

October 27, 2020

We, the history graduate workers at Northwestern, are writing in response to President Morty Schapiro's letter on October 19, 2020, a portion of which has now been [published in the Wall Street Journal](#). We are disgusted by President Schapiro's email to the University, which expressed virulently anti-Black sentiments and called for the deployment of force (whether by law enforcement or through University-based disciplinary systems) against Black abolitionist student protestors.

We stand in unequivocal solidarity with NU Community Not Cops and [support their demands](#) to abolish NUPD, divest from and sever all ties with EPD and CPD, and invest in life-giving institutions and Black communities, both on and off campus. You can read NUCNC's response to President Schapiro's note [here](#), and a response from the African American Studies department [here](#), and a letter from Jewish students, faculty, and alumni [here](#).

We write to encourage graduate workers and faculty in our department to **visibly support and join the NUCNC protests**, which are happening daily and are announced on their [twitter](#) and [instagram](#). If you are unable to attend, we suggest supporting their campaign by donating to their [NUCNC fund](#) and/or by donating to Northwestern University Graduate Workers [NUCNC organizer fund](#), which helps to support the NUCNC organizers' well-being. We can also support NUCNC by participating in their [email and phone zaps](#). ***While statements of support are important, they are no substitute to taking direct, material action to abolish police and support Black lives on campus.***

As much as our work as historians makes clear the endurance of racist, settler colonial, imperialist, and hetero-patriarchal institutions, it has also taught us the power of organized communities and social movements to do the unthinkable, like abolish slavery, win worker protections, defend Indigenous sovereignty, and tear down Jim Crow. All of these struggles at one point in time faced virulent opposition (and still do today) and were thought to be pie-in-the-sky, far-fetched visions -- in retrospect, many of us recoil at the defenses of the old proffered by those hostile to these then-radical visions and struggles for liberation. **In fighting for abolition in our lifetimes, NUCNC is among this long legacy of freedom fighters who are working to disrupt the patterns of anti-Black and settler colonial criminalization, surveillance, and punishment that persist so long as police and policing remain central features of American governance.** We urge our department to join NUCNC on the streets, with your wallets, and with visible, loud proclamations of solidarity.

Signed,

Gabrielle Guillerm
Alana Toulin
Alexandrea Keith
Jayson M. Porter
Holly Dayton
Teresa Alvarado-Patlán
Dexter Fergie
Hope McCaffrey
Esther Ginestet
John Branch
Heather Menefee
Miguel Giron
Emiliano Aguilar
Conrad Hirano
Andrea Christmas
Savoy Curry
Emily Lyon
Colin Bos
Eunike Setiadarma
Charlotte Rosen
Rebecca Rwakabukoza
Jonathan Ng
Angela Tate
Andrew Holter
Elizabeth Barahona
Emily Kamm
Hazal Ozdemir
Gennifer Geer
Morgan Barry

If you would like to sign the letter, [please go to this Google Form](#). Names will be updated daily.

Appendix:

As historians, we know from our work that U.S. policing exists to uphold twinned systems of [racial capitalism](#) and [settler colonialism](#). In the United States, policing emerged from anti-Indigenous [militias](#) and from slave patrols, which were given the authority by local governments and slaveowners to beat, maim, and kill enslaved people as they saw fit to enforce curfews, surveil enslaved people's [movements](#), and recapture those who ran away--in short, to protect white [slaveowners'](#) property and profits. US policing also has its roots in the similarly anti-Black and anti-labor [urban municipal police forces](#) developed in the late 19th century to beat back the power of organized labor and to criminalize Black, brown, queer, and working class people in cities whose presence threatened the legitimacy of the modern American state. The state depends on violence perpetrated by the police to enforce this unequal capitalist system, maintain white settlers' right to private property, and sustain [imperial](#) networks.

The U.S. also relies on police to maintain its claim to lands taken violently from Indigenous people in North America in a structure known as settler colonialism. Settler colonialism, which is predicated upon the expropriation of Native lands, [elimination](#) of Native peoples, and their replacement with white settlers and white settler society, relies on legal doctrines that sanction violence by the state and vigilante groups. The police enforce white settlers' and settler companies' rights to claim ownership of land. Settler colonialism and policing continue to work together today, which is [why police violently attacked and arrested water protectors and protestors](#) of the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 which was planned to occupy unceded [Očhéthi Šakówiŋ](#) land. The police, working alongside federal forces and private security companies, were attempting to ensure a private corporation's claim to the land and assert U.S. imperial power.

