

We, the members of the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) History Department, join with communities across the United States in condemning the racist violence that has recently taken the lives of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Abernathy, Nina Pop, and more. We mourn their deaths and those of Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, and others killed by the police as well as the many more whose murders have not received the same attention and yet arise from the same historically rooted causes. We affirm that Black Lives Matter.

We recognize that our practices as scholars cannot be disentangled from structural racism. As members of America's first research university, we have the responsibility not just to understand the long history of racism that undergirds academia in the United States, but also to work to counteract it. That is impossible if Johns Hopkins does not embrace rigorous, intentional, and forceful anti-racist practices. "Diversity" and "inclusion" ring empty if this institution refuses to not just acknowledge but also actively seek to undo white supremacy.

Johns Hopkins' many institutions rightly celebrate our founder's insistence that the hospital he endowed would service the public "without regard to sex, age, or color." We are constantly reminded of Johns Hopkins's legacy in official statements, but a careful look at our history also reveals the functioning of white supremacy within our institution in numerous ways. Like our peer institutions, whose founders and original endowments are irrevocably tied to profits directly extorted from enslaved Black people, JHU and Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions (JHMI) also exist as a result of slavery and the divestment of land from the Piscataway and Susquehannock peoples. JHU's first endowed chair was funded by and named after the widow of one of Maryland's most prolific slave traders. The Homewood campus occupies land worked and lived on by enslaved people, including the Homewood Estate (now Homewood Museum), the home of Charles Carroll, the slave owning son of Charles Carroll, Sr., also a Maryland slaveowner and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

We cannot be leaders in creating an overtly anti-racist university without integrating this history into our institutional mission. In other words, we can and should do what Johns Hopkins intended this institution to do, a mission we have failed to live up to.

Hopkins has followed rather than led on questions of racial justice. It did not offer a Humanities course taught by a Black instructor until 1970. At the same time, the university joined those many liberal corners of the country that successfully fended off the arrival of Black Studies. When Hopkins students and faculty first demanded Black professor hires in the late 1960s, the administration moved to incentivize department cooperation by treating any such faculty line as an "absolute bonus," or what we today call an "add-on." Protecting a department's number of lines, conventional wisdom held, helped to render pliable those majority-white and majority-male departments otherwise not amenable to "giving up" other areas of strength. Legacies of this strategy continue to shape the University, including our own department's Atlantic World Seminar, which was designed to advance all the interdisciplinary energy that demands for Black Studies brought to academe without any unseemly associations with "identity politics." Johns

Hopkins University did not establish a Black Studies program until 2002, nearly a half century after some of our peer institutions.

Johns Hopkins continues to reinforce racial disparities and even expand the opportunities for racialized violence through its push to form a private police force. Johns Hopkins University is an integral economic component of one of the United States' majority African-American cities. This is not reflected in the Homewood Campus student body or faculty. The fact that the Homewood campus was once a site of enslavement has been largely ignored until recently and is still barely mentioned in the university's physical and digital spaces. In recent years the History Department has become one of the most dynamic and cutting-edge sites for African-American history in the United States, but such rich scholarship on Black lives remains the exception rather than the rule in the university community. Many of the university's non-academic staff - from gardeners to custodians to cafeteria workers to service staff at the Hopkins Club - do represent Baltimore's ethnic makeup, and we are both angered and not surprised that these workers were deemed the most expendable early into the COVID-19 crisis. This structural racism also manifests in the university's wage and meritocratic hierarchies. While Johns Hopkins is not solely culpable for the many factors that have created these inequities, it can and must protect its most vulnerable workers and take action to correct the imbalance.

Now is a chance for Johns Hopkins to lead the way forward in terms of an explicitly anti-racist employment model, which would immeasurably benefit both the university and the great city of Baltimore which sustains our institution. Many of the actions that would be necessary for this leadership are beyond the scope of a department, but there are steps we can take within the History Department to work towards an anti-racist university, including a recognition of the Department's own anti-Black and racist history.

