



June 2, 2020

The African American Studies Program at the University of Texas at El Paso
Statement Condemning Racial Violence and Police Brutality

The African American Studies Program in the most stringent of terms, condemns the brutal treatment and murder of Black men and women happening across this nation. We condemn systemic and institutional racism and the havoc they wreak upon the lives of Black men and women, who are subjected daily to racial violence and inhumane treatment. We are sickened by this nation's continuous cavalier approaches to, and denial of, human rights and the sanctity of life; this was vividly displayed by the killing of Mr. George Floyd. The image of police officer Derek Chauvin's knee pressed tightly against the neck of Mr. Floyd while he screamed "I can't breathe" and pleaded for his life, is an image that we must never forget! We must sear that memory into our collective consciousness so as to understand that no one is untouched by tyranny; by violation of rights, by a denial of dignity, freedom, respect and life.

What happened to Mr. Floyd, to Mr. Ahmaud Arbery, to Ms. Atatiana Jefferson, to Mr. Philando Castile, to Ms. Breonna Taylor, happened to us all. There is no escape, no safe space from which to observe, to comment. The violent attacks upon Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples, the denial of basic human rights in this country, the disregard for the welfare of communities of color, must be brought to an immediate end. We are all responsible for challenging racism, for naming inequality, for standing against tyranny wherever we see it and in whatever form it takes. The reality is that most of us are just one wayward traffic stop, one legislative amendment passed, or one executive order signed, from individual or collective tragedy. We must be concerned and bothered by each and every single miscarriage of justice. "For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night" is what James Baldwin wrote in 1970. We all have a responsibility to work for collective change at every level for those who are here and for the generations to come. We cannot allow the wanton killing of Mr. Floyd to escape our consciousness when news cycles turn to the new story of the day.

We must decide now what our legacy will be in response to these horrid times. How shall we transform our anger, hurt and disgust into sustained points of resistance against unjust systems and institutionalized racism? Fannie Lou Hamer rightfully questioned America in 1964: "Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hook because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings in America?" The question is still relevant today and we must continue to work just as hard to transform America now as they did then.

The African American Studies program proudly aligns with those standing for justice and demanding an end to systemic racism and oppression, to police brutality, to governmental lawlessness and the denial of people's humanity. We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are rightfully angry and calling for a transformation of this nation's racialized policies and practices against Black men and women. We stand in indignation with the families of Mr. George Floyd, Ms. Breonna Taylor, Mr. Ahmaud Arbery, Ms. Atatiana Jefferson, Mr. Philando Castile and the many men and women throughout history, both known and unknown, whose lives have been taken by police violence, white supremacist ideations and institutional racist policies and practices. Today is the day for change, so that we can claim tomorrow as evidence of it.



The African American Studies Program, University of Texas at El Paso