

We Say Their Names:

George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Sandra Bland, La’Vante Biggs, Akiel Denkins,  
Layleen Xtravaganza Cubilette-Polanco, Eric Garner, Chynal Lindsey, Freddie Gray,  
Atatiana Jefferson, Lennon Lacy, Trayvon Martin, Tony McDade, Clementa C. Pinckney, Tamir Rice,  
Antwon Rose, Breonna Taylor, Adama Traoré, Kawaski Trawick, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Aiyana  
Stanley-Jones . . . And far too many more.

These names have global, national, and local resonance.

These names comprise those slain in the South, here in the Triangle, across the nation.

These names include those felled within LGBTQIA+ communities by anti-Black violence.

**Statement of Commitment and  
Plan of Action  
Department of English and Comparative Literature**

Approved by Departmental Vote July 2020

We support the movement for Black lives.

It is with a heart of renewed commitment that the Department of English and Comparative Literature issues a statement of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement. The Movement’s tenacious struggle against anti-Black racism and state violence has re-galvanized a resolve in our department to abolish systemic racism in its multiple forms. Our department has spoken out strongly in favor of removing from our campus certain historic remnants of white supremacy, such as the confederate statue, yet we know that the removal of such symbolism is but one step along the road we must take.

We therefore pledge through our instruction and scholarship to counter proactively the status quo of white patriarchal hegemony, which thrives upon the reproduction of racism — and specifically anti-black racism — in largely amorphous forms. We also renounce the quotidian practice of racism and anti-black police violence represented in the actions of the “Amy Coopers” of the world — those who exploit systemic police violence every day by wielding normative whiteness, sexuality, and normative gender/cis gender identity as weapons against black people, amplifying the stereotype that black people are an automatic social threat. This means that we will work diligently to develop a vibrant program of interventions that draw upon research emanating from critical race studies, broadly construed, and black critical theory, in its most specific applications.

This work will be arduous, but it is work that critical black humanism has long undertaken, and in many ways — some of it accomplished outside of the Academy due to Jim Crow and segregation — this early work empowered the Modern Civil Rights Movement. Today, a new movement powered by recent generations that include our own students and alums — the Black Lives Matter Movement — has taken up the call for an inexorable process of change. The voice of energetic youth has drawn upon the wisdom of the ages to show us a new way. We determine to use all of our expertise and artistry as we devise with them new knowledges that work to dismantle and abolish any transnational techniques of white supremacy that may be reproduced in our curricula. We will continue to foster and enhance a curriculum that reflects a new critical humanism, always alert to the resilience of white supremacy and prepared to eradicate it.

To commit to “diversity” and “inclusion” is not enough: the very history of these terms reproduces a whiteness that deems itself originary and central to the structures of power. Instead of pledging simply

to listen to faculty and staff of color, and to present with greater commitment the work of Black writers and thinkers along with that of indigenous writers, writers of color more broadly construed, and writers representing an expanse of marginalized communities, we pledge a pro-active, abolitionist-oriented approach to white supremacy. We commit to concerted departmental action to uproot the long histories of systemic racism and racial genocide in western literature, literary studies, and rhetoric/writing studies wherever we uncover them as we go along.

We pledge, in the short term, to make the Department of English and Comparative Literature a “safe space” for blackness and difference. We pledge, in the long term, to make obsolete the need for such safe spaces. Our goal lies beyond “diversity” and “inclusion of difference”: we aim instead to transform the spaces around us into radical spaces of scholarship, teaching, learning, and practice wherein no welcome is needed but is always offered, and we are all at home.

