

June 10, 2020

Dear President Becker:

We are writing this letter both as members of the Black community and as faculty members at Georgia State University. Across a continuum of disciplines, many of us are scholars whose teaching, research and writing examines, interrogates and translates the racially discriminatory treatment of Black people that predates the founding of the United States and continues full force into the present. We live the experience of being Black in America, and in that regard submit this letter as an expression of solidarity with those who are using their bodies in visceral objection to the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and countless other Black victims of racial violence whose lives did not matter to some. A number of units and deans at Georgia State University and at other institutions have issued statements addressing the public's response to pervasive police violence and enduring white supremacist structures and systems, and we felt compelled to write this letter from our unique perspective as African descended people.

We express our sincerest sympathies for the victims of police violence and for their families and friends who, while grieving the loss of their loved ones, must fight for justice in the criminal legal system. We stand with protestors in cities across the nation and around the world exercising their right to petition their government for redress and demanding anti-racist policies and laws that will acknowledge Black people's humanity. We share the anger and pain caused by centuries of killing, mutilation, and exploitation of Black people and other acts of violence that they have been expected to endure without complaint. We are outraged that necessary responses to the consistent dearth of consequences and accountability for perpetrators of racial violence (explicit and implicit) are challenged as inappropriate or incomprehensible. We are awed by the audacity of young people, so outraged and victimized by sustained injustice, that they are risking exposure to a deadly disease, to protest an unabating pandemic of racism and racial violence.

There is a clear, historical record of white supremacy that is an animating aspect of this nation and of the State of Georgia. It is still very present throughout all of our institutions, both public and private. The grace and power the protestors are demonstrating in response, reflect the best traditions of democracy and also considerable restraint, given the pervasive violence that has shaped the experience of Black people from slavery to date.

Georgia State University sits in the heart of Atlanta, Georgia, America's citadel of civil rights. Many of its classrooms and administrative offices are located on Auburn Avenue, which John Wesley Dobbs affectionately named "Sweet Auburn" and was once home to one of the largest concentrations of Black businesses in the United States. And though the city embraces the sobriquet "The City Too Busy To Hate," and its civic identity is inextricably intertwined with the life and legacy of its native son, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it is no stranger to police violence resulting in the death of Black people. In the African tradition of saying their names we include some of them here: Kathryn Johnston, Oscar Cain, DeAundre Phillips, Jimmy Atchison, Alexia Christian, Caine Rogers, Jamarian Robinson, Shali Tilson, Deravis Rogers, Maurice Hampton, and Anthony Hill. We are therefore alarmed by [Georgia State University's police exchange program](#), which partners with international law enforcement agencies that restrict civil liberties, commit human rights violations, and/or promote bigotry, signaling an aggressive, militarized over-policing of Black people and Black communities. The University must divest from this program immediately, if it truly wishes to be a community partner.

The complete history of race-relations at Georgia State University, the state's largest public university, includes a lawsuit by three Black women—Barbara Pace Hunt, Iris Mae Welch, and Myra Elliott Dinsmore who were denied admission because they were Black. In 1959, the NAACP and local activists won a [precedent setting lawsuit](#) against the state of Georgia and its Board of Regents, and Georgia State became the first desegregated institution of higher education in Georgia. Despite this legal victory, these young women were not admitted to Georgia State. It took coordinated activism by clergy, students, community members, organizers, faculty and civil rights organizations to enforce the judgement rendered by the federal district court. Students also led a campaign against racism on campus in 1992 to win reforms, including the [formation of the Department of African-American Studies](#). These sustained efforts have contributed to the [graduation of record numbers of Black students from its undergraduate programs](#). However, as you acknowledge, [75 percent of the student body is non-white, nearly 70 percent of faculty is white](#) and less than 5 percent of full-time, tenured faculty at GSU is Black, revealing there is still much work to be done with respect to racial diversity, anti-racist policies and practices and meaningful inclusion throughout university life and units. While Black students have indeed excelled as academic and community leaders, distinguishing Georgia State University on the national stage, they have done so in spite of racism, not due to its absence.

In 2011, Georgia State published its [Strategic Plan](#) and a *separate* [Diversity Strategic Plan](#). The Diversity Strategic Plan made a number of specific recommendations to address racial disparities that have not been implemented by the University. In 2017, you established the Commission for the Next Generation of Faculty, which was created for the purpose of making “increased faculty diversity an institutional priority.” The Commission rendered its report in 2019, noting some of the same racial disparities documented in the Diversity Strategic Plan. Many are concerned about whether the Commission's recommendations will suffer the same fate as the Diversity Strategic Plan's recommendations.

