

English Department Statement in Solidarity with Protests

Dear Members and Friends of the English Department,

We are reaching out to you in pain and solidarity in these days of uprising against our nation's fundamental structural injustices, longstanding and deep-rooted injustices most recently exposed by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade and others. Our university, like so many, has long participated in maintaining those structures, as our administrators have acknowledged. We must all work together, and stand up for one another, if we are to help bring change.

But these are just words if they are not married to action. How do we, as word people, reiterate the importance of both? How do we acknowledge the most recent, most visible and shocking tragedies while working for deep change in ways that recognize how people of color on American soil have, since colonial arrival, endured the threat of violence, dehumanization and death from those in power?

The uprisings are happening as a pandemic crests whose victims are disproportionately black and brown, another plot point in our country's long story of callous disregard for minority health and lives. Here in Northwest Arkansas, poultry plants were kept open despite worker protests; COVID19 outbreaks in them helped put our region on the map for the rapid spread of the virus. In our campus community, healthcare workers, maintenance workers, and those in the gig economy, including many of our students, lacking the income to socially isolate, are forced to work without sufficient personal protective equipment or the safety net of healthcare when they fall sick themselves.

Please know that those of us who teach in this department struggle every day to decolonize our ways of knowing. We are here to engage you as partners in this struggle, in classrooms and far beyond. If we meet you out at the protests, we want you to be safe and know you are supported. Those of us screened by privilege are reading and rereading those authors who bring us closer to experiences we cannot otherwise know, trying humbly to acknowledge our blindnesses. Many of us are formulating action in response to our municipal, state and federal leaders' reactions to this most recent crisis. Some of us are acting as interlocutors within our own communities.

Even while we can't be with you on our campus or in our classrooms, we, too, are seeking ways to connect with others acting to bring about swift, effective, real change. Below, you'll find links to other organizations talking, thinking and taking action.

And we are taking this opportunity to recommit to the work we were already supposed to be doing every day: valorizing under-heard stories; working for real inclusion at every level of our department; using our skills in critical thinking and writing to critique our laws and those who make and uphold them, sometimes unequally, or to unequal effect; using those same skills to read our society and the false narratives it promulgates.

We reach out to you in fellowship, and close with literature, a poem by one of our own, Professor Geoffrey Davis.

Poem in Which My Son Wakes Crying

--for dead blk boys

when there is no exit wound

his life matters

when there is only the dream-wound

his life matters

when I still run with all my panic against his hurt sound

his life matters

when I wrap his finger's non-wound in the undivided dark

his life matters

when he has been soothed and I lay him back inside the casket of sleep

his life matters

when I still linger to watch him rest with all my worry against his calm

his life matters

when he rises with and into and as if the easy miracle morning

his life matters

when he smiles bright like no more fires need setting

his life matters

when he asks to have the bandage removed

his life matters

when my hands shake too much

his life matters

Some links:

[Statement of Solidarity from Fulbright Dean Todd Shields](#)

[Black-owned bookstores around the country](#)

[Black Presidents and Deans, Schools & Departments of Theology & Religion](#)—a statement including a close reading of our president's position and a clear and practical list of demands

[National Bail Fund Network](#)

[Native American and Indigenous Studies Program](#) statement

[Taking video in witness of police brutality](#)

[Keeping safe during protests](#)

[Where to Donate to support Black Lives Matter](#)

[Pat Walker Health Center](#)