

AAAS Statement on Comments by Khadijah Lynch

Twitter comments by Brandeis undergraduate Khadijah Lynch ('16) regarding the recent shooting of two New York Police Department officers have received widespread media attention. Many of the responses to her comments, beginning with an article written by a fellow Brandeis student Daniel Mael ('15) for the blog *Truth Revolt*, have noted that Ms. Lynch is a “student leader” who serves as an Undergraduate Department Representative (UDR) for the African and Afro-American Studies (AAAS) Department.

The comments of Ms. Lynch, made through her own personal Twitter account, do not reflect the views of AAAS as a department. AAAS, unequivocally, does not promote nor condones a disregard for the loss of human life. The deaths of officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu are a tragedy and should be treated with proper respect. We express our most sincere condolences to their family and loved ones.

Ms. Lynch has offered her resignation as an Undergraduate Degree Representative for AAAS, which I have accepted.

AAAS provides students with an interdisciplinary grounding in the history, culture and politics of African Americans and other peoples of African descent. We believe that a firm appreciation for the varied and complex experiences of black people in the United States and throughout the world is essential to a holistic liberal arts education, as well as developing the critical skills necessary for productive civic and global engagement. Our faculty are rigorous scholars and recognized experts in our respective fields. We are also compassionate teachers, committed to the educational welfare of every Brandeis student that sits in our classes, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexuality or political ideology. AAAS has and will always be a central pillar of Brandeis University and what makes this institution great.

The Undergraduate Degree Representative program was established in 1998 to “open avenues of communication between undergraduate majors and departmental faculty.” UDRs perform a variety of functions, such as promoting department events, organizing social gatherings, advertising classes and informally advising interested students about the major and minor. Ms. Lynch served admirably in her capacity as a UDR and responsibly represented AAAS. She never disrespected a fellow student nor publicly promoted ideas that ran counter to the beliefs of the department.

In 1961, the great American writer James Baldwin poignantly noted that, “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.” While it may be easy and convenient at this emotionally charged moment to condemn Ms. Lynch, we must also strive to understand why she would make these comments. This means openly and honestly recognizing the very real pain and frustration that many young people of color struggle with in trying to navigate their place in a society that all too often delegitimizes their existence.

We are in the midst of a very perilous time in our country’s racial history. The frequent deaths of black men, women and children at the hands of law enforcement officials has received greater

attention and long overdue heightened scrutiny in the aftermath of the Michael Brown and Eric Garner grand jury decisions. Protests and consciousness raising activities have taken place across the country, including here at Brandeis, on an unprecedented scale. As history has proven, social movements such as the one we are currently witnessing are necessary for our country to progress and achieve some semblance of maturity when it comes to issues of racial injustice. The marches, rallies, and die-ins of the past weeks have been overwhelmingly peaceful, a fact that the actions of one deranged individual should not deter us from recognizing. Indeed, the fundamental premise behind the declaration that “Black Lives Matter” is that *all lives matter*. We must mourn the unnecessary loss of life of a twelve year old unarmed boy in Cleveland with the same compassion as we do the death of a Brooklyn police officer.

As a society and as a university, it is imperative that we always uphold the principles of freedom of speech and freedom of expression. We also recognize that with these rights comes both responsibility and accountability. In this context, social media can be both productive and dangerous. As witnessed over the past year in regards to the “Black Lives Matter” movement, social media has the power to educate, energize and organize people in unprecedented ways. However, with the click of a button, social media also can give comments expressed in the heat of the moment a potentially regrettable permanency. The comments expressed by Ms. Lynch in no way excuse those made in response to her tweets, many of which have been horrifically racist, sexist, Islamophobic and threatening physical violence. These appalling comments should be resoundingly condemned with even greater passion.

This incident has elicited tremendous emotion and will necessitate further dialogue about a host of important issues. We therefore encourage Brandeis—students, faculty, staff, alumni—to take pause and self-critically examine ourselves, as individuals, but also as members of a community linked by a commitment to improving our society and world. We hope that Brandeis can seize this moment to grow and learn. AAAS stands ready to take the lead in this process.

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