We pledge as a department to take up the following initiatives:

- A recognition that institutional structures across the United States, as well as our own in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, are premised upon the erasure and marginalization of black and brown bodies, black and brown experience, and black and brown knowledge;
- A call to reconfigure radically our campus system of public safety, so that it no longer reproduces on our campus the roots of systemic state violence against black and brown people;
- A review of our pedagogies, curricula, and coursework aimed at uprooting any remnants of white supremacy and identifying implicit and unconscious racial biases wherever they persist;
- A call for advanced institutional support through a broad array of innovative peer-reviewed research and cutting edge methodologies in anti-bias training and education for our students (e.g., classroom incivilities and teaching evaluations), instructional staff at all ranks, graduate admissions committees, search committees, tenure committees, and post-tenure review committees, aimed at identifying the insidious remains of white supremacy;
- A recognition that our ongoing efforts to recruit and retain undergraduate and graduate students of color reflect a renewed commitment to the mission of UNC as a state university with a legal mandate to admit 83% of its student body from residents of the state of North Carolina, and that people of African descent makeup 23% of North Carolina’s population.
- A recognition that our ongoing efforts to recruit faculty of African descent, of the African diaspora, and faculty of color reflect a renewed commitment to dive deep and strategically into a national pool of highly qualified candidates for faculty positions at UNC as we seek new faculty hires that more accurately reflect the diverse demographic of North Carolina – a commitment announced by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the June 22 Faculty Executive Council meeting, partly in response to the presentation of the Roadmap for Racial Equity;
- A commitment to support for our majors and elective students alike at both the graduate and undergraduate levels through mentorship, independent studies, research funds, creative writing prizes, essay prizes, and honors theses and doctoral dissertation prizes, aimed at redressing this set of problems.

By affirming that we stand with our diverse Black communities, as we issue a call to protect those whom systemic violence has made most vulnerable, we also, as humanists, commit to realizing a more humane and equitable society in which to live, work, and reach our highest potential. We commit to antiracist scholarship and instruction that counter anti-black violence, and to shifting perspectives that will reinvigorate our research and teaching, advising and mentoring. As our needs and those of our students evolve, this plan of action — which is a living document — will evolve in real time to meet those needs.

We began our call to action with names. We end with a query from [MappingPoliceViolence.Org](https://MappingPoliceViolence.Org):  
**“Do you know their names?”**



These names map faces beneath the statistics selected from databases such as Mapping Police Violence and the Center for Policing Equity

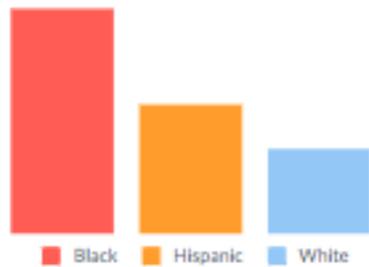
*“1 in 5 Americans interacts with law enforcement yearly. Of those encounters, 1 million result in use of force. And if you’re Black, you are 2-4 times more likely to have force used than if you are White .”*  
—Center for Policing Equity

### **Mapping Police Violence: A Few Stats**

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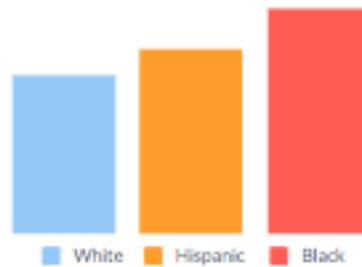
## Black people are most likely to be killed by police

