

Statement from the NYU Department of Physics on anti-Black racism

2020 August 6

With sadness and anger we read about the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, two more among hundreds of killings by police (and others) of unarmed Black people in America in the last decade. We condemn police actions that kill Black people and make our City and Nation unsafe for Black people. We express solidarity with Black communities and all people of color who are suffering from attacks on their lives, livelihoods, and peace as a result of systemic racism.

Racism is not confined to the streets. Here in the Department of Physics at New York University, we are part of a system in which very few Black people have the opportunity to obtain undergraduate physics degrees, even fewer are in our graduate programs, and fewer still are faculty. At present the Department has only four Black members, in a community of roughly 200 (when we include students, researchers, faculty, and staff). This is way below any reasonable representation given our City and our Nation.

Furthermore, police violence and structural racism against Black people make our spaces unsafe. We need to make changes that will improve the representation and raise the voices of Black people in the Department. We must make it a safe haven, safe from police violence and racism. But it is not enough not to be racist; we need to also be actively anti-racist in our practices.

We commend researchers from around the world who have devoted their scholarship to studying the complex problems and systems of racism. We recognize those who are working on solutions. We promise to seek out and attend to the scholarship of these researchers and activists, along with Black voices more generally.

In the [Strike For Black Lives](#) on 2020 June 10, the Department convened conversations, which led to the creation of a Committee on Equity and Inclusion to research and work on the following kinds of goals:

Undergraduate and graduate programs: We will help NYU get applications from and admit more Black students interested in the Physics Major and the graduate programs. We will develop structures to better support Black students in their learning and research in physics. We will re-evaluate our curricula and courses with inclusivity in mind. And we will learn how we can work outside of NYU to support Black students in grades K-12 who are interested in physics.

Postdoctoral scholars and staff: We will find ways to make sure that Black people are applying for our postdoctoral and staff positions. We will revise and monitor our hiring practices to ensure that their applications are being fairly considered.

Faculty: We will understand and create paths for increasing the number of Black people on our tenure-track faculty. We will create structures to support the teaching, research, and careers of Black faculty.

Department culture: We will foster an environment for Black people in the Department that is safe from police violence and racism. We will work to understand and eliminate processes and behaviors that contribute to exclusion, oppression, and inequity. We will increase representation and participation of Black physicists in our events, seminars, and colloquia. We will change

Department procedures to make the workings of the Department more transparent.

We commit to these goals and we commit to changing our Department. We put these efforts at the same priority as the physics education, training, and research that we do. Most importantly, *we are committed to the principle that anyone can learn and do physics*. We recognize our failure in the past to create—in a truly anti-racist way—conditions in which all members of our community reach their potential. We are committed to making new and better opportunities for Black students and Black physicists. Black Lives Matter.

Signed, The NYU Department of Physics Committee on Equity and Inclusion:

Yacine Ali-Haïmoud, *Assistant Professor*

Lauren Altman, *PhD student*

David W. Hogg, *Professor (chair of the Committee)* david.hogg@nyu.edu

Lauren Kayli Jones, *undergraduate Physics Major*

Evette Ma, *program administrator, Graduate Studies*

Andrew I MacFadyen, *Professor and Director of Graduate Studies*

Angus McMullen, *postdoctoral scholar*

Maryam Modjaz, *Associate Professor*

Frank Moscatelli, *Clinical Professor and Department Chief of Staff*

Anthony Pullen, *Assistant Professor*

Endorsed by:

Matthew Kleban, *Professor and Chair of the Department of Physics*