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OUR PROTEST IS OUR BREATH

OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF THE

ASSOCIATION OF BLACK PSYCHOLOGISTS, Inc.

Countless events of race-related violence and aggression that continue to plague the nation and the media significantly impacts the thoughts, behaviors, feelings, interactions, and reactions of many people. As we grieve the loss of Black family members during the COVID-19 pandemic, we share in the grief, pain, rage, and sorrow from the recent murders of Ahmaud Aurbrey, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. We understand both instances - racial health disparities and race-related brutality - as two strands rooted in historical, institutional, and systemic oppression personified by Amy Cooper, a white woman who summoned the police against Christian Cooper, a bird-watching, law-abiding, unarmed Black man. The debilitating psychological effects of centuries of racial oppression cannot be underestimated. European human traffickers uprooted an estimated 15-50 million Afrikans leaving broken bodies, spirits, and families. Centuries spent burdened by the legacies of enslavement and racism have left the Black community in distress in all areas of life. We pen this open letter, to tell you what we expect and express how our people experience systems of dehumanization. To say we are frustrated would be an understatement. To say we are tired doesn't come close. However, if we must continue to show up and shout out - to claim our right to breathe, we will do so. Our protest is the collection of voices unheard, the fury of the invisible, and the power of the grieving. We will continue until justice is served. Our protest is our breath.



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ABPsi LETTER TO MEMBERSHIP

We, The Association of Black Psychologists Inc. (ABPsi), recognize the countless events of race-related violence and aggression that continue to plague the nation, and the media that significantly impacts the thoughts, behaviors, feelings, interactions, and reactions of many people. As we grieve the loss of Black family members during the COVID-19 pandemic, we share in the grief, pain, rage, and sorrow from the recent murders of Ahmaud Aurbrey, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. We understand both instances - racial health disparities and race-related brutality - as two strands rooted in historical, institutional, and systemic oppression personified by Amy Cooper, a white woman who potentially weaponized the police against Christian Cooper, a bird-watching, law-abiding, unarmed Black man. The debilitating psychological effects of centuries of racial oppression cannot be underestimated. European human traffickers uprooted an estimated 15-50 million Afrikans; leaving broken bodies, spirits, and families. Centuries spent burdened by the legacies of enslavement and racism have left the Black community in distress in all areas of life. We pen this open letter, to tell you what we expect and express how our people experience systems of dehumanization. To say we are frustrated would be an understatement. To say we are tired doesn't come close. However, if we must continue to show up and shout out - to claim our right to breathe, we will do so. Our protest is the collection of voices unheard, the fury of the invisible, and the power of the grieving. We will continue until justice is served. Our protest is our breath.



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The COVID - 19 story is an allegory for the Black experience in America. A respiratory disease at its core, it primarily attacks one's ability to breathe by crippling the lungs and exacerbating health and mental health disparities resulting in high mortality death rates. As our community labors in breathing through this pandemic, we are compelled to note that World-wide, white supremacy ideology is the constant and persistent global pandemic. America's underbelly of white supremacy is kneeling on our collective necks. white supremacy creates the conditions that white fragility refuses to acknowledge the aggression, and white silence allows it to pass as normal. The broadcast of lies born out of white supremacy support levels of oppression which perpetuate generational trauma and result in lifelong psychological challenges and problems ([Patterson, 1998](#), [Eyerman, 2001](#), [Leary, 2005](#), [Horton & Hotron, 2006](#), [Akbar, 2003](#), [Nobles, 2006](#)).

This violence has stolen so many souls. Among the souls we acknowledge a few here:

Rodney King in Los Angeles, California 1991; Abner Louima in New York City, New York 1997; Amadou Diallo in New York City, New York 1999; Sean Bell in New York City, New York 2006; Oscar Grant in Oakland, California 2009; Eric Garner in New York City, New York 2014; Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri 2014; Laquan McDonald in Chicago, Illinois 2014; Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland 2015; Sandra Bland in Hempstead, Texas 2015; Antwon Rose in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 2018; Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia 2020; Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky 2020; and George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota 2020, and countless more.

