

Dear Washington University Administration,

On December 18th, 2021, an incident occurred at the underpass of the South 40 where a group of white supremacists vandalized murals of Black Leaders with hate fuelled graffiti. Portraits of John Lewis, Chadwick Boseman, and George Poage were covered by a white supremacists group's website name and logo. The initial mural entitled "The Story That Never Ends" was created by local St. Louis Black artists during the summer of 2020. ([Link to Student Life Newspaper article here](#), [link to video of vandalism prior to clean-up here](#))

Black students at Washington University are disillusioned by the vandalism and reaction from campus authorities. Black students are disgusted, outraged, and fear that their well-being is in danger. It is illogical to think that despite the recent increase in WUPD presence, there were no officers bearing witness to the vandalism as it transpired. The University was only made aware of the event through student reports from Black first-years. It was Black students who noticed the smell of fresh paint and mobilized to remove the symbols. While attempting to rectify the mural, students reported seeing a white WUPD officer bike through the underpass, ignoring the scene. Minutes later, a Black WUPD officer approached the group and notified other officers. The burden of response to white supremacy once again fell on Black members of the university community, rather than the administration at large.

We recognize that the lackluster response from university administration is part of a long history of covertly enabling white supremacy at this institution. This comes as no surprise, particularly after the university's response to the incidents surrounding the removal of American flags from Mudd Field on September 11th, 2021. The nationwide backlash this inspired led to the doxxing of a student's family, a slew of online targeting, and threats of violence by white supremacists; however, none of this was addressed by the university, which was content to remain silent while a student's safety, and indeed the safety of marginalized students all across this campus, was threatened. Chancellor Andrew Martin wrote in an email responding to the recent vandalism that there is "no place on our campus for these behaviors and this type of harmful action will not be tolerated or ignored," yet the university did, in fact, publicly ignore the threats of white supremacists against a student. The continued reluctance to take a stand in the interest and safety of communities of color on WashU's campus, through at the very least a maintenance of communication with a concerned and fearful student body, is telling of this institution's priorities.

In order for the university to take responsibility and accountability for its complacency and continued disregard of recurring displays of white supremacy on campus, we students demand that the university:

Pay the original artists or other local Black artists to restore the “The Story Never Ends” mural and pay for the damages done to their art.

Provide students transparency regarding the investigation into those who vandalized the mural. The school has stated in emails and to local news stations that there are cameras in the area, so we demand consistent updates on the investigation. The white supremacists’ anonymity poses a continued risk for Black students, and all students targeted by the group. Students should not be in fear that they are living and going to class with individuals who harbor violence towards them. Being on winter break does not excuse any lack of transparency.

Reassess WUPD’s role on campus. Black students have resisted police presence on campus and the broader community for years. WUPD failed to act as white supremacists painted their website, logo, and words of hate on the faces of Black leaders. And they failed to see it as an issue as students identified officers walking past the vandalized mural. WUPD did not assist the freshman students in removing the racist signatures until a Black officer saw the students. **WUPD as a whole does not stop crime and their violent incompetence only makes students feel more unsafe on this campus.**

Student organizers have established WUPD as reactive, incompetent, and violent to students and community members, and this is exactly how they responded to this white supremacist display. In 2015, after the murder of Michael Brown, WashU Students in Solidarity released demands regarding WUPD and institutional mishandling of racism ([link here](#)), such as the demand for a WUPD specific bias reporting system, but the university’s response was unsubstantial. Again, in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd students released demands again, garnering over 7,000 signatures in support ([link here](#)). Additionally, that same summer the WashU Gradworkers Union and the Black Law Students Association released a platform demanding change to WUPD’s presence at WashU. Upon release of these demands, 500 community members converged on the Chancellor’s lawn in protest, then met with him via Zoom ([link to platform here](#)). Once again the response left the community disappointed, ([link to Student Newspaper article here](#).) **We are reiterating our demand that the presence of WUPD on campus be minimized and resources be allocated towards more generative forms of community care.**

Black Students fear for their physical safety at Washington University in St. Louis. White supremacist groups have made dangerous threats and taken violent actions towards students and the St. Louis community this semester, and the university’s inaction has emboldened and encouraged their further actions. **This university harbors and protects white supremacy.** White supremacist groups affect not only students and staff at this university, but these active

threats also endanger the entire St. Louis community. We do not feel safe here, and there has been a disappointing and disgustingly vague response from you, the administration. We see your silence.

We demand the university convey the active measures they are taking to ensure the safety of marginalized students and community members. We desire new, reimagined mechanisms of student safety to replace the existing punitive, reactive, inadequate institutions of policing that are currently used on campus. We will accept nothing less.

From,
the Washington University Community

Co-signed by:
Students for Black and Palestinian Liberation
Association of Black Students
Black Senior Alliance
and counting