

Black Presidents and Deans Schools & Departments of Theology & Religion

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement From Black Presidents and Deans - Schools and Departments of Theology and Religion

We are Black Presidents and Deans serving at schools of theology, departments of religion and African American Studies across the nation. Our co-signers include but are not limited to Black faculty and administrators who comprise the Black theological and religious intellectual thought-group of our time. We were raised and nurtured by Black men and women who had an unquenchable thirst for justice and liberation. Their ancestors bore on their shoulders the weight of oppression and carried in their hearts the hope of better lives for their progeny. This was a communal work. We understood - and even now understand - ourselves as members of a huge tribe of people who cared for our journey through this life. The survival and thriving of Black people in this nation and globally is our unapologetic commitment.

Black people are [three times more likely](#) to be killed by officers than are White people. In less than one month, our nation has been shaken by reports of the murders of three unarmed Black citizens of this country: Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd. We mourn their deaths and the murders of so many more whose names we have uttered and those whose names we have not known to call. History has shown us that the *rule of law* is a luxury to white America and an ever moving goalpost for Black and Brown people. This must end. Those of us who are committed to the Kingdom of God and to the creation and thriving of the Beloved Community know that this reality cannot come to fruition in the absence of justice for Black people in the United States and around the world.

We cannot and will not be silent while threats are continuously uttered by the highest political leadership in our country, nor will we watch the ongoing murders of Black people by police officers whose chief duty is meant to be “to protect and serve.”

In his most recent conversation with the nation’s governors Trump’s words read as an encouragement to bring harm to our local communities.

From [CNN](#):

"You have to dominate or you'll look like a bunch of jerks, you have to arrest and try people," the President told governors in a call from the basement White House Situation Room... "It's a movement, if you don't put it down it will get worse and worse," Trump said. "The only time it's successful is when you're weak and most of you are weak."(June 1, 2020)

As educators, we are concerned about public safety. Moreover, our experience has taught us that learning is made better when we embrace the voices and contributions of persons from diverse walks of life. Yet, militaristic tone and violence-laced threats will never be able to secure the safety of our communities and by extension, healthy learning environments. We deplore this rhetoric in the strongest terms and demand the White House administration cease and desist from such vile communications.

We believe that government energies currently being spent on illegitimate surveillance of Black protestors would be better spent on the investigation of those entities currently employed in highjacking a legitimate movement for change in the nature of policing in the United States. These entities include accelerationist white supremacist individuals and organizations who are infiltrating these protests with the express intent of inciting violence and, ultimately, a race war that they believe it is possible to win.

The sight of US military forces stationed in front of American citizens engaged in peaceful protest has let us know that this government plans a hardcore law and order response. We fear this will only make matters worse and that many lives may be lost in the quest for justice. Instead, we hope our local governments will see the benefit of negotiating with community leaders who are known for their work for the liberation of Black lives and economic justice. To that end, we make the following demands:

Public Policy:

- The removal of military equipment from our neighborhoods as tools for policing.
 - The end of the 1033 Program, whereby Congress transfers excess military equipment to local police agencies for use in counter-drug activities.
- The immediate work to create police reform initiatives as well as community oriented policing methodologies to include the following:
 - A revision of police union contracts so that police are held accountable for misconduct, to include clarity about “excessive force.”
 - A moratorium on no-knock warrants for drug-related arrests.
 - An end to “broken-windows” policing.
 - The implementation of swift and strong fines against persons who make emergency calls to police departments based upon false allegations against Black citizens.
 - State and local level public policy initiatives that ensure police review boards comprise citizens representing its diverse neighborhoods. Effective policy requires community oversight.
 - The refusal to hire/retain any officer who has a history of excessive force and misconduct.
 - An end to the practice of aggressive police persons not receiving repercussions and prosecution when they cross the justice line and end the process of internal policing, powerful police unions, powerless civil arbitration boards, and ineffective external (non-police) review boards being used to release accused police persons from justice.
 - An end to the standard of reasonableness that allows police officers to shoot to kill Black and other racial minorities on the officer’s assertion that they feared for their life.
 - Pressure on insurance companies to demand changes in police procedures and policies used by police departments that consistently lead to high incidents of police brutality against racial minorities by refusing those departments coverage.
- The immediate clarification by the FBI that Black Lives Matter is not a “black identity extremist” movement.

American Academy of Religion/ Society of Biblical Literature:

- The immediate development and support of the *Policing in Black and Brown Communities Initiative* that will work with journalists who cover religion. Black people's religious conceptualizations drive the way they move in the world. Through AAR/SBL support, this initiative's aim is to place scholars of religion in conversation with mainstream journalists around the country so that the narratives around our lives convey truth and sensitivity.

Association of Theological Schools:

- Include on its agenda for its upcoming Biennial Meeting a time for the Presidents of ATS schools to discuss what is both the impact and theological work needed to address the consistent killings of Black people.

During our lifetimes, we have placed our credentials and often our very bodies on the line doing the work of justice-making for our communities. Now is no different. In the days to come, we will do all in our power to resist the evils of racism in the many forms it presents itself, especially in our political systems and schools of higher education. We will not allow the violence directed at Black people and US citizens protesting against police violence to be baptized in religious symbolism as if to say that is the way that our faith, any faith, that follows the way of love and justice demands we obey. Instead, we join the collective response to those who seek justice, liberation and the end of white supremacy. NO MORE.

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