Black anger, frustration, rage, sorrow, helplessness, and hopelessness are our responses to those slaughtered. We cannot breathe and we can no longer allow our humanity to be denigrated, demeaned, and destroyed. As members of the ABPsi, we are also mothers and fathers afraid for our children. We are family members and friends worried about our support systems. We are coworkers and people of different faith backgrounds concerned about our communities. We are professionals who belong to disciplines that may have been complacent and/or complicit in this psychological pandemic; thus we exist to correct. We are people in black bodies who are experiencing the same threat as those we serve.

This objectification, dehumanization, and nullification of the Afrikan American individual, racial, and cultural identity served to create a psychological enslavement. Effectively helping Afrikan American people, therefore, requires that mental health providers have



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an understanding of the various forms of historical trauma contributing cumulatively to the revictimization experienced

by survivors.



So, our goal is to engage in the implementation of healing strategies that will serve to empower our mind and body, as well as increase our capacity to repair multigenerational psychological damage caused by centuries of oppression.

The ABPsi national, chapter, professional, and student areas have engaged in a global conversation through webinars, workbooks, publications, and virtual healing circles, all to support our members and the larger community during this time. President Dr. Theopia Jackson will host a global town hall in June 14, 2020 from 2 – 4 pm EST (more information to come). Our intent is to take this twin epidemic head-on.

Consistent with our mission, the ABPsi has spent over 51 years researching and documenting the importance of Black/Afrikan psychological perspectives for optimal development of Black/Afrikan American persons. Additionally, through our research we have examined the impact of complex trauma and the role of exposure to persistent racism on the mental health of persons of Afrikan ancestry. We stand ready to offer our support with regard to the development and implementation of transformative strategies. The ABPsi will continue its efforts to liberate the minds and rebuild and enliven the spirit of Black and other disenfranchised people throughout this nation and around the world. We sojourn with allies of different backgrounds to make our country a better union and democracy for all.



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Myers, L. James. (1988, 1993). [*Understanding an Afrocentric world view: Introduction to an optimal psychology*](#). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.

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ABPsi LETTER TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY

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We are mothers, fathers, cousins, mental wellness professionals, who are healing from our own traumas and experiences with racism while we also work to offer healing to others. We are clear that George Floyd's murder was just the one that was caught on video. But our ancestors told us stories. We have our own stories. And our children are learning new stories of injustice and oppression. Injustice in healthcare, housing, education, all systems are decidedly and purposefully kneeling on us, especially the law enforcement system.

We are sick and tired of initiatives and talk. We are sick and tired of sensitivity and de-escalation training. In fact, what's needed is un-training. The people who are charged with serving our communities must be untrained from the racist and white supremacist tendencies that form the basis of American government and institutions.



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Angela Davis warned us, “In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist”. Black anger, frustration, rage, sorrow, helplessness and hopelessness are our responses to these senseless acts. We cannot breathe and we can no longer allow our humanity to be denigrated, demeaned, and destroyed.

Afrikan Americans continue to experience physical and psychological violence fueled by racism and notions of white supremacy. With every highly publicized instance of a brutal police encounter or senseless death at the hands of a police officer or a concerned citizen, black people experience a type of vicarious psychological trauma.

These continuous and persistent experiences of racism create a psychological enslavement which continues to maintain systems of oppression for exploitation. The ongoing occurrences of fascism and racial trauma increases the risk of internalizing such acts that will further threaten and perpetuate the intended destruction of the Black community. Internalized racism means that we have accepted and believe in white superiority and black inferiority, informing what we do and treat ourselves, as well as one another. Internalizing these racist acts is becoming more difficult to resist and continues to affect our reactions and responses.

Cultural grounding has protected us from the insidious impact of racism and internalized racism. Racial socialization is a form of cultural grounding used to protect us against the negative psychological effects of racism. Racial socialization includes helping us think strategically about how to respond when confronted with a racist situation, acknowledging and educating us about the presence and reality of these various forms of racism, and preparing us for and overcoming the impact of these racists act. It promotes relying on and cultivating cultural heritage, racial pride, self-pride, and humanistic values and spiritual coping that will strengthen and unite Black communities.

In the face of ongoing racial trauma against the Black communities, it is essential that we are intentional with our responses. It is important that we rely on our cultural beliefs, rituals, and practices. Unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, creativity, purpose, and faith have promoted and sustained our survival during the civil rights movement. As a people, we are here again. It’s important to remember who we are, where we come from, and reach back to our history and use the strategies that our ancestors and community leaders have used to survive the various historical traumas we have experienced.



