

## CALL TO ACTION REGARDING STATE & EXTRALEGAL ANTI-BLACK VIOLENCE

June 2020

As the co-conveners of the Black Studies Project at UCSD, we stand together in anger, grief, and condemnation of the state and extralegal anti-Black violence that most recently took the lives of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade, and so many others, and that continues to be leveraged by police and military across the country in the name of ‘law and order.’ As scholars of Black Studies in the US and globally, we are all too aware that the devaluing, dispossession (or ‘looting’), and criminalization of Black people has roots in chattel slavery and decades of ‘Jim Crow’ era racial and sexual terrorism. We know that state-sanctioned anti-Black violence was critical to the founding and building of the US, and that violence against Black people remains central to US state power.

We therefore reject the criminalization of Black bodies that has rationalized and naturalized ongoing suspicion, surveillance, harassment, abuse, and murder. We also understand the killing of Black people in Minneapolis, Louisville, Atlanta, and Tallahassee, to be part of the same culture of Black death that has led to the vastly disproportionate infection and fatality rates among African Americans during the ongoing CoVID-19 pandemic—deaths rooted in racial income and wealth disparities, differential vulnerabilities to infection at work and at home, unequal access to health care, and environmental racism.

This is a crucial moment for Black Studies. As the late Clyde Woods reminds us, we cannot allow “the tools of theory, method, instruction, and social responsibility” to become “so rusted that they can only be used for autopsies,” but we must instead use them to “reflect the experiences, viewpoints, and needs of [our] communities,” particularly when Black lives are at stake—as they so often are. But this is not only an imperative for scholars of Black Studies; each of us has the responsibility and the opportunity to start questioning what we think we know. Some of these questions are close to home: why, ten years after the events of Black Winter and the Black Student Union’s critical white paper, “Do UC Us?,” are Black students and faculty still so dramatically underrepresented at UCSD, as the University continues to make little progress in the recruitment and retention of Black students and faculty? Why do Black students at UCSD continue to experience online and in-person racist and sexist harassment as they go about their daily lives?

The UCSD administration has rightly expressed concern for the health and wellbeing of Black students, faculty, and staff at this current moment. We, too, are fiercely committed to the physical and mental health of our students, and are committed to making space to support, empower, and nurture each other in this moment of crisis. In this vein, we support student demands to change the final exam grading system for this quarter. As members of UCSD’s Black communities have made clear since the Winter of 2010, however, without real structural change, there can be no true healing.

Therefore, we call on the UCSD administration to go beyond statements of solidarity and empathy. We urge the university administration to follow the call of graduate

student unions nationwide to divest from area police systems and to recognize that police on campus all too often make Black students, Indigenous students, and students of color less safe, not safer. We also call on the university administration to not allow the current budget crisis to serve as an alibi to once again turn away from much needed investments in recruiting and retaining Black faculty and students. Finally, we urge the university community to recommit to addressing the ongoing campus climate issues and anti-Black racism that make claiming space and thriving so difficult for Black students and faculty on this campus. As a university, we must move beyond simply deploring injustices that happen elsewhere and make material change toward overcoming those inequities that exist on our own campus.

In Study and Struggle,

Dayo F. Gore  
Ethnic Studies and CGS Program  
Director, BSP

Sara Clarke Kaplan  
Ethnic Studies and CGS Program  
Associate Director, BSP

Jessica Graham  
History  
Executive Committee Chair, BSP