AES STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY -- 3 JUNE 2020

Submitted by Ellen Palms on June 3, 2020 - 10:52am

Dear Members of the AES Community,

We write to emphatically say, Black Lives Matter. We stand with Black communities. We write in solidarity with the protests against the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade and all those whose lives were lost senselessly at the hands of the police and white vigilantes. Media attention on property destruction misrepresents, erases, and decontextualizes the protesters’ critique of white supremacy, anti-black state violence and its generational effects. We feel compelled to not only express solidarity with the protests, but also to contextualize their meanings.

Our communities of color on campus and beyond are interconnected and have formed through solidarities forged in protest, drawing on a long tradition of cross-racial social movement building, activism, and resistance against state-sanctioned anti-black and brown violence that has been normalized from the nation’s inception forward. Through protest and organizing, we have sheltered, fed, and cared for one another. Along with our allies, we have organized workers, fought for access in education, challenged residential segregation, demanded voting rights, and claimed rights to personhood. Our collective efforts have fueled the evolution of justice in this nation. African American, Asian American, Pacific Islander Americans, Chicanx/Latinx, and Native American communities are what we are, in part, because of the progress we’ve made through protest and resistance. Since time immemorial, we've fought for rights not given, and reclaimed our bodies, land, cultural expressions, and humanity. While each generation moves us closer towards these ends, each generation also confronts the issues of its time.

The historical production of the United States' system of policing, indeed its criminal justice system, stems from the institution of slavery, settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and the military operations of U.S. empire. In the last several decades, policing has become more militarized, sanctioned by systems of oppressive laws and discriminatory rules. The U.S. Supreme Court has granted police more “qualified immunity” in how they police black and brown bodies, including not facing legal liability for enforcing the law “in good faith and with probable cause.” Combined, these aspects of modern-day policing make it difficult to defend against clear police brutality and murder and to engage in the right to protest.

The multi-ethnic/racial protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd are part of a larger fight to reform policing, the criminal justice system, and to eradicate the systemic inequities that shaped the life of Mr. Floyd and countless others. It is not lost on our communities that the coronavirus pandemic has disproportionately impacted African Americans, Chicanx/Latinx, Native Americans, Pacific Islander Americans and Asian Americans. Protesting against police brutality, to save our lives in the midst of a pandemic that threatens our lives, is a cruel irony. And yet we must.

AES is rooted in protest. The history of American Ethnic Studies underscores the long tradition of cross-racial solidarity that has animated student activism on this campus since the 1960s. Born in the student and
community struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, American Ethnic Studies is a result of the efforts of a cross-racial coalition of Asian American, Pacific Islander, Chicana/x and Black students who insisted that an inquiry into the work of race and power should be located at the center of any college education. -Our commitment to community-driven transformation is the reason that we have all chosen to work in a department whose mission is to cultivate intellectual and activist traditions dedicated to uprooting ignorance, domination, and exclusion, as well as uplifting the voices of our communities. We are all figuring out how to meet these challenges, to stand in solidarity, to take effective action, to navigate these shifting iterations and intersections of state-sanctioned violence and trauma in the midst of a global public health crisis. This is work we have done and must continue to do together. Each of us plays an integral role in working towards lasting systemic change.

Faculty, staff, and administrators in American Ethnic Studies support our Black students. We call on the UW administration for systematic rather than piecemeal support of our Black students during this unprecedented moment of COVID-19 and anti-black violence which is the culmination of centuries of systematic injustice, acknowledging both the undue burden on students to make individual requests given different instructor/departmental approaches and the individual biases of instructors who do not acknowledge the daily toll of racism.

In solidarity,

The faculty and staff of American Ethnic Studies

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