Economics Graduate Student Organization, University of Massachusetts
Statement of Solidarity with Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter. We grieve the murders of Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, George Floyd, João Pedro Mattos Pinto, Anderson Arboleda, Ahmaud Arbery - and too many others - by the pervasive anti-black racism which covers the globe and finds a special quarter in the United States. We commit to the work of dismantling white supremacy in all of its forms and to building a world of dignity and justice. We, the Economics Graduate Student Organization (EGSO) of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, wholeheartedly support the Black Lives Matter protests around the country and the world.

We became economists to use the tools of the discipline towards liberation. And yet, our discipline has all too often frustrated liberation, from our theory to the makeup of the discipline. Despite decades of research by Black political economists that deconstructs racism in the US and elsewhere, the mainstream economic literature on racism (and thus, on society) pays little attention to its structural drivers - itself a form of systemic racism in the field. The discipline is overwhelmingly white and male, and the representation of Black people in economics has decreased in the past 25 years. One manifestation of this is the widespread normalization of smug condescension by the profession’s white and male gatekeepers - directed at activists and dissenting ideas - a posture both ethically disgusting and completely inappropriate for academic inquiry. Representation matters, and the work of representation begins at home. Our support of Black Lives Matter means committing to Black voices at UMass Economics and in our discipline, and reckoning with the concerns of the Black Lives Matter movement - in its array of manifestations - with our theory and work.

Similarly, the broad promise of academia has been that truthful inquiry into our world will set us free. Yet far too often, the academy has congealed social power and institutionalized white supremacy. We participate in academia and seek to build an academy which brings the university in line with its promise of liberation - a task which involves representation as well as the manner in which the university confronts power and white supremacy. This work, too, begins at home. We support the call of the UMass Brotherly Union and the Graduate Students of Color Association to defund the campus police and invest in the well-being of Black and Brown students, immediately. More broadly, we challenge the University to confront white supremacy beyond the well-worn paths of workshops and climate surveys, with material commitments upon serious introspection on the depths of white supremacy in the university.

The Economics Department, along with other departments like AfroAm, emerged with its radical character as a direct result of the Civil Rights movement on campus during the 1960s and 1970s. The University of Massachusetts Amherst, itself as a land grant institution, was birthed during Reconstruction. We are in fact indebted to the legacy of movements for Black liberation. As graduate students of the radical tradition, we practice and fully endorse democratic and participatory decision-making in the allocation of community resources, and we stand with Black Lives Matter in the call for defunding police and investment in Black communities. As radical economists, we support ideas and policies centering Black liberation that work towards diminishing the role of policing and prisons in society including reparations and building liberatory economic systems. Lastly, we commit ourselves to this work, for the long run.

Signed,
The Economics Graduate Student Organization
University of Massachusetts, Amherst