



Fordham English Department Statement on Black Lives Matter

Unanimously approved on Wednesday, October 7, 2020

The English Department of Fordham University affirms and supports the global outcry against anti-Blackness and racism in all its forms. Our abhorrence of the ongoing violence against Black, Indigenous, and other people of color obliges us to take account of, and take responsibility for, our own cultural and institutional roles in perpetuating white supremacy. Any move toward reparation must begin by answering the call for accountability at the present time—from our students and alumni, from the scholarly community, and from the nation and world at large. We seek to acknowledge, therefore, that our teaching, our research, and our knowledge-making activities at Fordham, as at all universities, are deeply embedded in structures that marginalize, silence, and harm Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

Along with this acknowledgment, the Fordham English Department has begun examining the structures of white supremacy as they relate to our work as educators and scholars. Our aim over the next twelve months is to look closely at our departmental requirements, our curricula, and the profiles of our students and instructors. We hope to gather concrete information about our teaching, learning, and research contexts; to investigate their histories; and to identify the limits of our capacity for inclusion. In doing so, we aim to create opportunities, initiatives, and resource allocations that expand beyond our current limits and ultimately make lasting and meaningful changes to our practices. We commit to creating a second, more robust statement of our progress by October 2021.

We speak now directly to our students. Drawing on the praxis of Black, Indigenous, and women of color feminism, we hold that anti-racist work begins by forging a space of active listening. In order to recognize the bold and courageous work that you have undertaken to expose racial violence at Fordham, we articulate back to you what we have heard you calling for:

- You call for an end to the microaggressions, silencing, tokenizing, and marginalization experienced by BIPOC students in the classroom.
- You call for decentering the white and Eurocentric literary canon.
- You call for engagement with BIPOC scholars and authors in all courses.
- You call for the recognition that white supremacy is the structuring condition of the academy and its forms of knowledge production across all fields, all disciplines, and all subject areas.

We hear your calls and affirm that the work of pursuing justice and repair must proceed on all these fronts, taking into account racism's insidious ability to seep into the tiniest places. As a partial response to your concerns, as well as to the concerns of earlier generations of students, the English Department has to date taken the following steps:

- We established a "Race and Social Justice" requirement for undergraduate English majors in 2019.
- We established a "Difference and Intersectionality" requirement for English graduate students in 2017.
- We formed a working group on anti-racist pedagogy.
- We organized accountability groups, where faculty can learn more about systemic racism, discuss anti-racist teaching strategies, and hold themselves accountable.
- We created an archive of models of anti-racist syllabi, lesson plans, and teaching techniques, as well as pedagogical statements of equity, inclusion, and care.

- We submitted a proposal for a Teaching Race Across the Curriculum (TRAC) grant to institutionalize a year-long colloquium on “Teaching Racial Justice” that will give faculty rigorous training in anti-racist pedagogy.
- We are creating an E-Ethnic/Race Studies Program to connect faculty and students interested in Race and Ethnic Studies in the English Department and across the University.
- We continue to host the Reid Family Writers of Color Reading Series.
- We are evolving existing programming. For instance, the Mullarkey Research and Teaching Forum is being redesigned as a roundtable to address issues of race, ethnicity, diversity, and social justice.

These steps are just a beginning. They represent a process of organizing resources and building capacities. Next comes the process of identifying possibilities for implementation, as we examine our course catalogs and syllabi, our classrooms and office hours, our hiring practices and retention policies, our labor conditions, and our interpersonal relations. We understand that, to be done thoughtfully and carefully, this work must be an iterative process, undertaken collaboratively, accountably, and responsively, with and for students and colleagues. We understand too that this work is neither easily nor quickly done. With this statement, the Fordham University English Department publicly commits to seeing it through.