

June 10, 2020

To the administration of Center for University Programs Abroad (CUPA),

We—the students of CUPA—are heartbroken and appalled; furious and exhausted; yet refuse to be surprised or silent; at the rampant violence perpetrated against Black communities by local and national law enforcement around the world. The murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Nina Pop, Sean Reed, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery in the US; the long-unaddressed murder of Adama Traoré in France, whose extrajudicial killing was incredibly similar to that of George Floyd, and for which his family still seeks justice; and all the many names for which there are no hashtags. Lives extinguished at the hands of police, families left devastated and tasked with picking up the pieces of their shattered hearts, and each murder a constant reminder to this community of global scholars that the countries in which we live have very little regard for the lives of Black people.

For many of us, police violence is a deeply familiar, interminable history—the substance of our childhood nightmares, lessons our parents armed us with before sending us into the world, and the reality of our young adult existence. For others, what is happening in the world today serves as a revelatory moment—exposure to systemic racism that has been masterfully crafted and inexhaustibly reinforced by centuries of slavery, colonialism, nation-building, imperialism, capitalism, and the mutually reinforced powers of anti-Blackness and white supremacy. These pervasive systems of oppression have dutifully enforced egregious racial disparities, in both the United States and France, in adequate and necessary healthcare, housing security, expansive primary and secondary education, mobility and stability within the job market, and most of all fair and just public safety. In both countries, these disparities have meant the difference between life and death for Black and Brown citizens.

In all corners of the world, we have pulled each other close in order to weather the storm of the coronavirus pandemic. Families, neighbors, universities, corporations, local and national governments, and everyone in between, have touted the rhetoric of community care and accountability. We have spoken relentlessly of the need for individual responsibility in order to uphold collective safety and perseverance through these unprecedented and disastrous times. In the face of this pandemic, CUPA stepped up immediately. They were vocal on all platforms, as an organization and as individual staff members. They worked tirelessly in their efforts to hold us all together while we adjusted to this new, uncertain reality, from each of our separate corners of the world. They implemented a meticulous and coordinated effort that we, as current students, overwhelmingly feel eased the transitional process significantly. They stressed time and time again the imperative nature of self-care, community care, and patience with oneself. In the face of COVID-19, CUPA proved their ability to be a team we could count on.

Thusly, we students ask ourselves: why did CUPA not step up for us in the face of an international uprising against police brutality, and the insurmountable racial violence that both produced and arose from this moment? We have been traumatized by the intensely-circulated videos of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd. We have continued to sit at home in quarantine, drowning in the weight of this pain and confusion, and have tried tirelessly to make sense of something so senseless. We have been inundated with the work of great activists and scholars, who have attempted to detangle some of our convoluted thoughts. Many of us have taken to the streets, trying to derive some twisted sense of hope and community from a moment that is, at its core, nothing but devastating. Speaking for myself, and a feeling I am sure many of the Black students in our community may share, I have gone to bed every evening with the weariest of souls, trying to reconcile the joy in hearing so many people unabashedly scream Black Lives Matter, with the fact that anyone still requires convincing in the first place that my life does in fact matter.

We look to the communities that promised to support us in moments like this. We expect solidarity in the typically very active social media platforms, that have become so integral to our new virtual society. The success of many academics in our CUPA community stands on the shoulders of Black stories, traditions, histories, and cultures. University of Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, an important partner institution, enjoys great prestige in liberal spaces for its physiological engagement with the predominantly Black and Brown communities of Seine-Saint-Denis. A disproportionately small number of Black students have come and gone through CUPA's curriculum, contributing to this program and becoming invaluable members of our community of global scholars. Yet you remain silent.

