



"It is not enough to simply condemn anti-Black racism. We know that solutions begin with listening to and learning from those who face anti-Black racism, and by standing next to those fighting for a more just world." - Rhonda Lenton

June 11, 2020

Dear President Rhonda Lenton,

We are writing to you as concerned students and community members to condemn your institutional and personal active complicity and perpetuation of Racism, anti-Blackness, and anti-Indigeneity. Since the murder of George Floyd, a necessary conversation surrounding anti-Blackness has sparked globally and here at home. This has been a time for individuals and institutions to position themselves on the right, or wrong side of history. We are ashamed to say that York University and its administration are very clearly on the wrong side of history. We acknowledge your statement released on June 1st, 2020, but to echo your own words: "it is not enough to simply condemn anti-Black racism." Our question to you, is: what have you done to dismantle the deeply rooted racism and anti-Blackness within your institution besides disingenuous condemnations?

How can you possibly claim to recognize the impact of anti-Blackness when you continue to perpetuate it on your campuses? How can you possibly claim to recognize the impact of anti-Blackness when Black students have time and time again asked for you to be and do better, yet you've ignored their calls? How can you possibly claim to recognize the impact of anti-Blackness when your Board of Governors, Senate Executive, and Senior Administration are composed of nearly all white individuals, lacking serious representation? How can you possibly claim to recognize the impact of anti-Blackness and work to dismantle it when you fail to take issues of anti-Blackness seriously? Let us be clear - your statement does nothing to prove that you care about Black or racialised lives on your campuses, because you do not. For an institution that prides itself on being a leading institution, you have a habit of underestimating your students' intelligence and memory. In your statement, you claim that you "know that solutions begin with listening to and learning from

those who face anti-Black racism" - allow us to remind you of the many times you've failed to do so:

You claim to support Black students, but are you not the same administration that fails to act on the lack of Black representation amongst staff and faculty? Are you supporting Black students when you fail to accept a [recommendation](#) to hire an additional 6 Black faculty members? Are you supporting Black students when you fail to hold your anti-Black faculty and staff accountable? You condemn anti-Blackness but you continue to protect your anti-Black faculty, who on numerous occasions, have said the n-word and racist statements in their lectures and to this date have faced no repercussions, despite students raising their concerns. You certainly aren't supporting Black students when, despite numerous calls for better representation, only 1% of your total faculty is made up of Black professors, and you certainly aren't supporting said Black faculty when you are actively silencing and harassing them - a perfect example can be found in your ongoing [human rights tribunal case](#) with Prof. Aimé Avolonto.

You claim to support Black students, but are you not the same administration that fails to recognize the discriminatory and racist practices that are upheld within the community safety and security department? Are you supporting Black students when you continue to allow Toronto Police Services onto our campuses, despite the many times they've responded with excessive force and police presence? Were you supporting Black students when a Black student, on your campus, [had his leg broken by private security](#) - and you referred to it as a "troubling incident?" You're certainly not supporting students when your security members continue to put Black lives, safety, and wellbeing at risk on campus via their heavy-handed and hostile responses to incidents involving Black students and community members - it's clear that you're more concerned with silencing and surveilling Black students than actually supporting them. York University campuses have not been strangers to [hate](#)



[crimes and anti-Black rhetoric](#) over the last few years, but keeping in line with your most recent statement, it seems as though you're more comfortable spewing "diversity and inclusion" message boxes, rather than addressing incidents that make your Black, Indigenous, and Racialised students unsafe on your campuses.

You claim to support Black, Indigenous, and Racialised students, but are you not the same administration that fails to collect race-based data, and thus, fails to provide any targeted support services? Are you supporting Black, Indigenous, and Racialised students when you apply a 10% increase to international student tuition fees in the midst of a pandemic, and ignore [calls to support](#) your international student community? Were you supporting Black, Indigenous, and Racialised students when you [unfairly targeted](#) students who participated in political dissent? Were you supporting Black, Indigenous and Racialised students when you blocked a proposal for fossil fuel and weapons divestment - investments that disproportionately impact racialised bodies on your campus - by [undemocratically dissolving](#) the advisory committee that dealt with such proposals? Where was the listening then?

When the world is watching, you choose to be vocal about incidents of anti-Black racism, but you have always been silent when it comes to those very instances happening on your campuses. No amount of disingenuous statements will change that. We've been listening to you for some time - we've heard all about the university's mandate and commitment to social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. You may preach diversity and inclusion, but that certainly hasn't followed through with tangible support for your Black, Indigenous and Racialised students. We've been waiting for you and your administration to listen, Rhonda Lenton. You have an opportunity to prove us wrong. You have an opportunity to prove that you support your Black, Indigenous, and Racialised students. You have an opportunity to situate yourself as an institution on the right side of history.

As student leaders, we have listened.

We demand the following:

1. Cops off Campus
2. The implementation and institution of community-based alternatives to security and police forces in a campus safety plan, to be determined in collaboration with student leaders like ourselves, the department of social work, and staff and faculty who are familiar with abolitionist frameworks
3. The re-introduction of the Community Safety Council at York to advise and oversee the Community Safety Department and Security Services
4. That the recommendation of hiring 6 additional Black Faculty be accepted immediately
5. The implementation of mandatory Anti Oppression and Mental Health training for all Staff and Faculty
6. Collection of race-based data
7. The introduction of a separate reporting process for incidents of Racism and Discrimination

We await your response.

With all due respect,

