Black Lives Matter:

Center for International Studies' Position on Social Justice and Equity

Prepared by the Faculty and Staff of the Center for International Studies

OHIO University

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Author Note

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Abstract

This position paper on Black Lives Matter is a collaboration of the faculty and staff of the Center for International Studies of OHIO University. This paper was conceived during the summer and fall of 2020 as a response to the Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper critically evaluates the past, present, and future positioning of the Center for International Studies within OHIO University and develops recommendations in the struggle against systemic racism that move us toward equity and social justice.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, racism, international studies, OHIO University

The Center for International Studies denounces racism in all its forms. We support the Black Lives Matter movement and stand in solidarity with those protesting police violence and the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Elijah McClain, Tony McDade, Dominique "Rem'mie" Fells, Riah Milton, Layleen Polanco, and many other Black Americans and people of African descent. As we rethink our commitment to Black Lives Matter, we reflect on the call for the #ScholarStrike and teach-in for racial justice: "We can no longer sit quietly amidst state violence against communities of color. We believe that it's of crucial importance for those of us in higher education to take a stand in solidarity with our students and the communities we serve" (Gannon, 2020). As we celebrate and join the struggle to uplift the lives and cultures of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) throughout the world, we are saddened that the centuries-long sufferings of these groups due to racial pandemics is, today, exacerbated by the overlapping COVID-19 health pandemic, which disproportionately has impacted the individual and collective lives of these marginalized communities. Here at Ohio University, we support Black students, faculty, staff, and our colleagues in the Division of Diversity and Inclusion, the Multicultural Center, the Office of Multicultural Student Access and Retention (OMSAR), the Department of African American Studies, the Black Faculty Association, the Council of Employees and Staff of African Descent (COESAD), the International Student Union, and International Student and Faculty Services, among other allies.

Uniquely situated to address the global problem of systemic racism, the Center's mission is to "advance excellence in education, research, and outreach for Ohio University by fostering an innovative academic community." Together with similar institutions across the U.S., the Center aspires to be a model of distinction in educating globally engaged citizens, promoting sustainable and responsible development, and contributing to peace and justice in the world. We

strive to achieve these goals by designing and embracing interdisciplinary curricula and perspectives in our international and global-studies academic programs, and by promoting diversity, inclusion, equity, access, and justice at Ohio University and beyond.

Our team of CIS faculty and staff includes people with diverse national, geographical, and racial backgrounds. In the past months, we have been grappling together with new, honest, and difficult conversations about race and its different effects in our lives. This was especially prompted by the horrifying footage of George Floyd's murder by the police near Powderhorn Park in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020 (Otárola, 2020). We started a series of conversations in Summer 2020, in the immediate aftermath of his killing and the world-wide protests against systemic racism and police violence in the United States. This document was born out of those conversations. From the conversations we grew painfully aware that we, as a group, needed to go beyond mere "performative" allyship. We thus began an unpretentious and honest self-searching exercise as individuals and as an academic unit, critically evaluating CIS's past, present, and future positioning within the university and harnessing such introspection to develop recommendations in the struggle against systemic racism, inequity, and social injustice. As a result, we understood and determined that we needed to alter our own ways of thinking and doing, augment our contribution to institutional change towards justice and equity, and make conceptual and actionable recommendations to bring about change.

The CIS was founded in 1964 during the U.S. Civil Rights movement and the increased demand for area- and international-studies programs. It was a product of public interest but was also driven by U.S. Department of State national-security interests. It was initiated as a response to U.S. university faculty and student demands in the context of the Cold War, an era of radical international change marked by the decolonization of nations and peoples in the Global South

and the U.S. war in Vietnam. Charles King published a well-considered piece in *Foreign Affairs* on the complex and inherently tenuous entanglements of power and knowledge in the founding of International Studies in the U.S. academy. King (2015) puts it thus:

The rise of the United States as a global power was the product of more than merely economic and military advantages. Where the country was truly hegemonic was in its unmatched knowledge of the hidden interior of other nations: their languages and cultures, their histories and political systems, their local economies and human geographies. Through programs such as Title VIII, the U.S. government created a remarkable community of minutemen of the mind: scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates who possessed the linguistic skills, historical sensitivity, and sheer intellectual curiosity to peer deeply into foreign societies. Policymakers sometimes learned to listen to them, and not infrequently, these scholars even became policymakers themselves (p. 89).

The CIS has historically centered its programs on Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Teaching and research by CIS affiliated faculty also expanded to include comparative and international studies on the "Global South." The instruction and championing of world languages is one of the central pillars of the Center for International Studies, providing excellent instruction of often "less commonly taught" and "critical" languages to students and fostering a deeper cross-cultural understanding embodied in these languages. In past years, world-languages instruction housed in CIS (especially African and Asian languages) has been significantly supported by funds obtained from the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI National Resource Centers (NRC) Program, resulting from nationally competitive proposals written by grant-winning CIS program directors.

