

Statement of Commitment to an Anti-Racist Romance Studies

We begin by acknowledging that Duke University occupies the territory of several Native nations, including the Shakori, Eno, and Saponi peoples. We also acknowledge that many of the university's founders, benefactors, trustees, and faculty have participated in and benefited from the perpetuation of slavery, segregation, exploitative labor practices, and the disenfranchisement of people of color. These histories of racist violence continue to shape the institution we work in today, and it is incumbent upon us to not only acknowledge them but also to work to counteract their effects in the present.

The present moment reveals the urgency of our responsibility. We are facing a global pandemic that disproportionately affects the lives of people of color as a result of systemic racism in housing, employment, and healthcare. The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and countless others demonstrate the mortal danger posed by white supremacy and police brutality. The Department of Romance Studies joins in unwavering solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and with global struggles against racist violence and racial inequities.

Our scholarship and teaching on the linguistic, social, and cultural histories of the Romance world can contribute to anti-racist struggle by engaging with the representations of race and racism produced over the course of several centuries. Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Italian are today global languages because of the long history of European colonization and imperialism that began in the 15th century. As these languages were imposed in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, so too were ideas of racial difference and practices of racist domination. While there are commonalities between the experiences of race and racism in these sites and in the United States, there are also divergences as a result of cultural particularities. We seek to make our classrooms a space where teachers and students engage in respectful discussion and analysis of these divergences, producing the knowledge and compassionate understanding that are necessary tools in the fight against racism. Through our scholarship and our teaching we will continue to pursue an understanding of race and racism that is attendant to the particularities of cultural contexts beyond the anglophone world, while remaining steadfast in our united opposition to racism in all its manifestations.

Learning languages is a practice that is essential for understanding our own experiences and those of other cultures. It entails more than mastery of vocabulary and grammatical structures—it requires an openness to seeing the world from differing perspectives. As a department, we also acknowledge that language can be a source of oppression, discrimination, and inequity. Thus, we are committed to denouncing discriminatory acts based on language, because we firmly believe that linguisticism—discrimination based on language use or accent—is a proxy for racism.

Our work as scholars and educators, while important, is not enough on its own. Centuries of systemic racism and violence cannot be dismantled without committing to structural

reform. Thus, we will pursue the following initiatives in order to promote racial and social justice at Duke University and within our department:

- Organize a department-wide town hall for open discussion of anti-racist initiatives
- Compile a report on historical department demographics, including race, gender, undergraduate/graduate institutions, as well as the history of student and faculty attrition
- Revise hiring and recruitment practices where necessary to foster equitable hiring and advancement at all levels
- Adjust course offerings and degree requirements for undergraduate and graduate students to ensure exposure to discussions of equity, systemic racism, and social inequality
- Establish regular professional development courses, workshops, and/or trainings on anti-racism for faculty and staff, and determine and implement attendance requirements for these events

We commit to making our department an environment in which students, faculty, and staff of color are supported, recognized, and celebrated; we commit to opposing systemic racism at Duke University and in the broader Durham community; and we commit to the continued struggle against racism in all its manifestations throughout the world.