

A Statement of Solidarity and Intent

We unreservedly declare our solidarity with our colleagues: Dr. Michelle Cowin Gibbs and Dr. Lisa L. Moore. We do so because their experiences mirror ours. As educators, artists, and scholars from historically racialized communities, committed to justice and emancipation, we condemn the White liberal framing of their critiques as “a wakeup call” and “a gift.” This is tokenizing rhetoric that treats Dr.s Gibbs and Moore’s racial trauma as singular instances for White edification further proving the damage that “Ole Culture” can inflict. The term “Ole” is meant to charm; to evoke quaintness, innocence. But we have never been duped by this even when we, from brute futility, declined to speak against it. Today we do speak against it. As Confederate and settler colonial monuments are being dismantled over the objections of those who speak of “heritage” rather than race, “Ole Culture” is a euphemism for a racial legacy of which St. Olaf is a dedicated monument. Standing against this legacy is the foundation of our solidarity. Claims of innocence can no longer save St. Olaf. This is an institution of scholarship, after all, answerable ultimately to disinterested reason, not a club of donors worried about the survivance of their legacy, of blood and soil.

Rather than treat Dr.s Gibbs and Moore’s racial trauma as “gifts,” we grieve. We grieve their experiences of anti-blackness and overall racism at this institution. We grieve the loss of our colleagues’ brilliance as teachers and experts in their artistic and scholarly fields. We grieve the loss of the many St. Olaf students who would have been taught and mentored by them. We grieve the immeasurable ways that their creativity, intellectual labor, and pedagogies could have transformed the college into an institution where Black women professors and all Black and Brown faculty thrive. Moreover, we share in the racial fatigue of our departing colleagues, and thus have no confidence in the culture of Whiteness at St. Olaf to represent or discuss our grievances as BIPOC faculty. Due to the lack of accountability when White supremacy suppresses us, co-opts our contributions, silences our voices, or kills our careers, we stand with them and the truth they speak.

We will release a statement in the following days indicating our grievances regarding the systemic and epistemic racism that continues to exist at St. Olaf. In the meantime, we offer the following statements as indications of our intent:

We, in defense of our academic freedom, would dismantle notions of “Ole Culture” as a brand, discount claims of “shared community,” call out practices of White supremacy, and like others in the present global movement, expose the culture of protectionism and apologia around racist actions and the punitive targeting of Black and Brown students, staff, and faculty on campus. We insist on real systemic change and reject superficial actions (committees, task forces, councils) that seek to “include” racialized faculty, students, and staff, rather than re-examine and dismantle the violences of “Ole Culture” and “community.”

Sincerely,
The Mad Faculty of Color Anti-Racism Coalition (Mad Facs)