

Brooklyn College Faculty and Staff Against Anti-Blackness and For Systemic Change

Dear President Anderson,

As members of Black Faculty and Staff (BFS), Faculty of Color (FOC) Group, and Latino Faculty and Staff (LFSO), we are greatly affected by the murders of Black people by police officers and white vigilantes. Even before the mass uprisings across the country, we witnessed the vulnerability of our students as COVID-19 exposed the structural fault lines where Black suffering is distinct, often beyond comparison. Now that conscientious people across the nation have joined in protests to condemn racism, corporations and institutions have seized the moment to join the chorus of those who utter the name of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McCade. However, we at Brooklyn College are disturbed by the way in which Black suffering is placated, ignored, and co-opted, not for social justice but in the perpetuation of anti-black racism.

Anti-blackness names the specific kind of racism that describes the conditions that Black people face, dehumanization that has its origins in the historical project of Western modernity that serves as the foundation for global racial capitalism. Focusing on anti-blackness in discussions about racism pushes back against the idea that all ethnic minorities have the same lived experiences and can be understood within a singular logic, often signified by those who champion “diversity and inclusion”.

Attention to anti-blackness requires the recognition that racist violence is not limited to spectacular displays of state violence such as in the case of the murder of George Floyd. An awareness of anti-blackness recognizes the pervasive violence that is manifested by stereotypes that label Black students as less capable and intelligent and view the research of Black faculty as biased and less scholarly. In both instances, Brooklyn College becomes simultaneously a site of general hostility and social isolation. Institutional racism has been recognized for some time at Brooklyn College and the current administration has campaigned “We Stand Against Hate” since 2017, yet the most subtle and effective form of anti-blackness is the liberal rhetoric that advocates equality and boasts of progress while the lived experiences of Black people stand in contrast.

We are encouraged that some of the broader social and economic conditions that are highlighted by Black Lives Matter activists are getting recognition but we condemn the opportunism that seizes upon the spectacle of black deaths; when in reality anti-blackness is a regular feature on campus. Brooklyn College has been inert when it comes to addressing the daily abuses of Black staff, faculty, and students. Additionally, the faint response to the declining number of Black people across the college is normalized anti-blackness. *What would a Black life-affirming campus look like?* We pose this question to college administrators and all in leadership positions, who sincerely value equity, to imagine a campus that is proactive and committed to social justice. When BFS met with President Michelle Anderson on February 19, 2020, they presented several low cost, modest recommendations that the college could put into action as a display of “good faith”. BFS discussed the development of a mentoring program for Black faculty and all junior faculty. They requested the development of the formal position of a Black staff ombudsperson, who would be drawn from the existing staff, in recognition of the work that is already being done informally. Lastly, they requested a fix to an account issue that would better allow them to allocate scholarships and awards to deserving students. BFS endeavored to create a better working relationship between faculty and staff and the upper

administration to end the practice of being talked at and not talked with. The dwindling Black presence on campus cannot be described as less than a crisis and in the months that followed their concerns have been received with mostly silence.

Brooklyn College is situated in a neighborhood that is 34.1% Black but only has a 17% Black student population and a dismal 6.5% full-time Black faculty body (CUNY Quarterly Report Jan 2018). If Brooklyn College is opposed to anti-blackness it must first acknowledge that it is pervasive and is expressed ideologically and materially and the demands the appropriate action:

- the curriculum we teach: programs and departments that support culturally relevant pedagogy (Africana and Puerto Rican and Latino Studies among others) are systemically underfunded and indirectly targeted by budget cuts.
 - We demand: culturally relevant programs have specific protections to ensure the expansion of anti-racist pedagogy and an equitable distribution of funds and support across disciplines, programs and departments.
- the over-representation of Black people in underpaid, undervalued, and contingent jobs on campus;
 - We demand: all jobs at BC are paid a living wage, with clear pathways to promotion and viable means to job security; prioritize hiring and promotions internally (across roles: adjuncts, HEOs, CLTs);
 - We demand: a faculty and staff that is representative of the student body, specifically targeting Black hires with attention to acute lack of representation in certain disciplines, including mentors to support promotion to full professor.
- the lack of recognition (either in salary/pay or public acknowledgment) of the amount of invisible labor Black faculty and staff contribute to the college. Black faculty and staff routinely perform unrecognized labor beyond job description to confront anti-blackness in their institutional roles and to advocate for Black students who suffer regular indignities;
 - We demand: changing promotion and tenure policies to honestly reflect the hidden workload of Black faculty and staff
 - BFS's suggestion for a Diversity Mentorship Coordinator and a Staff Ombudsperson could oversee this project; the under-hiring (including hiring below rank) and lack of retention of Black faculty and staff contributes to the revolving door of faculty and staff and diminishes morale.
- the presence of the NYPD on campus extends a continuum of policing of students, faculty and staff from majority Black neighborhoods to the feeling of surveillance and criminalization at their institution of higher education;
 - We demand: the immediate removal of NYPD from campus and a longer-term goal to reimagine campus security with increased social services that support the safety and well-being of all people on campus: this includes increased funding for: mental health services; dedicated funds for Black students in the form of scholarships, grants and post docs; mentorship programs; de-escalation, conflict resolution and restorative justice training for all faculty and staff.

This moment in our country is the culmination of systemic denial of dignity that typifies anti-blackness. This form of structural inequality cannot be addressed through empty statements of standing in solidarity and promoting "diversity". We advocate a transformational solidarity that aligns departments, programs, and campus life with an ethos of social justice that is action oriented. Transformational solidarity means that the systemic racism, surveillance, and

austerity that is a normal feature of society is aggressively struggled against on campus. Transformative solidarity understands that struggles against domination are shared and that anti-blackness and austerity must be fought hand in hand. This is a fight that involves Albany and state politics but it begins with us on campus. We require a shift in the current institutional logic of the administration urging faculty and staff to do more for our students with less.

This moment calls for a transformative solidarity and not token statements of support. By embracing this moment of profound possibility in response to this crisis, is to imagine and create a life-affirming campus we do not have, but require.

*Endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Brooklyn College Chapter of the PSC-CUNY Union