

**An Open Letter to UCLA Chancellor Gene Block  
and Executive Vice Chancellor Emily Carter**

June 10, 2020

We write to you as the chair of the Department of African American Studies and the director of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies. We lead the two largest institutional units at UCLA dedicated to the study of Black life but we were not consulted prior to your offices issuing statements on the uprising for Black life now unfolding across the nation, around the world, and, yes, here at UCLA. As a means of addressing this offense and rectifying this oversight, we have taken the initiative to provide you with our institutional perspective on UCLA's failure -- and opportunity -- to make Black lives matter at UCLA.

To date, your offices have issued two letters in response to the current uprising for Black life. In the first letter, *The Pain Behind the Protests* (May 30, 2020), you underscored the systemic and global climate of the "utter dehumanization of Black life" and emphatically affirmed that "Black lives DO matter." In the second letter, *A Violation of Our Values* (June 3, 2020), you acknowledged that UCLA had been complicit in suppressing the uprising for Black life by allowing LAPD to utilize the parking lot of the Jackie Robinson Stadium to process the arrests of protestors, including UCLA students "who stand for Black lives." You also stated that under your leadership, UCLA would "do more to ensure that our commitment to equity, diversity, respect and justice are front and center across all of our campus policies and practices." And you announced a plan to begin this justice-seeking work by establishing a task force on structural racism.

That UCLA leadership so emphatically affirms that *Black lives DO matter* is a cause for great optimism. We applaud this stand. Yet merely resolving to establish a task force on structural racism is neither the appropriate nor the needed response at this historic crossroad. At this moment, the world is watching to see if U.S. institutions will make the necessary changes to truly divest from white supremacy and invest in Black lives. UCLA can and should emerge from this reckoning with more than a task force. As one of the world's pre-eminent institutions of higher education, we must begin by investing in the study of Black life. Therefore, we call upon the university to match its stated commitment to Black life with a budget for Black study. In particular, we call on the university to fully fund the African American Studies Department and the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies as the core institutional units established and mandated to advance the study Black life at UCLA.

In the Department of African American Studies and the Bunche Center, our students, staff, and faculty have led the campus' research and instructional efforts to improve the conditions of Black life since the 1960s. We do this work with excellence every day and have been doing it for a half century, but our requests for productive space, adequate staffing and

faculty, and sufficient student funding to do this work have persistently gone overlooked, denied, and unanswered. We are starving for the resources we need to do our work. Therefore, in solidarity with campus partners and community allies, we strongly urge UCLA leadership to take the following actions to improve the quality of Black life and Black study at UCLA:

1. Fulfill outstanding Afrikan Student Union (ASU) and Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA) [demands](#), including their demands for UCLA to end its relationship with LAPD and other county, state and federal law enforcement departments, divesting from UCPD, and investing in a properly funded and located Black Resource Center
2. Fund a series of Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellows dedicated to the study of Black life
3. Endow the Bunche Center to sustain its research agenda on the study and wellness of Black people
4. Endow the African American Studies Department to generate a sustainable curriculum on the study and wellness of Black people
5. Endow the Bunche Fellows Program to support research by undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and faculty members dedicated to the study of Black life
6. Provide at least 10 new faculty lines to the Bunche Center and to the African American Studies Department
7. Provide the Department of African American Studies with the spatial capacity to house courses and all of its faculty and interested affiliates within a shared space
8. Hire more Black staff and ensure that pending budget cuts do not disproportionately impact Black students, staff, and faculty
9. Appoint to the Chancellor's Office a Special Assistant for Black people and Black matters
10. Implement a process whereby Ethnic Studies centers and departments are chief stakeholders and of great consult on matters related to structural racism at UCLA

Your immediate action on these items is needed for UCLA to begin living up to its stated values, responsibilities, and promise. We expect to have a seat at the table in developing the campus' plan to make Black lives matter at UCLA. Of course, we also recommend that you consult with additional key stakeholders, such as ASU, BGSA, the UCLA Black Alumni Association, and the many staff and faculty leaders with deep track records in serving Black students and communities. Acknowledging the broad base of Black leadership at UCLA and heeding our collective insights will prove vital to improving Black life and well-being at UCLA.



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