

FAU's Department of History's Statement of Condemnation against Racist Speech

During the last week of October 2020, a white FAU student recorded himself repeatedly using a racial slur—the n-word—in a video that has now been widely circulated on social media. FAU's student community was understandably outraged and demanded the student's immediate expulsion. Despite this, FAU has chosen not to expel or punish the student, asserting that the First Amendment protects his racist language.

However, hate speech is *not* protected. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), “the First Amendment does not protect behavior on campus that crosses the line into targeted harassment or threats, or that creates a pervasively hostile environment for vulnerable students.” This video has undoubtedly created a hostile environment for vulnerable students, as well as faculty and staff, because it targeted FAU's entire Black population.

As historians, we understand that the n-word is a racial slur used to threaten, dehumanize, degrade, attack, and oppress people of African descent. When viewed from a historical perspective, such language is not mere words; it has a material and often violent impact across U.S. history. The n-word carries with it an implicit threat, and has historically allowed for - and reinforced - centuries of enslavement, segregation, economic and other forms of discrimination, disenfranchisement, violence, and murder that Black people have faced in the United States.

Inaction sets a dangerous precedent that will enable other students to engage in racist activity with impunity. In solidarity with FAU's Black student population, we demand some form of transparency and accountability for this inexcusable offense. The Department of History is a safe space for the University's Black and other minoritized student populations, and has been committed to teaching histories of race and racism to prevent, protect, and remedy past and future harms. Words—as acts of communication—have the power to heal or to humiliate. This student's actions were deliberately used to discriminate against FAU's Black community and are, therefore, unacceptable.