We, the undersigned members of the University of Missouri-St. Louis History Department, are outraged by the ongoing state-sanctioned violence against Black communities in the United States. We mourn the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and too many others. We stand in solidarity with the Black community, with our Black students, with our Black faculty and staff, and with all those fighting for justice. We affirm now and always that Black Lives Matter.

As historians and St. Louisans, we know all too well that these killings and systemic anti-Black racism are not new. We remember Michael Brown and Anthony Lamar Smith, and we think about the present moment by thinking about the past. As elsewhere in the US, slavery was integral to the founding of St. Louis, weaving racism and inequality into the fabric and institutions of this city. This history is today acknowledged – a sign denoting the slave auction that occurred on the steps of the Old Courthouse, a statue of Dred and Harriet Scott – but it has not been fully addressed, still haunting our city and our nation. Institutionalized racial segregation, its legacy, and persistent manifestations continue to negatively impact Black lives and communities, while serving to undermine our nation’s democratic strivings.

From studying the past, we know that struggles for justice are arduous and ongoing. We also know that great lasting change can occur when outrage, inspiration, and conviction converge to create extraordinary moments of opportunity. This is one of those moments. As historians, we vow to redouble our work with communities victimized by systemic racism and to help amplify their testimonies. In our scholarship and our teaching, we will continue to call attention to racial violence and inequality, and to highlight the important history of civil rights movements and struggles for racial justice.

We pledge to advance racial justice at UMSL and within our department by taking the following actions:

- Designing a more expansive support system for our Black students, offering mentorship and a forum for feedback
- Participating in continual professional development on anti-racism
- Creating safe spaces for student reflection and brave spaces that encourage honest dialogue between students, faculty, and staff
- Working to ensure that the voices and concerns of Black colleagues, staff, and students are solicited and included throughout our University community, and especially in policymaking arenas
- Reviewing and revising syllabi to center the writings and perspectives of marginalized peoples
• Supporting the creation and success of the proposed African American and African Diaspora Studies major
• Prioritizing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color for new faculty hires
• Strengthening our partnerships with community groups dedicated to anti-racist work and cultural organizations telling the stories of the fight for racial equality

We commit to ongoing work to address systemic racism and to dismantling white supremacy and all systems of oppression.

Signed,

Peter Acsay
Deborah Cohen
Priscilla Dowden-White
Andrew Hurley
Minsoo Kang
Lara Kelland
Laura Miller
Blaine Milligan
Kara Moskowitz
Laura Westhoff