As historians, we are also keenly aware that even the most enlightened efforts at police "reform" [do not work](#). Police reform has historically [expanded, not reduced](#), the power of police to enact racialized state violence.

Likewise, diversity and inclusion trainings or simply [hiring more police of color](#) are incapable of meaningfully addressing racism and inequality. The proliferation of piecemeal diversity efforts assigned to already overburdened staff members of color is not tenable, as Northwestern's September 2010 Whitepaper on Diversity & Inclusion (which has since been removed from the University website) indicated. DEI initiatives are an essential part of the neoliberal university business model--it keeps

money circulating among endless administrators, consultants, and committees instead of being used to address organizer's demands. NU uses the language of diversity and inclusion to delegitimize critical movement work, isolate students in tightly controlled taskforces and working groups, punish already vulnerable students for their conscientious actions, and sanitize the histories of student activism from official narratives. Black [students](#) and students of color have led critical [movements](#) since being admitted to Northwestern, yet administrative efforts have sought to [prevent these movements from transforming](#) structures founded in white supremacy.

Not only does Northwestern University benefit from the legacies of slavery and settler colonialism in the U.S.--and is directly implicated in these histories, [as documented in reports](#) on John Evans' responsibility for the [Sand Creek Massacre](#) of Cheyenne and Arapaho people--the University is an inherently capitalist enterprise. Its interests lie in protecting its endowment and continuing to profit off the labor of its employees, the most vulnerable of which [the University has failed to pay for 7 months during a global pandemic](#), despite its promises. As such, it relies on police not to protect its students and staff, as Schapiro claims, but rather to protect and maintain its [capital](#). The NUPD is a private security force mobilized to protect the financial interests of a private institution. Schapiro and upper level administrators know this--that is why they have [failed to release](#) the NUPD budget despite promises to do so and why they need private consultants to "contextualize" police spending, as they stated in the Community Dialogue on October 21st.

Alongside Northwestern, the city of Evanston has long benefitted from the dispossession wrought by racial capitalism and settler colonialism. A recent report commissioned by the City of Evanston on the history of policies affecting Black residents found that from its very origins, the city has ["supported and created systems to segregate, limit, deny, and control Black citizens."](#) Nearly every aspect of municipal law and policy—encompassing housing, education, residential and commercial zoning, policing, employment, public and private services—in Evanston's history was leveraged to dispossess, segregate, and exclude Black residents. This violent history is most evident in the ongoing practices of the Evanston Police Department (EPD). In 2018, Black Evanstonians—who constitute 18% of Evanston's population—[were subject to 60% of all EPD stop and frisk encounters, 30% of driver stops, 53% of traffic citations and vehicle searches, and 100% of the dog sniff searches](#). In 2015, Lawrence Crosby, a Northwestern PhD student, was viciously assaulted by the EPD, after an [anonymous caller described him getting into his own car](#).

If President Schapiro cared to respect the expertise of scholars of race at Northwestern -- including those belonging to one of the most esteemed departments of African American Studies in the country, itself formed through the struggle of student activists -- he would know that hosting more consultants

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and diversity seminars is a mockery of the problem and that solutions are not hiding from him. If he wasn't so simultaneously avoidant of and hostile to the concerns of Black faculty, students, and staff, he would know that the shame he believes the protesting students have earned for themselves in fact belongs to him and the pride he feels in the smallness of his moral imagination. If he wasn't such a poor student of the history of his own institution, he would know that the present concerns have deep roots and that he has a responsibility to address them or resign, which he ought to do.

Instead, he upholds a proud Northwestern tradition of willful ignorance toward the violence that this institution has cloaked from the genocidaire John Evans on down. Instead, he responds to the culmination of at least half a century of the university's failures to Black faculty, students, and staff with a menu of cliches to which the leading lights of such organizations as the John Birch Society ([link](#)) and the Birmingham Police Department ([link](#)) would nod their heads. Instead, he sounds very much like those well-meaning, indignant, embarrassed university presidents of the 1960s remembered by history for starting to swim only after they started to sink, and he is sinking.

We can't know how history will judge President Schapiro in this moment, but we who are here now are judging and that is enough, and our judgment is total failure.