Although the History Department's faculty and staff universally condemn anti-Black racism, we cannot deny its history and continued workings within our department. Our flagship program, the Seminar, was founded by Herbert Baxter Adams in 1880. Adams devoted his career to producing racist historical scholarship that consistently promoted the superiority of "Germanic" peoples. So did many of his students at Johns Hopkins, including Frederick Jackson Turner, whose writings on the American frontier celebrated an ethos of American exceptionalism predicated on the erasure of Indigenous histories and white settler violence. As Nathan Connolly recently noted in an essay for [Electric Marronage](#), the Johns Hopkins History Seminar was where "the second Ku Klux Klan received its literary and historiographical birthplace through the work of Thomas Dixon and Woodrow Wilson." In 1970, the first course taught by a Black History graduate student precipitated his being called a "jive nigger" in the campus paper.

This is not to say that scholarly white supremacy at Hopkins marched across the twentieth century in a straight line or was unchallenged. During the 1930s and 1940s, progressive or liberal white professors such as Broadus Mitchell and C. Vann Woodward tried at various points to desegregate university courses and social venues. Challenges came from without as well. In the 1880s, W. E. B. Du Bois secured financial support to study in Germany on the good word of

then-Hopkins President Daniel Coit Gilman. Yet Du Bois's relationship with Gilman did not make Du Bois especially influential in opening the door at Hopkins for other Black students and professors decades later. In 1925, Du Bois tried to challenge the "policy and tradition of Johns Hopkins University [not] to admit Negroes to its courses." He received a sharp and decisive rebuff from then-president Frank Goodnow, who flatly affirmed the university's commitment to states' rights and Jim Crow. We cannot celebrate our department's central role in the creation of the American historical academy without reckoning with its role in justifying white supremacy.

Nor is this simply a matter of distant history. Well into the 21st century, the department remained a remarkably white environment, even in comparison to other elite institutions in the field. The department only hired its first Black faculty member, Ray Kea, in 1970. Kea subsequently left in 1979 due to persistent racist harassment from a white colleague. Franklin W. Knight was hired in 1973 and became the first Black faculty member to gain tenure at Johns Hopkins. While he remained with the department until his retirement, the other Black men hired over the following three decades all left to build distinguished careers at other institutions. Their choices remind us that we must not only hire Black faculty, but also create a department in which they can thrive. At the same time as Knight and Kea were hired and in response to calls for a Black Studies program at Hopkins, the department instead helped found the Program in Atlantic History, Culture, and Society. Seen as a less politically fraught alternative, the Atlantic World program gained the deans' and the department's approval and redirected funds and energy away from possible Black Studies programming. Between 2000 and 2016, the department enrolled approximately one Black graduate student every other year, representing roughly 5% of total graduate students. These numbers are all the more notable given the department's status as a major center for the study of slavery in the Atlantic World, as well as the study of African history.

Over the past decade, the History Department has done important and transformative work to diversify the faculty, our graduate admissions, and the intellectual content of our collective research and teaching. In 2015 the Department had no Black faculty members in residence, with its sole Black faculty member on leave. That year the department belatedly began to hire more faculty of color. It appointed its first Asian faculty member and first woman of color in the department's history (2015), the first Arab faculty member (2015), the first Black woman professor of any rank (2016), its first Latinx faculty member (2016, the same person as the first Black woman member), the university's first Black distinguished professor (2016), the first Black woman full professor anywhere in the humanities (2017), and the first Black woman specialist in non-US subject matter (2020). We have also increased the diversity of the curriculum by conducting successful searches in Africana Studies, African history, African-American history, East Asian history, and Latin American history, as well as hiring a historian of medieval Egypt. We have substantially increased the number of Black graduate students admitted and successfully recruited to the program: 7 students matriculated between 2017 and 2020, more than 15% of the department's historical total.

