CRITICAL ETHNIC STUDIES COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Dear Critical Ethnic Studies Majors,

This document will not reach you when you likely needed it most; nor will it provide what many of the solidarity campaign email-writers advocated: a unilateral policy by CES, and/or faculty and administration as a governing body, to cancel final exams or papers. We understand that both our timeline for the release of this declaration and any coursework decisions pertaining to finals week in CES electives may be construed as lack of support for Black Lives Matter, or lack of care or concern for our community of student-scholars. Nevertheless, our deep and abiding commitment to and concern for students, while not performed publicly or made available in a demonstrable way in the wake of George Floyd’s murder, has always been—and will continue to be—at the forefront of our minds and at the core of our major CES strongly aligns itself with the Black Lives Matter movement. We affirm our unequivocal support of Black students at K, and those acting in solidarity with Black students. We seek to bolster their voices, echo their criticisms of systemic racism, and pledge to take action to resist racial injustice. We will use the rest of this document to demonstrate our commitment and outline our ongoing support.

This year our program has been staffed by four faculty members, 3/4 of whom are women of color, affiliated with CES but whose primary responsibility is to a home department, English and AnSo. Additionally, we are tasked with staffing or supporting numerous other academic programs (WGS, Film, American Studies, Environmental Studies, etc.) and serving on high-service equity and inclusion committees. We are overextended and over-committed to this work. It is not simply a research or curricular investment; it is suffused in all we do and the very essence of who we are at K. We did not, therefore, view the production of this document as a quick or easy task. Instead, it is an articulation of our most central values mediated by the questions and challenges our students raised at the end of an exceedingly difficult and challenging quarter. We have been actively working in collaboration with next year’s DSAs, Ngozi and Sophia, as we discussed student needs, the goals of this document, and the ways in which CES could and should intervene. We know and understand that, while there may be heightened urgency and anxiety about our current circumstances right now, the scope of this moment isn’t limited to this quarter. We approached this document accordingly, with an overwhelming sense of our responsibility, to you and to each other, not only now, but in the days, weeks, months, and years to come. What follows is the product of two weeks of conversations, reflection, grief, anxiety, exhaustion, care, collaboration, anger, listening, fear, frustration, and love.

We have heard the student body’s dissatisfaction with the sensed emptiness of statements made by various limbs of the College’s administration and faculty. We want to address the neoliberal impulse towards statement-making in the face of great social injustices and the ways in which such statements frequently stand in for—or even sidestep—commitment to action that could make substantive change within the institution itself. Words matter. They are also not enough. Through words we can make important assertions of allyship and denounce racist and oppressive structures; however, a statement cannot be the full-stop at the end of our anti-racist commitment. Words alone will not dismantle racist structures, erase violence, or eradicate oppression.
This is also not to undermine the world-making power of language, as we know in CES that the capacity of our words to conceive and construct new realities is immeasurable. Yet, the facility of language to imagine new logics is so powerful because it is coupled with the potential to act within those frameworks: to make choices, to build relationships, and to remake our lives in the shape of our words. We, as a CES department, wish not only to make a statement of solidarity with our Black community members, but to offer a tangible commitment to enact that solidarity. We intend to show this enacted solidarity through our continued curricular design, as well as our advocacy for and alongside our students.

Much like the Ethnic Studies programs of the 1960s that preceded it, our program resulted from the convergence of student activism and faculty and administrative commitment. In 2014, K’s Critical Ethnic Studies was implemented as a major, spurred forward by student demonstrations in 2012, two years of assiduous research of other programs to inform our curricular design, and faculty-student collaboration. From those demonstrations and the subsequent conversations that followed, we designed a program that insists on thinking, working, and creating from knowledges that have been made invisible or silenced. Crucial to that undertaking is to seek multiple voices and worldviews in a way that encourages self-determination and solidarity among racial minorities within and beyond the United States. We hold these principles as the central vision for what we produce, both in and outside the classroom. We affirm the constitutive relationship between these two spaces. For us, academic work and activist work are not separable labor: they must shape and inform one another. We resist the instinct or inclination to regard them otherwise because they function together as the very foundation of our program’s existence and mission.

