

Statement from the Department of Political Science

This week we watched in consternation as yet another Black American died at the hands of the police. The undeniable evidence of George Floyd's agony as he was slowly suffocated by a white police officer has exposed in a brutal way the systematic racism that often goes unnoticed by white America but never by Black America, because they live it daily. This is why, in every major city across the nation—and not just in Minneapolis—we have seen night after night of protests: to make sure that we all notice what is happening. Black Americans are more likely to die in confrontations with police, more likely to be pulled over for searches, more likely to die of COVID-19 because of unequal access to health care and jobs that often put them on the front lines, even, apparently, more likely to be tear gassed while protesting than white Americans. And Black Americans bear a disproportionate share of trying to make the rest of us notice. I must quote the statement of the chair of Black Studies at UCSB here: "It is exhausting for Black students, staff, and faculty to summon the resolve to stand, to smile, to do what is expected of us, while experiencing such deep-seated pain."

Hopefully, we will do more than just notice. We must participate, in big ways and small, to make a change. Likely, we will disagree about how to effect change, or even what policy reforms need to be enacted. But there is one action within the reach of everyone. The violence that led to George Floyd's death is rooted in everyday language and behavior, every time we get away with treating another human being as 'less than' because they are different, whether because of the color of their skin, or their gender, or their sexual orientation, or their disability. This takes work and it starts within each of us. These are the values that we aspire to uphold, as human beings and as political scientists.