While this rapid increase in departmental diversity should serve as an example to the rest of the university that transformation is possible, much work remains. Our central communal space, the

Seminar Room, is still dominated by a sculpture of Herbert Baxter Adams and pictures of emeritus faculty, all but one of whom are white. Although we regularly acknowledge the problems with the message conveyed by this space, we have nonetheless expected our colleagues and students of color to work in this environment. The Seminar continues to disproportionately feature the work of white scholars as well. In terms of faculty hires, the department has yet to appoint an Indigenous/First Nations scholar, and Latinx and Asian faculty remain underrepresented in comparison to the national population. Meanwhile, the current representation of Black faculty must be viewed in light of more than a century of extreme under-representation. While several white faculty members research the history of predominantly non-white regions, the inverse is not true. We continue to hear from Black and other non-white prospective students who are hesitant to enroll at Hopkins due to these issues and other evidence of the racial climate of the department. Non-Black faculty have recognized these problems, but have not taken on responsibility for actively organizing to change them.

As such, we commit to the following:

#### On Hiring

We will continue the work of transforming the composition of the department by doing the following:

- Prioritize job searches that increase the coverage of underrepresented communities and histories, particularly African American, African diaspora, and African histories. In the near term, we will recommit to hiring a senior Latin Americanist with a strong preference for a scholar who works on Indigenous or Black histories.
- Work to ensure that hires, regardless of field of study, increase the number of underrepresented faculty in the department. We commit to actively recruiting Black faculty and other faculty of color to the department by reaching out to the networks these scholars have created, broadening the placement of job ads, soliciting applications from scholars of color, and more.
- Recognize that standards of excellence can be inequitably applied as a mechanism of exclusion, and therefore work to ensure that our Black colleagues, along with other faculty of color as well as all department members who work on issues of race, are fairly evaluated through the university's tenure and promotions process.
- Recognize the racial inequities that structure admissions to selective undergraduate and graduate programs, and therefore actively seek out excellent candidates for graduate admissions and for faculty positions among applicants who have not yet trained or worked at elite institutions. Among the department's

current tenure-line faculty, Black scholars are much more likely to have earned at least one degree from a public institution or from a non-elite private institution.

**Implementation: A hiring working group that includes Dr. Pier Larson (chair), Dr. Jessica Marie Johnson, and Dr. Gaby Spiegel has been formed to generate a set of internal guidelines for faculty searches that institutionalize best practices for hiring in our department, incorporating the above commitments. This document will include mandates around advertising, language for the posting, composition of the hiring committee, and search activities to ensure a diverse applicant pool and a respectful and welcoming experience for those applicants who advance to the interview and campus visit stages. It will also put forward a long term plan for hiring that seeks to fulfill the commitment to further transforming the department's composition. Search committees will be required to report on their fulfillment of these guidelines when reporting back to the department. We have the blueprint for these guidelines in documentation created during our recent search (chair: Professor Nathan Connolly) for a historian of Caribbean history.**

#### On Graduate Education

We will recruit a diverse incoming graduate class each year and provide Black and non-Black students of color with a welcoming and supportive environment from recruitment weekend onward by doing the following:

- Work with current graduate students to ensure that recruited Black students are treated respectfully and that all students are introduced to Baltimore beyond the confines of the White L -- those predominantly white communities running from North/Central Baltimore City down the Charles Street corridor and East along the harbor.
- Establish professional development and career success workshops that respond to the needs of all of our students on topics developed in consultation with the History Graduate Student Association and Black Graduate Student Association. Where workshops aren't available or timely, we will allocate funds for our students to attend workshops elsewhere and/or receive the skills they need to be successful.
- Set aside funds for graduate students to attend conferences and secure mentoring from scholars beyond the History department, recognizing that Black historical study is often interdisciplinary and therefore requires more face-time across multiple external venues than other fields.
- Develop a mandatory racial literacies course on the white supremacist history of our discipline and its methodologies, both within our department and writ large, and incorporate it into our graduate training. We have the blueprint for such a

course in the course designed by Professor Nathan Connolly, titled “Racial Literacy in the Archives” and in the Black World Seminar, established Fall 2019.

