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Why Black Lives (Must) Matter at UK

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Why Black Lives (Must) Matter at UK

Nicole Martin

*Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching
University of Kentucky*

Our mission at the Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching is to support faculty in creating innovative and inclusive learning environments. Part of this charge asks us to remember that our pedagogical practices and philosophies are not crafted in insolation from our social, political, and cultural environments.

Today (Aug. 9) marks the two-year anniversary of the death of Mike Brown at the hands of police in Ferguson, MO, and the beginning of an unapologetic cry across the nation that Black Lives Matter.

In just over two weeks, classes will resume on UK's campus following another summer of discordance sparked by homophobic and racially charged violence. The 2015-2016 academic school year ended on the heels of a North Carolina law that restricted public access to bathrooms for transgender people. In June, 49 individuals lost their lives at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida marking the deadliest mass shooting to date in U.S. history.

July saw the names Alton Sterling and Philando Castile added to a heartbreakingly endless list of unarmed black men and women killed by police. Their deaths were immediately followed by the targeted shooting of five officers at a Black Lives Matter protest in Dallas, Texas; the incident holds another national record as the costliest day for law enforcement since 9/11.

The psychic and emotional injury spurred by these acts of violence will continue to reverberate across campus throughout the fall semester. This is how trauma operates ~ it seeps through the cracks of even the most tightly contained spaces. Trauma shows zero regard for the rigidity of timelines and schedules, for the guise of decorum, or even the tendency toward "business as usual." To discount the effects of trauma, particularly that which arises out of the racist legacy of U.S. colonialism and imperialism, and the deeply rooted violence of racial apartheid and Jim Crow, is naive at best, if not dangerous. More importantly, to deny the presence of trauma is to bolster the systems that create the conditions for violent and traumatic acts.

Given this, we must decide to boldly and fearlessly situate the call that Black Lives Matter into our communal core at UK. Critics of Black Lives Matter (particularly those who counter with #AllLivesMatter) will wrongly accuse its advocates of promoting exclusionary biases. Yet, those with the knowledge of the history and violence out of which the movement has emerged recognize its battle cry as an affirmation. Black Lives Matter is testimony to the truth that those who have been racially, socially, politically, and economically marginalized have a right to exist in their fullness ~ with all of the love, laughter, and joy this affords.

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By centering Black Lives Matter into the holistic service of our campus culture, we demonstrate our awareness of the interconnectedness between state-violence, systemic injustice, religious intolerance, queer phobia, ableism, and income inequality. Moreover, we forcibly position the University as cultivators of our nation's next generation of great change makers.

This is why Black Lives (Must) Matter at UK.

Let us to continue to rethink and reimagine how our campus creates space for the civic development of our students, staff, faculty, and administration. What students learn, how they learn, and how they go on to embody socially conscious and justice driven lives is determined by our ability as educators to respond to the moment.

CELT continues to provide workshops and resources that support your efforts to engage in culturally responsive and critically immersed learning environments. For more information or to register for upcoming events, go to <http://www.uky.edu/celt/events>.

MEDIA

Phil Roeder, “Black Lives Matter,” Flickr, CC-BY-2.0 (Title).

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Nicole L. Martin is a Faculty Instructional Consultant at the University of Kentucky's Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. She holds an affiliate appointment with the African American and Africana Studies program at UK where she teaches courses on performance studies, Black feminisms, media studies, Black theatrical literature, theatre historiography, and critical performative pedagogy. She completed her PhD in Performance Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.