



Statement of Solidarity and Commitment to Antiracism

Members of the Department of English are outraged and grieved over the murder of George Floyd and the ongoing violence against Black Americans that it exemplifies. Thousands of people, including many in the Charleston area, have risen in protest at this tragedy and at systemic injustices that continue to harm African Americans. We mourn with those grieving these losses. We stand with those protesting against them.

Harmful practices in US law enforcement led to these tragic events and the disturbing, heavily militarized reactions to the current uprisings. These events are also symptoms of a long history of white supremacist laws and ideology. Here in Charleston, we have witnessed the police killing of Walter Scott and the massacre at Emanuel AME Church in 2015. As professors at an institution that was funded, built, and sustained by exploiting black bodies, we are aware that racist violence is a long and shameful American tradition.

The field of English Studies has a history of legitimizing racial hierarchies and reinforcing a colonialist status quo. We acknowledge this. We also believe literature and scholarship can be vehicles for truth-telling and liberation. This is why we teach and study the powerful literary and cultural texts that Black people have created in the face of racism and unspeakable trauma. We seek to honor Black lives, contribute to an equitable society, and further the intellectual and ethical development of our students.

But we need to do more. English Department classrooms, like the larger College of Charleston population, are disproportionately white spaces. Our learning environments must be more inclusive. We must promote Black voices and agency. Therefore, we commit to (a) developing benchmarks for improving diversity, equity, and inclusion in our classrooms, in our course offerings, and among our faculty, (b) prioritizing our resources to achieve these benchmarks, and (c) reporting our progress every year for the next 10 years. We look forward to collaborating with our students, the Office of Institutional Diversity, and other stakeholders toward these ends.

We affirm our neighbors, students, colleagues, and College of Charleston leaders who speak unequivocally in support of Black lives. We will work harder to dismantle white supremacy, in all its iterations, in order to make our college, city, and country more just.

[Please read Prof. Gary Jackson's poem "Forward and Back"](#)