

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!
-Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Sympathy"

If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world.

-James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

We, the English Department at Virginia Tech, decry the senseless murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and countless other Black lives that have been stolen by police brutality, racism, and white supremacy terror. We acknowledge the long histories and overlapping effects of racism, settler colonialism, sexism, religious intolerance, sexual violence, and economic disenfranchisement on communities of color, particularly Black and Indigenous communities; and we welcome this moment of resistance, even as we also recognize that it is one of great pain.

In our department gatherings, from classes to conferences to literary readings, we regularly turn to art, literature, language, and writing for thoughtful perspectives, beautiful expressions and models of persuasion and persistence that can provide insight into the causes and effects of racial injustice. We take inspiration from the many Black writers who have shaped the minds of our nation's great thinkers and given voice to the oppressed. We turn to the work of writers like Phillis Wheatley, David Walker, Zora Neal Hurston, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Martin Luther King, Jr., Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison and our own Nikki Giovanni to find the stories, poems, speeches, essays, novels, and plays that can speak to the effects of racism and assert the beauty of Black selfhood in the face of dehumanization. These writers, among many others, help us to reflect on our own positions as writers, researchers, and educators, as well as the responsibility we have to embody antiracist ideals. We affirm, unequivocally, that Black lives matter.

We urge our students and members of the community to reach out to us and to each other, as we work toward rebuilding and supporting communities affected by violence and discrimination and creating a more just world for all.