

Statement from the Department of Black Studies

To the UCSB Community:

Today (May 31, 2020), marks the 99th anniversary of what is believed to be the worse race riot in U.S. history on May 31, 1921 in the all Black Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma. During the two days of violence, mobs of whites attacked black people and property, leaving death and destruction in their wake. Greenwood was burned to the ground, with more than 10,000 Black people rendered homeless with no means of income. Some Blacks fled while others stood in self-defense of their lives and property. On June 1, 1921, the National Guard was called in to disarm Blacks standing in self-defense of their lives and livelihood.

On May 4, 2020, Ida B. Wells received a posthumous Pulitzer Prize citation for her “courageous reporting on the horrific and vicious violence against African Americans during the era of lynching.” In 1892, Wells began her anti-lynching campaign after her dear friend, Thomas Moss, and his associates, Calvin McDowell and Henry Lee Stewart, were lynched for daring to open their Black-owned business, “The People’s Grocery,” in the Curve neighborhood of Memphis. Wells would share her outrage by writing: “[Somebody] must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning. . .and it seems to have fallen on me to do so.” Her campaign would span the globe and decades. Thanks to Wells’ relentless activism, approximately 200 anti-lynching bills would reach the Senate floor by the time she passed away in 1931. However, each bill, one by one, would die on that floor. In 2005, the U.S. Senate issued a formal apology “. . .for the failure of the Senate to enact anti-lynching legislation.” In 2018, the Senate passed a bill making lynching a federal crime. In 2020, the government must act in making police brutality a federal crime.

As Black Studies scholars, teachers, and activists, we know the history—the context—of protest against anti-black sentiment and actions that mark black bodies as dangerous and therefore in need of containment. We know the history of our country’s deep-seated discomfort in recognizing Black people as victims at the hands of official and unofficial state sanctioned violence that send a centuries old message: Black lives do not matter.

We will not vilify and demonize protest. Without white supremacy, without anti-blackness, without the persistent indignities that Black people continue to face in our country, there would be no protest. In 2020, we would not know Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd were it not for the tenacity of state supported violence against Black people. To

UC SANTA BARBARA

that end, we vilify and demonize entrenched state sanctioned terrorism that Black people continue to face in our nation. "If there is no struggle, there is no progress" (Frederick Douglass, 1857).

In 1964 at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, the remarkable civil rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer, declared: "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired." It is in the spirit of Wells and Hamer's labor in centering Black humanity that we offer the following: It is exhausting to confront the enduring nature of anti-blackness in a nation that was built on the backs of Black people, where "liberty and justice for all" stand as our pledge of allegiance. It is exhausting to have to explain to Black children why they must tread lightly in a society where Black people are not afforded equal protection under the law, despite what the 14th amendment states. It is exhausting for Black students, staff, and faculty to summon the resolve to stand, to smile, to do what is expected of us, while experiencing such deep-seated pain. It is exhausting to write this, but we do so because we are committed to the cause of social justice. We embrace working to make our nation live up to its pledge of allegiance to all citizens. We stand firm and without apology in our resolve. We thank the UCSB community in standing with us and sharing in a cause that ultimately enriches all lives.

As Black Studies scholars and teachers, we would be remiss if we did not offer up two separate statements from the archives that we believe resonate so deeply today

President John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Address on June 11, 1963

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BEhKgoA86U>

Gil Scott-Heron's "We Beg Your Pardon" (1978)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDCfEkopry0>

In solidarity,

Banks + McAuley

Ingrid Banks (Chair)

Christopher McAuley (Interim Chair, 2019-20)

05.31.20