In 2012, MEChA staged several actions demanding institutional accountability to, and support for, Latinx students, including K’s investment in the expansion and retention of Latinx students, the hiring of more Latinx faculty and other faculty of color, as well as the formation of a Chicano Studies program. These demands created the groundswell that led to Critical Ethnic Studies at K. In 2020, Black students and those who stand in solidarity with their Black peers, have demanded public transparency and accountability in regards to K’s history of anti-Blackness, mandatory ERRACE training for all faculty, and clearer access and wider promotion of K’s anti-bias reporting system. There were similar surges of activism by Black students and other students of color in the 1960s and 1990s. These are the ebbs and flows of history within all institutions of higher learning. We resist naming this valued heritage institutional “progress,” despite the achievements of these activists. Narratives of progress are dangerous. The desire for them is equally dangerous. The activism from the 1960s to now operates along a continuum.

In this spirit, we recognize the vital role of student activism in holding K accountable to and for its student body. We honor the role that activism has played not only in the history of Ethnic Studies as a field, and specifically the creation of our program, but also for identifying sites of violence, exclusion, inequity, and harm at K. We are grateful to the student activists who dedicated, and continue to dedicate, their intellectual and emotional labor in service to K. These interventions ensure that K is always cognizant of redressing its perpetuation of systemic violence. They provide us opportunities to imagine, to design, and to strive for a more socially just system. But, to do so requires constant vigilance. Such was the case in the 1960s. Such was the case in the 1990s. Such was the case in 2012. Such is the case now. We must continually intervene and interrogate, acknowledging the urgency of our current moment and simultaneously looking beyond it to the year(s) ahead.
In this moment of crisis, we must listen to Black voices. We must hold space for Black students to be seen and heard. We must provide these spaces and ensure their efficacy. CES, and the entire K community, needs to operate in a constant mode of vigilance against white supremacy. We urge our community to form coalesional bonds with Black students. CES understands that settler colonialism and systemic racism implicate us all. We are only as safe as our most vulnerable community members. And, as such, it is our duty to amplify Black voices at this time. We must also ensure that we are incorporating Black scholars even more prominently into our curricular discourse. Our experiences at K unite us, but our disparate embodied relationships with this institution and our positionalities in the world must be directly engaged and accounted for. This is what we have always strived to do in CES, but we know it is important to name it as committed practice. Our program operates to bring the world into the classroom and the classroom into the world. We pledge to bring this same intentionality we deploy in a CES classroom to the college more broadly, seeking to encourage our students and ourselves that our engagement with this work must not end at the classroom door.

In whatever capacity we return to K for the 2020-2021 academic year, we vow to feature this commitment to action document prominently on the CES website for full disclosure and accountability and to prioritize these agenda items:

**Curriculum:**
- Center Black Lives Matter prominently in CES 260 Insurgency, Solidarity, and Coloniality of Power (Salinas, Spring 2021)
- Frame the work of CES 490 Senior Colloquium (Katanski, Winter 2021) with the commitments included in this document.
- Reach out to faculty in other departments to develop and/or cross-list CES electives that support engagement with Black Studies, Latinx Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies more deeply within our major.

**Advocacy:**
- Expand our review of CES course evaluations to include all CES electives.
- Hold annual reflection, training, and professional development opportunities for faculty and affiliated faculty to work on our relationship to these commitments and other core program goals.
- Use these commitments as a central foundation for how we assess our program.
- Support and sponsor student Independent Interdisciplinary Concentration (IIC) petitions to the Educational Policies Committee for Black Studies, Latinx Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies concentrations.
- Demand that K address the campus community’s concerns about the presence of police at campus events (Monte Carlo, commencement, etc.)
- Maintain the list of resources following this statement as a living document for K community members who want to take action in the community, or who seek to engage in independent learning. If you would like to add a resource to this list, please email the information to Amelia.Katanski@kzoo.edu.
**Programming:**

- Collaborate with CES majors to host panels, forums, roundtable or fishbowl discussions on topics relevant to our current socio-political conditions (voter suppression; civil unrest/uprising; structural racism and public health disparity)
- Partner with other programs and departments on campus to develop programming that addresses structural racism from multiple disciplinary perspectives, and that examines critically our own institutional practices.