The call to return to pre-pandemic “normal” ignores the reality of inequity and racism inherent in the status quo. It is therefore unacceptable. We invite the University to seize the opportunity this moment presents to **address stubborn disparities that sustain white supremacist structures and systems and to adopt anti-racist practices and procedures in hiring, tenure, promotion, and retention**. We also ask the University to consider the following:

- **Support the recently formed university task force with appropriate resources to best position Georgia State to respond to this critical historical moment.**
- **End Georgia State's involvement with the [Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange \(GILEE\) program](#), which puts Black people and communities at greater risk of experiencing police violence in Georgia.**
- **Ensure re-opening plans fully informed by the reality that [Black people are overrepresented in COVID-19 deaths](#), given GSU's large population of Black students and staff.**
- **Establish the Africana Studies Center with the full support of the University as proposed by the Commission for the Next Generation of Faculty.**
- **Memorialize the Black women who fought to end GSU's racially discriminatory admissions policies (e.g., erect statues or a permanent marker and name a scholarship, fellowship, classroom or building after them).**
- **Provide increased professional development opportunities supporting advancement of Black staff and faculty.**
- **Increase numbers of Black full professors, chairs, deans, associate deans, and other executive administrators across colleges and in central administration.**

History will record where we stood in this moment, judging us not by our rhetoric, but by our actions. As Black faculty members, we declare our value as scholars, as teachers, as researchers, as mothers, as fathers, as sisters, as brothers, as children, as citizens, as human beings, and as African descended people. We do not know how this moment will evolve or what lies beyond it, but the words of Langston Hughes inspire and caution us about the dangers of dreams deferred. We will not prioritize cries for peace over demands for justice.

## **Signatories (201 Black faculty members and supporters)**

**Tanya Washington Hicks, Professor, College of Law, Affiliate faculty African American Studies Dept**

**Akinyele Umoja, Professor, African American Studies**

**Joyce E. King, Benjamin E. Mays Endowed Chair for Urban Teaching, Learning & Leadership, Dept of Education Policy Studies, CEHD**

**Corneill A. Stephens, Professor, College of Law**

**Janice Fournillier, Associate Professor, Dept of Educ Policy Studies, CEHD**

**Wendy Simonds, Professor, Sociology, CAS**

**Elizabeth J. West, Professor, Dept of English**

**Natalie King, Assistant Professor, Science Education, Dept of Middle and Secondary Education College of Education & Human Development**

**Julie A. Washington, Professor and Chair, Dept of Communication Sciences and Disorders**

**Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Chair, Dept of Middle and Secondary Education**

**Dr. Maurice Hobson, Associate Professor of African American Studies and Faculty Affiliate in the Urban Studies Institute**

**Tonia Durden, Clinical Associate Professor, Dept of Early Childhood and Elementary Education College of Education & Human Development**

**Gwendolyn Benson, Associate Dean for Faculty Development and Partnerships College of Education and Human Development**

**Makungu Akinyela, Associate Professor, African American Studies Dept**

**Lauren Sudeall, Associate Professor, College of Law**

**Courtney Anderson, Associate Professor, College of Law**

**Michelle A. Nelson, Clinical Associate Professor, Byrdine F. Lewis School of Nursing**

**Ursula Thomas, Associate Professor Education, Associate Chair-Cultural and Behavioral Sciences Online**

**Marcia Jones Cross, MS., CNP, Clinical Instructor, Department of Marketing (J. Mack Robinson College of Business)**

**Prentiss A. Dantzer, Assistant Professor, Urban Studies Institute, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies**

**K. Jurée Capers, Associate Professor, Department of Public Management and Policy, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies**

**Stacey French-Lee, Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education**

**Natalie R. Davis, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Early Childhood & Elementary Education, CEHD**

**Desmond F. Goss, Lecturer, Department of Sociology**

**Akilah Heggs Lee, PhD, CCC-A, Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders**

**Kim Ramsey-White, Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Public Health**

**La'Twan Roddey, Grants and Contracts Officer, Early Childhood and Elementary Education, College of Education and Human Development**