**3X** more likely to be killed by police than white people.



Police Killings per 1 million population

**1.3X** more likely to be **unarmed** compared to white people.

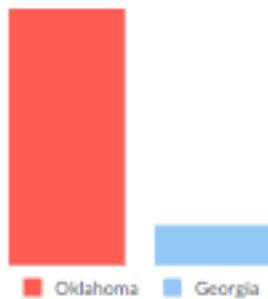


% Killed by Police Unarmed, 2013-19

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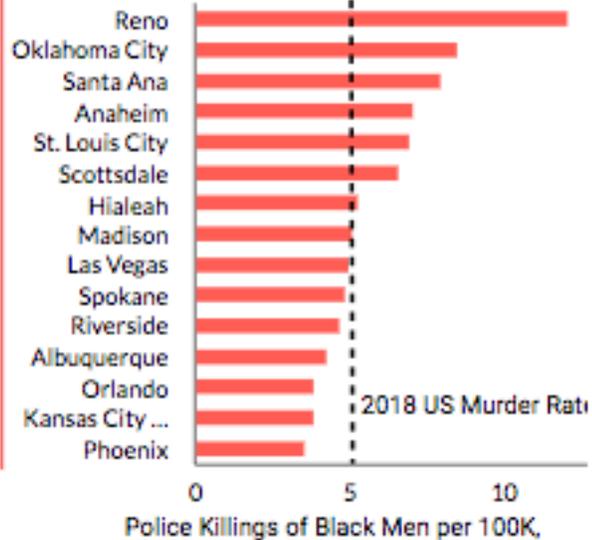
## Where you live matters

**6X** more likely to be killed by police in Oklahoma than Georgia.



Police Killings of Black People per 1M

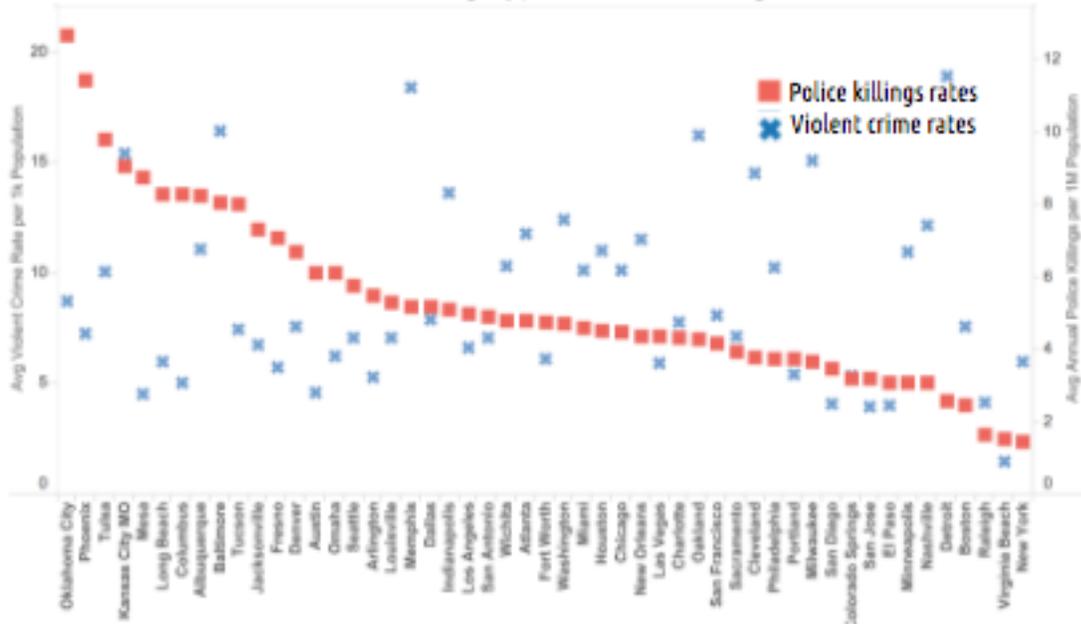
**8** of the 100 largest city police departments kill black men at **higher rates** than the US murder rate.



## It's not about crime

Levels of violent crime in US cities do not determine rates of police violence.

Violent crime rates and rates of killings by police in America's 50 largest cities, 2013-2016



## There is no excuse for police violence

### Buffalo, NY

Population: 258,959  
 Percent People of Color: 50%  
 Violent Crime Rate: 12 per 1000

**0** People killed by Buffalo police from 2013 - 2016

### Orlando, FL

Population: 255,483  
 Percent People of Color: 42%  
 Violent Crime Rate: 9 per 1000

**13** People killed by Orlando police from 2013 - 2016

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## There is no accountability

**99%** of killings by police from 2013-2019 have not resulted in officers being charged with a crime.



■ No Criminal Charges   ■ Officer(s) Charged   ■ Officer(s) Convicted