

From the Director's Desk

I had prepared my Director's Desk letter, focusing on the admirable efforts of our students, staff, and faculty in managing the high level of personal and professional demand and strain associated with COVID-19. I threw that letter away.

Today is the day after George Floyd's memorial service, and this week I can think about little other than the police killing of George Floyd, the persistent killings and acts of violence and harassment against Black people (including women, girls, and femmes #SayHerName [live link to <https://aapf.org/shn-campaign>]), the particular pain and anger that our Black students, staff, faculty, and community members are (and have been) carrying for so long, and the responsibility of White and White privilege benefitting people to do the labor of anti racist action.

In this context, I have been absorbing the stream of statements of solidarity from businesses, professional organizations, leaders of colleges and universities, etc. Many of these statements can be distilled into a predictable template: start with expressions of solidarity, sorrow, anger, [insert other negative affect]; move to describing the statement makers' commitments, values, and expertise in combatting racism [or diversity and inclusion]; end with a call for action that often names some form of introspection (e.g., implicit bias training).

Holding the persistent killings of Black people and the deeply engrained anti-Black racism in our institutions, I wonder what to make of these statements. I suspect they are well-intentioned, that the statement makers believe the sentiments they are expressing, and that these statements are useful for many recipients. At the same time, I am mindful of critical analyses of such statements as performances that take the place of actual anti-racist actions (e.g., Ahmed, 2012). When I read phrases like "we stand in solidarity with...", "we do not tolerate...", etc. I wonder what this means exactly. Have the statement makers physically stood in the protests against anti-Black violence? Have they actually given their time and labor to projects to influence change at their organizations? Have they truly not tolerated anti-Black racism? If all the people and organizations declaring non-tolerance (myself and our own institution included) actually not tolerated racism, would we be in the predicament we are in now? When I read statements of action that call for "implicit bias training" I wonder about this obsession with introspection on personal bias. I wonder why there isn't a similar persistent focus on longstanding evidence of explicit racist outcomes? For example, in higher education, how about addressing known racist outcomes like the disproportionate labor that Black and other people of color are doing? How about counting this labor as part of tenure and promotion? How about compensating folx for this invisible labor? When I read these statements, I wonder, where was this solidarity and non-tolerance of anti-Black racism last week, and where will it be next week, and the week after, and the months and years after that?

I would love to see the time, money, and effort that communications offices, general counsels, diversity and inclusion teams, and organization leaders dedicate to

producing and disseminating these statements be matched with time, money, and effort to address known racist outcomes. I would love to see more White people take on the emotional labor to listen from a place of humility, and do what Black folks want and need, recognizing that the trust necessary for such communication is deeply depleted and that White people need to work to earn this trust with anti-racist actions this week, next week, and the weeks, months, and years after.

In that spirit, what I can say and hope for our Center is that we work to stand in solidarity and action against anti-Black racism. Our students, staff, and faculty have devoted significant efforts in their research, teaching, service, and personal lives to this goal. This labor has fallen disproportionately on our Black students and colleagues. We can do better and we will act in support and solidarity to hold one another accountable for doing so.

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