

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD AND ENSUING PROTESTS

As faculty members who teach in the Department of English at Wofford, we write to express our collective outrage and anguish over the horrific murder of George Floyd by four Minneapolis Police officers, the recent murders of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, and the not so recent, but still salient police killings of Freddie Gray, Philando Castille, Laquan McDonald, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice -- and so many others. George Floyd's death is only the most recent case in a four hundred year history of violence against Black people, other people of color and indigenous peoples in the US. We acknowledge this terrible history and see its continuing effects in, among other things, violence at the hands of federal and local law enforcement, white people weaponizing their privilege against people of color, discriminatory housing policies, massive wealth inequality, and disproportionate suffering in public health, as the current COVID-19 crisis has reinforced clearly.

We work in a context with a complex racial history. As a predominantly white institution, whose "Main" building was built by enslaved people; who educated (white) people for 110 years before admitting its first student of color; whose annual cost to attend is more than twice the average annual household income of the majority-minority city in which it has been located since 1854 and in which 45.7% of children live below the federal poverty level; whose tennis courts, Greek village, Senior housing, and the offices that house co-curricular high-impact practices all sit on land that was once a thriving, vibrant community of color, Wofford College has a complicated relationship with Spartanburg. We commit ourselves to acknowledging these land and labor histories in our classes and in our interactions with students, faculty, staff and the larger Spartanburg community. We believe that Wofford cannot achieve beneficial, equitable, and inclusive relationships without publicly acknowledging that racial inequity is our immediate reality, not simply our historical past. The college must facilitate healing on campus and in our community through real, measurable reparation and transformation—beginning with identifying and addressing systemic, long-term and daily practices that perpetuate white supremacy.

As scholars who work with language and literature, we are especially aware of the way words shape current events. Words are power. We recognize racism is woven into the literature we teach and the language we speak, and we are committed to addressing them in our work. For example, terms like "looters" and "rioters" are being used to undermine or discredit the current protest movement without taking into account their histories. Looting was practiced by white Europeans against Africans for centuries; what became known as American land was looted; rioting is a behavior that can be read as a powerful language to elicit real social change. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "a riot is the language of the unheard". We reject efforts that seek to restore stability and maintain the status quo over seeking justice.

We commit ourselves to developing ways of teaching that are anti-racist:

- we will ensure our syllabi promote equitable language and policies
- we will commit to diversifying content in our courses

- we will cultivate safe spaces in our classroom in which all who are present are affirmed
- we will work to dismantle racist structures in our classrooms, department, on campus and in our communities
- we will listen to and uplift voices of color.

Our concern about the effect of these events, this moment, and the cycle of racial violence on our students and colleagues at Wofford College is shared by other Wofford academic and administrative departments:

[Wofford College Campus Union](#)
[Studio Art/Art History/Theater](#)
[Sociology and Anthropology](#)
[The Career Center at Wofford](#)

Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures
Student Athlete Advisory Committee

What You Can Do Now

- Attend the “Anti-Racism Teach-In Series”: from 1PM-2:30PM Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, June 9-11. See Daily Announcements for more information or contact the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.
- We urge you to support [Black organizations](#).
- Please refer to the [following resources](#) for additional context, history, perspectives.

Signed:

Taifha Alexander (Assistant Dean of Students for Diversity and Leadership Development), Alan Chalmers, Chris Dinkins, Natalie Grinnell, Kimberly Hall, Sally Hitchmough, John Miles, Jim Neighbors, Kim Rostan, Julie Sexeny, George Singleton, Amy Sweitzer, Carey Voeller, John Ware, Patrick Whitfill, Carol Wilson