

**There Is No Cop City in the Beloved Community:
An Open Letter from Members of the Morehouse College Faculty**

February 2, 2023

As members of the Morehouse College faculty, we have grown accustomed to consoling and counseling our students as they attempt to grapple with cycles of police brutality. Year after year, as Black people continue to be abused and killed at the hands of the police, jailed and surveilled in barbaric ways, we struggle to make sense of it all. We struggle to help our students determine where we go from here.

But events that have transpired in Atlanta in recent months—specifically, the City's initiative to build a \$90 million police training facility, commonly known as "Cop City"—give us a clear indication of where we need to direct our energies. Atlanta, our home town, has become the epicenter of the struggle over the future of policing in America. Now is the time to STOP COP CITY.

The proposal for a new police training facility was publicly announced in 2021, at a time when the nation was still reeling from the killing of George Floyd and a broad coalition of concerned citizens demanded that cities and states defund the police. Last fall, the Atlanta City Council formally approved the project, what amounts to a massive new investment in the police, despite widespread public opposition. In a city that is rapidly losing its famed tree canopy, the project is also environmentally disastrous; it would require the clearing of 85 acres of Atlanta's lush South River Forest. Plans call for shooting ranges, spaces for militarized drills, a Blackhawk helicopter landing pad, and a mock city complete with buildings and roads to allow the Atlanta Police Department—as well as other police agencies drawn from all over the region—to practice urban warfare tactics along the lines of the SCORPION unit in Memphis or the TITAN squads in Atlanta. There is an undeniable and direct relationship between the fate of Michael Brown and George Floyd as well as Tyre Nichols and the pending plan to build Cop City.

Let us not delude ourselves: Cop City, if built, will result in more death and destruction at the hands of the police. Indeed, the Cop City project already has blood on its proverbial hands. On January 18, 2023, as authorities conducted a sweep of the forest site, police shot and killed protestor Manuel Terán, known among friends as "Tortuguita," under very suspicious circumstances. Details of the tragedy remain sparse. As we mourn Tortuguita's death, we call for an independent and transparent investigation of the incident.

In times like these, the name of Morehouse's most famous alumnus is often bandied about, typically in an effort to tame a groundswell of rage, to channel the righteous frustration of Black and working-class people into nonviolent modes of protest. But we must not sanitize the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who sought to expose and challenge the "triple evils" of racism, militarism, and materialism; taken together, King opposed the commodification of Black bodies and he understood that police violence was a pernicious because systemic problem. "Armies of officials are clothed in uniform," he said in 1964, "invested with authority, armed with the instruments of violence and death and conditioned to believe that they can intimidate, maim or kill Negroes with the same recklessness that once motivated the slave owner."

It is telling that Cop City is slated to be developed on the site of the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. Before the site was sold to the City of Atlanta after the Civil War, it was a slave labor camp. And before that, the Weelaunee Forest of the Muscogee Creek people. The trail of tears is not a thing of the past.

We must listen to and learn from this history. We must study how state violence directed against Black, Indigenous, People of Color [BIPOC]—as well as working-class people of all colors—reproduces itself in different ways over generations. We must listen to the voices of those most affected by police violence and abuse. Our civic leaders have not done this. On the contrary.

Georgia has the highest rates of correctional control of any state in the nation by far, twice as many as almost every state, at 5,143 per 100,000. Only New York City's police foundation raised more money in 2020—and that was before Atlanta's fundraising roughly tripled in 2021. Atlanta is the most surveilled city in America. It is the most economically unequal major city in America. King said in 1967 that "a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." Today, we say that a city that continues year after year to spend more money on policing and urban warfare than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

King claimed in 1966 that "only a refusal to hate and kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where men [and women] can live together without fear. Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives."

Strangely, we tend to celebrate Atlanta—and the so-called "Atlanta way"—as a Black Mecca. As an alumnus of Morehouse and a luminary of Atlanta, Dr. King articulated an inspiring vision of the beloved community. The dream has become a nightmare: There is simply no place for Cop City in the beloved community.

We, the undersigned members of the Morehouse College faculty, call upon our civic leaders and fellow educators in Atlanta to denounce Cop City, to take immediate action to cancel the project, and to respond to the will of the people—and not merely the wealthy and well connected—in determining the character of our communities and the conduct of those who claim to serve and protect us.

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1	Corrie Claiborne, PhD	Associate Professor of English
2	Andrew J. Douglas, PhD	Professor of Political Science
3	Kipton E. Jensen, PhD	Associate Professor of Philosophy & Religion
4	Nathaniel Norment, PhD	Professor of English
5	David Wall Rice, PhD	Professor of Psychology
6	Adrienne Jones, PhD	Assistant Professor of Political Science
7	Sinead Younge, PhD	Professor of Psychology
8	Melvin Foster, DMA	Associated Professor of Music
9	Cindy Lutenbacher, PhD	Professor of English
10	Elizabeth Topping, PhD	Visiting Assistant Professor of English

11	Nathan Nobis, PhD	Professor of Philosophy & Religion
12	Clarissa Myrick-Harris, PhD	Professor of Africana Studies
13	Stephane Dunn, PhD	Professor of Cinema and English
14	Samuel T. Livingston, PhD	Associate Professor of Africana Studies
15	Haile M. Larebo, PhD	Associate Professor of History
16	Taura Taylor, PhD	Assistant Professor of Sociology
17	Adria Welcher, PhD	Associate Professor of Sociology
18	Monique Earl-Lewis, PhD	Associate Professor of Africana Studies
19	Ruihua Shen, PhD	Professor of Chinese Language and Literature
20	Jann H. Adams, PhD	Professor of Psychology
21	Vicki Crawford, PhD	Professor of Africana Studies
22	Haakayoo Zoggyie, PhD	Associate Professor of Modern Foreign Languages
23	Maria Korol, MFA	Assistant Professor of Art
24	Nia Reed, PhD	Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology
25	Karcheik Sims-Alvarado, PhD	Assistant Professor of Africana Studies
26	Ida Rousseau Mukenge, PhD	Professor Emeritus of Sociology
27	Avery O Williams, MFA	Assistant Professor of Cinema, Television & Emerging Media Studies
28	Kinnis K. Gosha, PhD	Professor of Computer Science
30	Tina R. Chang, PhD	Associate Professor of Psychology
31	Ulrica Wilson, PhD	Associate Professor of Mathematics
32	Wallace Sharif, PhD	Assistant Professor of Biology
33	Alexandra Peister PhD	Associate Professor of Biology
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35	Kristin Moody, EdD	Education, Leadership
36	Yohance Murray, PhD	Assistant Professor of Psychology
37	Tuwaner Lamar, PhD	Assistant Professor of Mathematics
38	Nathan Alexander, PhD	Assistant Professor of Mathematics

39	Mikki Harris	Associate Professor of Journalism
40	Justin S McClinton, PhD	Visiting Assistant Professor of Leadership Studies
41	Ervin China, PhD	Adjunct Professor of Mathematics
42	Cynthia Hewitt, PhD	Professor of Sociology
43	Levar Smith, PhD	Assistant Professor of Political Science
44	Keisha Tassie, PhD	Associate Professor of Communication
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49	Dominique Thomas, PhD	Adjunct Professor of Psychology
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52	Jason Jones, PhD	Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology
53	Tanya Clark, PhD	Assistant Professor of English