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A CALL TO ACTION

An Open Letter from The Association of Black Psychologists

Countless events of race-related violence and aggression that continue to plague the nation and the media significantly impacts the thoughts, behaviors, feelings, interactions, and reactions of many people. As we grieve the loss of Black family members during the COVID-19 pandemic, we share in the grief, pain, rage, and sorrow from the recent murders of Ahmaud Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. We understand both instances - racial health disparities and race-related brutality - as two strands rooted in historical, institutional, and systemic oppression personified by Amy Cooper, a white woman who summoned the police against Christian Cooper, a bird-watching, law-abiding, unarmed Black man. The debilitating psychological effects of centuries of racial oppression can not be underestimated. European human traffickers uprooted an estimated 15-50 million Africans leaving broken bodies, spirits and families. Centuries spent burdened by the legacies of enslavement and racism have left the Black community in distress in all areas of life. We pen this open letter, to tell you what we expect and express how our people experience systems of dehumanization. To say we are frustrated would be an understatement. To say we are tired doesn't come close. However, if we must continue to show up and shout out - to claim our right to breathe, we will do so. Our protest is the collection of voices unheard, the fury of the invisible, and the power of the grieving. We will continue until justice is served. Our protest is our breath.



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We work, rear children, go to school, run errands, build communities, save lives, and serve in the military the same as any other American - but we do it under the oppressive footing of racism, discrimination, invisibility, and hatred. We demand to move forward, in an anti-racist society and in moving towards this, we issue the following eight calls to action:

1. **We call for our people to recognize the law of self-preservation** and endorse and encourage every Black person, organization, including Black Armed Self Protection Groups to use their genius and skillsets to preserve and advance Black life.
2. **We call on those who want our votes to issue an anti-racist platform -** Candidates must offer a substantive plan to root out white supremacy ideology from the nation's policies and practices. We are not interested in inclusion, diversity, cultural competence, or equity initiatives. Strategies to help us cope with white supremacy are ill-conceived and have demonstrably failed. We must doggedly address the roots.
3. **We call for anti-racist employment standards** - Employers must ask the question during the application and interview phase "Do you hold racist views or beliefs". It is not enough to address the issue after the damage has been done. Racists must be put on notice at the outset that those beliefs are unwelcomed and they need not apply. Specifically, law enforcement, healthcare, and education systems must screen all prospective and current employees for white supremacist views.
4. **We call for anti-racist healthcare standards** - Every healthcare metric must be reported with race/ethnicity breakdowns. It is required all health care organizations and facilities track health care disparities and reduce them. Healthcare professionals should operate from a default that racist policies and practices are in place. Starting with that default position makes it easier to correct course before too much damage is done.



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5. **We call on education systems to adopt anti-racist standards** - All systems, K - Higher Education must immediately overturn policies and practices rooted in white standards and norms. Education systems must have teachers, professors, and leaders who mirror the children they teach. We call on all educational systems who are bare of Black and Brown principles, assistant principals, deans, tenured faculty, school boards, directors and superintendents to change this atrocity by creating a timeline for a plan of action with clearly defined expectations. This is not limited to instructors- we also call for you to examine the diversity of your supportive staff and departments which make up your institution (i.e. sanitation, accounting, and other departments).
6. **We call on law enforcement systems** to undo their standard police training and retrain “policing” based on the primacy of honoring the humanity of all people, especially Black people. We call on those law enforcement officers who stand by their oath to protect and serve - to publicly stand with the community by denouncing the actions of Derek Chauvin. We require police to be police and intervene when they see a fellow officer murdering and harming another human.
7. **We call on communities** to demand respect for the cultural integrity of their customs, values, and traditions and the linking of us all by the communality of our humanity. We ask each individual to find their authentic way of protesting (i.e. marching, donating to the cause, supporting Black-owned businesses, making phone calls to political leaders, and voting). **We ask Black people everywhere to Zola (Love, Peace, Productive) Up as a People** and therein activate our self-healing capacity to be well.
8. **We call for all healers of the Afrikan Diaspora** to engage in the implementation of healing strategies (i.e. Emotional Emancipation CirclesSM) that will serve to empower our mind and body and increase our capacity to repair multigenerational psychological damage caused by centuries of oppression.



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