

Black Lives Matter at University of Virginia Department of Anthropology

Department Commits to Racial Justice

June 17, 2020

The Department of Anthropology at the University of Virginia forcefully condemns the reprehensible killings of Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many other Black people at the hands of police. We deplore the political economy of public education and health care in the U.S., which denies basic means, services and opportunities to many people of color. We commit to working toward a more just, compassionate, and equitable society. We state our unequivocal conviction that Black lives matter.

We are proud to belong to a discipline which was founded in efforts to combat racism and eugenics. At its best, anthropologists' scholarship on white supremacy exposes additional and intersecting webs of inequality -- including but not limited to sexism, heteronormativity, anti-semitism, ableism, and settler colonialism. We recognize however that institutionalized racism is present in countless ways in the fabric of U.S. society, and that our Department can be no exception. Anthropology as a discipline has played a significant role in the fabrication of spurious theories of racial superiority, and often marginalizes the contributions of non-white scholars and field consultants. Starting in our own Department, we commit to redoubling our efforts toward countering these and other forms of racism in our professional lives.

In the coming months we will convene conversations within our Department that will build on existing work by our most forward-looking members in 'decolonizing Anthropology', in critical community-linked pedagogy, and in diversity-aware recruitment. We re-commit to participation in programming for antiracist awareness. We pledge to give ever closer attention to equity in our recruitment practices, and to propose to our Administration the hire of an anthropologist whose research addresses race and racism. We commit to rewarding the often-invisible additional service performed by faculty of color within our ranks. We pledge to address the relative absence of non-white and women authors from our discipline's canon, and to continue to build curricula that address white supremacy and other forms of unjust oppression.

We also pledge to redouble our efforts to connect our scholarship in ethical ways to the communities in which we live and work. The University of Virginia was built on the enslaved labor of African and African-American people, and the attempted destruction of Virginia's Indigenous peoples. We offer our Department's institutional backing to the descendant communities of those who suffered to build the University, and pledge to support the demands of all of our non-academic co-workers for equitable working conditions. We commit to proposing and supporting initiatives that expand access to the University for those without great wealth. Finally, we pledge our anthropological expertise to assist in publicly exposing the ways that spurious science combines with organized violence to maintain racial and economic privilege at the expense of those who are non-white or poor.