

Dear National Communication Association Colleagues,

Recently, the Black community specifically and people of color generally have encountered literally hundreds of statements – from organizations, institutions, departments, corporations, etc. These statements are laden with assertions of struggle, justice, allyship, and solidarity; some even name White privilege and White Supremacy as problems that the U.S. and global society must reckon with.

The language is admirable; however, trajectories for accountability and action are largely and shamefully absent. So, this outpouring of statements partakes in what has become our normative societal cycle that unfolds like this—police brutality, Black death, public outrage against anti-Black racism that causes Black death, societal exhaustion, followed by a return to White normativity—only to be repeated again...and again...and again as the list of names of Black people who have died as a result of police brutality gets longer...and longer...and longer.

Statements against racism and White supremacy constitute first steps only when they are followed by additional steps. In and of themselves—perfunctory, normative statements tend to do nothing at all or very little to actually improve the everyday lives of people of color with regard to individuals, intersectional identity groups, and/or communities. As such, most statements are brimming with unfounded hope, already broken promises, and soon-to-be empty rhetorical signifiers.

Moreover, despite good intentions, such statements oftentimes wallow in Black suffering with an un/stated commitment to remembering how a Black victim of racial hate crime died rather than how the person who lost their life lived. For instance, Mr. George Floyd is currently more recognizable as a Black man murdered via police brutality over a \$20 bill presumed to be fraudulent than being recognizable for the life he lived before, now former, officers Derek Chauvin, J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane, and Tou Thao chose to take part in his murder.

To be clear—the assertion of “Black Lives Matter” is about far more than just Black disposability and death; to reduce “Black Lives Matter” to Black disposability and death is to partake in the objectification and essentialism that has sustained White supremacy for centuries. Equally injurious are the many scholars in our field and members of our association who participate in objectification and essentialism by acknowledging and even researching Black suffering and Black death without acknowledging Black life in myriad contexts ranging from classrooms to faculty meetings to search committees to citational practices.

In place of issuing hurried statements, NCA’s Diversity Council is calling for strategic articulations of concrete action steps designed to incite measurable systemic change in our discipline. Coupled with concrete action steps, we are calling for articulations of accountability and culpability if said actions are not completed on a specified timeline. As a council, for example, we are less interested in hearing our colleagues and myriad NCA constituencies (re)commit to White self-reflexivity and/or social justice yet more interested in how strategic action will amount to anti-racist praxis thereby rendering our discipline more humanizing and inclusive for people of color and less susceptible to White supremacy. What we are asking for in place of an outpouring of statements will admittedly take a great deal of energy and time when

many are pressed for both. However, concretized action, accountability, culpability, and specified timelines for change and transformation are absolutely essential to building a robust infrastructure that will long outlast whomever is currently serving in leadership positions.

As you think through what we are asking NCA's caucuses, divisions, units, leadership, etc. to publicly do in place of or perhaps alongside statements, please consider the following questions:

Did your respective unit issue a statement in response to the Distinguished Scholars Award controversy? If so, how has that statement resulted in anti-racist actions that have materially improved conditions for NCA members of color? If the statement has not resulted in anti-racist actions that have materially improved conditions for NCA members of color, how and why did the statement fall short of follow through and action?

What does your respective unit need to start doing? What does your respective unit need to stop doing? What happens if your respective unit does not start or stop?

How do people privileged by Whiteness need to step up? How do people privileged by Whiteness need to step aside? How will your respective unit respond when people privileged by Whiteness do not step up and/or aside?

What are the specific racialized equity challenges that your respective unit faces? Why hasn't each specific racialized equity challenge been addressed already? What steps will your respective unit take to address and resolve each specific racialized equity challenge?

Which policies and practices anchored in White normativity need to change? What steps will your respective unit take to make these changes and build durable infrastructure that resists White normativity? What will happen in your respective unit if White normativity remains its guiding paradigm?

To be clear, we are not asking you to report back to the Diversity Council in any way. Rather, we are trying to shape the kinds of discourses and efforts that emerge in our discipline in response to our current cultural landscape.

Of the utmost importance to note is that the work we are asking NCA's constituencies to do should not be only predicated upon or limited to the Black community or the Black/White binary that has governed race matters for too long. At times Blackness needs to be unapologetically centered; yet our approaches must also unapologetically attend to racial and ethnic diversity. Take for instance the egregious ways that those who identify as Chinese and those assumed to be Chinese have been impacted by President Trump and his Administration's racist and xenophobic use of "Chinese virus" in place of coronavirus. Likewise, the coronavirus will continue to have devastating consequences for immigrants, those imprisoned, and working-class essential workers which are 3 of the many systemically disadvantaged groups that multiple communities of color are disproportionately represented within.

Our hope is that you can really hear our request to shift from statements to articulations of specific actions—namely assessment, praxis, and accountability. We are making this request

because the Diversity Council is not clear on what (re)commitments to struggle against racism in its myriad forms actually do for people of color. Like many other organizations and institutions, NCA has been “committed” to this for years and yet we are of the world we live in—and here we are.

Always feel welcome to connect if the Diversity Council can be of service in your vital efforts to prioritize inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in its myriad forms.

Sincerely,

Rachel Alicia Griffin, Chair

Elizabeth Parks, Asian/Pacific American Caucus

Kami Anderson, Black Caucus

Deryl Johnson, Caucus on LGBTQ Concerns

Jim Cherney, Disability Issues Caucus

Michael Lechuga, La Raza Caucus

Ashley Mack, Women’s Caucus