



Department of Sociology

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Dear KSU Community,

The University is currently engaged in a discussion about how to respond to the recent protests against racial discrimination, particularly anti-black racism, around the country. I wanted to share a statement written by some of our Sociology Faculty in support social justice and anti-discrimination. The statement below was also posted on the Department's Facebook page. Please look at the University's website for more information about how the University plans to support students of color in these difficult times.

<https://www.kent.edu/kent/news/university-student-leaders-reflect-whether-george-floyd-protests-will-spur-sustained>

Thank you,
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Statement on Racial and Social Justice

As faculty of the Department of Sociology at Kent State University, we write in response to the recent killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade. These killings are stark reminders of the systematic racism that persists in society. When viewed in connection with the disparate effects of COVID-19 on communities of color, it is clear that Black Americans are not just over-policed, but devalued in many areas such as healthcare, education, and employment. The Department of Sociology strongly condemns these recent killings by police officers and armed citizens. We recognize that the protests occurring are a response to a legacy of oppression against Black Americans that has existed since the founding of this country.

We would like to express our collective grief and indignation over these murders alongside the broader forms of state violence. We also would like to call out the systemic racism that led to the death of Mr. Floyd and the local, national, and international uprisings that have followed.

One of the founders of Sociology, W.E.B. Du Bois, once said "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." (in *The Souls of Black Folk*). The color line, meant as racial segregation and continued racism since the slavery's abolition in the United States, is clearly also a problem in the 21st Century. Du Bois also felt education was a means to emancipation. As sociologists today, we embrace the legacy of Du Bois as we try to understand and combat the many forms of oppression and inequality in our society that pervade our social institutions, laws, and criminal justice system. Education is critical and education is a form of social action. Of course, there is more we can do beyond educating ourselves.

We believe that silence and passivity make us complicit in the oppression we seek to dismantle. Therefore, our Department encourages you to consider some of the following courses of action that have been encouraged by experts in social action techniques to combat inequality (Actions steps 1 and 2 were adapted,

with permission, from a statement released by American University's Black Faculty in the Department of Justice, Law & Criminology):

1. **Read.** Seek knowledge. Read scholarship on racism, inequality, and police violence. Read research written by Black scholars.
2. **Listen.** Listen to the voices of disenfranchised Black Americans. Their narratives highlight a long history of racism and persistent discrimination by social institutions, including the criminal justice system.
3. **Act.** Get involved. Involvement will vary. In the Department of Sociology **Faculty** members can act with intention by researching and teaching about race-related topics, which may require additional training and restructuring current courses. **Students** can learn with intention by using course material to evaluate existing biases and seeking knowledge to overcome those biases. **All members** of the Kent community can act with intention by engaging in any of the following activities:
 - a. **Donate.** Donate to organizations committed to combating racism and inequality.
 - b. **Volunteer.** Volunteer your time with organizations committed to combating racism and inequality.
 - c. **Vote.** Local elections provide the opportunity to elect prosecutors and judges who make criminal charging and sentencing decisions.

To conclude—we acknowledge the pain, anger, and exhaustion that you are experiencing. We will continue to engage in these action steps and uplift the voices of our students. The Department of Sociology at Kent State has a long-standing history of social justice and advocacy work. Moving forward, we reassert our Department's dedication to research, teaching, and advocacy that creates justice and equity in Kent and beyond. For more information on anti-racism, experts have compiled and continue to update resource guides, including this guide for "[anyone looking to broaden their understanding of anti-racism and get involved to combat racism](#)" and this guide that is "[written to help white people and parents deepen our anti-racism work](#)".