

To all faculty, staff, and students in Communication Studies:

## Black Lives Matter

As the nation and world rise up in outrage and grief following the most recent state-sanctioned murders of black people in the US, we in the Department of Communication Studies at SF State join in solidarity with those protesting voices. Last week, graduate students in the department called on us to act in response to the systemic anti-blackness and racism. These students exemplify the leadership embodied by black youth and other communities of color in the current protest movements: they are righteously angry; they demand fundamental and lasting change. As a department that is sometimes a disciplinary leader, one that aims to—and struggles to more consistently—enact social justice, all of us, especially those of us with white privilege, need to do better in terms of directly addressing and resisting anti-blackness and supporting our students, faculty, and staff who are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). Inspired by and in solidarity with our students, we vow to align our departmental practices, curricula, and communication with our espoused values.

Communication Studies as a discipline has long been complicit in systemic anti-blackness, in, for example, its centering of white, U.S., and Eurocentric research, and its promotion of primarily white scholars for leadership positions. On social media platforms and in disciplinary conversations, faculty and graduate students who are BIPOC have been providing long lists of instances of micro and macro aggressions in their graduate programs, their departments, and their professional organizations (e.g., #CommunicationSoWhite).

Communication is constitutive—that is, communication does not just report or describe the world, it creates and recreates the world. When we say Black Lives Matter, we recreate the world in a small and profound way that gives the lie to so-called color blind constructions. However, individual acts of communication cannot stand alone—they must be part of ongoing, repeated acts in service of dismantling structures of white supremacy, anti-blackness, and racial injustice.

As our former and much missed colleague, Javon Johnson, reminds us:

. . . black people are a threat to safety simply because we are black, “and the resistance to enslavement,” or perhaps resistance in general “is the performative essence of blackness,” which, in a white supremacist, anti-black world, must be reined in. Hell, gay safe spaces, prison (not justice) systems, HIV/AIDS discourses, and this entire country were built on the logic that black bodies are inherently unsafe and must be reeled in.  
(p. 179) \*

Four hundred years of structural racism will not be swiftly dismantled. But its continued presence in our institutions is unconscionable and we must not delay in doing what is necessary. In the days ahead, we will work together as faculty, staff, and students in Communication Studies to plan and take action in multiple ways. We look forward to coming together in this undertaking.

Yours in Solidarity,

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*\* Johnson, J. (2015). Black joy in the time of Ferguson. QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking, 2(2), 177-183.*