

June 18, 2020

Via Email

Chancellor Gene Block  
Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Emily A. Carter

Dear Chancellor Block and Executive Vice Chancellor/Provost Carter,

As you are likely aware, **Breonna Taylor** was slain by police in her home on March 13th, inaugurating nationwide protests in her name. On June 15, 2020, thousands across the country rallied to demonstrate that **Black trans lives matter**. In this watershed moment in the history of Black organizing, public intellectuals, activists, and scholars have insisted that anti-black violence is gendered, and that Black feminism and Black queer study are crucial intellectual and political resources for imagining a transformed future anchored in racial justice. **Many of the most vocal, public, paradigm-shifting and inspiring challenges to police and carceral violence have emerged from Black feminist and Black queer scholars (Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mariame Kaba, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, CeCe McDonald, and Angela Y. Davis to name a few).**

Black life is multitudinous; therefore valuing it, as UCLA pledged to do in its May 30th letter, requires a commitment of resources that is both deep and broad. Some of these resources might be acquired by divesting from policing, as UCLA faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members have demanded.

This letter urges UCLA to renew and expand its support of ongoing research and programming that advances Black study and cultural life in ways that both acknowledge and center the experiences of women and queer people and ensures that Black feminism as a central framework for the study of racial violence and racial justice be permanently supported.

One arena of such study and cultural life at UCLA is the [Center for the Study of Women/Social Science Division Black Feminism Initiative \(BFI\)](#). Launched only this past fall (2019) with initial support from the Center for the Study of Women and Social Sciences Dean Darnell Hunt, the BFI has promoted research on anti-blackness, gender, and state violence, and gender and racial justice by establishing the **Alisa Bierria Graduate Fellowship in Black Feminist Research** and the **Mariame Kaba Graduate Fellowship in Black Feminist Research**, both of which support the development of research that furthers the **anti-carceral feminist work of the public intellectuals for whom they are named**. The BFI has supported emerging research through

the **Black feminism faculty-graduate workshop**, a working group that focuses on the development of research in Black feminism by graduate students and faculty from an array of units in the arts and sciences, social sciences and humanities. This workshop has, by the accounts of its graduate student members, not only been a space of scholarly development but also a site of support in the face of institutionalized racism as constituted by gender and sexual oppression. The Initiative has also hosted programming on Black life, resistance, and institutionalized violence, with public events and workshops on topics including Black maternal and infant mortality, the history of national defense campaigns in support of criminalized survivors of domestic violence, as well as gender and empire. This summer, we are also launching a **Black feminist mutual aid project, which is being led by graduate students.**

The BFI is housed in the Center for the Study of Women, which itself has produced research and programming on related critical topics, for example hosting a **national graduate student conference on anti-carceral feminism in 2019**; hosting a **national graduate student conference on sexual violence as structural violence in 2020**; writing a forthcoming **policy report on gender and the carceral state that centers the analyses of formerly incarcerated writers**; developing a groundbreaking **research study of the role of gender and race in long-term sentencing decisions in California.**

All of this work has provided a volume of insight and direction for those invested in the intersection of gender and racial justice, yet in order to continue providing this resource to the UCLA community it must be permanently institutionally resourced. As it stands now, it is precarious and temporary.

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**The following are requests for the fostering and promotion of Black study and life at UCLA that makes gender and sexuality central to the endeavor.**

- If, as members of the Combahee River Collective argued, “we cannot live without our lives,” we certainly cannot research, study, produce art, or contribute to the public good as UCLA asks us to do, without our lives, which depend upon safety from police violence. **We therefore reiterate the demand of [faculty](#), staff, and students for a thorough divestment from policing.**
- Although we have not heard of such a commitment thus far, we certainly hope that UCLA has agreed to substantially increase funding for the critical race studies program, and specifically for **Kimberlé Crenshaw’s pioneering policy work on police violence inflicted upon Black women.** Professor Crenshaw’s work has quite demonstrably altered American politics for the better. Moreover, we join in the calls to devote substantially **greater resources to institutions devoted to Black study at UCLA, such as the Ralph J. Bunche Center and the Department of African American Studies.**

We also urge UCLA to demonstrate its expansive investment in Black life and study by:

1. **Endowing the Black Feminism Initiative**, including its programming fund to continue events anchored by activists, practitioners, and scholars that inform and inspire UCLA's community on the gendered character of racial violence and racial justice movements; and its Mariame Kaba Graduate Fellowship in Black Feminist Research and the Alisa Bierria Graduate Fellowship in Black Feminist Research thereby ensuring the longevity of these awards to advance research on gender and race.
2. **Funding a BFI visiting fellow** in each of two years, which would support the development of in-progress work by scholars, artists, and/or community activists **at the nexus of Black feminism/Black queer/trans studies research and the carceral state**.
3. **Providing a Triple-match of financial support** granted in 2019 to the CSW gender and long-term sentencing project by the Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy.
4. **Establishing an FTE** for a hire **suitable to the BFI and the Center for the Study of Racism, Social Justice, and Health** (Dir. By Chandra Ford), a priority during twin crises of public health crisis and state violence.
5. **Providing Substantial Funding for faculty and graduate research and programming** in the field of **Black trans/queer studies** to be distributed across units primarily dedicated to the study of gender and sexuality at UCLA.

As optimists, we expect that UCLA will demonstrate its investment in the value of Black life at this pivotal moment by reflecting upon this request during the Juneteenth weekend of organizing and education, and reply expeditiously committing to these requests on Monday, June 22<sup>nd</sup> or sooner.

Sincerely,



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With,

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