**M. James Kahiga, Professor of Economics**

**Chantee L. Earl, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Middle and Secondary Education**

**Angela M. Miles, Clinical Instructor, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders**

**Melody D. Kelley**

**Stacey Wallen, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders**

**Tracy McKinney, Clinical Assistant Professor, College of Education & Human Development**

**Donna J. Smith, Faculty, Academic Professional, School of Public Health**

**Jonathan B Sylvester, Senior Lecturer, Dept of Biology**

**Tomeka M. Davis, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology**

**Naomi Jessup, Assistant Professor, Early Childhood Elementary Education**

**April S. Davenport, Adjunct Professor, Department of English**

**Amani Marshall, Senior Lecturer, Department of History**

**Ketisha J. Kinnebrew, Assistant Project Director, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies**

**Moraima "Mo" Ivory, Professor of Practice & Director of the Entertainment, Sports & Media Law Initiative**

**Yolanda Travis, College of Law Technology Coordinator**

**Ambrosia Berry, Capitol Hill Child Enrichment Center**

**Chamara Jewel Kwakye, Lecturer, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies**

**Ashley Salmon, Research Coordinator, Center for Leadership in Disability, School of Public Health**

**Brandy Owens Domengeaux, Senior Lecturer, College of Law**

**Kinda Abdus-Saboor, Lecturer, College of Law**

**Missale Ayele, Ed Tech Specialist, School of Public Health**

**Lakeyta M. Bonnette-Bailey, Associate Professor in African America Studies**

**Cyntoria Johnson, Clinical Assistant Professor, Dept. of Criminal Justice & Criminology**

**Charity T. Gordon, Clinical Assistant Professor, Middle and Secondary Education**

**Brian Williams, PhD, Clinical Professor, Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education and Director, Alonzo A. Crim Center for Urban Educational Excellence**

**Naderia Wade, Adjunct Professor, Department of English**

**Naeshia McDowell, Program Coordinator, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, School of Public Health**

**Danny Darby Curriculum Coordinator Child Development Centers at GSU**

**Japera J. Hemming, PhD, Assistant Project Director, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies**

**Tiffany King, Associate Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Affiliate Faculty, African American Studies Institute for Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies**

**Tiffany A. Player, Assistant Professor, Dept. of History**

**Shaneeeka Favors-Welch, Teaching Assistant, Middle and Secondary Education**

**Jonathan Gayles, Professor, African American Studies Dept.**

**Adrienne L. King, Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Public Health**

**Tameka Lester, Associate Clinical Professor, College of Law**

**Stephanie Evans, Professor, Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Affiliate faculty, African American Studies Dept**

**Akilah Thomas, Senior Training Specialist National SafeCare Training and Research Center Mark Chaffin Center for Healthy Development, School of Public Health**

**Warren Terrel Bunyan, Jr.**

**Trina Holloway, Librarian, GSU Law Library**

**LaToya Brown, Sponsored Programs Officer, Office of Sponsored Proposals and Awards**

**Alexandria Patterson, Project Coordinator, Mark Chaffin Center for Healthy Development, School of Public Health**

**William A. Edmundson, Regents' Professor of Law and Professor of Philosophy**

**Richard Rothenberg, Regents' Professor, School of Public Health**

**Jung Ha Kim, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Dept. of Sociology**

**Mindy Stomblor, Principal Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology**

**Katie L. Acosta, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology**

**Mathew D. Gayman, Associate Professor, Sociology, CAS**

**Amelia Jazwa, Research Associate, School of Public Health**

**Emanuela Guano, PhD, Professor, Department of Anthropology**

**Julie Kubala, Senior Lecturer, Women's Gender, and Sexuality Studies**

**Christa Wright, Assistant Professor of Population Health Sciences and Environmental Health**

**Matt Hayat, Professor, School of Public Health**

**Sarguetta Ervan**

**Dr. Lawrence M. Kiage, Associate Professor, Department of Geosciences**

**Susan Talburt, Professor, Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies**

**Rhina Fernandes Williams, PhD, Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Early Childhood Education & Elementary Education**