- Set aside funds to support innovative graduate teaching like the Black World Seminar, the Black Womanhood course, the Sex and Slavery Lab, and more that center Black diasporic histories and historians.
- Reach out to the development office to begin a campaign for funds to establish a competitive research postdoctoral fellowship in Black history, and identify junior scholars to sponsor for the Provost’s Postdoctoral Fellowship.

**Implementation: The Director of Graduate Studies (Dr. Todd Shepard) and the Graduate Studies Committee (Dr. Kenneth Moss, Dr. François Furstenberg, Dr. H. Yumi Kim) will take the lead on this work, but all members of the department have committed to taking up these projects. The DGS and GSC will consult with our students with regards to these projects and incorporate their feedback into plans for the future.**

#### On Undergraduate Teaching

We will examine our undergraduate teaching offerings to ensure that Hopkins students are exposed to the global history of Black communities and receive the political education they need to confront current and future events by doing the following:

- Recommit to seriously engaging Black scholars and authors of color in general in our coursework and including them in our syllabi. We commit to teaching primary sources that reflect the Black experience.
- Ensure that every History major and minor is exposed to the critical study of race through their coursework.
- Continue to expand our support for undergraduate research into Black histories through programming like the new history lab.
- Introduce course materials, either in the Sophomore Seminar or in a new class, that will regularly offer the opportunity for undergraduates to examine the history of race at Johns Hopkins, in the History department, and the discipline more broadly.
- Create an undergraduate major concentration loosely themed around the history of organizing, racial justice, and political education, to better equip students with the tools they need to face the 21st century and beyond.

**Implementation: The Director of Undergraduate Studies (Dr. Erin Rowe) and the Undergraduate Studies Committee (Dr. Tamer el-Leithy and Dr. Katie Hindmarch-Watson) will take the lead on this work, and all members of the department commit to volunteering for the new teaching obligations this will entail. The DUS and USC will also**

**consult with our majors with regards to these projects and incorporate their feedback into plans for the future.**

#### On “the Seminar”

We will use the recognizable prestige of the Seminar to spotlight innovative work by Black, Latinx, and Indigenous scholars. As individual faculty members, we commit to seeking out such scholars if we are not already in conversation with them and to prioritizing them when inviting scholars to the Seminar, as well as doing the following:

- Begin to use themed semesters for the Seminar to better familiarize ourselves as a department with the history of white supremacy and antiracist historical methodologies. The first themed seminar will begin Spring 2021 and be guided by the theme: “Critical Race Consciousness.”
- Work with Homewood’s curators of cultural properties to make the Seminar room a more welcoming space representative of our anti-racist commitments.
- Consider ways to incorporate these proposals into the pedagogical activities of the department, potentially working with the Program in Museums and Society to develop a course to take on the work of redesigning the Seminar Room.
- Research and implement anti-racism and bystander intervention training for faculty and students within the department, drawing on the Office of Institutional Equity’s resources and course offerings as well as other professionals engaged in this work.

**Implementation: A working group that includes Dr. Anne Lester (chair), Dr. Angus Burgin, and Dr. Elizabeth Thornberry has been formed to propose both physical and programmatic changes to the Seminar.**

#### On the Department’s Understanding of Historical Knowledge

We will continue to advance the work of anti-racism in the ways we understand, represent, and advance what is considered to be history by doing the following:

- Work to diversify our understanding of what constitutes historical knowledge beyond the traditional monograph and article driven work and the regionally and temporally bounded fields we generally engage with in the Seminar Room.
- Recognize, promote, and institutionalize the kinds of knowledge creation and dissemination that our Black colleagues have regularly engaged in beyond the classroom. Whether Professor Jessica Johnson’s Electric Marronage platform, Professor

Nathan Connolly's participation in the *Backstory* podcast, or Professor Martha Jones's regular contributions to opinion pages and other popular media, we will make sure this public facing scholarship is acknowledged and incorporated into our understanding of what contemporary academic production entails.

