

NOTE: Capitalizing "Black" and leaving "white" lowercase was a deliberate rhetorical choice on the part of PSBLM. Whiteness is socially "capitalized," whereas Black bodies are treated as capital. Capitalization of "Black" is meant to symbolically counteract the dominance of whiteness, similar to the way in which the alternative spelling of "women" as "womyn" is meant to disrupt patriarchal linguistic constructs.

Dear People of the Palouse and City Officials of Moscow and Pullman,

We, the organizers of The Palouse in Solidarity with Black Lives Matter (PSBLM), are writing in response to a memo posted at Pullman City Hall by the Pullman Police Chief Gary Jenkins on Thursday, June 11, 2020, the date preceding our second protest in Pullman, WA. This memo was passed on to several local businesses and organizations, many of which passed on their own memos to their employees and patrons concerning our group.

It is our collective sentiment that the original memo from Chief Jenkins mischaracterized the event and PSBLM. We have written correspondence from constituents verifying that this memo created unfounded fear in the general public, discouraged many peaceful protesters from attending the event, and weakened our credibility. We wish to clarify any misunderstandings that may have resulted from the memo. The memo reads as follows:

There is a protest planned tomorrow (Friday, June 12) at 5 pm. They plan to march from Martin Stadium to Pullman City Hall. Initially, protest leadership was working with us to facilitate a peaceful event. However, due to some volatility in the makeup of the group, the initial leader has stepped down. We are still hopeful for a peaceful protest, but we are preparing to have enough law enforcement resources to protect City Hall and the Police Department and, if needed, downtown. I recommend that all staff working in City Hall plan to leave the area by 5 pm Friday.

Gary Jenkins

PSBLM would like to make the following clarifications:

Statement 1: "Initially, protest leadership was working with us to facilitate a peaceful event."

Implication: There was coordination between the group and the Pullman Police Department.

Clarification: PSBLM contacted the Police Department to inform them of the event. The Police Department offered an escort for the group, but the group declined. This was the full extent of the PSBLM's coordination with the police.

Statement 2: "However, due to some volatility in the makeup of the group, the initial leader has stepped down."

Implication: Leadership of PSBLM changed due to volatility.

Clarification: Leadership of PSBLM did not change. The group is composed of several co-organizers, all serving equal roles of leadership. Ms. Samantha Fulgham, a white female, was the initial point of contact for the police and several members of the public. As interest in the event increased, the group felt that it would be more appropriate for Mr. Jason Kennedy, a Black male, to become the most visible member of the group. As a result, Ms. Fulgham relinquished her most publicly visible duties to Mr. Kennedy.

Changes in the roles within PSBLM were the result of a cooperative decision by co-organizers. Relations within the group are amicable, and we intend to keep them that way.

Furthermore, the implication that the makeup became volatile in direct correlation with the heightened visibility of a Black male among its organizers is offensive, intolerable, and reflective of unconscious bias on the part of the Pullman Police Department.

Statement 3: “We are still hopeful for a peaceful protest, but we are preparing to have enough law enforcement resources to protect City Hall and the Police Department and, if needed, downtown. I recommend that all staff working in City Hall plan to leave the area by 5 pm Friday.”

Implication: This event has great potential to become dangerous. The public should avoid the area at all costs. The police are ready and willing to use force against protesters.

The language creates an “us” versus “them” mentality for the people within the Police Department and also for the people reading this public memo. It also suggests that the Pullman Police Department planned to be present at the event in some capacity and that police were preparing to take an offensive, possibly defensive, position.

Clarification: PSBLM asked that police not be present at the event due to recent incidences of excessive force. Officers were seen and photographed on the tops of buildings overlooking the protest below.

The protest was peaceful, no property was damaged, and protesters left the space completely clean and exactly as they found it.

We feel that the Pullman Police Department could have taken preemptive steps to avoid this misunderstanding by reaching out to the co-organizers listed on the event page and discussing the matter prior to releasing the memo. Additionally, we know that the intent of the memo was to alert City Hall employees that they may want their cars out of the parking lot prior to 5:00 PM. However, what was written vilified the very community that they are sworn to serve and protect. We offer this criticism with no judgement. We simply hope that the Pullman PD will consider the language they use prior to releasing memos about their community members.

In conclusion, it is our collective intention as the organizers of PSBLM to bring to the attention of the public and the police the importance of language in sustaining peaceful relationships

within the community. It is the duty of our city officials to maintain harmony in the community. We ask only to be represented properly by these officials and for our demands to be heard.

People of the Palouse, thank you for your time, for your support, for showing up with us, and for believing together with us that Black lives matter. Together, we can make all the difference.

Sincerely,

Jason Kennedy, Co-organizer and Speaker

Ivy Ndambuki, WSU Senior in Political Science, Co-organizer and Speaker

Samantha Fulgham, M.A., Co-organizer, Coordinator

Joe Hedges, M.F.A., Co-organizer, Artist

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