

Sent to HUMN students on 6.15.20

Humanities Program Statement on the George Floyd Uprisings

The recent killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery make clear that black lives are not safe in the United States. Despite decades of efforts to eradicate it, racism continues to shape the systems that order our society. Some people have stood to protest these racist systems while others have taken a knee. Hundreds of thousands have marched in the streets, peacefully affirming that Black Lives Matter. We admire their courage, join that affirmation, and mourn the many black lives lost because it is not yet true.

Some say that systemic racism does not exist. Current events conspire with history to prove them wrong. It was 1931 in Birmingham, Alabama. Three young black men were arrested, beaten, and jailed for a crime they did not commit. One was Angelo Herndon, an activist and labor organizer. Three young white women had been shot, two were dead. The third was brought to see the prisoners. "No," she told police, "It was some other black man." Herndon wrote,

Yet we knew that we were not through with the messy business, for the lynchers were still there and our acquittal might so anger them that there was a likelihood that they would storm the jail and mete out "justice" to us in one-hundred-per-cent American style—a style draped in the stars and stripes and holding a Bible in its blood-stained hand.

Systemic racism exists. How else did one-hundred-per-cent American justice come to mean white people killing black people under cover of the flag and a holy book? More to the point, why do politicians still assert these connections?

We condemn systemic racism, the police brutality that it excuses, and the authoritarian politics that it supports. But we also acknowledge that we must do more to root out systemic racism in our practices.

The Humanities Program is committed to creating inclusive learning environments where diverse perspectives are recognized, respected, and seen as a source of strength. We bear a responsibility to contribute positively to an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity. To this end, we commit to revising reading lists in Humanities Program courses so as to include more authors of color and voices from oppressed groups. We also commit to expanding efforts to broaden and diversify our faculty and student community. Developing new interdisciplinary courses for Gen Ed "Diversity" designation is a measurable first step that takes us in the right direction.

We invite you to suggest other ways to make the Humanities Program more diverse and inclusive. We welcome you and your ideas.

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