- Further our engagement with and education in the methodologies and technologies that enable the aforementioned public facing work. We will incorporate this training into our graduate and undergraduate teaching, as well as work to undertake such production ourselves.
- Use the occasion of the turn to online teaching required by the COVID-19 crisis as a wake up call to our digital illiteracies and a moment to better our understanding and use of technology as part of our academic practices.
- Continue to support interdisciplinary work by taking on leadership roles with centers and programs, co-sponsoring seminars and courses, and creating spaces for students to engage with other kinds of epistemologies. We've noted with great concern the divestment of resources from gender, race, and ethnic studies work on campus (i.e. the slow disappearance of the Program in Latin American Studies) and we rebuke it. We will continue to support our colleagues doing interdisciplinary work and to demand the university financially and structurally support the centers and programs that make that work possible including the Race, Immigration and Citizenship Program, the Program for Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, the Program in Jewish Studies, the Program in Latin American Studies, East Asian Studies, the Program in Islamic Studies, and the Center for Africana Studies to name a handful.
- Continue to support innovative projects that bring the resources of Johns Hopkins to Baltimore's Black community, such as Professor Lawrence Jackson's Billie Holiday Project for the Liberation Arts. We will incentivize future work of this sort by reaching out to our development office to begin a campaign for funds to establish community engagement grants for faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates.

**Implementation: A working group that includes Dr. N. D. B. Connolly (chair), Dr. Casey Lurtz, and Dr. Tobie Meyer-Fong has been formed to study, implement, and promote digital and other types of knowledge.**

#### On the University

Beyond the department, we will work as individuals and as a collective to pressure the university to become a more actively anti-racist institution by doing the following:

- Continue to draw on our own research and expertise to oppose the university's private police force.



- Continue to push against the university's calls for austerity, generally at the expense of the most precarious among us, during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Call out the inequities of tenure and promotion processes that rely on traditional markers of prestige, and push our scholarly communities to recognize that innovative scholarship takes many forms and appears in many venues, no matter the discipline.
- Pressure the university to join the long-standing consortium of [Universities Studying Slavery](#), a project based at the University of Virginia, and to create and fund a Racial Reconciliation Commission that will address the history of Johns Hopkins University's history of predatory interaction with the City of Baltimore and the region. We learn from examples like Harvard University, Georgetown, Brown University, Emory University, University of Virginia, the College of William and Mary, Rutgers University, the University of Maryland, and others who are already leading in this work.
- Push for recognition of and compensation for the "invisible labor" of advising, advocacy, and diversification of committees that inevitably falls on our Black and non-Black colleagues of color, particularly Black and non-Black women of color.
- Pressure the administration to make concrete commitments to acting on rather than only collecting feedback from constituent communities, particularly Black communities.
- Work within our professional associations and scholarly networks to ensure that the intellectual labor of Black scholars is recognized and disseminated.
- Use our professional skills to excavate the history of white supremacy at Johns Hopkins as well as in the wider world, in order to bring greater clarity to the ongoing work of dismantling it.

We make these commitments in July 2020 and will meet regularly to discuss our progress towards their fulfillment. Going forward, faculty meetings called by the chair will include time to reflect on how the work we are doing aligns with this statement.

White colleagues must assume leadership and responsibility, ensuring that the work does not fall solely on the shoulders of our Black and non-Black colleagues of color. We all commit to take on the work of recognizing and fighting injustices and inequities at Johns Hopkins and in the broader academic world. We will continue to educate ourselves and take action to be actively anti-racist.