Pertaining to the general CIS curriculum, the Center's faculty members, like many of their colleagues at comparable institutions, have taught content courses using critical and methodological tools centered on the histories, perspectives, and experiences of BIPOC in the U.S. and around the world. The critical tools and methods include intellectual traditions of international relations, development studies, critical race theory, postcolonial and decolonial theories, feminist and gender theories, queer studies, and intersectionality. As such, this inclusive

and interdisciplinary approach has positioned the Center to become a uniquely equipped teaching/learning space of globally oriented intercultural conversations and anti-racist education.

We recognize that our duty as scholars and academic leaders is to understand our history, to conceptually wrestle with ideas and hard truths, and to strategically address the root causes of problems in our society and the world. We see our engagement in this deliberative process as part of an ongoing critique in which we systematically address and reveal not only the historical racial trauma and injustices that were afflicted on the Black Community in the United States, but also of what we ourselves have experienced and witnessed, as citizens, professionals, and individuals of diverse race, ethnic, and gender identities, living and working in the U.S. We critique and seek to dismantle racist systems that disadvantage and harm the BIPOC communities and create unearned privileges and advantages for white people. We critique and seek to honor the legacies of Native and Black resistance to slavery, colonization, and white supremacy.

The constructivist nature of race is evident, but racism is very real. We understand racism in its intrinsic relation to power. Racism is prejudice plus power, or "a prejudice against someone based on race, when those prejudices are reinforced by systems of power" (Oluo, 2018, p. 27). Or, as Ibram X Kendi puts it, racism is "a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities" (Kendi, 2019, pp. 17-18). Racial inequity is "when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing" (Kendi, 2019, p. 18).

In daily life, racism may be expressed through interpersonal conflict and individual behaviors and attitudes, and as the history of more than 400 years of the U.S. experience has shown, it is always deeply rooted in and operates in the context of structures, policies, and institutions. That is why the disparities and injustices of racism have been manifested through

genocide, slavery, colonialism, segregation, lynchings, mass incarceration, and police violence in the U.S. and around the world. Racism has also been used to wipe out entire ethnic groups, deprive humans of their dignity and humanity, and rape and plunder entire continents and indigenous populations.

Here at OHIO University, as we grapple with our history and current struggles with racism, we also must recognize that the Athens and regional campuses are sited on the indigenous lands of the Shawandasse Tula (Shawanwaki/Shawnee), Osage, Adena, and Hopewell cultures (Native Land Digital; U.S. Department of Arts & Culture). In the introduction of the Ohio Settlement Conference, Schoen (2020) reveals the complex social history of Ohio:

The first people in Ohio arrived more than 13,000 years ago. These Native Americans overcame rapid changes in climate, eventually building the state's first homes and becoming the state's first farmers.

More than 200 years ago a series of events and actions began to shape the state of Ohio we see today—its government, its economy, and its people. Empires clashed and diverse peoples mingled.

Immigrants "settling" Ohio came from the East Coast and Germany, from free people of African descent to slaves crossing the Ohio River, from merchants to Johnny Appleseed. They fought over what freedom in a rapidly expanding republican nation meant, and they left legacies and institutions of enduring significance, including Ohio University (p.1).

Indeed, the history of OHIO University is part and parcel of the history of European colonialism in the Hocking River Valley and what is now the state of Ohio. OHIO was founded in 1804 in the image of ancient Athens, Greece, as a place of enlightenment and higher education for white Europeans who settled this region (Hollow, 2003). Some leaders of the university, especially founders Manasseh Cutler and Rufus Putnam, are reputed to be abolitionists and narrativized as actively involved in the Underground Railroad. DeWitt (2020) reflects on the roles of OHIO University founders:

Considered one of the most important legislative acts of the Confederation Congress, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 protected civil liberties and outlawed slavery in the new territories including what would become Ohio. While it did include a noxious fugitive slave clause, the Northwest Ordinance stands as the first U.S. government document to ban slavery. The negotiation of that was the work of Massachusetts Rev. Manasseh Cutler, who had joined several other Revolutionary War veterans, including Rufus Putnam and Winthrop Sargent, in forming the Ohio Company of Associates in 1786.

In the years to come, Cutler and Putnam would establish the first Ohio settlement of Marietta. They were also responsible for the establishment of Ohio University. While Cutler moved back to Massachusetts, his son Ephraim later came to settle permanently on Federal Creek. In 1802, Ephraim was selected as Washington County's delegate to the Ohio Statehood Constitutional Convention. Ephraim Cutler introduced the section to the Ohio Constitution barring slavery and cast the deciding vote for Ohio to enter the Union as a non-slave state (p. 1).

