

## **Black Lives Matter**

We stand at a historic moment, when millions of protesters around the world are taking to the streets to proclaim that Black lives matter, and to protest police brutality. The killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Chantel Moore, Elijah McClain, and countless others at the hands of the police demand justice. The History Department at the University of Victoria supports the cause of anti-racism and commits to making meaningful changes to advance that goal.

The problem of racist policing has deep roots. In the United States, it began with slave patrols, which enforced the system of unfree labour that was the foundation of the North American economy. In the decades bridging the end of slavery and the modern Civil Rights Movement, White Americans used both legal and extralegal policing and violence to limit the social, economic, and political power of African Americans, predominantly in the southern states. In the twentieth century, the repeal of Jim Crow segregation laws led directly to the expansion of the prison system, which disproportionately burdened Black people. In the twenty-first century, the threat of terrorism has been used to justify the militarization of the police, producing the circumstances in which peaceful protesters have been attacked by the police with tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets.

Canada is also the site of historic anti-Black racism and racist policing. Free Blacks fleeing to Canada in the era of the American Revolution found themselves re-enslaved or denied the rights of other Loyalists. The RCMP was established in 1873 to remove Indigenous peoples from their lands; their cultural practices were criminalized and parents imprisoned for refusing to send their children to residential schools. There have been close to 500 fatal police encounters in Canada since 2000, with Black and Indigenous people disproportionately the victims of this violence. Systemic racism in Canada is intertwined with the history of settler colonialism and violence against Black and Indigenous people.

It is not enough for the History Department, the Faculty of the Humanities, or the University of Victoria to express solidarity with anti-racism, and anti-Black racism in particular. This is a moment that calls for action. In Minneapolis, a veto-proof majority of the City Council has expressed support for defunding the city's police department. In New York, the state legislature has voted to repeal Section 50-A, a law that kept police officers' disciplinary records secret. The Canadian chapter of #BlackLivesMatter is publicly campaigning to #DefundThe Police. This movement seeks to redirect the \$41 million spent per day on policing in Canada to more effective methods of providing safety in Black communities. Moreover, following the recent police killing of Chantel Moore, a Nuu-Chah-Nulth woman living in New Brunswick, Indigenous leaders and organizations are once again demanding an end to police brutality against Indigenous people.

The History Department of the University of Victoria must also put solidarity into practice. One key way is to begin to take the necessary steps to de-colonize our curriculum, since the history of anti-Black racism in the west is embedded within the history of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. The History Department must teach more courses focused on the lives of Black people throughout the diaspora, and draw on more texts written by Black authors. The resurgent visibility of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 crisis underscores the need to teach our students about the ugly histories of racist discourses and to remain attentive to these critical conversations in our scholarly, professional, and personal work. As members of the department, we must continuously challenge one another so that our classrooms are safer and more welcoming spaces, particularly for Black, Indigenous, students of colour, and those from other marginalized groups.

We must also seek to diversify. To date, there has never been a Black faculty member in the History Department. This is sobering evidence of the impact of structural racism within academia and our discipline. In the past decade, the department has repeatedly sought approval to hire a historian of Africa and the African diaspora, with the hopes of using that hire to diversify the faculty as well as our course offerings. The Department of History continues to prioritize the hiring of Black faculty members and urges the University to consider a cluster hiring approach across the Humanities and UVic. Now we the undersigned members of the History Department once again call on the University to back up its statements of solidarity with material resources to support Black students and scholars.

To quote the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., “This is not time for romantic illusions and empty philosophical debates about freedom. This is a time for action.”

Sincerely,

Peter Baskerville

Sara Beam

Gregory Blue

Neilesh Bose

Paul Bramadat

Penny Bryden

Martin Bunton

Zhongping Chen

Rachel Hope Cleves

Jason Colby

Peter Cook

Consuela Covrig

Beatriz de Alba-Koch

Simon Devereaux  
David Dolff  
Patrick Dunae  
Norman Fennema  
Theresa Gallant  
Mariel Grant  
Larry Hannang  
Matthew Koch  
Patrick Lozar  
John Lutz  
Lynne Marks  
Andrea McKenzie  
Brian McKercher  
Angus McLaren  
Christine O'Bonsawin  
John Price  
Eric Sager  
Tom Saunders  
Oliver Schmidtke  
Kristin Semmens  
Georgia Sitara  
Jordan Stanger-Ross  
Veronica Strong-Boag  
Elizabeth Vibert  
Serhy Yekelchuk