

USF Anthropology Statement on Police Violence and Anti-Black Racism

Over the last week, the USF community has been hit hard by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other victims of police violence as well as the widespread protests that followed. The painful events have brought forth anger and grief made worse by the anxiety associated with the pandemic, exposing systemic inequalities simmering not far under the surface of this country. It is impossible to remain untouched. In the words of Desmond Tutu: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

We write to you today to share our clear commitment to principles of anti-racism.

We acknowledge that anthropology, as a discipline, is rooted in racism in the guise of colonial projects. Despite efforts to end scientific racism and include a diversity of voices, racism persists in the academy. We affirm our commitment to continuing to overcome long-standing structural barriers to access in higher education, the discipline of anthropology, and academia in general. While 47% of USF's student body comes from racial and ethnic minority groups, our graduate program and faculty are majority white. A critical mass of Black faculty and students strengthens much-needed dialogue and critique of current systems of oppression, contributing to change that is sustainable and beneficial to a wider range of people. Though USF just publicized new Principles of Community focused on inclusion, much more needs to be done during this extremely challenging time. Now is the time to be vulnerable, open to systemic change, and willing to do better.

We also acknowledge that we live in a city once in the heart of the Jim Crow South, where institutions were completely segregated by both law and social custom and Black people excluded from public parks, institutions of education, and other places. In June 1967, anger rose to the surface in Black neighborhoods, culminating in a wave of violence that changed Tampa forever. Cases in Tampa and St. Petersburg where a white police officer killed a black resident set off days of civil unrest in 1967 (Marvin Chambers), 1987 (Melvin Hair), and 1996 (TyRon Lewis). We recognize that the civil rights struggle in Tampa is ongoing and acknowledge that the racism of the 60s is still present in our local communities and on our campus, such as when racist flyers and symbols have been posted and in the everyday discrimination students experience in the classroom or while pursuing their degrees. USF students and faculty have been organizing events, speakers, and marches around the issue of police violence against Black and Brown people for many years.

Despite civil rights advances, Black people today continue to struggle with everyday forms of structural and symbolic violence including disproportionate levels of mass incarceration, health disparities, and everyday micro-aggressions. These have only become more starkly evident over the last few months during this pandemic. USF anthropologists have helped document overlooked, disappeared, and vandalized African American cemeteries in our own backyards, the residue of racism in the past and in the present. Others are researching hunger, environmental racism, segregation, disparities in health outcomes, underrepresented histories, and the impacts of COVID-19 on communities of color just adjacent to USF. Many of these communities are the same sites of protests and violent conflict today. We are committed to conducting applied research that will support actionable change.

The matter of anti-Black racism must move beyond our research and into our daily lives as well. The problem of systemic racism in our society may feel too complex to solve, but we believe that structures of oppression can be dismantled through deliberate action and through meaningful actions to effect change in our community and society. Educating ourselves about

being better allies is one step. We invite you to help us as we move forward. We are using the list of resources below to educate ourselves and to progress more effectively. Please explore these and share other resources and tools with us.

We believe we have to start at home. We must be a resource and place of support as a department for all. We strive to be attentive to the need for systemic change, recognizing that we are a source of strength for those who don't share the same privilege. This includes a review of our own USF police department as to its function to provide safety for the university community and particularly Black students, staff, and faculty. We need to offer our assistance to the local community. We need to connect with others in the university and beyond, use our privileges and our resources, and effect change within our own university, the larger community in which we are situated, and in this nation.

This moment is worth nothing if nothing changes. We will continue this conversation as we move forward as a nation and as a program.

In solidarity,

The USF Department of Anthropology

Useful Resources:

How to be An Antiracist: <https://www.ibramxkendi.com/how-to-be-an-antiracist-1>

National Museum Of African American History And Culture's Being Antiracist Toolkit: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/.../talking-abo.../topics/being-antiracist>

A Detailed List of Anti-Racism Resources:
<https://medium.com/.../a-detailed-list-of-anti-racism-resourc...>

Anti-Racism Resources:
https://docs.google.com/.../1BRIF2_zhNe86SGgHa6-.../mobilebasic...

For our White Friends Desiring to be Allies:
<https://sojo.net/arti.../our-white-friends-desiring-be-allies...>

Guidelines for being a Strong White Ally:
<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/kivel3.pdf...>

Ways to support the Tampa Bay Community:
<https://ilovetheburg.com/black-owned-businesses-and-nonpr.../...>

Civil Rights Movement in Tampa:
<http://exhibits.lib.usf.edu/exhibits/show/civil-rights-in-tampa/introduction/intro/>

How Tampa Bay's History of Civil Unrest Repeats Itself:
<https://www.tampabay.com/.../how-tampa-bays-history-of-civi.../...>

* This statement was drafted by a sub-group of the Department's outgoing and incoming Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, the current and incoming Graduate Director, current Chair and Incoming Chair.