Nonetheless, as we reflect on the history and future of Ohio University, we must not forget that the founders created a university system *not* intended for the education of all, but one for white men, denying its space to women and Black and indigenous people. The founders' narrative upholds a pioneering white savior mythology and obscures the racist realities of settler colonialism, genocide, land occupation, and the dispossession of the indigenous peoples who lived in this region.

It is within OHIO's responsibility as an academic institution to disseminate critical knowledge about Native Americans and African Americans and the institution's history with them (Northwestern University, 2020). It is essential to deconstruct a eulogizing Eurocentric history. A critical history of the region must acknowledge, unpack, atone, and reinstate what is underrepresented, neglected, and erased. Consistent with the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion, as well as community engagement, we must work toward building honest, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with indigenous communities and communities of color (New York University; Northwestern University, 2020; Princeton University, 2020; U.S. Department of Arts and Culture).

In the spirit of the Black Lives Matter movement, we also want to consider the experiences of early Black pioneers at Ohio University. John Newton Templeton was the first Black student to attend Ohio University and the first Black American to earn a Bachelor's degree in the State of Ohio and the Northwest Territory. He was the fourth Black college graduate in the United States. Born into slavery on a cotton plantation in South Carolina, he was freed in 1813 and moved to Ohio with his family. According to the biography of Templeton by Perdreau and Perdreau (1980):

With the aid and encouragement of Rev. Robert G. Wilson, president of Ohio University (1824-1839), Templeton enrolled at the University in 1824. It is noteworthy that Ohio University, unlike many institutions of higher education at this time, had no restrictive clauses pertaining to race; any male youth who qualified for acceptance was admitted. While working his way through college, Templeton maintained a superior academic record and was an especially active member of the Athenian Literary Society. One of ten graduating students in the commencement exercise of 1828, Templeton delivered a speech entitled 'The Claims of Liberia.' After graduation he taught in Chillicothe, Ohio. In 1834, reversing his pro-Colonization stance, Templeton became one of the officers of the Chillicothe (Colored) Anti-Slavery Society. He finally settled in Pittsburgh in 1836, where he became the first teacher and principal of the African School, the first school for Black children in the city. In addition to his relentless political activities, Templeton was co-editor of The Mystery, an Afro-American newspaper dedicated to the fight for freedom and political emancipation. He died unexpectedly in 1851, but his memory lingered on in the hearts and minds of the local community. In 1915, Edward C. Berry, a prominent Black businessman and resident of Athens, donated a substantial contribution in honor of Templeton for the construction of the Alumni Gate (p. 1).

While OHIO's President Wilson supported Templeton's education, it was not without conditions. Templeton was being groomed to go back to Africa and to become a leader in Liberia. He chose not to return to Africa and instead focused on educating Black people and ending slavery in the United States. OHIO's second Black student, Edward Yore, did go back to Liberia and was President for a year in 1870, before being overthrown. Martha Jane Hunley Blackburn was the first Black woman to graduate from Ohio University. She majored in English and Literature with a minor in Home Economics and graduated with a B.S. ED. in 1916. She

later worked as an educator in Ohio and West Virginia (Ohio University Libraries Digital Archival Collections). The Templeton-Blackburn Alumni Memorial Auditorium is named after these Black alumni.

These stories highlight the early connections and tensions between African Americans and Africa at Ohio University. Collectively, they also anticipate the paradoxes and challenges faced by Black students at Ohio University in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The oral-history collection *Soulful Bobcats*, which explores the experiences of alienation and self-empowerment among African American alumni who attended Ohio University between 1950 and 1960 (Walker & Hollow, 2014), notes:

During the 1950s, when less than 20 percent of American high school graduates attended college, a group of ambitious young African Americans enrolled at Ohio University, a predominantly white school in Athens, Ohio. Because they were a tiny, barely tolerated minority, they banded together, supported each other, and formed lasting bonds. Years later, at a series of "Soulful Reunions," they recalled the joys and challenges of living on a white campus before the civil rights era, and eighteen of them decided to share their stories (Ohio University Press, 2014).

A review of *Soulful Bobcats* in *The Athens News* explains, "While OU was making progress against institutional racism in the years after World War II, it still had a long road to travel [...] While it's clear that being treated as second-class citizens or worse was infuriating and demeaning [...] (Black students) patiently fielded questions from curious white classmates about what it's like to be Black, and took insults from professors as a spur to do even better in class. Most of all, they relied on each other" (Phillips, 2013). These stories reveal the history of racial discrimination and inequities, as well as the strength, resilience, and success of OHIO's Black alumni.

