



ACADEMICS **FOR** BLACK
SURVIVAL **AND** WELLNESS

A TALE OF TWO TOWERS: AN OPEN LETTER AND CALL TO ACTION

from Pearis L. Bellamy and Della V. Mosley, PhD / Friday, June 5, 2020

“On behalf of your Black colleagues: we’re not okay. And you shouldn’t be either.”

[Danielle Cadet](#), 2020

INTRODUCTION

These are terrifying times. On Friday, May 27, 2020, we woke to a tweet from Trump: “When the looting starts, the shooting starts.” This was a gut punch that, combined with our despair over not seeing any news of Breonna Taylor’s assailants being arrested, set the tone for the rest of the day. “Forty-five’s” invocation of a 1967 quote from an anti-Black police chief and the continued lack of arrest of the people who murdered Breonna 75 days after her killing, registered to us both as psychological and political warfare. We were crushed and feeling the weight of these blows in our bodies and spirits. We had hoped this day would bring us some time to catch-up from an already emotionally draining week. News of back-to-back murders of Black folx compiled with the Black deaths due to coronavirus overwhelmed us. Friday was going to be our day to catch up...but that’s the thing about anti-Black racism. We never get a day to rest or catch-up. So, **we organized Academics for Black Survival and Wellness, a weeklong initiative where non-Black academics engage in training on anti-Black racism and white supremacy while Black academics engage in rest and resistance.**

Anti-Black racism is a “system of beliefs and practices that attack, erode, and limit the humanity of Black people” ([Carruthers, 2018, p. 26](#)). It is so ingrained in our nation’s fabric that every day is a battle to survive

and be well as a Black person, including within U.S. academia. Both of us are in the second year of our new roles in academia as a counseling psychology doctoral student (Pearis) and tenure-track faculty member (Della). This was supposed to be the year that we finally found our footing in roles that have felt foreign in so many ways. But before we are our roles and titles, we are Black women who love Black people--and who fight for Black people. We discussed the tension we feel as Black women in academia: wanting to grieve and resist, needing to persist in our academic tasks, and simultaneously dealing with racism in our classes, scholarship, and various academic communities. We were reminded of a Black undergraduate participant in one of our recent studies. She shared that despite COVID losses and ongoing racism, she cannot afford to grieve or momentarily process her racial trauma, because her non-Black peers were performing at their highest from the safety and comfort of their parents’ homes. She knew they would be her job and graduate school competition soon. She could not fathom rest, as her financial wellness in a racist society requires her to keep pushing. Keep producing. Keep her hurts inside. At every level, from undergraduate education to faculty positions, Black folx in the academy are having a vastly different experience than our non-Black peers. *This is a tale of two ivory towers, and it’s imperative that they collide if we ever want to see change.*

CALL TO ACTION

Academics for Black Survival and Wellness is a weeklong personal and professional development training that will begin on Juneteenth, June 19, 2020. In recognition of the toll that anti-Black racism, white supremacy, and

racial trauma has on Black people, we are inviting all academics to join with #Academics4BlackLives as we collectively strive to enhance the safety and wellness of Black students, staff, faculty and community members.

- We invite our white academic colleagues to give up some of your privilege (e.g., research productivity) during this week. Instead of advancing your own work, begin or continue the lifelong journey toward [critical consciousness of anti-Black racism](#). Join with fellow academics across the globe for a week of training (e.g., readings, lectures) and accountability (e.g., personal reflections, group dialogue).
- Non-Black Indigenous and People of Color have also experienced increased racial trauma under Trump and continue to experience exclusion in U.S. academic spaces. We recognize that not all of you can commit to pausing your work. However, we encourage each of our non-Black Indigenous and People of Color colleagues to participate in the training and accountability components.
- While non-Black graduate students and faculty engage in the weeklong training, we lovingly challenge Black academics to rest, resist, and take advantage of our Black wellness and survival related resources.

We are in a fight for our lives. We need each of you fighting with and for us if we are going to turn the tide on our campuses, broader communities, and world. Many of your university administrators have come forward, stating their commitments to supporting Black people, diversity, and inclusion. For these statements to translate to substantive change and wellness for Black people, all people in the academy must understand anti-Black racism and proactively work toward promoting Black survival and wellness. If you are a non-Black graduate student or faculty member, it is imperative you understand what your Black colleagues and “friends,” students, lab mates, mentees, and community members are experiencing and be accountable to that. We will teach you how, using culturally mindful, interdisciplinary, and

empirically grounded approaches. Before now, you may not have had much exposure to the study of anti-Black racism, white supremacy, and liberation. But Black academics and our comrades have **been** studying the pathways away from white supremacy and racism and toward Black survival and wellness. As Dr. Allison P. Harris [noted](#) “To those suggesting that political scientists need to start studying ‘this stuff’. We are and we’re here. You may not have heard of some of us, and we may not be published in the journals to which you first turn, but trust, we exist.” Pearis, Della, and the other amazing scholars who contributed to the Academics for Black Survival and Wellness training have been engaged in the rigorous and critical study of anti-Black racism and Black liberation in academic and community spaces for decades.

WHY JOIN ACADEMICS FOR BLACK SURVIVAL AND WELLNESS?

Academics for Black Survival and Wellness is a love offering, a cry, a call to action, a scholar-activist-healer intervention, a drop in the bucket, and an [elegant next step](#). For the Black students you teach or mentor as TAs, for the Black faculty member who sits at the table with you in the faculty meetings, for the Black RA learning what and how to research under your guidance, for the Black staff member working on your floor, and for the Black person who lives two blocks or two towns from you, the practices you develop and actions you take right now matter greatly. Your participation in this week, and the commitments you carry forward as a result of it, may literally enhance Black safety and wellness (depending how you show up and what you put in during and after). Your willingness to be accountable in the ways we have

outlined may literally prevent additional grief and trauma and even enhance wellness for us. Additionally, your personal commitment to protecting Black lives could enhance your critical consciousness, strengthen your voice, deepen your integrity, and expand your social network. In her book [Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope](#), bell hooks offers the following message to folks experiencing challenges with building diverse beloved communities: “my response is always to encourage them to work actively for racial justice, because that work will draw to them the community they desire, if their longing is sincere and not an excuse for living a life cloaked in unchanged whiteness.” Our asks are clearly outlined herein, and you will find our goals on our website www.Academics4BlackLives.com.

COMMITTING TO THE #ACADEMICS4BLACKLIVES INITIATIVE

If you are not Black, will you commit, show up, and be accountable to what you learn in this moment, and for as long as it takes to realize Black liberation? We are looking forward to hearing about the reflections, dialogues, and discoveries that emerge as you engage with our materials and your accountability groups throughout the training.

If you are Black, will you focus on rest and resistance and our resources, as suits you? We are looking forward to your wellness.

Academic community, will you ask your cohort and department and university to join us as we work, as a collective of scholars, to promote Black survival and wellness during and after the current racism pandemic? We are looking forward to your solidarity. If you are ready to respond to this call to action, now is the time to register, promote this call using #Academics4BlackLives, and prepare to demolish the metaphorical towers so we can build anew.



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