



June 5, 2020

Dear Community Members:

The recent murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police and armed vigilantes have once again highlighted the centuries-long struggle for racial equality in our country. As historians we believe it is our duty to highlight the deep roots of these struggles in order to counter the false characterization of current protests as mere riots. They are rational expressions of justifiable rage in the face of oppressors who have condemned even the most peaceful acts of protest, from taking a knee to holding a sign. And millions of otherwise complacent white Americans are paying attention.

Racist policing began as a function of slavery, continued through the era of Jim Crow, and persists to this day as a tool of white supremacy. Early slave codes also laid the groundwork for vigilante violence against Black people by authorizing white colonists and citizens to surveil Black people and, whenever they deemed it necessary, to use violence to subdue any who resisted. These practices continued through the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the horrors of systematic lynching, and, more recently, through stand-your-ground laws that justify acting violently on fears rooted in racism.

Now, as millions of Americans—especially Black Americans, but also other people of color and their allies—take to the streets to protest police violence and systematic racism, they have been met with even greater violence by militarized police forces. Emboldened by the rhetoric of white supremacy emanating from the highest levels of the US government, these officers have only escalated the violence that sparked the protests in the first place.

We, the undersigned faculty and affiliates of the University of Oregon History Department, stand in full support of the protests against police and vigilante violence that have targeted and terrorized Black people and other people of color for generations. We also support related protests against the general militarization of the police. It has been alarming to see tanks and special operations units—as well as armed ICE agents—deployed on our nation's streets, to watch police shooting riot control rounds at people on their front porches, arresting members of the press, and gassing peaceful protesters. The presence of large numbers of armed—and almost exclusively white—prison guards in our nation's capital, deputized as a private army of the Department of Justice, is another chilling development that sounds alarm bells to historians who have studied failed states and dictatorships. We must resist such actions by our government.

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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In the face of these threats, we stand unequivocally in support of all Black students, faculty, and staff—and all people of color in our community—who feel especially vulnerable at a moment when racist state violence is expanding rapidly. We insist that Black lives matter, and we pledge ourselves to the fight for the rights, safety, and dignity of all Black people, both at the University of Oregon and beyond.

In solidarity,

Carlos Aguirre
Leslie Alexander
Curtis Austin
Steven Beda
Lindsay Frederick Braun
Jamie Bufalino
Bob Bussel
Hannah Cutting-Jones
Alex Dracobly
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[More names forthcoming]