

# MIT Mathematics Department Gathering

#ShutDownAcademia #Strike4BlackLives

June 10, 2020

# Agenda

- Opening remarks (Michel Goemans, Mathematics Department Head)
- Readings (Tom Mrowka, Haynes Miller, Elise Brown)
- Context for moment of silence (Henry Cohn)
- 8 minutes and 46 seconds of silent reflection
- Reading and transition to focused discussion (Peter Haine)
- Separate topical discussion sessions (links in email and later slide)
- Reconvene at 3:40pm for reports and final remarks (Drew Sutherland)

# Opening remarks (Michel Goemans)

# *Harlem*, by Langston Hughes (read by Tom Mrowka)

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

# *Caged bird*, by Maya Angelou (read by Haynes Miller)

A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

# *A small needful fact*, by Ross Gay (read by Elise Brown)

Is that Eric Garner worked  
for some time for the Parks and Rec.  
Horticultural Department, which means,  
perhaps, that with his very large hands,  
perhaps, in all likelihood,  
he put gently into the earth  
some plants which, most likely,  
some of them, in all likelihood,  
continue to grow, continue  
to do what such plants do, like house  
and feed small and necessary creatures,  
like being pleasant to touch and smell,  
like converting sunlight  
into food, like making it easier  
for us to breathe.

# George Floyd (Oct. 14, 1973 – May 25, 2020)

Killed by a police officer, who held a knee held to his neck for 8” 46’, continuing even after Floyd lost consciousness.

He called out for his late mother as he died.

Thirty years earlier, he had told his friends  
“I want to touch the world.”

How could society allow this happen? It shocks the conscience, yet it’s far from an isolated incident...



Please join us for 8 minutes, 46 seconds of silence dedicated to the memory of George Floyd and other victims of anti-Black violence.



# Excerpt from *So you want to talk about race*, by Ijeoma Oluo (read by Peter Haine)

It is important when talking about police brutality to stand secure in your experience, without trying to override the experiences of other communities with police. What has happened to you is valid and true, but it is not what has happened to everyone. The experience of white communities with police are real, and the experience of communities of color with police are real—but they are far from the same. And while it is important to recognize these different viewpoints, we must remember this: If you do trust and value your police force, and you also believe in justice and equality for people of color, you will not see the lack of trust on behalf of communities of color as simply a difference of opinion.

# Ground rules for discussion sessions

*Engage respectfully:* we are all here with goodwill to learn and think.

*Allow broad participation:* do not dominate the discussion if you have strong opinions or come from a position of power or privilege.

*Center anti-Blackness:* many other important topics may come up, but we will focus on the theme of anti-Blackness and defer other topics to another time.

# Zoom discussion sessions

***Anti-Racism for Newcomers:*** <https://mit.zoom.us/j/91944714738>

***Mathematics & Policing:*** <https://mit.zoom.us/j/98344579437>

***Race and Incarceration in the U.S.:*** <https://mit.zoom.us/j/95895044743>

***The Economics of Racism:*** <https://mit.zoom.us/j/99950895868>

***Anti-Blackness at MIT:*** <https://mit.zoom.us/j/91890192298>

Please reconvene here at 3:40pm.

# Reports from discussion groups (Drew Sutherland)

- Anti-Racism for Newcomers
- Mathematics & Policing
- Race and Incarceration in the U.S.
- The Economics of Racism
- Anti-Blackness at MIT