**Elizabeth M. McAdam, School of Public Health, NSTRC**

**Stephanie Hassan Richardson, Lecturer, Department of English**

**Steven P. Black, Associate Professor, Dept of Anthropology**

**Lia T. Bascomb, Associate Professor, African American Studies**

**Quintena Tinson, Radiation Safety Officer, University Research Services and Administration**

**Lisa Dickman Jackson, MPH, NSTRC Operations Coordinator**

**Asha Bell**

**Collins O. Airhihenbuwa, Professor, Health Policy and Behavioral Sciences**

**Jennifer Harris, Business Manager III, Georgia State University Library**

**Erin Vinoski Thomas, Research Assistant Professor, School of Public Health**

**Harry J Heiman, Clinical Associate Professor, School of Public Health**

**Vanessa Thomas-Meikle, Assistant Director – Office of Academic Assistance, School of Public Health**

**Jyll Walsh, Communications Coordinator, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, DrPH Student**

**Susan R. Snyder, Associate Professor, School of Public Health**

**Charlotte Alexander, Associate Professor, Robinson College of Business and College of Law (in support)**

**Darcy Meals, College of Law**

**Anne Marie Schipani-McLaughlin, Postdoctoral Fellow, Dept. of Health Policy and Behavioral Sciences, School of Public Health**

**David L. Ashley, Research Professor, Department of Population Health Sciences**

**Steven Black, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology**

**Anne M. Tucker, Professor of Law**

**Andrea Curcio, Professor of Law**

**Brooke Silverthorn, Assistant Clinical Professor, College of Law**

**Michaela Cotner, Research Coordinator, School of Public Health**

**Erin Mason, Assistant Professor, Counseling and Psychological Services**

**Robert E. Rice, Clinical Associate Professor and Program Coordinator School Counseling, CEHD**

**Franco Dispenza, Associate Professor, Department of Counseling and Psychological Services**

**Christine Stauber, Associate Professor, School of Public Health**

**Natsu Taylor Saito, Professor, College of Law**

**Kathryn (Kate) Wilson, Associate Professor, Department of History**

**Joanna Jury, Lecturer, Dept of History**

**Cirleen DeBlaere, Associate Professor, Department of Counseling and Psychological Services, College of Education and Human Development**

**Stephen D. Truscott, Professor, College of Education and Human Development**

**Windsor Adams, Senior Lecturer, College of Law**

**Erin C. Fuse Brown, Associate Professor, College of Law**

**Eric Segall, Ashe Family Chair Professor of Law**

**James Mitchell, Clinical Supervising Attorney, College of Law**

**Alessandra Raengo, Associate Professor of Moving Image Studies, School of Film, Media and Theatre**

**Jacob Selwood, Associate Professor of History**

**Julia Gaffield, Associate Professor, Department of History**

**Teresa Fisher-Ari (in support), Clinical Assistant Professor, College of Education & Human Development**

**Denise Z. Davidson, Professor, History Department**

**Dr. Teri Holbrook (in support), Associate Professor, Language and Literacy Education, Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education**

**Heather Bradley, Assistant Professor, Department of Population Health Sciences, Georgia State University School of Public Health**

**K. Journey Swafford, Assistant Clinical Professor, College of Education and Human Development**

**Glenn T. Eskew, Director, GSU World Heritage Initiative, Department of History**

**Jessica Pratt, School of Public Health**

**Laura E. Meyers, Clinical Associate Professor, College of Education & Human Development (in support)**

**Ruchi Bhatnagar, Clinical Assistant Professor, College of Education and Human Development**

**Pastor Yves T. McKenzie, Staff, College of Law**

**Aggie Ebrahimi Bazaz, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Film Media and Theatre, College of the Arts**

**Katie Simon Kurumada, Clinical Assistant Professor, College of Education and Human Development**

**Thomas Crisp, Associate Professor, Early Childhood and Elementary Education, CEHD (in support)**

**Laurah Norton, PSL, Dept. of English**

**Lisa Bliss**

**Lisa Domke, Assistant Professor of Language and (Bi)Literacy Education, Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education**

**Jacque-Corey Cormier, Ph.D.**

**Michelle Zoss, Associate Professor, Dept of Middle & Secondary Education**

**David Reginald Brown, College Business Officer, College of Education and Human Development**

**John A. Teal**

**Latresse Addison, Staff, College of Law**

**Cass Brewer, Associate Professor of Law**

**Nadia Behizadeh, Associate Professor of Adolescent Literacy Department of Middle and Secondary Education, College of Education and Human Development**

