

June 8, 2020

Our Moment for Change: Memorializing “George” to End the Enduring Stain of Structural Racism

The past weeks have witnessed the tragic and unjust extra-judicial killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Breonna Taylor in Louisville and Ahmaud Arbery in Glynn County, GA, in the midst of a tragic public health crisis (COVID-19 global pandemic) that is especially negatively impacting African Americans disproportionately. In what some are calling a revival of a new, multi-coalitional and multi-racial civil rights movement; we are now witnessing a national and global outpouring of anger demanding fundamental changes to law enforcement and a renewed commitment for fundamental social change rooted in values of racial justice.

In enjoining our voices to this movement for change; the Black Faculty, Staff and Students Association (BFSSA) of the University of Massachusetts-Boston wishes to extend our sincere condolences to the families of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and other victims of law enforcement and private citizen racial violence and bigotry. Our hearts are heavy and we feel immense frustration at the state of our country where institutional racism, structural social and economic inequalities and militarized, anti-black law enforcement have conspired to inflict emotional harm on too many Americans, especially communities of color.

BFSSA believes that the time is now to go beyond expressions of grief, sympathy and support for those actively involved in seeking justice for the perpetrators of these injustices. We feel that it is important to advocate for social change, including in organizations that we work in and are affiliated with. Doing so is the only way that we will ultimately bring about systems change and equity and justice for marginalized populations in the United States and the world. Over recent decades, events such as mass shootings, law enforcement-involved attacks and killings represent abundant evidence of systematic oppression and widespread inequalities in education, employment, the criminal justice system and other domains. The usual responses – task forces, “national conversations”, renewed commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion, and even political engagement - have proven to be ineffectual to date.

That is why we pledge to act boldly at our home institution, the University of Massachusetts Boston, in institutions of higher education regionally, and in our communities to change the nature of the social contract, to re-think how our communities and institutions are organized, and to propose fundamental changes in the nature of our organizations and communities. To this end, we condemn the recent anti-Black racist tweet by a UMass Boston student and enjoin the administration’s condemnation of the tweet as having no place in the ethical social discourse that our institution holds dear. We also commend the swift action taken by our University to revise law enforcement and public safety activities on our campus that have been perceived as intimidating and counter to our mission and advocacy for justice. To this end, we welcome Chief Baynard’s proposal to establish a Police Community Advisory Board that will finally include us and represent our voices on such critical matters in the future.

The BFSSA is strongly supportive of changes that put Black and other marginalized communities at the center of social policy, the economy, and public affairs. Such changes should be based on values of diversity, inclusion, awareness, engagement and positive transformation. We support

Black Lives Matter's range of proposals for systems' change. No doubt, we are in agreement on the "why". With the BFSSA, at UMass Boston, as Black faculty, staff, administrators, and students, we also possess the knowledge and expertise to figure out the "how". We pledge results-oriented action to make our society align with American values that too often are only symbolic. This knowledge base is evidenced by the recent policy brief, [Resilience: The Black Pinata: Fighting the Pandemic of Police Violence](#) by our member, Dr. Quito Swan, published by the William Trotter Institute of Black Culture, and it documents the sordid history and presence of police brutality in Boston.

That is why, we are pleased to enjoin with UMass Boston's senior leadership and Mayor Marty Walsh's pledge to make Boston a national leader in battling racism going forward, and make change in [the city of Boston] that has a fraught history around race relations and bigotry.

In loving memory of "George"; the 2020 change agent!

Sincerely,

The Black Faculty, Staff, and Student Association (BFSSA) Executive Council at UMass Boston