

The History Department's Statement of Solidarity Regarding Black Lives Matter and COVID-19

The History Department recognizes the visible challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the global protests that have followed the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Rayshard Brooks, to name the most recent examples of anti-Black violence. These challenges draw into stark relief structural inequities, most notably anti-Black racism, and have exposed and exacerbated the disadvantages and social inequalities impacting many of the most vulnerable members of our communities, including at Villanova University. We celebrate community, but we often exclude many of those whom we presume to welcome.

As a discipline, history has in the past and often continues in the present to reinforce structures of white power. As a department, we must work to confront these failures, intellectually and institutionally, and address our own contribution to these inequalities. Now, more than ever, we must propose concrete measures that acknowledge and change unjust structures. In so doing we can stand with and support those whom we have not fully welcomed or adequately included.

COVID-19

In the face of the widespread challenges engendered by the COVID-19 crisis, the History Department and Art History Program express our solidarity with all members of the Villanova community made vulnerable by the pandemic.

We commit to seeking out new strategies for inclusive teaching in general and online teaching in particular. We must be deliberate, energetic, and intentional. We must strive to carefully observe the evolving situation and work towards inclusive pedagogical strategies, whether we engage with students online, face to face, or in some combination of the two.

We believe it imperative to do all we can to confront and mitigate the inequities manifest through a shift to online teaching. We encourage all faculty to respond to and, when possible, anticipate our students' limitations and hardships in the time of this pandemic, and to work closely with those with limited access to technology or other obstacles to learning, including increased stress and anxiety; the burden and time commitments of child, family, and parental care; and heightened financial precarity and insecurity.

As the University plans for the return of students and faculty in the fall 2020 semester, we also believe it is vital that Villanova explicitly strategize how to support (financially and/or through workplace accommodation) other categories of staff, in particular, those who are not "professionally privileged" and who – in large measure – are of color. We express our solidarity with these workers who are in many ways the most vulnerable members of the Villanova community in terms of health, income, and employment.

Black Lives Matter

The History Department and Art History Program share the College of Liberal Arts and Science's deep concern for Villanova's Black students, faculty, and staff. We acknowledge,

share, and empathize with their anguish and outrage. We declare wholeheartedly, in unison, without reservation: Black Lives Matter.

In our teaching and as a community, we recognize and seek to fight against deeply ingrained racist histories and experiences of this country's past and present. It is imperative to face these and other histories of racialized violence head on, to understand the ways that the past informs the present; to identify the brutal operations of power and domination; and to develop ways to confront them. We oppose systems of oppression today, and we endeavor to provide historical perspectives on those systems as a means to resist them.

These historical lessons are not easy ones to process, especially for people of color who suffer the brutal effects of racism and white supremacy. They are experienced in many ways on and outside our campus: from physical assaults and murder to other forms of bodily harm; from verbal violence to painful microaggressions and racist assumptions.

We seek to fight racism and we position ourselves as explicitly anti-racist. At the same time, we acknowledge the ways that many of us benefit from white supremacy, heteronormativity, and the "patriarchal dividend." We welcome feedback from students, staff and faculty about how we can make ourselves and our department more anti-racist, and a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable community.

The History Department and Art History Program recognize our intellectual and pedagogical responsibility to address this situation and to express our solidarity with those targeted by that racism. We acknowledge our obligation to work for change within the institutions we inhabit that have also contributed to racist structures.

In the Department we commit to:

- Inaugurate an annual Black Catholic History lecture in November (Black Catholic History Month);
- Revisit the Core course offerings in the History Department to ensure that they meet our departmental expectations for cross-cultural historical engagement and consider requiring additional courses relating to Diversity or Identity/Difference for history majors or minors;
- Evaluate as a department the underlying assumptions of race underpinning the discipline of history and explore ways to integrate this understanding into our teaching;
- Require that all history and art history faculty participate in training on inclusive teaching as a means to address students' past classroom experiences;
- Participate as a department in Inclusive Hiring Training to foreground diversity in our upcoming hires;
- Hire an Art Historian of African American / African Diasporic Art or Contemporary Global Art;
- Encourage student, faculty, and community members to explore the history of Villanova University through the Rooted Project (2020-23) and thus critically investigate its place in the history of slavery, eugenics, colonialism, and other sorts of institutionalized racism;

In the College and University we call for:

- Villanova University to reverse the 2016 decision to arm our campus police force;
- Making Juneteenth a paid University holiday (as Georgetown and Fordham have recently done);
- The University to develop a diversity course experience, to echo Father Peter's message of July 13, that includes a dialogue component, and to adjust the University Learning Goals to include a goal on anti-racism education and cultural competence.
- A reconceptualizing of the Core Curriculum, from its foundations, to center diversity, equity, and inclusion within the pedagogical articulation of University community;
- All staff and faculty to pursue diversity and inclusion training through ODEI;
- The University to incorporate assessments of inclusive pedagogy in its evaluation of faculty teaching performance;
- An expansion of the Presidential Scholars Program;
- The allocation of additional funding to recruit more minoritized students at the undergraduate and graduate levels;
- Additional mental health resources for students and training for faculty to help support students with mental health challenges;
- Increased funding for Africana Studies;
- The College and University to Build on the intellectual work of the Rooted Project to explore new ways to address past racism and inequality with meaningful policy changes;
- Expanded support for the right of students, especially athletes (our most widely visible students) to protest as they see fit, without fear of reprisal.