

## NCTE Statement Affirming #BlackLivesMatter

—Authored by NCTE/CCCC Black Caucus

At this pivotal moment, between a space of hopeful resistance and fragile defiance, the dilemmas of race and racism in the United States have become so copious that to ignore them would be to render NCTE voiceless and bequeath it to those great chasms of silence through which racial injustices endure. The [recent incidents of racial injustice](#) in our country—from Charleston to Cincinnati to a tiny jail cell in Texas—require that we speak up. Each moment of despair, of another mother's or father's eyes swollen from carrying the weight of heavy tears, of another daughter or son swept into the dark abyss of senseless violence, bears witness to our country's deep and abiding struggle to uproot the crippling manifestations of racism brutally inflicted upon Black bodies.

We will not render ourselves voiceless, nor can we tolerate the fictions of colorblindness and post-racialism any longer. Though the election of President Obama raised the hopes and expectations of many that our country's legacy of racial apartheid, of devaluing the Black body, had ended, we know that systems of racial inequity persist. From [Watts in 1965](#) to [Ferguson](#) 50 years later, uprisings across our nation evince the resilience of American racial oppression. [Redlining](#) has become redistricting, leaving patterns of segregation from 1954 intact in 2015. In the wake of Baltimore, Ferguson, Cleveland, New York City, Charleston, and elsewhere, a devastating portrait of two Americas has emerged.

The picture of U.S. racism begins with our children (though it does not end with them). While they comprise 18 percent of the preschool population, Black children represent over [50 percent of all out-of-preschool suspensions](#). A recent [analysis](#) by researchers at Villanova University concluded that in addition to racial bias, Black girls face colorism: darker skin tone significantly raised Black girls' odds of being put out of school. To this point, we now know that [Black girls are six times more likely to be suspended](#) than White girls, just as [Black boys are imprisoned at six times the rate](#) of their White counterparts. Moreover, Black children are [18 times more likely to be sentenced](#) as adults than White children, and make up [nearly 60 percent of children in prison](#). While we could cite hundreds of comparable statistics, the evidence is unambiguous—racial inequities in the U.S. prevail from the cradle to the grave.

Most recently, the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd, Christian Taylor, Kayla Moore, Samuel DuBose, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Aiyana Jones, Freddie Gray, Duanna Johnson, Michael Brown, Tarika Wilson—we say their names—coupled with heroic acts of digital and physical activism (see Bree Newsome, DeRay Mckesson, Alicia Garza, Shaun King, among many others) give us both reminders and maps of the great toil set before us. Though much of the work will concern stopping the bleeding, another layer of effort will involve healing the wounds. Michelle Alexander's book [The New Jim Crow](#), which raises awareness of the crisis of mass incarceration, and Bryan Stevenson's dramatic and heartrending account in [Just Mercy](#) of justice transformed into redemption highlight the road ahead. From police brutality to new century policies of disfranchisement, both books proclaim that blood has been spilled in the U.S. We are only now beginning to understand both the causes and the cures.

In the struggle to stop the bleeding—that is, in the fight against racial injustice—we have long believed that English classrooms could offer triage. However, too often the void of safety and the disruption of dignity created in them are so vaporous and exotic that classrooms too can be seen as sites furthering racialized oppressions. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his 2015 book [Between the World and Me](#), has condemned classrooms and schools alike as public sites of disillusionment where Black bodies withstand the thrashings of ideological lynchings. The momentum of racial oppression rooted in classrooms, what Coates would consider as torturous, must be reversed if we are to seize any chance of achieving racial justice. Michael Brown's mother, Lesley McSpadden, knew this when one of her first statements about the death of her son involved his education—or the lack thereof—and how difficult it was.

In this light, we call upon English educators to use classrooms to help as opposed to harm, to transform our world and raise awareness of the crisis of racial injustice. We call upon English education researchers to commit time to studying and disrupting narratives of racism rendered complexly in the substance of our profession. As an organization, we are committed to providing English educators with the tools, training, and support needed to build a more equitable system better able to serve the unique needs of all youth. In addition to the revolution on

the ground, we seek a parallel revolution in curricula, instructional models and practices, assessment approaches, and other facets of education that would lead to a future free from the barriers of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and bias. At the same time, we must pursue meaningful opportunities for all stakeholders to build their capacities for higher cognition, deeper compassion, elevated empathies, and greater acceptance.

Such educational work exists beyond self-conscious, oscillating identities and the whims of political penchants that too often define space. The new space that we seek is intentional, locating itself in a paradigm of moral accountability as opposed to anonymity. It is a space of formless potential, traced by and tracing the possibilities of other narratives, of outside narratives, narrations of justice begetting, and finally, an emerging image of who we together might become. This new educational space must provide an assault against the negative and contradictory effects of abstraction. It must move beyond the surface concerns of test scores and teacher ratings into a strange new place of feeling—a place that must make us think of inimitable and breathtaking things such as the hopeful possibilities of a world that renders racial oppression obsolete.

Recognition of structures of racial hatred sits at the center of our conviction as an organization. This statement seeks to affirm what should be obvious: Black lives matter. As an educational organization committed to equity and educational justice, promoting literacy and human life, we take seriously our obligation to ensure racial justice. Therefore we remain resolute in our mission to use and produce knowledge that is essential to eliminating racism in the U.S. and beyond.

#### Additional Readings & Resources:

1. [\\_Making Black Lives Matter in Classrooms: The Power of Teachers to Change the World](#) by David E. Kirkland
2. [\\_Black Students' Lives Matter: Building the School-to-Justice Pipeline](#) by The Editors of Rethinking Schools
3. [\\_From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter: Lessons for the Classroom](#) course offered by The Center for Experiential Learning and Diversity, University of Washington
4. [\\_Teaching about Race and Rights](#) by Beth Fertig
5. [\\_How the #FergusonSyllabus Can Help Teachers Talk about Race and Rights on the First Day of School](#) by Liz Pleasant
6. [\\_What Educators Can Take from #BlackLivesMatter](#) by Ryan Williams-Virden
7. [\\_Educators Can Ease Racial Trauma Experienced by Students](#) by Will Morris
8. [\\_Teaching "Black Lives Matter"](#) by Kathy Ishizuka
9. [\\_Teaching While White](#) by Molly Tansey
10. [\\_Not Just Us? Using Classrooms to Get \(White\) People to Talk about Race](#) by David E. Kirkland