

Dear Emory Community,

We are proud of our diversity and inclusivity and the extraordinary benefits we reap because we celebrate the ways we are varied and different. Our community fellowship has been on full display during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emory thrives because we prioritize our belief that everyone should feel welcome in the community in which they have made their personal and/or professional home. While we have witnessed innumerable acts of compassion, we have, unfortunately, once again been reminded that too often love and hate coexist.

We, like the rest of the country, are almost three months late in learning of the horrific murder of 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery, a Black American man, which occurred on February 23rd in Brunswick, GA. While taking an afternoon jog in a predominantly White neighborhood, Mr. Arbery was pursued by George McMichael and his son Travis McMichael. Reportedly, they pursued Mr. Arbery because they suspected he was robbing homes in the neighborhood. Mr. McMichael and his son approached Mr. Arbery carrying guns, subsequently blocking him from jogging, and their assault ended with Mr. Arbery being viciously shot and killed. For months, no charges were filed, and no arrests were made. Only after public outcry brought attention to this tragedy, were Mr. Arbery's assailants, two White American men, arrested on May 7th, ironically one day prior to Mr. Arbery's birthday. It is important to note that this incident cannot be considered a hate crime in Georgia because there is no such law in our state. Georgia is one of only four states without a hate crime law, which is legislation designed to enact tougher penalties to deter individuals who target their victims because of the victim's race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability.

Many, at least intrinsically, share our belief that all people are valuable and have the right to thrive. It is in this context that we stand in love and support with Mr. Arbery's family, and his mother, Ms. Wanda Cooper Jones, who had to endure *Mother's Day* grieving the loss of her son. Both the actions that caused Mr. Arbery's death and the injustice that proceeded them are unacceptable. We denounce all acts of violence and hate. We commit to uplifting victims, families, and communities at Emory and beyond. All Americans, indeed all people, have the right to equal and fair treatment, safety in their communities without harassment and racial profiling, and human dignity. Having said that, we understand that victims in the Black community, too often, are vilified or found culpable before any court proceeding. All Americans, nonetheless, are afforded equal protection under the law, and it is vital that we allow our penal system to exact punishment rather than vigilantes. If we fail to uphold these rights as written, we endanger the safety of all communities and disrupt the very tenets of civilized society. Hence, we must stand against hatred and all forms of intolerance.

Violence directed toward Black Americans is not new or uncommon. In fact, treacherous incidents like these have occurred throughout American history within every minority community. Black Americans, in particular, have been and continue to be enslaved, hunted, lynched, shot, and systematically oppressed with disappointingly slow shift toward change. The famous *Black Codes*, instituted in 1865 and 1866 after

Emancipation, had the expressed purpose of limiting the freedom and policing Black communities and served as a legal and historical foundation for this continued racial violence. The fact that these travesties continue to occur with relative frequency, while some turn a blind eye and deaf ear is deplorable. The perpetual failure of our criminal justice system to deter crimes such as these and bring justice for the victims and families sends an implicit message about the level of value our society places on Black lives. In 2018, the most recent year for which there are published scientific data, 49% of hate crimes in the United States (U.S.) were directed against Black Americans. It was not until February of *this year* that the U.S. Congress acted to designate Lynching as a Federal Hate crime, a bill that still requires the signature of the President before it can become a law.

During these troubling times, let us be mindful that divisiveness and stereotyping entire communities as well as the failure to acknowledge the history and systems of oppression, implicitly and explicitly, all perpetuate racism and bigotry. We remain united in combating hatred and denouncing acts of discrimination. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad but the silence over that by the good people." We stand with the Black community in remaining vigilant about the impact of losing a sense of safety and dignity. We recognize how frightening such heinous crimes are, as well as the harmful impact these abuses have on communities, directly and indirectly. Many in the Black community are wounded beyond words, existing through a veil of generational trauma, yet their experiences have been largely dismissed and de-prioritized. Let us voice outrage against hate and violence together and declare our commitment to social justice and human dignity for all communities, especially communities of Color.

Please contact those in your networks who hold positions of influence in order to spark impactful change in eliminating racial and ethnic intolerance. President Barack Obama once said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." Stand up and speak out in ways that are visible and that allow respectful, meaningful conversation. Show your love for your fellow man and your local community. Let's all work toward sustainable change, further healing, and improved mental health.

For members of our community impacted by this tragedy, we encourage you to take positive action in the community. Utilize family, community, and faith resources, including those within our department and the broader Emory community. Together, we must strive toward a future in which everyone can live in peace and safely.

- <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-05-07/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-georgia>
- <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ahmaud-arbery-murder-charges-gregory-travis-mcmichael-georgia/>
- <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fbi-hate-crimes-data-released-today-2019-11-12/>

Thank you for reading.

In Solidarity,
DISC Members



DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
SUBCOMMITTEE