

5 June 2020

We, the faculty in the Department of English and Modern Languages at Shepherd University, feel compelled in this moment to declare emphatically and unequivocally that **BLACK LIVES MATTER**. We will not soft-peddle our commitment to racial justice and fair treatment with the palliative sentiment that all lives matter; that is not up for debate, as we demonstrate repeatedly in our classrooms, our research efforts, and our engagement with the University and wider community. Given the outrage and protests occurring across the country, now is the moment—indeed, it is well past time—for us to affirm and aver that **BLACK LIVES SPECIFICALLY MATTER**.

Ours is not a declaration stimulated by George Floyd’s brutal and horrific murder on May 25th, nor is it a response triggered by the killings of Breonna Taylor or Ahmaud Arbery. Those, sadly, are only the most recent examples of black lives being destroyed by widespread social, societal, and systemic racism in this country. When the first black bodies were brought to the Jamestown settlement in 1619, our nation began its centuries-long pattern of prioritizing white lives over black lives. That devaluing of black lives continues to this day. Enough is enough!

We commit to *all* of our students that we will not allow racism and bigotry to go unchecked in our classrooms. Learning can only occur in spaces where all individuals can be evaluated by their deeds rather than their phenotype (or race or ethnicity or native language or age or sex or gender or sexual identity). We will do our best to ensure that discourse and discussion in every one of our courses respects all people—but not bigoted opinions and unfounded ideas—equally. In our literature courses, we will explore provocative texts that include devastatingly painful episodes and incendiary language, because they are important indicators of who we as a nation and a people are, but we will do so in a thoughtful, sensitive way. And when we fall short of this promise, we guarantee that we will step forward, own up to our mistakes, and strive to do better in the future. We are all subsumed in America’s racist ideology, so we, a group of white scholars and educators, might not get it right every time, but we promise to keep trying.

Our commitment to educational equality can only begin, we believe, when we as a faculty and we as a country begin to redress longstanding wrongs by affirming that **BLACK LIVES MATTER**, too. We declare that here, now, and always.

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