We demand more. We demand solidarity. We demand more than neutrality; we demand active dismantling of systemic racism in this transformative moment. In France, colorblind racism has reigned for too long. The misdirected fear of Vichy-era scientific racism and the pejorative discrediting of *communautaire* movements has painfully hindered the work of those attempting to confront the saliency of racial discrimination. The prohibition of racial statistics makes it almost impossible to track discriminatory police practices—though we do know from the few that have been conducted, and from testimony of those on the ground, that Black and Arab French are stopped, searched, harassed, and killed by police at a disproportionate rate to White French. We know that the fallacy of *universalisme* is not such for all French, we know that the erasure of race in the Constitution will not erase the evil in people's hearts, nor the centuries of racialized pathologizing of *quartiers populaires*, xenophobia, Islamophobia, Anti-Asian racism and Sinophobia (particularly in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic), anti-Black racism, and white supremacy that is the bedrock of French society.

These are futures that we cannot achieve without the collective support of all the institutions in which we take part. We cannot reach these futures that we imagine if you, CUPA, do not take a stand with us now and encourage your peer institutions to do the same. We cannot create a world of racial equity and justice if we refuse to interrogate, expose, then dismantle our own painful personal and national histories. We cannot see the liberation and safety of our Black students, of our Black communities, of our Black peers and colleagues, and ultimately all those who live at the intersection of many marginalized identities, if we do not demand justice in our own homes first. Lift up the names of Nina Pop, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Sean Reed, George Floyd. Lift up the names of Adama Traoré, Yacine Ben Kahla, Bouna Traore, Zyed Benna. Honor the many Black lives lost to police violence and negligence, especially the queer and/or trans women and gender-expansive folk whose deaths are too often stricken from public record and names never known.

We ask that you take a public stand with your students as we fight for racial justice in an intentionally unjust world. We ask that you recognize your silence and complicity on this matter thus far, and pledge to engage with us as we begin the laborious work of uprooting the foundation of oppression in both American and French society. Please recognize the urgency of this moment that we find ourselves in.

Many commentators right now like to say that history is repeating itself, but I believe rather that it is a continuum. Too much life has been lost, too much blood has been shed and too many tears have fallen for us to allow such rhetoric to slyly expunge the half-century that has passed and during which we have recklessly and negligently left too much unmoved. History is not repeating, this is true, but it has certainly provided us with valuable lessons that will shape what we do next. Do not be afraid to agitate the status quo, *please*, because the status quo is killing us.

In solidarity and demanding humanity now,
Erica Dugué, Spring '20

While this open letter is an expression of my personal beliefs and experiences, it also speaks on behalf of the undersigned, who wholly echo and support the sentiments expressed above:

Isabel Giovannetti, Spring '20
Charlotte Puscasiu, AY 19-20
Ethan Glattfelder Spring '20
Elinor Jones, Spring '20
Adriel Roncal, AY 19-20
Inés Anleu, Spring '20

Isabelle Liao, Spring '20
Ruby Carmel, Spring '20
Jessica Lovett, Spring '20
Jules Taylor, Fall '19
Tess Gutenbrunner, Fall '19
Talya Inbar, Spring '20
Isabel Ballard, Spring '20
Carolina Jimenez, Spring '20
Lucie Taylor, AY 19-20
Lucy Wu, Spring '20
Brooklyn Lee, AY 19-20
Vita Jones, Spring '20
Alex Greenberg, Spring '20
Lynn Nguyen, Spring '20
Khalid (Kai) Davis, Spring '20
Rylie Stolze, Spring '20
Michael Milam, Spring '18
Jean-Louis Baillely, Spring '18
Diego Berrios, Spring '18
Eve Taylor, Spring '20
Karena Landler, Spring '20
Lucy O'Brien, Spring '18
Mara Delta, Spring '20
Malia Clark, Spring '20
Annie Carroll, Spring '19
Lila Williams, Spring '20
Olivia Giacomo, Spring '20
Ashley Grauman, Spring '18
Sinclair Barbehenn, Spring '18
Julian Raiford, Spring '20
Jillian A. Quigley, Spring '20
Analeidi Barrera, Spring '20