**Jade Petermon, Assistant Professor, School of Film, Media and Theater**

**Jo Ann Lee-Joyner**

**Nicole White, Budget Analyst, Office of Budget & Planning**

**Debbie Berens, Clinical Assistant Professor, College of Education & Human Development**

**Oluwapese M. Anderson, Occupational Health & Safety Officer**

**Deonne McNeill, IRB Compliance Specialist, University Research Services & Administration**

**Ryan J. Ziols, Assistant Professor, Early Childhood and Elementary Education (in support)**

**Darius Evans, Business Manager, Dept of Communication Sciences and Disorders**

**Emily Torstveit Ngara, Assistant Clinical Professor, College of Law**

**Mary F. Radford, Professor (retired), College of Law**

**Queenie Gamble, Auxiliary Services**

**Tonii Owens Lewis, Assistant Project Director, GSU Best Practices**

**Lisa M. Casanova, Environmental Health, School of Public Health**

**Avais Arkwright, MSW**

**Danie Marshall Doctoral Student EPSF**

**Nirej Sekhon, Associate Professor, GSU College of Law**

**Janhavi Dubhashi, MPH**

**Julius Cave, Jumpstart Program Director, Alonzo A. Crim Center for Urban Educational Excellence**

**Nancy Jo Schafer, Clinical Associate Professor, Early Childhood and Elementary Education**

**Kristina Brezicha, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Policy Studies, College of Education & Human Development**

**Jay Rajiva, Associate Professor of Global Anglophone Literature, Department of English**

**Jan M. Ivery, Associate Professor, School of Social Work**

**Sheryl Strasser**

**Sanon Williams, MPH Candidate**

**Francheska Starks, Graduate Student, Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education in College of Education and Human Development**

**Natasha Mcclendon, Doctoral Candidate. Educational Policy Studies**

**Cori Salmerón, Assistant Professor in Reading Education, Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education**

**Robert F. Weber, Associate Professor, College of Law**

**Noah Nelson, Masters in Teaching Candidate**

**Christian Valdez, Juntos Project Coordinator, College of Education & Human Development**

**Tene Davis, Ph.D., Associate Director, Early College Program, Alonzo A. Crim Center for Urban Educational Excellence**

**Dr. Nikita Patterson, Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics, Computer Science and Engineering**

**Dr. Jeffrey Morrison, Educational Policy Studies**

**Brian Barger, Research Assistant Professor, Population Health Sciences**

**Tamera Walls, Grants and Contract Officer III, School of Public Health**

**Sarah Bridges-Rhoads (in support), Associate Professor, Dept. of Early Childhood and Elementary Education, College of Education and Human Development**

**Cassandra Patterson**

**Carlos A. O. Pavão, Assistant Clinical Professor, School of Public Health**

**Dedra Davison, Business Manager, College of Education and Human Development**

**Brian Greer, Director of Development, School of Public Health**

**Sandra Mason, Business Manager, Reading Recovery Unit, Dept of Early Childhood and Elementary Education, College of Education and Human Development**

**Roby Greenwald, Assistant Professor, Department of Population Health Sciences, School of Public Health**

**Rosalind S. Chou, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology**

**Kathleen M. Baggett, Interim Director, Mark Chaffin Center for Healthy Development, Associate Professor, Second Century Initiative Scholar, Health Policy & Behavioral Sciences, School of Public Health**

**Marni Davis, Associate Professor, History**

**Catherine Y. Chang (Catharina), Professor, CEHD Director of International Programs**

**Alex Sayf Cummings, Associate Professor, Department of History**

**Terry F. Pechacek, Research Professor, Health Policy and Behavioral Science, School of Public Health**

**Laura F. Salazar, Professor, School of Public Health, Second Century Initiative (2CI) Scholar in Health Equity**

**Jonathan J. Orr, Clinical Associate Professor, Dept of Counseling and Psychological Services, CEHD**

**Sandra Holland**

**Susan-Sojourna Collier, Lecturer, School of Film, Media & Theatre**

**Fa'Tima Geeston, MBA, Grants & Contracts Officer II**

**Dr. DaShaunda Patterson, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Learning Sciences**

**Niklas Vollmer, Associate Professor, School of Film, Media & Theatre**

**Kendall Kerew, Associate Clinical Professor, College of Law**

**PaviElle Johnson, Chemistry Lecturer**

**Olivia Johnson, Marketing and Conference Services Manager, College of Law**

**Caren Morrison, Associate Professor, College of Law**

**Susan Navarro Smelcer, Assistant Professor, College of Law**

**Will Miller, Immigration Clinic, College of Law**