We have been isolated from one another for the entirety of our spring quarter, and we do not know what awaits us for the 2020-2021 academic year. What we do know with certainty is that our community is our core. When we return in the fall, we will strive to build, nourish, and strengthen our community. Our platforms and modes of engagement may shift, depending on college policy and health guidelines, but our commitment to one another remains the same. To our senior graduates who won’t be returning to our learning community remotely or in-person next year, we trust that you will be strategic in the spaces you enter and engage with integrity as it reflects on your knowledge of self and the world. Our charge remains as it has always been: take accountability for our actions and encourage one another to think (because, to borrow the illustrious Dr. Gómez’s oft-quoted refrain, “it ain’t illegal yet”).

In love and light,

Sophia Goebel, CES Department Student Advisor, 2020-2021

Ngozi Idika, CES Department Student Advisor, 2020-2021

Amelia Katanski, CES Co-Director

Shanna Salinas, CES Co-Director

We have compiled a brief list of resources and readings with the intention to make it an open-facing, editable collection of materials to share among our CES community. As we strive to stay engaged with anti-racist work now and through the summer, here are some of the ways we can focus our attention. We have chosen to prioritize immediate actionable items, followed by readings. We encourage wide commitment to both reading and action, as you are able.

If you are interested in contributing local resources for wherever you call home, statewide or nationwide resources, or more readings, please send an email to Amelia.Katanski@kzoo.edu.
**Kalamazoo-specific actionable resources:**

**What can I do to help in Kalamazoo?**

➔ A living, non-exhaustive document of the initiatives, demands, and goals from local organizers; relevant places to donate money; information for contacting local politicians and other ways to support local activism combatting racist violence and police brutality in the Kalamazoo community

Funds to help those affected by the Northside arson fires & the family whose house was raided and seized without a warrant by KDPS (pulled from the above page for ease of access)

➔ [Rebuilding Twala’s Dream](#)
➔ [Achieving Community Together (Lenora Williams)](#)
➔ [Nancy-84 year old lost everything in arson fire](#)
➔ [Unlawful search and seizure in Stuart neighborhood](#)

Pages to follow:

➔ [PACCT (Promise Advocacy for Children and Community Transformation) BOARD](#)
➔ [MI Liberation](#)
➔ [Black Lives Matter: Kalamazoo](#)
➔ [Fire Arts Collaborative](#)
➔ [Rootead](#)
➔ [HOPE thru Navigation](#)
➔ [Elect Tami Rey](#)
➔ [Black Wall Street Kalamazoo](#)
➔ [Face Off Theatre Company](#)
➔ [Kzoo Protest Updates #BlackLivesMatter](#)

More local Kalamazoo orgs:

➔ [Local Black Lives Matter Chapter](#)
➔ [Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation](#)
➔ [Interfaith Strategy for Advocacy & Action in the Community](#)
➔ [Urban Alliance Kalamazoo](#)
➔ [Society for History and Racial Equity](#)
➔ [ERACCE](#)

**Black Scholars to Read this Summer:**

Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers *by Kwame Anthony Appiah*

*A Report from Occupied Territory* *by James Baldwin*

*Many Thousands Gone* *by James Baldwin*
The Fire Next Time, *by James Baldwin*

*Between the World & Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates

*Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* by Amy Gutmann & Kwame Anthony Appiah

*Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* by Patricia Hill Collins

*Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in the United States* by Ibram X. Kendi

→ *Stamped: Racism, Anti-Racism, and You* by Ibram X. Kendi & Jason Reynolds is the version of this book adapted for young adults if you have younger readers in your life!

*The Encyclopedia of Africa* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. & Kwame Anthony Appiah


*Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde

*The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action* by Audre Lorde

*Silencing the Past* by Michel Rolph-Trouillot

**A collection of syllabi:**

→ [Sociologists for Justice Ferguson Syllabus](#)

→ [Institutionalized Racism: A Syllabus](#)

→ [#BlackLivesMatter PGI Micro-Syllabus](#)

→ [Duke University Racial Justice Syllabus](#)

→ [Duke University Police Violence Syllabus](#)

→ [Duke University Political Protests and Movements of Resistance Syllabus](#)

→ [NYC Stands with Standing Rock #StandingRockSyllabus](#)