

June 10, 2020

Open Letter from the Department Chair to Anthropology Majors

This is a pivotal time in anthropology. White anthropologists (like me) need to accept our part in processes that have excluded minority voices and step forward to stop anti-Blackness, undo Native invisibility, support immigration, dismantle white supremacy, and advance racial justice. To move forward we must clearly acknowledge the history of our discipline, including its roots in a racialized anthropology. This reality needs to be clearly engaged rather than downplayed or sidelined as unimportant. It is not sufficient to simply say that “biological races do not exist” without also acknowledging the ways in which social race and “racial experience” have real influence on opportunities and access, bodies and lives.

Committing ourselves to advancing racial justice seems especially fitting because we study and work at Texas State, the alma mater of President Lyndon B. Johnson. Among modern presidents, President Johnson created significant legislation aimed towards promoting the welfare of minority Americans, including the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act, the Higher Education Act, and the Fair Housing Act. Yet, decades later we live in a time when institutionalized racism persists and nativism and xenophobia flourish in many areas of our society.

It is time to ask ourselves what we can do to promote positive solutions for human problems in the present and for the future. A good place for us to start is to combat racism through clear and accessible discussions of anthropological perspectives on race and ethnicity. We can do this by teaching a critical history of anthropology that focuses on its colonial origins and early role in solidifying and perpetuating the myth of biological race, teaching modern scientific views of race and ethnicity in the public schools (kindergarten on up), decolonizing our teaching of social theory and research methods, and through advancing wider dissemination of anthropological knowledge in our work places and communities through public discourse and outreach.

This coming year the department will also hold a series of voluntary Zoom faculty and student discussions on several books and films, such as: *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, author Ibram X. Kendi, *Between the World and Me*, author Ta-Nehisi Coates, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, author Robin DiAngelo, *13th*, director Ava DuVernay, *I Am Not Your Negro*, director Raoul Peck, and *Teach Us All*, director Sonia Lowman.

My colleagues and I stand in solidarity with those who are lawfully protesting violence against Black Americans and fighting for racial justice in our nation. We have a moral, ethical, and disciplinary obligation to work towards equality for all, to reform the institutions that perpetuate racism, and to overcome the legacy of centuries of racism.

If you have additional suggestions as to how the Anthropology Department might better work to advance an engaged culture of equity, inclusion, and mutual respect on campus, please feel free to contact me directly at ee10@txstate.edu.

Sincerely,

Dr. Elizabeth Erhart
Chair, Anthropology Department
Texas State University

If you are experiencing distress or sadness, the following resources might be helpful:

[Counseling Center](#)

[Minds Matter](#)

[Student Health Center](#)

[COVID-19 Helpful Resources](#)

[Bring it up Bobcats!](#) (Texas State University Bias Response Protocol)

Use these links to access open letters and statements from anthropological organizations:

[Association of Black Anthropologists Statement](#)

[American Anthropological Association Statement](#)

[American Association of Physical Anthropologists Open Letter](#)

[American Association of Physical Anthropologists Statement](#)

[Society for American Archaeology Statement](#)

[American Society of Primatologists](#)

Use these links if you would like to learn more about racism in the U.S. and ways to confront it:

[There's No Scientific Basis for Race—It's a Made-Up Label](#)

[Talking About Race, National Museum of African American History and Culture](#)

[Sojourners Guide for White People Desiring to be Allies](#)

[American Anthropological Association's RACE project](#)

["Project Implicit" Hidden Bias Test](#)

If you need to talk with children about racism, the following resources might be helpful:

[Coretta Scott King Book Award Winners: books about social justice and racial equality](#)

[The ABC's of Diversity w/Carolyn Helsel & Joy Harris-Smith](#)

[Integrated Schools podcast episode "Raising White Kids" w/Jennifer Harvey](#)

[PBS's Teaching Your Child About Black History](#)

[Your Kids Aren't Too Young to Talk About Race: Resource Roundup, Pretty Good](#)