

2020 Anti-Racism Statement and Action Items from The Writing Seminars

As a creative writing department, we know that the words we use have power. James Baldwin wrote that “not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” We, the faculty members of The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University, commit to facing racism and inequality in words and working toward equity and inclusion in our actions. Baldwin also wrote, “I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.” We, too, recognize criticism as a loving and generous act (including the uncomfortable work of self-criticism), an act necessary to imagining and building a more equitable future.

We condemn racism in all forms, including the racist and militarized policing of our communities and the racist violence that has caused the deaths of Black Americans like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and numerous other individuals. We understand that, while grieving these losses, Black Americans are also grieving the disproportionate toll of the ongoing pandemic on Black communities. We understand that valuing Black lives means making a commitment to challenging the underlying inequalities that lead to such a stark difference in outcomes. We affirm that Black Lives Matter.

We also understand that expressing a desire for Black people’s basic survival is step zero in creating communities where Black people feel welcome, heard, and valued. In affirming the value of Black lives, we must also acknowledge our own personal and institutional responsibility to work toward an equitable present and future in our classrooms and community. Creative writing, publishing, and higher education are not immune to the historical legacy of entrenched and institutionalized white supremacy. We commit ourselves to the work of anti-racism within our institution and our department, recognizing that such a commitment entails a process of self-education and reflection, listening, and concrete action.

We have collaboratively developed and will collectively work on the following practical, interlinked steps:

- **Hire and retain tenured/tenure-track faculty of color, focusing on URM faculty.**
- **Distribute the labor of anti-racism and inclusion equitably across faculty.**
- **Diversify curriculum and pedagogically address issues of race and representation.**
- **Regularly solicit input on issues of diversity and inclusion.**
- **Address equity in editing, curating, and awarding.**
- **Prioritize diversity in graduate admissions.**
- **Recruit and retain a more diverse undergraduate student body.**

We recognize that our challenges are not conducive to quick fixes and therefore **promise to hold ourselves accountable in our progress**, both through stock-taking and transparency. We don’t think of our statement as a one-off, but as the beginning of a process. To this end, we will institute an annual review to see what steps we’ve taken, to measure the difference they’ve made, and to see what further steps are necessary. We recognize that we have to build trust in the sincerity of our intentions and commitment, that some of our goals will take longer than others, and that additional actions and initiatives will likely be necessary, particularly in response to student feedback. Thank you for joining us in this work of imagination, reflection, education, critique, and action.

Sincerely,

The Faculty of The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University