

## Teaching Assistants' Association Executive Board Statement on Invasive Classroom Arrest

*Madison, WI - April 15, 2016*

On the morning of April 14, University of Wisconsin Police Department (UWPD) officers entered a class in session at the Humanities building and arrested a black student for the crime of painting anti-racist graffiti. Two eyewitnesses [report](#) that he was handled roughly, and that one of the officers said the student “had his chance to get his message out, and now it’s our turn.” UWPD may rest assured that we have gotten the message.

The UWPD’s message is that the university’s halfhearted condemnations of racist incidents such as the [mocking of tribal leaders](#) at DeJope Residence Hall, graffiti of [a man hanging from a tree](#) in a Wisconsin Institute for Discovery restroom, and students facing [hateful language and being spit in their face](#) in their own dorms are utterly devoid of substance. University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) administration apparently considers these incidents less concerning than a black student’s expression of justified frustration with this climate.

Their message is that, at a time when we are witnessing an upsurge in racist backlash against movements for a more inclusive university, officials acting on behalf of the university will respond aggressively to the victims of that backlash rather than to its perpetrators.

Their message is that a minor property crime such as graffiti—if it happens to criticize racism at the UW and racist policing—warrants all the resources required for a [six month long investigation](#). The clean-up amounted to some \$4,000, approximately the cost of nine UW Badgers football game tickets. How much of UW students’ tuition money was spent on the investigation of this misdemeanor?

Their message is that UW administrators and UWPD will invest far more time and resources to investigate anti-racist graffiti than misogynist or racist graffiti, or even violent [sexual assault](#) on campus.

Their message is that UW Chancellor Rebecca Blank has become complicit in the creation of a hostile living and learning environment for UW students of color. Her tenure contributes to a long history of administrative inaction towards hate crimes and hateful language on campus. It has taken UW undergraduate and graduate students [seizing the initiative](#) through campaigns such as #TheRealUW to identify these incidents for the prejudiced, bigoted acts that they are.

Their message is that no student at UW has the right to learn in an environment free from police surveillance or arrest. Faculty and graduate student workers have been put on notice that we do not

have the right to create and foster learning environments where students feel safe and respected. The UWPD claims the right to blithely ignore educators in their own classrooms.

The Executive Board of the Teaching Assistants' Association (TAA) condemns in the strongest terms the intrusion of the police into a class in session in violation of the rights of students and educators alike. The TAA Executive Board applies the same condemnation to the arrest of the student, carried out in an African-American Studies class, in such a way as to demean, humiliate, and "send a message" to students of color. Finally, the TAA Executive Board condemns the double standard demonstrated by UWPD and the UW Administration in their treatment of this "crime" versus their inaction against rising anti-Black racism and widespread misogyny and violence against women on campus.

Fundamental questions of racial and educational justice are at stake. The TAA looks forward to uniting with UW campus and community members and organizations to ensure incidents like this do not happen again.

Teaching Assistants' Association - Executive Board (AFT 3220)  
University of Wisconsin-Madison