Dear Friends and Alumni of Romance Studies,

We write to state unequivocally the Department of Romance Studies’ commitment to racial equality and racial justice, and its support of the fundamental right in a democratic society to public protest. Recent protests in some 700 American cities have been echoed in the streets of France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and in certain parts of Spanish-speaking Latin America. They have opened up a necessary scrutiny of policing in Europe and Latin America, but also of systemic racism and its deadly consequences in those places. We wish to register our shock and horror both at the lives cut short through police brutality, and at the continuation and escalation of this brutality on the part of those called ‘to protect and serve’ towards those seeking justice. In these unsettled and unsettling times, we wish to register our sympathy for the families, friends, and communities that have been so deeply affected by the visible signs and actions of state power.

As a department, we have long observed principles and precepts that challenge racial and cultural stereotypes, confront racial bias and slanted state histories, and call for an inclusive humanity on a global scale. As we seek to ensure that concepts like cultural diversity are not simply empty phrases, we also take note of certain facts:

-- while France is a nation of some 65 million people, more than 200 million people worldwide speak French daily, and almost 55 percent of this number reside in African countries. We cite these numbers in order to affirm our commitment to recognizing and valorizing the wider francophone experience within a context of international languages, literatures, and cultures. In addition, the Department encourages and supports programs abroad, so that our students can broaden their views by meeting people of different cultures with different perspectives.

-- we are committed as a department to teaching Brazilian Portuguese, a language whose substantial number of vocabulary and grammatical elements that draw on African and indigenous origins reflect and valorize the presence and contributions of these groups to the nation’s language, literature and culture. In addition, an estimated 91 million Brazilians are of African ancestry, according to the 2010 census, which found that more than half (50.7 %) of the Brazilian population now identifies as preto (black) or pardo (mixed). Multiple generations of Brazilians of African descent have preserved their cultural heritage and religions, and indeed several African religions survive in Brazil to this day.

-- Italy is a country of about 60 million people, 6 million of whom have moved there from all over the world in the last 40 years, one million from the African continent alone. In the Italian Program, we value and are committed to recognizing the contributions of African groups and individuals to the Italian economy, music, cinema, language, literature, art, food, and culture as a whole.

--Spanish, as the second most spoken language in the world, has roughly 470 million native speakers today, while over 572 million people speak Spanish worldwide. Spanish language and culture contain many syncretic elements that have their origins in Africa, including Muslim North Africa; and in diverse indigenous civilizations in Central and South America, including the Caribbean Islands of Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Students at Tufts study how much of the strength and uniqueness of Hispanic culture derives from centuries of protest and struggle for basic human rights. After studying the history, language and culture of this diverse region, many Tufts students today are inspired to fight for justice in their own communities, and throughout the world.
In the Spanish section of the department, literature classes are based on texts from peninsular Spain and Latin America, many of which reflect institutional prejudice and persecution. In the case of Spain, the concept of "clean [pure] blood" had led to the persecution of Arabs and Jews. Our coursework examines the ways in which this mindset of racial superiority in turn led to the oppression of both black and indigenous populations during Spain’s colonization of Latin America.

The Department takes a firm and unequivocal stand against racism, and acknowledges that awareness of and engagement with the history and cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora are essential in today’s world. Faced with the ignorance and prejudices about these parts of the world that can permeate the classroom, we restate here our commitment to cultural outreach on a national and international scale as a means of expanding human connections.

And so, as we prepare to move forward into the upcoming academic year, our department will be working together to ensure that our teaching, our research, and our public programming activities work to combat embedded attitudes and practices of racism in its many forms, locations, and guises, and to honor the lives of those victimized by racism and violence.

The department has gained in diversity in recent years, and is strongly committed to pursuing and enlarging on this goal.