Struggle and Solidarity,

The Department of Africana Studies