

To the SLU Community,

These are times that can bring people together in solidarity or rip us apart. Each time these deaths occur, people begin to wonder how we got here. People ask themselves “why did this happen?” Many experience the grief stages and commit themselves to healing. Now we are here again—mourning the death of one of our own at the hands of police. We are forced to watch these deaths. Cries for redress are met with tear gas and rubber bullets. We are traumatized. We cannot turn away. With all that is going on in our world, in this nation, and in our city and county, we cannot afford to be silent or complacent.

For whatever reason these moments provide the sense of urgency that kicks leaders into gear more than moments of peace. Whatever progress we can point to since the Ferguson Uprising are the direct result of the uprising. The awareness of new vocabularies of resistance, the witnessing and confrontation with the rapid militarization of American streets, was met with tepid responses from many elected officials, calls for calm, and prayers for a better future. Some remained committed throughout. The Forward through Ferguson commission laid out details of a path forward, but it is not clear how and which civil society institutions took that framework seriously. On our campus, the Clock Tower Accords—a historic document—temporarily served as a guide for transforming campus life. They must be reignited and measure how far we’ve come or how far we’ve retreated since that document was composed.

The university must become a space of critical understanding of how we arrived at this moment. We have to understand that in the historic antagonism that emerged from African captivity (enslavement) the police and the general legal apparatus were catalysts that ushered Jim Crow into an institutional reality across this country. Under slavery Black resistance was criminalized. Freed Black people became bodies to be regulated and controlled. New laws were established under so-called freedom with a singular desired outcome to police Black people, govern Black mobility, limit Black possibility. This is a historic fact, not some Black imaginary. We experience the legacy of that history each and every day. Black people on all levels of our campus community have experienced chronic microaggressions, and have too infrequently had the supports needed to thrive at this university, a university whose social justice mission is to be for and with each other.

Who knows if this is a turning point for society. Who knows if our university is ready to prioritize Black desires for well-being on and off our campus and around the country. It seems that our campus has been frozen in the *potential* stage of growth. We have the potential to be exceptional, visionary, bold, and committed to deep structural changes that would enable thriving. But whether we reach our potential or snap back into silence and acquiescence when the smoke clears, boards come down from windows, and curfews are lifted is once and always up to us. We can speak to this moment jolting us, but we have to be moved into concerted and deliberate action. This moment can spark structural action that transforms us. One thing is certain: Black people on this campus will not be silenced into politeness and complicity in our own marginalization and invisibility. The question is not only who will stand with us, who will share our hashtags and march and even risk bodily harm, but who will plan with us a better future for us? We cannot divorce this moment from the longstanding structural changes that have long been desired and openly expressed.

African American Studies is needed now more than ever for all of our students and community. The call for justice has been the heart of our academic work and community engagement since its inception. African American Studies has consistently been the space students and community come

to understand the historic underpinnings of our current moment. These moments are far too frequent. Histories of racist policing and community responses are unfortunately critical to understanding the African American experience as a whole. Importantly, our courses open up learning and research opportunities designed to challenge structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism at all levels of society. Our knowledge production has always and necessarily been insurrectional to practices, policies, and beliefs that contribute to our marginalization. African Americans and Black communities throughout the world continue to struggle against all forms of injustice. Most importantly, we believe that working toward transformation begins with critical interrogation of the deep roots of these injustices. A robust, thriving, and supported African American Studies department will be core to the institutional transformation of our university.

Bold leadership and courageous commitment to racial justice is needed now and into the future of our university and our society.

For Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade and all the known and unknown people who have lost their lives to predatory policing and white vigilantism, for all the Black people whose lack of access to healthcare and proximity to food deserts has left them vulnerable to COVID-19, for those for whom the Delmar Divide has been a border of isolation and hostility, let us live and emerge from this moment better, stronger, and more committed than ever before. I, for one, am enlisted for the duration.

In struggle,

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