Since Templeton's enrollment at OHIO in 1824, thousands of Black students have attended and graduated from the university, including hundreds of our alumni from the Center

for International Studies. Nevertheless, Black students continue to be underrepresented at OHIO, and efforts for affirmative action and equity have fallen short of the goal of making this a truly diverse and inclusive university. According to recent data from the Ohio University Office of Institutional Research (2019), the student body is 78.3% Caucasian, 5.7% African American, 4.7% International (does not differentiate by race), 3.6% Two or more races, 3.5% Hispanic, 1.9% Asian American, 0.1% American Indian / Alaskan Native, 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 2.2% Unknown. The data shows that students of color are underrepresented, and OHIO remains a predominantly white institution. In fact, university policies, practices, and legal barriers have continued to impede progress. It would benefit all students to have more racial diversity on campus. Recruitment and retention efforts should align with the changing demographics of our state, our country, and the world. We must rededicate ourselves to fostering and supporting the higher education of Black students and other students of color through recruitment, financial aid, scholarships, retention, mentoring, advising, and ensuring their success and graduation.

Black Lives Matter. We live in challenging times, confronted by the compounded afflictions of health pandemics and systemic racism. The health and socio-political sequalae will live with us for a prolonged period. However, such crises also carry with them the opportunity for us to learn; to embrace emerging scientific innovations and theoretical breakthroughs in our respective fields of expertise; to rethink our prejudices generated by erroneous ideological and pedagogical assumptions and practices; and to productively re-imagine novel, or different, local and global systems of inclusion and social justice. At CIS we believe this is a moment to re-invent the Center and provide leadership, insight, a concrete plan of action, and recommendations that reflect the university's commitment to international education and

research. This commitment means reimagining and furthering the Center's core tasks of teaching, research, and outreach; assuring institutional integrity at all levels; and, critically, engaging in a targeted initiative with the goal of dismantling racism and its systems of oppression and privilege in CIS, at Ohio University, and beyond. We want to affirm, moreover, that we acknowledge that we have upheld structural inequalities within our university and have not sufficiently addressed systemic racism. In proposing action to do so, we uphold the spirit and letter of the Center's core mission to "advance excellence in education, research, and outreach for Ohio University by fostering an innovative academic community."

Our action plans include the following:

Self-reflection and Accountability: Engage in a process of critical self-reflection involving

CIS faculty and staff to identify and uproot racism and inequity in our own practices, policies,
and systems. Since the spring of 2020 we have met to discuss and develop this position paper to
guide our work in this area. We will listen to feedback from members of our community and
further empower the voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

Global Dialogues Series: Work to educate ourselves, each other, and our affiliated students, faculty, and staff on issues related to the global struggle against racism. We plan to organize a Global Dialogues series with our students in 2020-21 to examine racism and race relations in the U.S. and in relation to global movements to end racism and forms of colonization. This series will feature diverse speakers and will provide opportunities for international and domestic students to explore the history of racism and race relations in the U.S. and around the world. We will particularly focus on exploring the relationship between Africans, the African diaspora, and African Americans.

Decolonizing Curriculum: Decolonize our syllabi and our classrooms to include diverse authors in an expanded curriculum, with focus on critical race, development, and cultural theories and methodologies to examine histories, international relations and development, and justice systems. We will encourage students to take courses that promote reflection and debate on issues concerning Euro-American centrism vs. multiculturalism, examine racial injustice and inequality, and unpack stereotypes of the "Other" in academic discourse that alienate or marginalize many faculty and students.

Other measures will include working to integrate global-studies themes and intercultural knowledge and competence into the new university-wide model of OHIO B.R.I.C.K.S. General Education requirements and modifying the existing first and second semesters of world languages to fulfill Bridge requirements.

Diversity and Inclusion: Collaborate with our partners across the university to dismantle racism and to ensure that diversity, inclusion, equity, access, and justice are upheld across our institution. We will support and collaborate with university units working on strategic plans to improve recruitment, enrollment, and retention of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. We will actively advocate for affirmative action and scholarship programs that promote equity and access for Black students and faculty, and work to increase multicultural diversity at Ohio University.

Student Success and Engagement: Promote diverse students' success and engagement at all levels, with a strong focus on recruitment, retention, recognition awards, graduation, and alumni engagement, and diversify our foreign-languages and area-studies programs. Further diversification of our student population and language-teaching faculty will ensure equitable and

meaningful participation buttressing the work to eradicate racism in language-education policies, instructional practices, and curricula.

International Education Advocacy and Policy Reform: Support policies that protect equity and promote access of students and scholars to all OHIO international programs and increase support for our international graduate students' tuition, fees, stipends, travel and research expenses, and health insurance. In alignment with the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), we will "advocate for creating a comprehensive visa and immigration process that reflects our values as a welcoming and inclusive nation, helps to attract the world's brightest students, meets the needs for progress and competitiveness, and recognizes our global interconnectivity."

Research and Professional Development: Support collaborative research, scholarship, and creative activity and publication in partnership with diverse scholars and promote underrepresented graduate students' professional development and leadership opportunities to prepare them for careers in the academy and society at large as educated, well-rounded, and confident global citizens.

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